

角畑シンシア：道の上の子供の時代
Cynthia Kadohata : Growing Up On the Road of the
Japanese—American Diaspora
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Recent events at the Mexican American border, specifically the separation of children from their parents and the internment of those children, have led to comparisons with the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. (Calamur) If, as Santayana stated, “Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it,” we must wonder what steps should be taken to pass knowledge of the Japanese-American internment down to future generations. In addition to historical research and factual publications, in large part compiled by research institute on Japanese American History based in Seattle and Los Angeles, novels and movies based on the internment have spread knowledge of these events among the less historically inclined. *The No No Boy*, *Obasan*, and *Farewell to Manzanar*, which served as the basis of the film *Come See the Paradise*, are fairly well-known. Less known, but perhaps more important in educating younger generations about internment and the resulting dispersal of the Japanese American community, are the first novel and two later young adult novels by American writer Cynthia Kadohata.

Before examining these three novels, a short background of the internment of Japanese Americans in World War II will be given. While incarceration or imprisonment is used as punishment for a crime or to keep someone suspected of a crime from fleeing, internment is defined as follows: VERB 1 |m'tə:n| [with obj.] confine (someone) as a prisoner, especially for political or military reasons. *the family were interned for the duration of the war as enemy aliens.* 2 |'ntə:n| [no obj.] N. Amer. serve as an intern. In other words, someone can be interned due merely to suspicions. During World War II, clearly innocent people, including children, were confined just because they were of Japanese descent. This, of course, contradicts American tenets such as trial by jury, the presumption of innocence, equality before the law, and that the burden of proof rests with the prosecution, not the defense.

The internment of Japanese Americans clearly went against important American laws and traditions. The fact that it could happen can be attributed to several specific factors. First, the attack on Pearl Harbor shocked Americans and created an atmosphere of fear. Second, John Knox, the Secretary of the Navy, was embarrassed at his department's total failure to detect the attack. At a private dinner with other key members of the administration just three nights before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Knox had proclaimed that his department was closely tracking the Japanese navy. In an attempt to defuse criticism of himself and his department, after a whirlwind tour of Hawaii, Knox quickly confirmed totally unfounded rumors that Japanese fifth columnists had aided in the attack. (Barbash) Third, a precedent for internment had been established by Canada and the British Empire, which had already started to intern Japanese Canadians. A fourth factor was racism and a fear of “wage-breaking” Asian immigration on the west coast. (Spickard p. 27–30) It has also been said that local people in competition with Japanese Americans, such as truck gardeners or fishermen, stood to profit from the internment. Indeed, many Caucasian Americans picked up properties for a song in the fire sales initiated by the internment. Yet another important factor was the personal beliefs, prejudices, and character of John L. DeWitt, the general in charge of defense in the Pacific States.

The kindest thing that can be said about DeWitt was that he was over-zealous in his duties. He actually wanted to intern all Americans of Japanese, Italian, and German descent living near

the Pacific coast. (Conn) The un-redacted first draft of DeWitt's Military Proclamation #1, which authorized the "evacuation" of Japanese Americans from coastal area was rife with racist slurs and comments.(Densho) In his paper on racial nativism, Smith quoted a 1944 writer's assertion that the most important factor changing public opinion in a way that made relocation possible was the fact that America had been, "pushed around by a slant-eyed people to whom it felt racially superior." (Smith p.80) The place where the American army had been pushed around the hardest was, of course, the Philippines; where DeWitt had been division commander until 1937. (US Army Quartermaster Foundation) With DeWitt in charge of the West Coast, the removal of Japanese Americans from coastal areas was sealed with President Roosevelt Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, which allowed "...regional commanders to designate military areas from which any or all persons may be excluded." (Roosevelt)

