Paper prepared for

The Fourth Euroacademia International Conference

Identities and Identifications: Politicized Uses of Collective Identities

Venice, Italy

4 – 5 March 2016

This paper is a draft

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Maintaining a Japanese Cultural Identity Abroad: 'Old Japan' at the Japanese Department Store 'Shirokiya' in Honolulu

Jutta Teuwsen
Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, Germany

Abstract

Finding a huge Japanese department store in a U.S. shopping mall in Hawaii's capitol Honolulu might be very surprising. But in fact, the Japanese have a long history on Hawaii, which started in 1868. In this year, the first Japanese settled over to Hawaii to work there and in the next decades many others followed and more and more stayed for good. Today, more than 20 percent of Hawaii's population is Japanese. With this background, the existence of the department store 'Shirokiya' finds its reasons. Especially for the elderly Japanese Americans, the children and grandchildren of those immigrants, the department store constitutes a crucial role for dealing with their Japanese identity throughout various spheres. Yet, since the managers changed major parts of the store and today rather concentrates on the financially stronger younger generations and their needs, the elderly feel pushed off. Their disappointment towards the management and the store becomes obvious in the way that they do not visit the store anymore. What this loss means for the elderly Japanese and Japanese Americans of Hawaii and to which extent their processes of identity formation are constrained will be illustrated in this paper.

Key words

Japanese, Hawaii, Cultural Identity, Immigration, Nostalgia

1 Introduction

In this paper I will analyze the meaning of the Japanese department store 'Shirokiya' for the cultural identity construction of the elderly Japanese and Japanese American people of Hawaii. My background is a 3-month-research that I have conducted on the Japanese department store in 2011. I was very glad to find that the elderly Issei, Nisei and Sansei[i] included me into their social networks and let me participate in their group activities and invited me to their exclusive clubs and even their private homes. At the same time, they were glad they found in me someone to tell all their stories about what it means to be Japanese (American) in Hawaii.

The methodology of my research and therefore of the base of this paper can be summed up very shortly. I did participant observation basically all the time and conducted several interviews with the Japanese and the Japanese Americans who went to the store.[ii] Upon that, I led one expert interview with Eddie Wakida, the store's senior vice president of sales. Finally, I conducted research at the newspaper archive of the university, collecting and analyzing the articles about Shirokiya in the local newspapers from Shirokiyas opening on.
After this short introduction, I will describe the place Shirokiya from my experience and upon that describe it in sociological terms in part two. In the third part I will introduce a short summary of the history of Japanese immigration to Hawaii and in part four explain how the elderly Japanese used the store for nostalgic reminiscence of Japan, as the country no longer exists in that way. In chapter five, I will explain the difference between Japanese and Japanese American culture and the way in which the elderly found their Japanese identity violated by the new concept of Shirokiya. Finally, in chapter six I will explain the reasons for the manager of the store, to change the target away from the elderly, rather to the younger generations of all ethnic groups in Hawaii. I will end with a short conclusion.

2 Shirokiya: A place of history, relations and identity

When I visited Shirokiya for the first time I immediately felt like thrown back to one of the many department stores in Japan. After walking through the door I passed a little bakery within the store, offering the famous-in-Japan thick-sliced white bread, sweet melonpan and other products that can be obtained in Japan in literally every bakery. The sweet taste guided me through the place, where I discovered the center of the first level of that

two-leveled store. Here, kimonos, umbrellas and other fine imported goods from Japan were sold. I realized right away that the shop assistants, all female, spoke Japanese and, not surprisingly, they slightly bowed in contact with the customers. In one corner of the store I found the base of the "cute stuff": Hello Kitty accessories and famous anime character figures covered the place all over. A row of tables and desks that was decorated and assigned as travel agency advertised with "Kyushuu-fair" and a ramen festival – the first referring to a Japanese Island and the letter referring to a Japanese noodle dish. In a small separated room I found bookshelves filled to the top with Japanese books of all genres. Almost every book was in Japanese language and that most of them were used indicated that the exchange must be very vivid there. Back in the center show room I spotted a sort of food decoration that I have only ever seen in Japan. Here, traditional Japanese sweets, which are enjoyed at festivities and family celebrations, were displayed in heavy, yet filigree glass-topped tables. Like naturally, they were decorated with seasonal fruits and flowers.

