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On the Loss of Identity in *When the Emperor was  
Divine*

The novel *When the Emperor Was Divine* tells a story of a Japanese American family's ordeal in internment camps during World War Two. The father is arrested by the FBI because he is suspected a spy. The mother has to take care of her two children and move to the internment camp in Utah. After three years, the family is released from the internment camp; then they come back to their house and wait for the father's return. However, after the father returns home thin and worn, the family—forever changed—attempts to piece together their new existence.

It is strange that the main characters in the novel are nameless, while there are so many named unimportant characters. The change of the father and the roles the mother and children play in the novel also serve as the theme of the book. This essay aims to study the comparison of the named and nameless characters as well as the different personalities of the main family members. Through the analysis of their loss of identity, the essay also reveals the sufferings of Japanese Americans at that time vividly and draws attention to that history.

To begin with I will provide a brief background on the Japanese American during World War Two. Since the Pearl Harbour Attack on December 7th 1941, the U.S opened hostilities with Japan and the relationship between the two countries reached a tense situation. The profound influence of the war is that numerous Japanese started their sufferings and hardships in the next several years. At the start of the war, the American government took a series of measures aiming at Japanese Americans in the U.S. All the Japanese Americans, no matter who they were, adults or children, had been suspected spies. In addition, more than 120,000 Japanese Americans had been sent into internment camps, which were also called relocation centers. With all kinds of unbearable treatments during the internment, a lot of Japanese chose

to commit suicide. The measures taken by the American government brought a lot of harm to thousands of Japanese American families mentally and physically.

In *When the Emperor was Divine*, the author depicts the Japanese family members' lives and ordeals in order to portray the situation in which they lose their identity at that time. The structure of this essay will contain two parts: the first one is to demonstrate the loss of identity through the study of the named and nameless characters: the second one is through the analysis of the Japanese family members' characters and experiences to indicate their loss of identity.

At first, the four main characters are all nameless but with the appellation---the father, the son, the daughter and the mother. Generally speaking, if authors want their writings to be understood easily, they always choose to set names for the characters, which also can avoid confusion. But in *When the Emperor was Divine*, the author must mean to express a special meaning through the nameless main characters.

On one hand, it is thought that the experiences of this nameless Japanese American family is not a single example but the epitome of what all Japanese American encountered at that time. Nearly 120,000 Japanese American were taken from their homes in the spring and early summer of 1942 and incarcerated in concentration camps by the United States government.(Roger Daniels, 3) So, as the quotation shows, these four nameless characters can be any Japanese in the U.S and there are still numerous Japanese trapped in that similar situation. On the other hand, what is more significant, the namelessness of the characters also indicates the loss of their identities. Because they are Japanese American, they are different from the real American natives in their habits, world views and values. They live in an environment with mixed American and Japanese cultures. Even they are obsessed by their Japanese identities in American society. For example, when the mother

and children come back from the interment camp, they find that everything is changed and their Japanese identities may cause trouble for them. So the children say like this:

We would change our names to sound more like theirs. And if our mother called out to us on the street by our real names we would turn away and pretend not to know her. We would never be mistaken for the enemy again! (Otsuka, 114)

From what is above, we find although the children have their own Japanese names, but they cannot use them because that may cause trouble for them. As to the relationship between name and identity, Seeman argues: "Identity, though complex, can be encoded in a name." (Seeman, 1 paragraph) In other words, the name is the most obvious symbol of the identity. However, in order to avoid troubles, Japanese children even want to change or give up their Japanese names. In addition, they should also behave as the native American and only in this way they can never be mistaken for the enemy again. In fact, no matter how the children pretend they are no different from the natives, they are only "American-born Japanese". They want to be the same as the natives, but they have to drop the right to use their names to avoid trouble, which is a kind of helpless sorrow. Through this arrangement of the author, readers can realize the Japanese hardships in the U.S during World War Two.

