



Towards Rethinking Ethnocultural Cooperatives

- Measuring the Co-operative Difference
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Outline of Presentation

- Investigate discourses about Ethnic Minority Cooperatives via a case study Japanese Canadian Fishing Cooperatives
- Implications for research and theories about Cooperatives
- Why does this matter?



Goals

1. Reframe understandings of marginalized groups' involvement in cooperatives.
2. Critically consider actors' identity and subjectivities through intersectional frameworks (race, class, gender, etc.) to make visible more complex relations and effects within cooperatives and community based economy;



Goals

3. Reframe cooperative research and frameworks to account for ethnic minority cooperatives in contexts of racial nation state formation and colonization.
4. To hold knowledge practices, categories and frameworks open for critical examination



Points

- Little research on ethnic minority cooperatives;
- Eurocentric norms and assumptions-need for critical, anti-racist, feminist frameworks;
- Ethnic minority cooperatives ignored and seen to be outside of normative models
- Cooperative research and theory suffers from methodological nationalism

Case Study: Fishing Co-operatives in Context: **Japanese Fisheries and Racist Exclusion**



Japanese Fishermen - Steveston BC 1913, *Salmonopolis*, p. 106

- In the late 1800s appearance of salmon canneries brings a rush of white and Japanese fishermen to the Fraser River.
- Highly contested race and ethnically divided fisheries. White fishers were not yet in an ascendant position.
- Industry is highly racialized, with aboriginals, whites, Japanese and Chinese all operating as distinct racial groups.



Early Gillnetter - *Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet*, p. 30



Formation of Japanese Canadian Fishing Cooperative

- Racial exclusion from hospitals and schools, and need for collective negotiation with canneries and other fishermen's groups prompts formation of Dantai in 1897.
- Dantai renamed the Fraser River Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Association in 1900, but still referred to as the 'Dantai' – 'group' in Japanese