Until World War II, most Japanese—American had lived in the territory of Hawaii or in enclaves along the west coast. Starting three months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, almost 120,000 Japanese Americans and Japanese citizens residing on the West Coast were forcibly interned in 10 different camps located in the western interior of the USA. (Daniels xvii) These internments were solely based on the internees' ancestry or race rather than any alleged criminal activities or proven acts of disloyalty. Not one case of spying or sabotage by a Japanese American was proven in World War II. (Barbash) The members of fairly small, often conservative, pre-war Japanese—American communities had had strong ties to each other and often had strong ties to Japan. Their internment not only swept away these prewar communities but also destroyed, or at least shook, the faith that Japanese-Americans had in their adopted country. (Spickard pp. 122-127) Relocation and its aftermath were especially confusing for American—born *nisei* still in the process of socialization. Brian Niiya, the content director for Densho and editor of the Densho Encyclopedia and formerly curator and administrator for both the Japanese American National Museum and the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii, explained that at the start of World War II, 60% of *nisei* were under 12 years old. (Niiya) In the aftermath of the war, Japanese American-Americans were in flux. Most of them had lost their houses, land, their communities, and their security. These communities had been shattered into nuclear families or individuals. Upon release from relocation camps family heads were given \$25.00 and told they were free to re—establish themselves in a country in which many people were strongly against them. Cynthia Kadohata was born into one such post—internment family.

Cynthia Kadohata was born in Chicago, in 1956. Until she was 12, she and her family lived a nomadic existence, roaming the Pacific and mid-western states. (Notable Biographies) Both travelling and "settling down", finding a group with whom, and a place where one could feel comfortable, are major themes in her work. These themes can be best seen in the context of the Japanese—American history in her largely autobiographical first novel, *The Floating World* (1989) and her novels for young adults *Kira Kira* (2004) and *Weedflower* (2006). While the first two works are based on her family's search for security and better economic conditions in the 50s and 60s, *Weedflower* describes a time before she was born. It shows forced relocation into and the formation of new communities in a fictitious WWII internment camp for Japanese Americans. The setting is partially based on the camp at Poston, Ca. in which her father had been interned. The goals of this paper are to introduce Cynthia Kadohata to those unfamiliar with her work, to briefly discuss the internment of Japanese — Americans in World War II, and to examine the resulting dispersal of West Coast Japanese American communities through the personal experiences that form the basis of Kadohata's fiction — the floating, changing, world her family experienced on the road.

Kadohata's parents grew up in America's largest Japanese communities, Southern California and Hawaii. Her mother and maternal grandmother were born in Southern California.

However, they moved to Hawaii in the 1930s. After her maternal grandfather drowned in Hawaii, her grandmother waitressed to support her children for several years before moving to Chicago. Kadohata's father's family left Japan in the 1920s and immigrated to Southern California, where they became tenant farmers. As a boy, Cynthia's father and his family were interned. When Cynthia's paternal grandfather was killed in a farming accident, her father's surviving family members also moved to Chicago. Her parents met and married in Chicago, where an older sister and then Cynthia (July, 1956) were born.

Cynthia's younger brother was born after the family moved to Springdale, Arkansas. It might seem odd that a Japanese American family in search of economic opportunities would leave then booming Chicago for an Arkansas town of 10,076 people (1960 census). However, Mr. Kadohata was able to get a well-paying job with an odd name. He became a "chicken sexer." "Vent sexing", a new method of telling female from male chicks, had been developed in Japan in 1933 by researchers in Nagoya. (McWilliams) The object of this work is to separate the desirable egg laying females or pullets from relatively worthless male chicks, cockerels. Males chicks are killed, usually drowned, as soon as possible in order to save the cost of feeding them for several weeks until they reach a stage in which their sex is clearly discernible. (McWilliams) A well trained professional can sex over 8,000 chicks a day with about 99% accuracy. Of course half, the males, can be killed to save their feed. Although we are talking about chicken feed, we are talking about a lot of it. Good chicken sexes were in short supply and count earn well in towns like Springdale.