In addition, there are also a lot of statements about the nameless Japanese in the novel: "We were just numbers to them, mere slaves to the Emperor. We didn't even have names. I was 326." (Otsuka, 119) This is said by a Japanese who has been arrested as a spy. When compared to the previous example, the difference between them is obvious. In the former example, the children do not want to use their real names for that their real names will expose their identities and cause trouble for them at that particular time. However, what this Japanese says manifests that they do not have the right to own their names. Even the basic right to use their own names is rejected after they are arrested. In other words, with the right to use their

names being deprived, they also lose their identifications. Moreover, when the Japanese family lives in the internment camp, there is also another event of the children describing the misery of them:

One evening, before he (the son) went to bed, he wrote his name in the dust across the top of the table. All through the night, while he slept, more dust blew through the walls.

By morning his name was gone. (Otsuka, 64)

When deeply analyzing it, this plot means to express the helplessness and the suffering of nameless Japanese in the U.S. The son writes his name on the table in the evening, but by morning the name is gone. The author never explains that why his name is gone or who makes his name gone. It is not necessary to make it clear that who on earth takes his name gone, because the phrase “By morning his name was gone” has already express the helplessness of the children. This irony manifests that even though the Japanese want to record their names, there are still people who can take their name away. They have been deprived of their basic rights to prove their identities, and all of these are represented through the nameless characters depicted by the author.

In addition to the main characters in the book, there is still another example relating to nameless Japanese in the internment camp.

On a warm evening in April a man was shot dead by the barbed-wire fence. The guard who was on duty said the man had been trying to escape. He'd called out to him four times, the guard said, but the man had ignored him. (Otsuka, 101)

This event happens in the internment camp where the Japanese family lives. In the camp, the lives of the Japanese Americans are cruel and repeating. Initially, camp authorities spied on internee activities in the different blocks in addition to the twenty-four-hour watch by armed sentries in surrounding watchtowers.( Creef,85) Everyday, everything, including eating and sleeping, they do should be supervised. They have no freedom in the internment camp;

they do not even have the right to take a walk in the internment camp freely. This man's death attributes to that he has not heard the warning of the guard and his names has not been mentioned even at his funeral. Being deprived of the right to own their names is just the same as being deprived of their freedom. In the internment camp, the Japanese eventually know what the significance of the identity is. Loss of identity means they cannot be treated as human but a kind of animal which should be monitored in the internment camp. About the ordeal of Japanese in the internment camps, Renteln's argues that: "[S]ome lost their lives as well as their dignity." (Renteln, paragraph 6) For the guard, this man's life is valueless because he can decide to shoot when he thinks this man is intractable. As the guard takes this man's life, he also takes this man's dignity. This dead man's loss of dignity can manifest his loss of identity. The dead man's friend believes that it is just a rare and unusual flower on the other side of the fence that the man wants to pick when the shot is fired. No matter what kind of flower this is, it is on the other side of the fence and can stand for their names, their freedom and everything they lose due to the war, even their own identity. In fact, no matter what the flower stands for, the dead man just wants to pick a flower but it is this small desire that causes his death. The essential reason for this tragic event is that the war deprives Japanese Americans of their freedom and identity; they cannot be treated equally.

Then, after the mother and two children come back from the internment to their former house, they find their house has been dwelled by some nameless people and everything in their house is changed. For the first time, they realize they cannot come back to the former lives:

Many people had lived in our house while we were away but we did not know who they were, or where they had gone, or why we had never received a single check in the mail from the man who had promised to rent out our house. (Otsuka, 110)

During the three years the mother and two children live in the internment camp, their house has been inhabited by "many people" who are nameless. Their house should have been rented out by a lawyer, but there is no check and they don't even know who lives in their house when they are away. These nameless people, just like robbers, break the family's dream to come back to former days. In addition, these nameless "robbers" also can stand for anyone or anything that deprives the Japanese family of their rights or possessions. In the short three years, their house has been "robbed" like that. Even no government, no police, not their neighbors would help to protect their possessions just because they were Japanese American. As Waseda states: "The attack on Pearl Harbor engendered increasing public suspicion of, fear of, and hostility toward people of Japanese ancestry in the United States."( Waseda, paragraph 1) At the chaotic time, due to the misunderstanding of the American society to Japanese, Japanese Americans become a particular community who cannot receive equal protection and treatment as native Americans; the Japanese Americans living in the U.S are victims who cannot protect themselves mentally and materially. Until then, the Japanese family has to admit that they are unable to protect their house as other citizens because they indeed have been deprived of many rights.