By the smell of fried dishes and simmered fish I was guided upstairs to the second floor. On the escalator I already heard the joyful sound of a food court, which instantly reminded me of my time in Japan. The whole level was covered with Japanese food booths along the walls while the center area was a huge atmospheric seating area, called "Yataimura Beer Garden". Here, Japanese foods of all kinds were sold and they all appeared just as homemade Japanese as they did back in Japan. I was convinced, that I just had found real Japan – outside of Japan. Surprisingly, I found it in the shape of a Japanese department store in the center of a huge shopping mall in Hawaii. Now, when even me got reminded and literally thrown back to Japan so vividly just by visiting a store – what meaning could this store possibly have for the Japanese born and Japanese Americans living here? I felt it must be of greatest importance for any of their Japanese identity formation – be it regarding their own home land, the home land of their ancestors or a place they are still visiting to visit their family? Obviously, this place was much more than just an analogue cultural container, as one would describe spaces in intercultural contexts that do not have any meaning for the groups of people, who are focused by it. The place rather seemed relational as it made possible any social processes of perceiving, using and adopting it for individual and group identity activities and considerations (cf. Bachmann-Medick 2006: 292). It seemed close to even handle this place as anthropological place (cf. Augé 1992: 51). Namely, when space[iii] is concretely and symbolically constructed, serving ends of identity formation, it becomes a place. It appears that Shirokiya allows the local groups and individuals to deal with all those identity relations that Augé describes. First, shared identity: it symbolizes the components a whole group has in common. Second, particular identity: this is how groups and individuals understand their identity in relation to each other. Finally, singular identity: this gives information about the differences between groups and/or individuals (cf. Augé 1992: 51). In view of this Japanese department store, it seemed evident that Shirokiya had this principle meaning and extensive influence on identity formation matters for the Japanese Americans of Hawaii. No one could oversee that it literally did, watching all those Japanese Americans there, eating the delicious Japanese foods, booking their next trip to Japan or just walking around and enjoying the admittedly likewise vibrant and cozy atmosphere. In this estimation, the place Shirokiya at first sight incorporated the three basic characteristics that Augé assigns to all anthropological places: They are places of identity, relations and history (cf. Augé 1992: 52).

3 A short history of Japanese immigration to Hawaii

To understand the background of the different Japanese groups of Hawaii and therefore the way, they are engaged in identity formation processes today, it is essential to know the basic phases of Japanese immigration to Hawaii. Therefore, here I provide just a very short historical overview. In 1868, right when Japan got opened to the West, a first group of 148 men came by boat to work on Hawaii's sugar plantations. This group is synonymous for the beginning of the Japanese diaspora (cf. Daniels 2006: 31). They were supposed to stay three years, due to their contract and after this period most of the workers went back to Japan. Because of the bad working conditions some men even went home earlier. Initially, all workers intended to go back home after they would have saved enough money (cf. Befu 2010: 34). But soon the working conditions and the contracts improved so that more and more Japanese immigrants came to Hawaii and many of the stayed for good. By 1898, more than 16,000 Japanese were living in Hawaii (cf. Kimura 1988: 13). This is the same year in which Hawaii became territory of the U.S. As one consequence, Japanese immigrants were no longer bound to the contracts for sugar plantation works that had been made by the government. This led to an explosion of the number of immigrants from Japan to Hawaii and between 1900 and 1907 more than 68,000 more Japanese came to Hawaii. Yet, not all of them stayed and more than 35,000 Japanese left Hawaii again to settle down at the U.S. West coast, because the wages were supposed to be higher there (cf. Kimura 1988: 13-15). The increasing number of immigrants from Japan led to the Gentlemen's agreement in 1908: starting in the same year, Japan only issued passports to close kin and picture brides[iv] of the Japanese who already lived in the U.S. In the end, the Japanese Exclusion Act completely prohibited Japanese immigration from the year 1924 (cf. Kimura 1988: 13-15). In that year 125,368 Japanese were living in Hawaii. Up to today, the Japanese American population remains one of the largest and most influential ethnic groups in Hawaii. One fourth of the islands' population is