The course for this skill at the school at which it was developed in Nagoya takes two years. (McWilliams) Like most chicken sexers in America, Mr. Kadohata probably had not taken this course. However, the science had been developed and was associated with Japan that ethnic background was possibly advantageous for job seekers. It is probably safe to say that there were few other jobs in post World War II America in which being considered Japanese was a plus. Also, since jobs were plentiful, more experienced Japanese—American chicken sexers passed on their knowledge to friends wishing to enter the field. In her coming of age novel, *Kira Kira*, Kadohata explains how groups of Japanese—Americans chicken sexers hired on as teams to various poultry concerns. Springdale, Kadohata's home in Arkansas, would eventually becoming a leading center in the America poultry industry with a surprising international population. Tyson Foods and George's Chicken, two of America's leading companies in the field have their headquarters in Springdale. The town's population has grown over 50% every 10 years over the last 5 censuses. Its population, now about 80,000 people, includes "2% Asian, 5.7% Pacific Islander and about 34% Hispanic. (Wikipedia— Springdale, Ark.) However, Gibson, as she called the fictitious setting of *Kira Kira*, is a small, was an overwhelmingly Caucasian town in which a young Japanese American was decidedly an outsider.

At age 9, Kadohata moved back to Chicago with her mother and siblings following her parents' divorce. When her family moved to Southern California in 1971, her new school, Hollywood High, did not accept several transfer credits from her former school. She decided to drop out and held several menial jobs over the next few years before entering Los Angeles City College in 74. Evidently a very good student, she soon transferred to USC and graduated with a degree in journalism in 1977. That same year, while visiting her older sister in NYC, she was injured when a passing motorist lost control of his car and panned her arm against a building. She read extensively during her recovery and her interest shifted from journalism to fiction.

At 25, having largely recovery from her accident, she took a bus trip up the west coast and then out through the Southwest and back to California. On this trip, in her own words, "She rediscovered the joy of traveling." (Kadohata: On Becoming A Writer) She also began writing short

stories about the Japanese American community and her childhood experiences on the road. During this childhood, she had practiced her skill as an observer and gained experience as both a storyteller and a listener. After several rejections, she published her first short story, which was based on her childhood travels, in the *New Yorker*. This and other similar stories were woven into her first novel, *The Floating World*. A highly autobiographical work about the experiences of a young, third generation Japanese—American girl as her parents roam the country in search of economic stability and a home. This novel won several literary prizes which and attracted the attention of Michiko Kakutani, whose review in the *New York Times* praised her “...beautiful, clean yet lyrical prose.” (Kakitani)

With the help of her prize money and proceeds from the sales of *The Floating World*, Kadohata published two more novels, *In the Heart of the Valley of Love* (1992) and *The Glass Mountains* (1995). Searching for and establishing a home are essential to both books. However, although they grew from the same experiences on the road that gave birth to her first novel, they are written as soft science fiction and will not be further discussed in this paper. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the protagonist in each of these novels is a young woman attempting to establish a new life after losing the most important adults and places in her life. Unfortunately, these two novels were poorly received. An unnamed biographer on eNotes made the very plausible suggestion that they included a bit too much character development and not enough action for the genres in which they were written. (eNotes)

In her fourth novel, *Kira Kira* (2004), the struggling young writer again focused on Japanese—American themes, her own childhood attempts to fit in to a small town in Arkansas. Though the novel’s setting was a return to her past, it marked a major shift for her. It was her first book for the young adult (YA) market. *Kira Kira* won the prestigious Newberry prize for Children’s Literature. Not only could she pay off her credit card debt, she also signed a contract with Atheneum, a major publisher of YA fiction. After doing considerable research, including conversations with her father, who had been interned as a child, Kadohata published *Weedflower* a coming of age novel set in an internment camp. Kadohata’s Japanese—American heritage and themes important in *Floating World* and *Kira Kira*, such as life on the road, forming new communities, and settling down, are revisited in her later YA novels; especially, *The Thing About Luck* and *Outside Beauty*. However, in this paper, comments on her works will mainly be limited to three novels *The Floating World*, *Kira Kira* and *Weedflower*.