In the next section, the analysis of the named characters is given. It is interesting to analyze the reason why so many unimportant characters in the novel have names. The first example is at the beginning of the novel when the mother buys a bucket in the store.

"Thank you, Joe." Then the door slammed behind her and she was alone on the sidewalk and she realized that in all the years she had been going to Joe Lundy's store she had never before called him by his name. Joe. It sounded strange to her. (Otsuka, 6)

On one hand, in the novel, even though this unimportant seller gets a name, there are still no names for the main characters. It indicates that even if the Japanese have stayed in the U.S for

many years, they are still not real Americans. Their identities are complex and different from the natives. Moreover, the comparison between the nameless mother and the named unimportant seller manifests the Japanese American's subordinate position in American society. On the other hand, the mother feels strange about having never called the seller's name for many years. The mother has known the seller's name but just never call out, however, the seller may never know the Japanese mother's name. It is just at that time the mother starts to realize she is different from the natives. The reason that the mother feel strange to call the seller by his name is that she has never been called by her Japanese name. Even before that, she never realises that the meaning of the name, as a symbol of one's identity, is so important. Especially in war time, the neglect of her name means the loss of identity.

In addition, after the father's arrestment, the mother has to take the children to the interment camp. However, on the train, the Japanese children meet an American girl with her doll named Shirley which is ironic and hurts them deeply.

In the middle of the aisle a young girl of five or six was playing with a dirty doll on the floor. The doll had curly yellow hair and big china eyes that opened and closed.

"What's your doll's name?"

"Miss Shirley." The young girl held the doll up shyly. "Mama bought her for me from the Sears catalog." (Otsuka, 35)

This scene is really an irony. First of all, even though the young girl's doll can own a name, the Japanese families in the novel are nameless all along. This comparison manifests the unjust treatment of Japanese at that particular time realistically. Secondly, when the daughter happens to meet the young girl in the train, she asks the doll's name politely. However, throughout the whole novel, it is strange that none of the family's native neighbors, friends or classmates have ever asked the Japanese family members' names. That is to say, the American natives all do not care about the Japanese family's names and their lives, or they



just do not want to cause trouble by being close to the Japanese. In other words, the name “[M]iss Shirley” is the image of many Americans who are proud of their American identity, meanwhile, ignore other people around them.

Furthermore, even if the Japanese family knows clearly about their neighbors, their neighbors still do not really care about the Japanese existence. This abnormal relationship between the Japanese family and their neighbors manifests the Japanese Americans are subordinate in the American society.

Sometimes one of us would suddenly stop on the sidewalk and point to a neighbor’s front window. Wasn’t that our mother’s Electrolux Mrs. Leahy was pushing back and forth across her living room floor? Didn’t the Gilroy’s mohair sofa look awfully familiar?[…](Otsuka, 123)

These events happen on the children’s way back to home from school after the mother and two children release from the internment camp. Many things they see in the neighbor’s house are so familiar to them. Despite that maybe the whole paragraph is just the children’s imagination, but Renteln has argued that: “[M]any Japanese Americans also lost their property.” (Renteln, paragraph 10) The author does not mention that if those furnitures in neighbor’s house are stolen from the Japanese family or not, but Japanese family has indeed lost their property in the wartime which is due to the different status between Japanese American and the American natives. In addition, from this paragraph, we can see their neighbors all have names except the single Japanese family. In the novel, a nameless Japanese family lives in a community with native American families who all have names. This comparison or irony expresses the loneliness of the Japanese family vividly. Furthermore, the Japanese family knows their neighbors’ names clearly, but their neighbors do not know the Japanese family members’ names and they do not even care to know.