Japanese (cf. U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

4 A changing Shirokiya

Observing the elderly Japanese Americans around Shirokiya, I considered that for Japanese Americans in Hawaii Shirokiya was the perfect place to deal with their ethnic background, reviving the heritage of their parents and ancestors and finally work on Japanese identity issues. Therefore, from seeing those people strolling around Shirokiya I assumed that the majority of elderly Japanese Americans would do so. I was surprised how different the reactions were when the topic of this Japanese department store came up. I talked to several Japanese Americans who go to Shirokiya, just strolling around. And I met several Japanese Americans who just did not care about Shirokiya. But most of those elderly I have been talking to on a regular basis, reacted in a sad, disappointed, or even angry way.

To illustrate this, here comes an extract from a talk I had with a group of 14 elderly Japanese Americans, I met every Tuesday in the Makai Market – a food court near Shirokiya. Curious about this large group of Japanese Americans I approached them one day and they warmly invited me to sit down at their table. They invited me to come again and so I did every week, sharing food and chatting with them. These 14 classmates graduated from the same high school in Honolulu many decades ago and use to meet at Makai Market once a week. Most of them are Nisei. On one of these Tuesdays I sat close to the end of a long row of tables, talking with Shawn about my research on Shirokiya. Then suddenly, when the term Shirokiya fell, the ladies at the other end of the row stopped talking and curiously looked over to me. I did not expect they could have even heard me speaking. The expressions on their faces suddenly changed and one of the ladies, Jane, straightened her back, holding her head up higher. She raised her voice and the strong expression on her face showed that she was about to say something very significant for her:

> "Some years ago, they sold all the fine Japanese goods at the upper level..." Her voice lowered again, while the ladies around watched her mouth. She went on speaking slowly, diligently pronouncing all the terms: "All the fine goods like kimonos, crafts, lacquer ware, fans... but all that is gone now." The other ladies nodded, looking down at the table, when she went on talking: "All of this is gone. Only the food is left, just food!" Her voice adapted a rather angry tone, just as the voice of the other ladies, joining her: "Yeah, only food! Now it is all about the money!" "Just money-making!"

I decided to let the situation cool down before I would try to find out more about their disappointment. Namely, everyone remained silent like I have hardly ever experienced them. Only hesitantly did talks emerge again, then on different topics. During that early stage of my research I did not expect that Shirokiya was such an emotional topic - in the negative sense. Yet, as soon as I mentioned the term Shirokiya, people just busted out telling me what they feel about that store. Obviously, some crucial changes had taken place at Shirokiya, so that the people felt the Japanese department store had become something else. Like I soon found out, these changes basically root in a replacement of management personnel in 2001, when the store had almost been closed down. Only because the Japanese mother company, Tokyu Department Store Co., sold the Honolulu Shirokiya to local managers did the store remain open. The new management decided to change strategies and rather concentrate on food, more and more dismissing those sections with the lowest revenue (cf. Honolulu Advertiser 31-03-2001: C2). After some renovations the store reopened in 2002. As the result of the changing strategy, the Yataimura Beer Garden opened in June 2011. Until that day electronics and tableware, besides a selection of food, had been sold on the second level. Now the electronics section has been dismissed, and the selection of all other goods has been decreased and transferred to the first level. The food section with its 21 booths stretches across the complete second level. In the center of it is the new Yataimura Beer Garden, decorated with Japanese lanterns and furnished with wooden tables and stools. Then, in July 2011 the "Meika Plaza" was established. This is the sweets section on the first level, where Japanese sweets and cakes are offered, as well as packed sweets from Japan once again, all other sections of diverse goods have been shortened (cf. Pacific Business News 17-06-2011).