The success of her novels about the Japanese—American community have led her to be considered a Japanese American novelist; however, there is a universality to her work. An article on her presented in *Notable Bibliographies*, which draws heavily from her 1992 interview with Lisa See for *Publishers Weekly*, describes Kadohata’s status as a writer as follows:

Cynthia Kadohata has been viewed as one of the most compelling novelists in the United States. At the same time, she has tended to be described as a Japanese American writer, a distinction the author feels is both flattering and misleading. In her work Kadohata does explore the complications that come with having a "hyphenated heritage," or two heritages, however she believes that her novels have a more universal appeal. (Notable)

This analysis remains true even today. The main characters in eight of her eleven published novels are Japanese—Americans. Two of the remaining 3 novels center on animals and their trainers in Vietnam and the third discusses the adoption of a boy from Kazakhstan by an American family. Nevertheless, the writer of the *Notable Biography* of Kadohata goes on to argue for the universal nature of her message arguing, “... that all of her books are coming-of-age stories which explore such common themes as feeling different and struggling to find an identity.” (Notable) These themes and childhood challenges vary from culture to culture and time to time

but are indeed universal. Again, this analysis remains true in the books she has published since this (Notable) biography was first written.

Interesting insights can be obtained into Kadohata's novels by approaching them from gender—related, historical, developmental, economical, or even sociological viewpoints. Masami Usumi, of Dooshisha University wrote the following in reference to *The Floating World*, “As a sansei—the third generation of Japanese Americans—Kadohata, moreover, recreates their experiences within the context of the entire history of oppression of voiceless minority people in the white—dominated American society.” (Usumi p,106). In *Listen to Their Voices 20 Interviews With Women who Write*, Mickey Pearlman explains what Kadohata considers to be her misfortune at being identified as a “hyphenated writer”; a Japanese—American writer or a woman—writer. Pearlman's interview with Kadohata describes her reaction to being called a Japanese—American writer as follows:

Kadohata has strong feelings about being pigeonholed as ‘...a Japanese—American writer’, I get mad because they are always very dogmatic about it: ‘You have to be (an Asian writer)’. ... Sometimes I want that identity,... but not always. When I want to be an Asian writer, then I am one, but I don't like people saying that you have to be an Asian writer, and if you do something different then you are a banana or whatever... The situation... for me, [is] to have to be a Japanese—American writer one day, a woman writer the next etc. By being b each of these things separately, rather than being all of them at once, you disempower yourself...”

This paper attempts to examine Kadohata's work as coming of age stories and “road novels.” Although passages from three different novels will be used they could be combined into one story. This story starts at what could be the defining event in the lives of the heroines' parents' generation, the destruction of close knit Japanese American communities and internment of their inhabitants as seen in the novel *Weedfower*. The story continues with observations of life on coming of age on the road. This is mainly seen in *The Floating World*. Part of this story recounts alienation, social isolation, and prejudice against Japanese Americans, found in some passages from *The Floating World* and in all of *Kira Kira*. The story ends with attempts to integrate or re-integrate into society. Successful and unsuccessful struggles for integration into a community can be found not only in all three novels to be discussed in this paper; but indeed, throughout all of Kadohata's novels. While writing these three novels, Kadohata was definitely in the role of Japanese American writer.

The Relocation

The unwritten background of both *The Floating World* and *Kira Kira* is, of course, the destruction of the Japanese—American communities on the west coast. The stories of a childhood on the road and attempts to make a new beginning in inland communities, such as Gibson Arkansas, would never have been written if Kadohata's parents had stayed on the west coast. Without her childhood travels in search of a new home, Kadohata could never have developed her skills of observation or have amassed the experiences that became *The Floating World*. As MICHIKO Kakutani pointed out in her review of that novel, “Because of the immediacy of Olivia's descriptions, because of the intimate, confessional tone of her voice, because of the lack of authorial distance between her and Ms. Kadohata, the reader is inclined to think of *The Floating World* in terms of a memoir rather than as a novel.” (Kakutani) Further proof of the importance of internment in Kadohata's work is shown by the fact that her first attempt to describe situation

other than life on the road or attempts to choose and settle down in a new home was her 2006 YA novel *Weedflower* — a fictitious account of the internment of Japanese Americans.