In addition, even when their neighbors want to show friendliness to the Japanese family, they just use "neighbor" but never try to find out the family members' real names or show real respect. For example, "Nice to see you again, neighbor. How long do you plan on staying in town?" (Otsuka, 112). "*How long do you plan on staying in town?*" (My emphasis)

In fact, the speaker wants to show his concern to the Japanese family, but unconsciously, he regards himself as the owner of the town. In the speaker's mind, the Japanese family just plans to stay but not inhabit the town, and what he really cares about is how long these Japanese will stay in the town but not the lives of them. Through the neighbor's attitude to the Japanese family, the Japanese Americans' subordinate position is clearly represented.

Through the analysis of the named and nameless characters in *When the Emperor was Divine*, we will find that nameless characters are almost Japanese and most of the named characters are unimportant Americans. With the comparison of the named and nameless characters in the novel, the hardship of Japanese Americans at that time and the loss of their identity is manifested vividly. In addition to that, there are two meanings of the nameless Japanese characters in the novel. The first one is that they have no name, so they can be any Japanese at that time and their encounters are just a part of what all Japanese have experienced during World War Two. The second one is that having a name is a basic human right, and being deprived of the right to own a name is the most obvious symbol of their loss of identity. The author means to set the main nameless characters to attract the readers' attention and describe the hardship of Japanese Americans in the U.S at that time. This nameless application expresses that the war hurts the American Japanese deeply and also evokes the readers' sympathy for the Japanese.

Furthermore, the analysis of the characters of the family members can also manifest their loss of identity. The first important character in *When the Emperor was Divine* is the father.

Although the direct description of the father is rare, the father's experiences and the change of the father are part of the novel's theme. There is no depiction of the father before he is arrested. But through the memory of the children, we can know about it.

Our father, the father we remembered, and had dreamed of, almost nightly, all through the years of the war, was handsome and strong. He moved quickly, surely, with his head held high in the air. He liked to draw for us. He liked to sing for us. He liked to laugh.  
(Otsuka, 132)

The description above manifests that, in the children's heart, the image of the father is optimistic and positive. The children also keep a very good relationship with the father all along. During the years the father is arrested, the children never stop writing letters to the father who is the hope and the topic of the family. But when the children see their father again in the railway station, they cannot believe the man in front of them is the father they miss day and night. "He uttered our names, but still we could not be sure it was him." (Otsuka, 132). The only reason the children cannot recognize their father at first sight is that they are startled by the change of their father. When the father is arrested, he is young, strong and optimistic; but when he comes back after several years, he is old, weak and cannot even be recognized by his family. The change of the father's appearance is just one representation of the father's ordeal in the camp and his loss of identity.

However, the father's release does not mean the family's dream comes true. The family cannot come back to the former happy life due to the change of the father. The father's odd behavior drive the family trapped in trouble again. For example:

He wore the same loose baggy trousers every day and was convinced that someone was watching the house. He did not like to use the telephone---you never know who might be listening---or to eat out in public.

[...]

"You think they care?" he(the father) shouted at us as we slowly made our way toward the door. We covered our ears with our hands and kept on walking. (Otsuka, 134)

Once the father comes back to the family, the father becomes sensitive to everything in his life and suspects everyone around their house. Eventually, the father's crazy behavior in the bank makes the children feel ashamed to recognize him and they just cover their ears and keep on walking. In the children's memory, their father likes to draw for them or sing to them; at least he is a normal person. But this event in the bank manifests children's dream breaks totally because of the change of the father. There are no comments about the sufferings of the father in the book. But this massive change of the father manifests that the war hurt the father hardly. Furthermore, this change of the father mainly indicates the father's loss of identity. The war and the suffering in the internment camp change an optimistic normal father into an odd and insane person. The father should have behaved as a kind father or a good husband after his release, but in reality, he cannot even behave normally. His odd behavior indicates that he loses his identity in the family and in the children's mind. After a short time of the father's odd behaviors, he changes again and becomes more and more silent and isolated. For example:

As the days grew longer our father began spending more and more time alone in his room. He stopped reading the newspaper.[...]The handwriting in his notebook grew smaller and fainter and then disappeared from the page altogether. (Otsuka, 136-37)

It is different from his former crazy behavior because he does not shout out but refuse to express his thought to others. He begins to spend more time to stay alone. The former event indicates that the father loses his identity in the family because of his crazy behavior; this event indicates that the father loses his identity to be a social man. Because

he even loses the basic capability to communicate with others or raise the family as a man and he also cannot return to the normal life. Superficially, the change of the father embodies in his personality, but analyzing it essentially, we find that the father's loss of identity is represented by his change of his role in the family. As a father, he loses his capability to teach or educate his children; as a husband, he loses his capability to support the family; and he even cannot lead a normal life but always behaves oddly. The internment thus constituted a major disruption in the socio-economic development and cultural identities of Japanese Americans. (Waseda, paragraph 1) From Waseda's argument, we can see the event that the father loses his role to support the family and even becomes insane attributes to his ordeal in the internment camp. The father's loss of his identity is indicated through his massive change brought by the war.

Another important role in the book is played by the mother. As a woman, she should have behaved weakly after her husband is arrested; but with the hope for her husband's release and bringing the children up, she is so tough that she tries all kinds of methods to earn money in order to support the family and seldom shows her weakness to the children. Only when she stays alone, she can behave as a helpless mother. The mother's loss of identity can be indicated through the comparison between her tough character in the daytime and her weakness at night. She has to control these two different characters and transfer from one to another. The next quotation is about the experience of the mother's finding a job after she releases from the internment camp.

The ads in the papers all said help wanted, will train, but wherever she went she was turned down. "The position's just been filled," she was told again and again.[...] "I was afraid I'd ruin my eyes back there," she told us. (Otsuka, 128)

In this event of finding a job, the mother has encountered many obstructions due to her Japanese identity. "[Y]ou will be stripped of all of your legal rights as an American

citizen and summarily incarcerated as a 'prisoner without trial' for three years in an internment camp." (Lim, Jennifer, 11) Even when the mother comes back from the internment camp, she also cannot find a job as the other Americans because she has been stripped of her legal rights as an American citizen. "Many white people held racist views toward Japanese Americans and did not want to work with them." (Smith, paragraph 12) Due to the American society's discrimination to the Japanese, finding a job becomes much difficult for the mother. The comparison between the many "help wanted" ads and the mother's experience of being rejected by almost all the employers can express the mother's loss of identity well.

At last, the optimistic and tough mother finds a job. For example:

Finally she began cleaning house for some of the wealthy families who lived in the hills. The work, she insisted, was not hard. *You just smile and say yes ma'am and no ma'am and do as you're told.* [...] she was friendly, she told us, but not too friendly. *If you're too friendly they'll think you think you're better than they are.* (Otsuka, 129)

Eventually, she gets a job to clean house for some wealthy families who live in the hills. "The work, she insisted, was not hard. You just smile and say yes ma'am and no ma'am and do as you're told." (Otsuka, 129) The mother describes that her work is not hard in order to avoid the children's worry. However, after that, the author uses parallelism in the sentences beginning with "if" to express the real situation of the mother's job. Dennis Ogawa presents four major stereotypes of Japanese Americans: highly un-American, inferior citizens, sexually aggressive, and part of an international menace. (Ogawa, 43) Among Ogawa's four stereotypes of Japanese Americans, highly un-American and inferior citizens can be embodied in the mother's experience of working. In the wealthy families, she should not behave too friendly, too careless and has no right to express her real thought in that work. The

mother just has to work like a machine without any feelings and do whatever the employer asks. The application of anaphora not only manifests how hard the mother's work is but also makes the readers know the situation of the mother's loss of identity. With the description of so many restrictions and demands in the mother's work, the author wants to depict the hardship of the mother's life and manifest that the mother loses her identity in her work. All of these just attributes to her Japanese identity at that wartime.