Newspaper articles reveal that the shift of focus rather towards food was already been initiated ten years ago, but the most crucial changes have just recently been accomplished. Therefore, people who had decided to accept the minor changes of 2002 have become angry again and do not accept the recent changes. Besides these angry voices I heard much more rather disappointed Japanese Americans, presumably because they already have resigned to the fact of a changing Shirokiya over the last decade. I want to illustrate this estimation with the following dialog, stemming from a vivid conversation with two elderly Japanese American ladies in the Makai Market. While we were joyfully chatting about the Makai Market, the local people of Hawaii and so forth, I told them that I was researching on Shirokiya. Darcy seemed to get absorbed in thought, once she heard the word Shirokiya. After some time of pondering silence she just said, looking down at the table in front of her:

> "I like the old Shirokiya." I waited for her to go on talking, but when she did not, I asked her: "Like some months ago, before they established the Yataimura Beer Garden?" "No, no, like ten years ago or something. When it was supposed to be closed down first, and then it was taken over by the locals." "So you mean, when the management changed?" "Yeah, exactly. Then they changed the whole place. Before it was really different. On the upper level they used to sell a lot of beautiful things from Japan... do they still sell it? Or only food?" Her question revealed that she has not been there for a long time. I answered: "Well, they still have some small sections of Japanese goods left." She rather did not listen and started listing the things she missed at Shirokiya nowadays: "They had the tableware, all the things for the house... and they also sold dishes like you could use them as a present. Nicely wrapped and pretty. Really pretty things." She looked at her friend and her voice grew louder: "But now they don't have it anymore. It is only food!" Her friend added with disappointment: "Yes. It's all about food."

When going back to the newspapers of the time of Shirokiya's opening in 1959, it becomes obvious, what these Japanese Americans are missing nowadays, talking about "the old Shirokiya". When opening in 1959, the executive vice-president of Shirokiya announced that the store would handle only first quality Japanese merchandise: "Our offerings are unique in concept and finish. They range from kimonos and textiles to ceramics, furniture and lacquer ware. We intend to showcase these fine products in a building that will provide a classical Japanese setting." (Honolulu Advertiser 09-03-1959.) And four years after opening, the store had adjusted this selection to the Japanese American population and their requirements: "There is more lacquer ware, but in the pastel shades Americans like, not the vivid true colors so dear to the hearts of the Japanese. (...) Shirokiya at the center now has the largest selection of Kanebo silk outside of Japan." (Honolulu Star Bulletin 03-10-1963.) Finally, the store increased its sales area by about 40 percent in 1966 (cf. Honolulu Star Bulletin 29-06-1966) and remained this way until the new management initiated the changes from 2001 on. Obviously, offering the fine goods from Japan has always been the focus of Shirokiya. And this is what especially elderly Japanese Americans, whose memory starts even before Shirokiya had opened in Honolulu, miss today. They are not too eager about eating the Japanese food, but they want their Shirokiya to remain the way they knew it. The abstracts from my talks and interviews show that many of the Nisei and elderly Sansei Japanese Americans do have a strong connection to what they perceive as Japanese culture. They wish that Shirokiya would go on presenting the good old times of Japan, while many of them have in fact never been to the country of Japan. Neither today, nor when there had been Old Japan - which rather is an imagined construct and not a fact of the past. Actually, they do not know what in the end is represented at Shirokiya - the only element of comparison they have is what their parents taught them to be Japanese, or rather Japanese American, culture. And over the decades they have gotten used to what is offered at Shirokiya and labeled the offered goods as original and unique presentations of Japanese culture - of good Old Japan. They want to maintain the pictures, the mirror images and reflections of what in their heads still is Japan and do not wish any sort of representation in that the established meanings could be endangered (cf. Handelman 1990: 41)[v]. Whether reasonable or not, they take this Old Japan's culture that had been displayed at Shirokiya for so long as the culture of their ancestors. In that, the way they talked to me, describing the "fine Japanese goods" in exact detail, with soft voices and bright eyes, revealed that they do not see Shirokiya as an economic institution, but rather as a museum: "Museum displays mobilize and echo signs and discourses which are in general cultural circulation (...)" (McLean 2008: 287). The offered goods themselves did not have inherent meaning since they are just goods offered to be sold. But those groups rather perceived these goods as displayed exhibits. They interpreted the exhibits alone on base of their individual background and the shared memory with their mates. In the end, they did not even think about buying any of the offered goods of which kind they probably had more than enough back at their homes anyways. But Shirokiya, as a museum, gave them a place to get their individual and group experiences and memories into discourse with the other group members. It incorporated valuable signs, like a museum does. In this sense, they feel that what they find at Shirokiya today still should be the heritage of their ancestors' generation, in which "heritage can be seen as an aggregation of myths, values and inheritances determined and defined by the needs of societies in the present" (cf. McDowell 2008: 37). And obviously there presently is this need, which the elderly Japanese American groups seek to satisfy by means of Shirokiya. They need the discourse, mobilized by Shirokiya presenting the goods of good Old Japan. But now, Shirokiya has so crucially changed that their picture of Old Japan as the root of that heritage, which had been maintained through Shirokiya for more than four decades, does not fit anymore to what they find at Shirokiya nowadays. The essential place for them to go, to practice their symbolic ethnicity, "characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country" (Gans 1979: 9) is gone.