The pre-war Japanese—American community depicted in *Weedflower* is very conservative, hard working, close—knit, and probably somewhat stifling. As in Japan before the war, much of what occurs in daily life is based on habit, social status, and rituals. The novel's 12 year old heroine seemed to know what every member of her family would be doing at every time of every day. It was a life of unquestioned order. This life required a heightened awareness of what every other family member was doing or would do. For example, as the youngest female in the household, Sumiko always was the first person in the bath, in order to prepare the bath for her elders, but she was last to actually take her own bath. (Wf p. 11)

This awareness of others extended beyond the family to other members of the Japanese community. In fact, the whole West Coast Japanese—American community seems to have been organized along the lines of village life. An active rumor network reinforced the conservative order that dictated the actions of her family and bound the far-flung “villagers” together. Cautionary tales circulated showing what could happen to those who did not adequately prepare for hard times or who were simply unlucky. For example the story of a Mrs. Hata in Oregon, whose “... brother and husband had suffered heart attacks within days of each other” started “... a chain reaction that ended in the nearly previously wealthy Hata family nearly going broke and thereby providing gossip for Nikkei all up and down the coast.” (Wf p.14) Although, no one among Sumiko's family or acquaintances had ever met the Oregon Hatas. The story's moral was clear—work hard, prepare, don't take chances, succeed.

It was perhaps more important for Japanese Americans to be aware of and fit into a group than it was for most other (often more individualistic) Americans. West coast Japanese—American communities operated as a shame culture, as described by Ruth Benedict. Shame formed an important part of the framework of conservative, often inflexible Japanese—American communities. The source of this shame could be failure to achieve one's goal, breaking the rules of one's own community, or “getting into trouble”, attracting the attention of authorities, as did one of Sumiko's neighbors, who was arrested in a case of mistaken identity. Young Sumiko definitely realized that Japanese Americans operated under different rules than those of their non-Japanese neighbors. In an inner monolog, she revealed that “... she knew one of the things that made her different from the rest of the family, one of the things that made her more American than her cousins, was that she didn't feel *haji*, or shame, quite as much as the other Japanese did, maybe because she hadn't attended a lot of Japanese school. All the *Issei* were steeped in the culture of *haji*.” (Wf p.59)

News of the attack on Pearl Harbor threw the Japanese—American communities into disorder. Nothing was certain any longer. No plans or dreams were safe. It was no longer clear that devotion to one's family, study and work, the *issei* path to success, would be rewarded. The future was unclear. Sumiko's little brother Tak-Tak even asked, “Do you think they'll kill us if war breaks out?” Sumiko's only answer was, “Uncle will protect us!” (Wf p.20) The orderly Japanese—American world shown in the first 40 pages of *Weedflower* are in stark contrast to the chaos that ensued after the day of infamy. Nothing illustrates this more clearly than Sumiko's observation about Mr. Ono, a neighboring flower grower who was hard working ambitious and industrious even by the high standards of the Japanese—American community. Mr Ono had been using flood lights on his fields at night to speed their growth. He wanted to be first on the market that year in order to get the best prices for his chrysanthemums. On the night after learning of the Pearl Harbor attack, the Ono's, like Sumiko and her family, burnt books, flags, pictures and

letters from Japan. It is not clear if they did this as an act of loyalty or out of fear. In either case, the clear path of hard work leading into the future had disappeared. Sumiko reported:

In the distance Mr. Ono had not turned on the lights over his fields. His fire was still going strong. It was as if he no longer cared if his chrysanthemums bloomed early or not. All he cared about was burning his things. (Wf p.53)

Japanese Americans could not burn everything that tied them to the past. Their heritage was in their manners, in their accents, and on their faces. Within three months of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the decision to relocate Japanese-Americans away from the Pacific coast had been made. Executive Order 9066 devastated the West Coast Japanese communities and condemned children yet unborn, like Cynthia Kadohata, to the floating world.