Even though the life of the Japanese family is hard, the mother has never give up the hope. Facing the difficulties in the reality, she is always optimistic and teaches her children to be tough. For example:

They're afraid, our mother had said.

Keep on walking.

Hold your head up.

Whatever you do, don't look back. (Otsuka, 115)

Those words are taught to the children by the mother after they come back home. In the beginning, they lead a hard life because some nameless people have dwelled in their house with many things in the house lost; they even have no money to support the daily life and at the same time, they are still treated unfairly by the society. It is the hardest time of the family and they do not know what the future will be like. But it is the mother's tough character that encourages the family to maintain hope and strive for a better life. "Keep on walking. Hold your head up."(Otsuka, 115) Facing all kinds of difficulties in the life, the mother chooses to hold her head up and never give up; she also teaches this to her children. As a woman, after her husband is arrested, she does not behave weakly but carries a huge burden of the family as a breadwinner. She plays the father's role in the family passively, in a way; this transition of her role in the family means her loss of her female identity. However, the mother is not

always so tough in her life. The following is a dialogue about the mother's femininity between the mother and the children:

"When I first met your father I wanted to be with him all the time."

"I know what you mean."

"If I was away from him for even five minutes, I'd start to miss him. I'd think, he's never coming back. I'll never see him again. But after a while I stopped being so afraid. Things change."(Otsuka,96)

From the quotation we see that, as a wife, the mother misses her husband so much and her weakness as a woman is also portrayed. The mother loves her husband and she wishes she could be with him all the time. What the mother says manifests that she is just an ordinary woman who wants to lead an easy life with her family. But, after her husband is arrested, the reality makes this ordinary woman learn to be tough and she has to support her family by herself. Even if she is a helpless woman whose husband is arrested, she cannot show her weakness and sadness to the others but only expresses to the children unconsciously. Most of the time, she behaves toughly and she seldom shows her sadness and helplessness because she must support the family and take care of the children. These two different characters: toughness and weakness promote the mother's loss of identity because the reality forces her to behave toughly which she has never done. About this point, there is still another example in the novel:

Every morning, in the place where we had lived during the war, she had reached for the key as soon as she woke, just to make sure it was still there. And every evening, before she closed her eyes, she had touched the key one last time. [...] The key had become a part of her. (Otsuka, 107)

The key plays a very important role in the mother's daily life because it embodies the mother's love for her husband which can be manifested by the sentence "[t]he key had become a part of her". No matter how toughly the mother behaves in the day time or how she teaches her



children to be tough, at night when the mother stays alone, she is feminine. In addition, the contrast between her toughness in the daytime and her femininity at night also makes her hope that her husband can come back earlier to end this situation. The mother has to play two different roles in the family and she also has been deprived of the right to be a housewife due to the war. The comparison of the two roles the mother plays in the family is the manifestation of her loss of identity, too.

At last, as the important role in the family, the children have encountered the hardship in their childhood. They also witness the ordeal of the family as a result of the loss of identity. There is such an example in the novel: “‘No more rice balls,’ she said. ‘And if anyone asks, you’re Chinese.’ The boy had nodded. ‘Chinese,’ he whispered. ‘I’m Chinese.’”(Otsuka, 75) After the mother and children come back their house, they want to return to the normal life they had before, so the mother demands the children to say they are Chinese when they are asked in order to avoid trouble. The boy's reaction is to nod at first and then whisper twice, which indicates that he is obedient to his mother even though he does not know the reason. Then, he is also confused by his mother's demands and in his heart he is not willing to do what she asks, which can be manifested through another example: “‘Later, a man stopped him on the sidewalk in front of Woolworth's and said, ‘Chink or Jap?’ and the boy answered, ‘Chink,’ and ran away as fast as he could. Only when he got to the corner did he turn around and shout, ‘Jap! Jap! I’m a Jap!’”(Otsuka, 76)

From this event, we can see that the boy is rebellious to pretend to be a Chinese and he also tries to fight for his Japanese identity. However, this fight indicates the children's loss of identity. On one hand, as the first example states, they could not acknowledge their real identities as Japanese frankly in order to avoid trouble; on the other hand, through the analysis of the second example, their Japanese identities also cannot be recognized by the outside. This stress from inside and outside make the Japanese children lose their

identities. Even if they come back to their old house, they cannot come back to their former life because they lose their identity due to the ordeal in the internment. Moreover, the society's nonrecognition and discrimination to their Japanese identities also makes them lose their identities.