5 Violated boundaries: the loss of a symbol

The two excerpts quoted before stem from talks with Nisei of the ages of around 82, 83 years. They were born around 1930 and spent their childhood growing up on the sugar plantations. But particularly during the years before they were born their parents had to fight for improving the working conditions on the sugar plantations. After the strikes in 1909 and 1920 were only partly successful, a deep resentment by other groups towards the

Japanese evolved and many Japanese left the cane fields. But only then, from 1930 on, fewer and fewer Japanese remained part of the field labor force and increasingly took over minor positions of responsibility, like field overseers (cf. Kimura 1988: 100-101). Therefore, their working and living conditions improved noticeably. Thus, these Nisei born around 1930 did not experience the constraints of the earlier years. I perceived that the date of birth, whether it is ten years earlier or later, indeed makes a crucial difference when I spoke to Maggi, a 91-year old Nisei I met in Makai Market. Despite her age, from her face and the way she talks she appears much younger. Still, her body is old and weak and when she stood up from her chair to walk over to the coffee booth I could see her pain when she moved so slowly, hardly able to hold the walking stick tight in her right hand. When we met I used to pick up certain foods or drinks for her, just like her friends did. Every time talking to her she impressed me with her precise memory - it seemed she could access her past experience like written down in a book right on the table. These used to be talks during which I barely asked any questions and just let her tell her story, which was always filled with many details and vivid descriptions. Since she was born in 1920 she experienced life on the plantations under bad conditions. As one of four children her parents had to decide whom to send to school and whom not because the money was not sufficient by far. As soon as they were old enough, her brothers had to start working in the cane fields. But she knows under which circumstances the situation slowly improved. She knows what it was like for Japanese Americans to establish the base for a better life in Hawaii.

Namely, while the conditions on the cane fields improved, and more and more Issei could work in more responsible positions, a solid base for the following Japanese American generations was built. Major institutions and organizations had been established and took root, like the United Japanese Society in 1932, and upon that Japanese vernacular newspapers were widely spread (cf. Kimura 1988: 178-179). The influence of the Japanese American population grew and more and more parents could afford to send their Nisei, but especially Sansei children to college on the U.S. mainland. The results are visible today in that the Japanese Americans are as a group socioeconomically very successful (cf. Okamura 2008: 127). Most of the Japanese Americans know about the history of Japanese immigration and life on the plantations in more or less detail. However, I found that living on the plantations like Maggi did makes up for a crucial difference regarding how these people would go on dealing with their pasts throughout their whole lives. She is not only aware of the history of the hard work her ancestors endured to enable a better life of their descendants by her knowledge. Also, she experienced it in person. She was there and knows what sacrifice her parents and even she herself had to give to make the good status of today's Japanese Americans possible.

The point of this is that for these Japanese Americans, having experienced the development of the Japanese American population in Hawaii, Shirokiya seems to be the symbol for this history of hard work and sacrifice. The authentic Japanese department store with its close ties to Japan, presenting a wide range of Japanese products reassured them that their work has paid out. It presented the legitimate presence of the Japanese American community in Hawaii. In this regard, Maggi expected Shirokiya to be and remain Japanese in the way it has always been before. Interestingly, as opposed to the Japanese Americans in their 80s quoted earlier, Maggi hardly ever mentioned the products and selection of goods offered at Shirokiya. Her focus is another one. She told me how much she once loved to go to Shirokiya, and why she does not go there anymore today:

> "Many years ago, the Shirokiya has really been a Japanese place. Japanese people, Japanese food, Japanese goods only. But now, it is just not Japanese anymore!" Her voice raised: "Anyone can go there and open a shop or anything, now. Filipinos! Koreans! ... Everyone!" Without me interrupting her, this time she literally educated me about the history of the plantation work and described in detail again, when the Japanese immigrants had come, how they struggled on the cane fields and how hard they had to work to establish their lives. She told me about the sacrifices of her own family. "A lot of Filipinos have left the plantations and gone back home - they did not stick it out. But now they are everywhere here!" Her friend joined us, and Maggi said to her, talking about Shirokiya: "Yeah, upstairs there, I even saw a FILIPINO making sushi! Really, I could not believe it!" She went on: "When Japanese tourists came to Shirokiya, I could tell them how to make shop assistants understand what they want. Most people there do not speak Japanese anymore! There are so many other people, now. Filipinos, everything!"

Maggi is obviously deeply disappointed about the changes Shirokiya went through. In this, not the changing products burden her in the first place, but the changing staff. When she praises that "Japanese place" which it had been many years ago, she reveals that she has created an analogy between the Japanese American life in Hawaii and the Shirokiya department store: While the Japanese communities had struggled on the cane fields and set up the environment for future development, the Filipinos left the plantations because of the straining conditions. Later, when everything was right in place in Hawaii, Maggi feels that the Filipinos came back and took advantage of the achievements of the Japanese. Now that her anger is that intense, she appears to feels that just the same thing is happening to Shirokiya. What has been a truly Japanese place before and a symbol of the Japanese achievements soon was more and more taken over by Filipinos and other non-Japanese. Just like the Philippine community had already taken illegitimate advantage from her parents' generation's work, now this injustice was getting more and more exhibited at Shirokiya. They had illegitimately crossed a boundary.[vi] Like I interpret Maggi's statements, Shirokiya as common heritage and place of collective memory (cf. Ashworth 2011: 28) for her more and more becomes a perfect reproduction of the experienced past injustice. She

judges that the Japanese American communities deserve a higher status than the Philippine and other Asian American communities, still today. Her individual perception of this heritage as a symbol for the achievements of her ancestors contradicts the current dominating attributes of Shirokiya to such an extent that Maggi will hardly ever visit Shirokiya again. The same applies to her friends I have met. It is no longer a place for them to practice their own identity as Nisei since it heavily violates their boundaries of the categories hierarchy and race (cf. Anthias 2009: 243).

These excerpts I have quoted thus far reveal that Shirokiya has a meaning for the Japanese American population of Hawaii that goes far beyond that of conventional department stores. Hardly any of those people ever talked about buying anything, even if they explained in detail which products they appreciate to be offered by Shirokiya (fine Japanese goods) and which they do not want to find there (packaged food). For these people Shirokiya does not serve to sell certain products to them - it serves to display these goods like in a museum. They would not go to Shirokiya to shop, but just to stroll around, take a close look at the offerings and then go back home carried by the picture of Old Japan, reviving memories and feelings related to the Japanese heritage. They do not see Shirokiya as an economic institution, but as a cultural institution in the first place. In that they seem to forget that Shirokiya today does not exist for the purpose of presenting whatever each and every individual holds to be true Japanese culture. There is just nothing like true Japanese culture anyway. In that, it needs to be stressed that when Japanese Americans talk about Japanese culture it does not necessarily refer to Japanese culture. Japanese culture and Japanese American culture are different things - even though many Japanese Americans either do not pronounce the difference (in that they talk about Japanese culture, while referring to Japanese American concepts) or are not even aware of the difference (cf. Okamura 2008: 130-131). But in the end, what past Japanese and what contemporary Japanese culture is, differs from what has evolved within the Japanese American community throughout more than one century. Therefore, the above described groups do not necessarily mourn the vanishing of Japanese, either past or contemporary, culture at Shirokiya: They mourn the vanishing of Japanese American culture. But Shirokiya is not an institution that can stay alive by presenting the culture of the elderly Nisei and Sansei. It exists as an economic institution and in that serves the aim to survive as such in the first place and then, of course, to make money. In that view it is strikingly awkward that Jane, as well as others, accuse the management for moneymaking. They are not aware of the fact that changes might be necessary also because their own shopping behavior changes. They just did not leave their money at Shirokiya anymore. Finally, the department store had to listen to other customer groups as well, therefore rather expanding the food section, motivated by the perspective on higher gains. In the end, Shirokiya which had been an essential place for this group of Japanese Americans throughout centuries, now has evolved into a non-place for them: It relates to nothing significant for them and it cannot serve them anymore in dealing with issues around their Japanese American identity. It is no longer attached with meaning.