The Floating World

In American fiction, the road is often seen as an adventure or quest. Kadohata's heroes are searching for a steady job, an affordable house with enough bedrooms, or an invitation to a birthday party, not the Holy Grail. Through Kadohata's coming of age novels, we realize that security, love, and a place to relax are just as important to a child as the Grail was to Arthur or Parzival. The security that Olivia Osaka, the heroine of Kadohata's first novel, did have was from her family, her siblings, not from the road that was her home. In the following words Olivia described this home and her family's place in it:

The floating world was the gas station attendants, restaurants and jobs we depended on, the motel towns floating in the middle of fields and mountains ... In old Japan, *ukiyō* meant the districts full of brothels, teahouses and public baths, but it also referred to change and the pleasures and loneliness change brings. For a long time, I never exactly thought of us as part of any of that, though. We were stable, traveling through an unstable world while my father looked for jobs. (FW p 3)

Michiko Kakutani wrote a very favorable and insightful review of *The Floating World* in the New York Times. She said the book's title, "... also refers to the impermanence of childhood, the ebb and flow of memories and experiences that make up our disappearing past." As the Osaka family tore through the countryside past fields and houses on the way to their next motel stop Olivia, usually seated in back of the car, experienced two worlds — the ever-changing world outside which offered new surprises almost daily, such as a camel or triplets dressed in the same outfits and the stable world inside the car her parents, her grandmother, and her brother. Through these childhood travels, Kadohata developed her powers of observation; and, probably, by listening to her family's stories and telling her own stories, improved her ability as a storyteller. As stated above, a bus trip through several western states taken after recovering from a traffic accident, rekindled her love of traveling and her desire to be a writer. In her interview with Mickey Pearlman Kadohata revealed the following, "I like to travel because it causes me to see ordinary things in a way that surprises me; I can get so used to my surroundings that I stop noticing anything strange about them. Also, traveling erases a vague discomfort or sadness or melancholy or dissatisfaction or something that is frequently with me." (Pearlman p113)

The novel *The Floating World* takes place in two settings; first, the floating world itself—the family car, and the places through which the family passes; and, second the towns where Olivia, first with her family and later by herself attempted to settle down. On the road experiences in this novel can be divided into four groups: first, childhood observations of Olivia's surroundings; second, stories told by family members, especially her grandmother, which reveal the family's past; third, interactions between the members of Olivia's somewhat dysfunctional family; and, finally,

interactions between Olivia and non-family members. As Kakutani succinctly wrote in her 1989 review, “*The Floating World* shows us the effects on a child of a rootless, peripatetic life, and like those works, it gives us an indelible portrait of a family in disarray. In addition, it leaves us with a sense of what it means to grow up as part of an immigrant family, what it means to belong to America and yet to stand apart.” (Kakutani)

Many of Olivia’s childhood observations can be taken at face value. For example, she described an auto accident and the effect it had on her, teaching her about the transience of life. Some of her observations are somewhat more questionable. Once when talking to a man late at night while waiting for her grandmother, Olivia noticed a subtle change in his face and “realized” that he was going to kill her. Fortunately, the return of her grandmother, ended this danger. In this novel, the lines between real and imagined are blurred, just as they are in a child’s mind.

Stories told by Olivia and other family members offer insight into Japanese—American culture and history. Olivia’s grandmother, who traveled with them, is a major source of information about Japan, is even given. When talking about her three marriages, Olivia’s grandmother said that she had never really loved any of her three husbands. Olivia asked her grandmother so why she had married. She replied, “Because they asked.” Olivia added this mental note, “I knew Japanese women were nothing without husbands, and she probably had not wanted to be nothing.” (FW p6)

Relations between the members of Olivia’s family were complicated. Charlie-O, Olivia’s legal father, was not her biological father. A rather short man, a big minus in Japanese society, he agreed to marry Olivia’s attractive mother when she was seven months pregnant. According to Olivia, “Obaasan (Grandmother) had forced my mother to marry him, though I wasn’t supposed to know that.” (p39) In addition, Olivia’s parents had left their previous home when her mother had an affair with another man there. Charlie-O himself seem to be a loving father concerned about Olivia. However as Olivia noted, “Charlie and I were growing apart. That hurt him. My allegiances were shifting to my mother. She was moody, but also graceful and pensive and intellectual, things I wanted to be when I grew up...” (FW p. 39) The third adult in their car, Olivia’s grandmother was not a sweet little old lady, but a hair—pulling harpy. In fact, we are led to believe that Obaasan died because Olivia, who could have called an adult for help, decided not to. (FW p25)

Despite the excitement that Kadohata’s characters seem to experience on the road, they sometimes express a yearning to settle down, to fit in. This can be seen throughout her entire body of work. Much of the physical, social, and psychological development that occurs in her novels is about group building, joining a new circle of friends, or, in a way, creating a new family. The novels at the core of this paper, *The Floating World* and *Weedflower*, clearly illustrate this development in relation to the Japanese—American experience. Even though the main theme of *Kira Kira*, a novel set in Iowa and Georgia, concerns a younger sister coming to terms with the sickness and death of her older sister, some difficulties Japanese—American children faced in joining the larger community around them are related.