Secondly, the children's encounters at school can also manifest their loss of identity and their helplessness. Once the Japanese children return to school, they find school's attitude to them has changed. So, they say: "Perhaps they had never expected us to come back and had put us out of their minds once and for all long ago. One day we were there and the next day, poof, our names had been crossed off the roll books, our desks and lockers, reassigned, we were gone." (Otsuka, 121) The change of the classmates' and school's attitudes to them is an obvious representation of Japanese children's subordinate position and unequal treatment. In the Japanese children's view, their classmates maybe never expect they will come back and even they have put them out of mind. Even if the Japanese children have encountered such a hardship in their childhood, the classmates still do not show sympathy to them because they have never really cared about the Japanese children. In addition to that, when the Japanese children leave school for the internment, their names have been crossed off the roll books, desks and lockers. As the prominent trait of human's identity, the Japanese children's names have been crossed off which is just like they have never existed. At that particular time, both school and their classmates do not want have an intimate relationship with Japanese children in order to avoid trouble. So, the Japanese become isolated by the outside society, which also cause their loss of identities.

In addition to the classmates' indifferent attitudes, the Japanese children should also pay attention to their own behavior and words at school. For example:

We said yes and no and no problem.

We said thank you.

[...]

Don't even think about it.

When our teacher asked us if everything was all right we nodded our heads and said, yes, of course, everything was fine.(122)

From what is said, we can figure out that the Japanese children always stand in an unequally position with respect to their classmates. The Japanese children are subordinate and should behave respectfully, be more polite and pretend to forgive others tolerantly. Roger Daniels properly contextualizes the central themes of American history -- the theme of white supremacy, of American racism. (Daniel, 16) The Japanese children's subordinate position attributes to the American racism which also promotes Japanese Americans' loss of their identities. Here, "of course, everything was fine." is an irony that expresses the children's dissatisfaction and helplessness. Because after they return to school, everything at school has changed and even they cannot find their own position, but when the teacher ask them if everything is all right, they also cannot tell the truth. The Japanese children do not want to admit they are different from the classmates, so they reply with everything is all right. There is also another example of the Japanese children at school:

If we did something wrong we made sure to say excuse me (excuse me for looking at you, excuse me for sitting here, excuse me for coming back)...I have always wanted to touch you, I will never touch you again, I promise, I swear...(Otsuka, 123-23)

The unfair treatment of the Japanese children at school can be obviously seen in this paragraph. No matter what the Japanese children do, even no matter whom makes mistakes, the Japanese children should always be more polite and apologize for what they do. Owing to their loss of identity, when they seek contact with their classmates they

always stand in a subordinate position. The Japanese children's unfair treatment by the classmates and subordinate position comparing to the native classmates are the prominent representation of their loss of identity.

To sum up, the book *When the Emperor was Divine* tells a story about the Japanese family's sufferings during World War Two. This Japanese family's ordeal is just an epitome of numerous Japanese Americans at that time; the depiction of their loss of identity impenetrates in the whole book through two aspects: on one hand, there are so many nameless important characters in the book. As the main manifestation of identity, they have been deprived of their rights because of the war. Compared to many unimportant but named characters, the main characters are all nameless which also indicates their loss of identity. On the other hand, the Japanese family members' ordeal and their changed personalities are also due to the war. Through their ordeal and unequal treatment, their loss of identity can also be represented.

With the story and ordeal of the Japanese family in *When the Emperor Was Divine*, the author depicts the situation of Japanese American's loss of identity at that wartime. In addition to that, the author also wants to draw people's attention to this history.

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