The strong expectations towards Shirokiya to maintain the Japanese heritage are held by those groups that do not have that strong connection to the country of Japan. They rather use Shirokiya to maintain Japanese American culture. The Japanese Americans' culture is basically a local culture, therefore different from any originally Japanese culture, whatever this might be. Thus, these groups demand that other institutions create symbolic traditions that cannot find place to such extent in their everyday lives and at home (cf. Gans 1979: 9). Shirokiya had done so for more than four decades and will no longer do so. It cannot fulfill their expectations towards Shirokiya to go on embodying what they perceive to be the heritage of their ancestors. Now they feel to be expelled by changes that are against their hopes and aspirations. For them it was a place of nostalgia, where they could maintain their constructed picture of Old Japan. This phenomenon is termed perfectly well by Appadurai: He states that not only nostalgia as a sentiment towards something that has been lost is created by merchandising institutions, like Shirokiya is one. Even more he stresses that this created nostalgia refers to something that in fact does not exist. Therefore, it refers to something that actually had never been lost. It is imagined nostalgia (cf. Appadurai 1996: 77). From the disappointment of this group that they can no longer live out their imagined nostalgia at Shirokiya, they cannot, and even more, they do not want to overcome the discrepancies that have evolved from the changes. They have literally split up with Shirokiya and perceive themselves no longer as customers of the store.

Finally, what these Japanese Americans find at Shirokiya today does not fit their own picture of what they think Japan is. But this well-established picture does not find a complement in reality either. Neither in Japan nor at Shirokiya do they find a valid reference point for what is on their mind as an assembled mosaic of memories, tradition and Japanese American culture.

6 From 'Old Japan' to 'New Japan'

In the former chapters I have already indicated the reasons why Shirokiya has crucially changed. The sales numbers declined, and the store was about to be closed down by the Japanese mother company. But local managers took it over and, of course, had to change the strategy to finally write black numbers again. That elderly people would come to look at the pretty lacquer ware and stroll around, even though this might help

maintain the image of Shirokiya, could not help it to survive as an economic institution. It seemed like Shirokiya had not only changed its focus to food, but likewise changed its target group from the old Nisei to the younger Japanese American generations and non-Japanese groups as well. Namely, these were the groups who had the money. To find out whether my estimation towards the reasons for the renovations were adequate I confronted Mr. Eddie Wakida, Shirokiya's senior vice president of sales, with the concerns of the elderly Japanese.[vii]

> I: I have heard some voices that Shirokiya has changed a lot - not only in the last months, but also over that last ten years, that it is not like before. They say that Shirokiya really was a Japanese store but that it has all changed.
> W: (nodding) I think what's happening right now is, yes, we are changing. But Japan's style is changing, too. And along with that we are changing. You know, for a lot of Nisei and Sansei, they know the old, traditional Japan. And if they went to Japan now, I am very sure they would be surprised how much changed. And the way of selling, the product itself, too. So, our change is along with the time.
> I: What is Shirokiya's greatest challenge?
> W: The challenge right now is more about how to entertain the people, entertain the customers. Because right now, to buy things you really don't have to go to the store anymore, not like 15-20 years ago. Now I can order it whenever, wherever I want. Therefore, what we are going to create is some place, people can enjoy. The Yataimura (Beer Garden) is one of these concepts. We are trying to create atmosphere and have increased our seating area and our selection of food.