A child’s yearning to be part of a larger community outside her family can be clearly seen the YA novel *Weedflower*. The novel opens with a description of young Sumiko’s elation at being invited to a classmate’s birthday party. (Wf p2) On the day of the party, Sumiko is stopped by her classmate’s mother at their front door. The mother, a local liberal, had not realized that there was a Japanese—American girl in her daughters class when she agreed to let her daughter invite the entire class to her party. (Wf35) She explained why she couldn’t allow Sumiko in, “It’s not me, dear, but my husband has a few friends in back, some of the other parents who helped him raise some

money for a charity we work with. I just want you to understand that if it were up to me... “ (Wf p36) There are several similar passages in Kadohata’s novels dealt with in this paper; such as a party for a younger brother to which no one came or a friend, another teenager, who later rejected the heroine, a Japanese—American girl, for no apparent reason other than race. These scenes are often based in Arkansas, where Kadohata spent her early teens.

Eventually, Olivia adapted to Arkansas and became part of the Japanese—American community there. In her words, “We were bound to the Japanese in Arkansas just as my mother, father brothers, and I were bound to each other; just as our relatives in Los Angeles soon saw us bound to the residents of Gibson. So in this way my family was rooted in a community. I felt safe. That was the thing I liked most about Arkansas.” (FW p78) However, like other small town mid-westerners, she felt limited or restricted by her family or environment. Kadohata’s heroines tend to be reflective. Using Olivia’s viewpoint, Kadohata wrote, “My family had lived many places, and traveled many places. I thought then that Arkansas was the most beautiful place I had ever been in, yet I badly wanted to leave I knew that ... someday I would have that freedom.” (FW p110)

After graduating from high school, Olivia first and worked in a large scale chicken raising operation. Decided to go to college, she left Arkansas to stay with an aunt in southern California. Other than the fact that her aunt Lily lived there, no reasons are given for why she decided to move to California, the former “homeland” of many members of the Japanese— American diaspora. At this point, *The Floating World* seems like a true coming of age novel. The heroine is moving, leaving her family, in order to become an individual and start a new life. The description of Olivia leaving Arkansas for California is the only passage in the novel which briefly and indirectly mentions the WWII forced relocation. Olivia described her feelings as follows,

I got on the bus and smelled exhaust, air-conditioning, cigarette smoke, and the provocative unfamiliar scents of people I’d never met. I was glad to leave my parents. That was one of the things they didn’t know about me. I was already full of beliefs, assumptions, and feelings that many years later I would want badly to unlearn. One of those things was fear; their first big fear, during the war; and when my father was arrested; their fear when [younger brother] Walker was missing; concerned that I would be all right in the future and 100 other interwoven fears. That was what I wanted to leave.” (FW p.121—122)

For Olivia, as it was for Kadohata herself, the road to California led to new roles, new loves and new identities.

T *Kira Kira* concludes with a short road trip to California. After the death of Lynn, her older sister, younger sister Katie convinced her parents to take their vacation in California. Katie, another reflective heroine, had these thoughts,

I wish Lynn could have lived to see the sea with us! When we first walked up to the Pacific ocean, the tears welled up in my eyes and her death seemed near. I don’t think anyone understood as well as I did how badly Lynn had long to walk along the water the way my family and I did that New Year’s Day. I hid my tears from my parents. But the water made me start to feel happy again. K p 123)

In *Kira Kira*, California again exerts an almost magical pull on a young protagonist, although in this novel its pull is largely equated with the thrill of walking along the ocean. Like Kadohata herself, her novels’ main characters often end up living in Southern California not far from the ocean. Her move to California is not an isolated case.