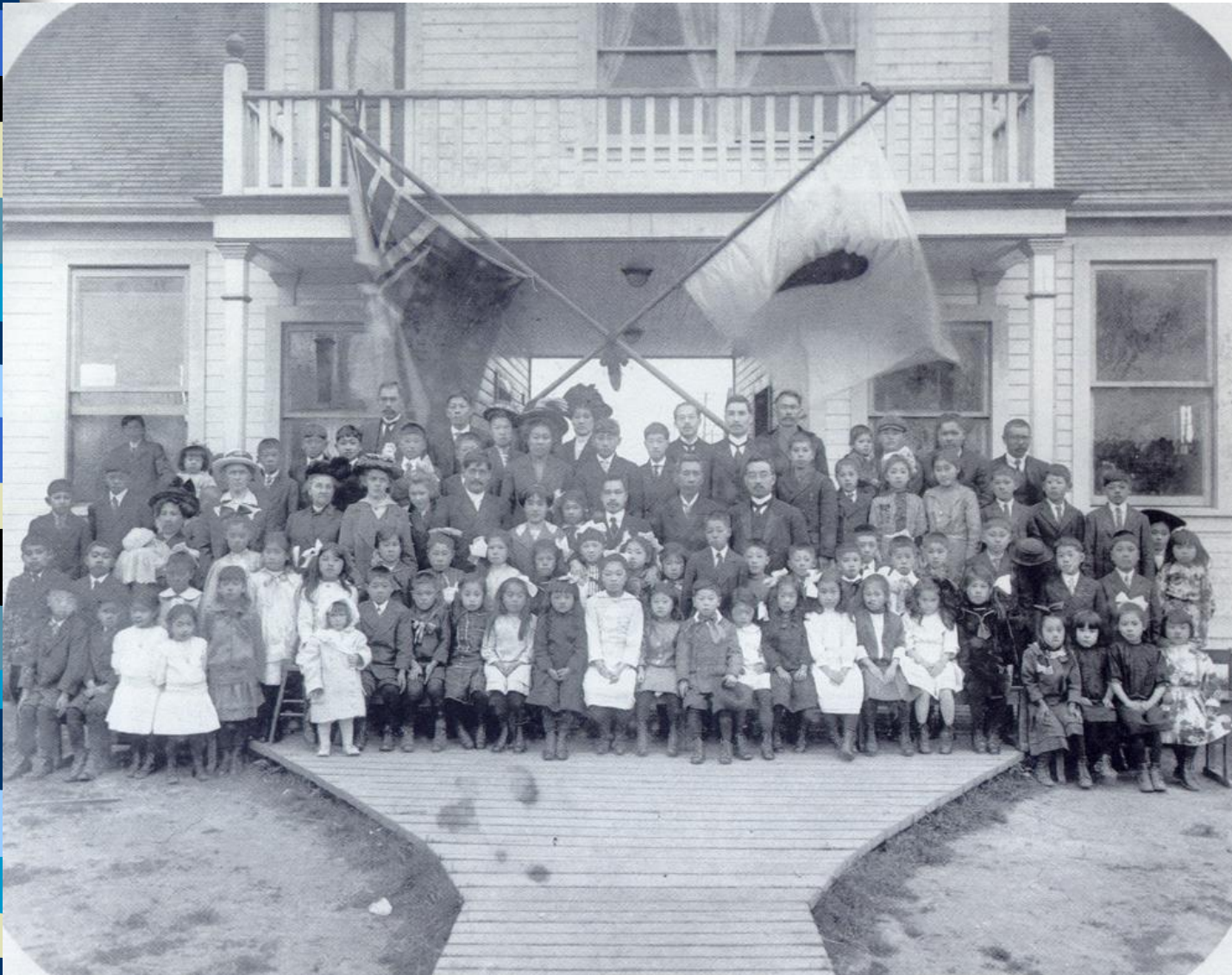


Japanese Hospital - Steveston, *Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet*, p. 74
21/11/2013



Coalescing Around the Need for a Hospital

- Came to be recognized as a real force in the strike of 1900, but the initial impetus for incorporation came several years earlier with the creation of a hospital.
- Japanese-Canadian fishermen had a problem getting medical care, often subject to humiliating treatment if they could get it at all. Suffering from serious water-borne illnesses due to the pollution in the Fraser River.
- Japanese minister built a Methodist chapel in 1894, but almost from the beginning used to treat people suffering from dysentery.



Japanese School - Steveston, *Salmonopolis*, p. 55

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Licensing as a Means of Discrimination

- In the era up until WW2, the issuance of fishing licenses was a means of racial discrimination on the BC coast.
- Through their fishing cooperatives on the Fraser and Skeena, Nikkei fishermen fought a long-term battle against the reduction in the reduction of fishing licenses, licenses that were allotted on the basis of race.
- Duff Commission of 1922 initiates a process for reducing the number of fishing licenses allotted to Japanese to zero.



Associations Play Key Role in License Dispute

- Dantai and Skeena River Fishermen's Association oversee process of who will continue fishing and who will leave for other occupations.
- Fishing associations raise the funds to launch a legal challenge – goes to the Supreme Court of Canada, and then London, where they prevailed, only to have the federal government amend the Fisheries Act giving Minister discretion.
- Though number of licenses steadily reduced, actions of the associations represent a real triumph – the situation without them would have been much worse.



Fraser River strike of 1900

- Fraser River strike of 1900 was a turning point – Japanese-Canadian fishermen had become a force to be reckoned with. Dantai negotiates with both canneries and white and native fishermen's groups.
- Japanese-Canadian fishermen settled first at a lower price, going out to fish under army protection from the hostile white fishermen.

JC generally portrayed as strike breakers, when in fact, the white union excluded them from membership.



Rochdale and beyond

- Were Dantai true cooperatives in the Rochdale sense?
- Cooperatives need to be situated in the context of their times. The use of Rochdale principles to evaluate cooperatives is a form of cultural imperialism because it assumes that there is one “right” form and way (Western) to develop cooperatives. Diffusion?
- Collective bargaining, mutual aid, political action, etc.

Women played pivotal role in community survival



Japanese Cannery Workers - Steveston, Salmonopolis, p. 65



Women and Cooperative Development

- Largely unknown and invisible labor of ethnic minority women;
- Need for more research in ethnic coops, from non-European groups;
- Need for gender, race, class, age, etc. intersectional frameworks



Implications from Case Studies

- Ethnic minority cooperatives need to be understood within context of racial state formation and decolonization; Assumptions regarding roots of coop movement need to be rethought given the research on non-western, ethnic minority cooperatives;
- Dominant frameworks fail to comprehend the emergence and development of ethnic minority cooperatives in their specific contexts.
- What work do dominant discourses about cooperatives do? In whose interest do they act? Discourses perform and are made to work in the interests of power (Foucaultian genealogical analysis).
- Innovative strategies and tactics of resistance initiated and implemented by ethnic minority women. Their agency often overlooked in studies of resistance.



Implications

- Attend more fully to racial/ethnic/class/gender hierarchies; Co-operatives can be a pragmatic response to racism and exclusion.
- Motivations for cooperative development does not just follow rational economic logics.
- Need to bring in other explanatory frameworks to make these other processes and effects visible.
- Changing composition of Canada, and North America make such approaches long overdue and urgent if cooperatives are to remain relevant and responsive to change; if cooperatives are to reach their aspirational ideals.
- Need to shift away from nationalistic, patriotic discourses for claiming cooperative “success”. Celebrating coop success is great but not if it truncates knowledge in favor of evangelical fervor or asserting norms based on unacknowledged assumptions. Power is always in circulation.



Thank you.

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