The interview reaffirms my estimations. Eddie Wakida does not say it explicitly, but he indicates that Shirokiya can no longer serve to satisfy the needs of a generation that cannot or does not want to contribute to the store in monetary means anymore. Therefore, the management does change the focus to another target group: rather those who come to Shirokiya because of the atmosphere. In that, he shares the community's persistence in using the dichotomic terms of "traditional" and "modern", applied to what they claim Japanese culture is (cf. Moore 2011: 275). Even though a small department of those so-called traditional Japanese goods remains, it appears that this dichotomy prevents tolerating the changes of Shirokiya and accepting it as a place where various Japanese goods are offered. According to the well-established dichotomy, there is no Japan with traditional kimonos and silk fans as well as modern Hello Kitty and Harajuku crepes on the same site. Finally, since Shirokiya is no longer a place of the old traditional Japan, it is not the place of many Nisei and elderly Sansei anymore. And yet, the shift towards representing New Japan makes way for other groups that attach different meaning to the store.

7 Conclusion

In this paper I have explained the various meanings of the Japanese department store Shirokiya for the elderly Japanese of Hawaii. After describing the place Shirokiya in part two and an overview of the history of Japanese immigration to Hawaii in chapter three I explained in part four how the elderly Japanese used the store for nostalgic reminiscence of Old Japan and how the recent changes of the store led to dissatisfaction by this group. In chapter five, I explained the difference of Japanese and Japanese American culture and the way in which the elderly found their Japanese identity violated by the new concept of Shirokiya. Finally, in chapter six I explained the reasons for the manager of the store, to change the target away from the elderly, rather to the younger generations of all ethnic groups in Hawaii.

In this paper I have shown that identity formation and maintenance processes are conducted throughout various levels and in interplay with manifold players. While the elderly Japanese Americans of Hawaii were dependent on Shirokiya to display 'Old Japan' to uphold their Japanese identity, the store could no longer serve these ends due to economic reasons. Therefore, the opportunities given to deal with one's national identity abroad are most likely bound to monetary matters quite closely. But while the changes of Shirokiya meant the end of an era for the elderly, it is the younger generation who profits of these changes. While they, whether of Japanese ancestry or not, would probably not have a significant connection to Old Japan, the new concept of the store about entertaining the people and offering unique Japanese foods rather fulfills their expectations. While Shirokiya profits in economic ways, the younger Japanese Americans, who through their travelling to Japan in these days have a connection to the country of Japan today, use it their way to construct another sort of Japanese American identity abroad.

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9 About the author

Jutta Teuwsen, born in 1984, studied Philosophy, Arts and Contemporary East Asian Studies in Dortmund, Duisburg-Essen, Reykjavík, Beijing and Osaka. She works as a research associate at the University of Düsseldorf at the Department of Modern Japanese Studies where she gives classes on Japanese culture. She is writing her PhD dissertation about the representations of nature in contemporary Japanese arts. During her studies and PhD she was awarded with several scholarships, e.g. by the DAAD in Germany and the DIJ in Tokyo. In 2015, she contributed papers and presentations to six German and international conferences in the fields of Japanese studies, Anthropology and Arts. In 2016, several papers about contemporary Japanese arts and the Japanese in Hawaii will be published.

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[i] First- Second- and Third generation Japanese immigrants.
[ii] As the conditions of privacy and the ethics of ethnographic field work require it, all names quoted (except for the name of Shirokiya's senior vice president of sales, Eddie Wakida) have been changed. However, I made sure that hints of ethnicity remained in the names. This means, that those with American names have been assigned other American names and those with Japanese names were assigned other Japanese names.
[iii] While Augé rather refers to open public space, for me applying the notion to buildings and institutions seems to be likewise adequate.
[iv] Picture brides were Japanese women sent from Japan to Hawaii in order to enter into an arranged marriage. The practice got started when the immigrants realized that they through their work could not accumulate enough money to go back to Japan soon. (Kimura 1988: 143) The future husbands had nothing but a picture, waiting for the brides to arrive at the harbor.
[v] While Handelman applies the notions of presentation and representation to public events, they fit my analysis of the (public) place Shirokiya as well.
[vi] Although this is obvious, I want to stress that the perspective in this paragraph does not go back to my personal judgment about the different ethnic groups of Hawaii. It reflects Maggi's individual estimation. Her words show extensive racist assumptions regarding especially the Philippine communities of Hawaii, and I hope not to hurt anyone by quoting her.
[vii] I am obliged for his invitation for an interview.