The pre-war “Japan towns” are gone but many members of the Japanese diaspora have found their way back to the west coast. Ameredia, a multicultural market firm reports that the leading US States for Japanese American population are California, Hawaii, Oregon and

Washington. (Ameredia) Their web site also reports, “Japanese American population declined 6.3% from 1990-2000. The 1990 Census reported 847,562 Japanese residents (*52% in California; 41% in Hawaii*). The 2000 Census reported 796,700 Japanese residents (*with similar distribution patterns*).” (Ameredia) Although Japanese Americans have returned to the Pacific coast in large numbers, their settlement patterns are much more diffuse now than they once were. Former ethnic centers are largely gone or exist mainly as historical landmarks. After the relocation of Japanese Americans from the coast, Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, which had been America’s largest Japanese community, largely fell into the hands of absentee landlords. People of color seeking work in the defense industries moved into the area, which became briefly known as Bronzeville. Several incidences in the Zoot Suit race riots of 1943 occurred there. Japan Town or J-Town in San Francisco had a similar fate. As mentioned in Christopher Moore’s novel *Noir*, It became famous in the 1960s as part of Haight Ashbury.

The extent of Kadohata’s role as a Japanese American writer is unclear. To what degree does she owe her genesis of as a writer to the Japanese—American diaspora? Would she have become a writer if the rural lifestyle of prewar Japanese-Americans had been unavailable to her? To what degree did life on the road and prejudice, isolation from postwar mainstream white America, help develop her powers of observation? In any case, she did grow up in an interesting ever-changing environment, the floating world. Many of the challenges she faced in her childhood and youth grew from the WWII relocation of Japanese Americans, something she returns to again and again,

As mentioned above, Kadohata herself rejects classification into literary hyphenation. Pearlman wrote this about her 1993 interview with Kadohata,

But in discussing the floating world, she maintains that she is, “...not sure that the Japanese aspect of it would be the main theme. That would be the plot.

And I hope my characters are not presented as victims because I don’t really like that role... I can’t say exactly what I would think the theme is versus the plot: love in life and all of that— and safety.” (Pearlman p 115)

Safety is what every child needs, no matter in which environment she/he comes from.

Despite the problems and hardships characters in her novels face, they are eager to discover life. They actively and insightfully face, and usually overcome, the problems life throws at them. While her characters speak with young voices, they do not have unrealistic expectations of life. As Kadohata stated in her 2007 interview with Lee,

Olivia is not afraid of getting old. I think she looks at her mother and realizes that her mother’s life did not turn out well and she is afraid of that. But in the end, she wants to face the future. I guess what is good about being young is that it makes one hopeful. A young person believes that he/she can do anything. But I did not intend to write from the perspective of young narrators. (Lee)

She reaffirmed this realistic but optimistic viewpoint in a 2013 interview with Tim Podell. She described the message of *Kira Kira* as follows, “...there are things that you can change about life and things about life that you can’t change but even so you can have a beautiful and happy life.” The young adults in Kadohata’s novels do their best to overcome hardship; or as said in Japanese, *ganbaru*. Her novels give readers young and old both lessons about both life and history. The “other voice” aspect of her writing shows “majority Americans” what it’s like to be in the minority; and, it shows minority Americans that they too can succeed. As Kakutani wrote about *A Floating World*, her writing shows “...what it means to belong to America and yet to stand apart.” (Kakutani)

The novels examined in this paper provide new insight into the Japanese—American diaspora to the few people who can actually remember it and to those of us who have read about it

before. However, the novels' real importance lies in introducing this sad chapter of American history to younger readers. In a 2006 speech to educators held at the Japanese museum in San Francisco, Kadohata recounted the following antidote. She said that when she first started writing children's literature, around 2004, she asked a more experienced writer of children's literature what children considered a historical novel. The answer was, "Anything before the 1980s." (Kadohata 2006) Time marches on. We should learn about and empathize with those who suffered in the Japanese American diaspora in order to avoid repeating past mistakes.

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