

“Out of Place, Where to Belong?”

Cynthia Kadohata's Writing of Cross-Cultural Japanese American Experience in *Weedflower*

Bess Yukuan Chen
Soochow University, Taiwan

Abstract

Set around the time when the Japanese bombing of Hawaii's Pearl Harbor occurred in December 1941, Cynthia Kadohata's award-winning young adult historical fiction *Weedflower* (2006) reflects upon a less-written and even less-known past in American history and in children's literature: the Japanese internment camps in the USA. The story centers around how Sumiko Yamaguchi (later known as Sumiko Matsuda), a 12-year-old Japanese-American girl growing up in a small-scale, family-run flower farm in California, experiences her family's American Dream is forced into a sharply harsh change. Being categorized, arrested, separated, and located in different camps in the States, some of her families, as *Issei* (the first generation of Japanese immigrants) and the leaders of Japanese communities or a trade union, are sent to the camp which functions as a virtual prison at the time, while others, including herself, as *Nikkei* (the second or third generation of Japanese immigrants), are placed in a detention camp set up in a Native American reservation. In this troublesome journey of relocation, not only their lands and farmhouses but even tiny little objects of memory are forced to be discarded or destroyed, especially if any of these items may reveal or suggest something “un-American” (i.e. Japanese) to their detainers. In the detention camp she stays, Sumiko meets people, people who suffer from the same fate as her family but each chooses a different path of setting off their future journey, bravely or passively, or, people like the Mohave, who have the lawful rights of the reservation but have no say when the American government decides to take the land away for the establishment of the detention camp. They simply live and struggle in poverty.

My paper does not seek to conduct further researches on verifying the crucial bits and pieces of historical fragments in *Weedflower*, rather, it presents a close analysis of how the misunderstanding, the disagreement, then the friendship and the departure between Sumiko and her Mohave friend, Frank, shape the way she perceives the adversities she experiences in life as a young Japanese American.