The “Picture Bride Problem”: Experiences of and Attitudes Toward Japanese Picture Brides in California, 1908-1920

Jemma Fagler

Honors Thesis Submitted to the Department of History, Georgetown University
Advisor: Professor Jordan Sand
Honors Program Chair: Katherine Benton-Cohen

May 7th, 2018
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Acknowledgments

This thesis is, without a doubt, the hardest project I have ever worked on, and I would not be here without the support of so many wonderful people. I would like to thank my advisor, Jordan Sand, for teaching History of Modern Japan, which got me re-interested in this topic in the first place, for pushing me in new, fascinating research directions, and for always believing in me, even when I didn’t. Thank you to Katherine Benton-Cohen, who provided invaluable guidance throughout this whole process, and whose questions and advice pushed me to be a better scholar. Thank you to my thesis seminar classmates-- it’s been a pleasure watching your scholarly minds at work. Your camaraderie and recommendations this past year have been so important during this time.

I would like to give a huge thanks to my friends who were there every step of the way, particularly Sarah, Lianna, Elena, Makayla, Dinah, Lizzie, and Cassie, who sat with me through all the long hours. You picked me up, dusted me off, and kept me going-- I owe so much to your support. Thank you to my parents, who prodded me when I needed it and have always loved and supported me and my projects. Without you, none of this would be possible. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my great-grandmother, who I never knew, but came to Hawaii as a picture bride. Without her bravery, I would not be where I am today.

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**Introduction**

In February 1908, after a months-long journey from Yokohama, Japan, the S.S. Chiyo Maru pulled up at Angel Island, the immigration station off the coast of San Francisco, built in 1905.¹ A variety of Asian immigrants crowded in the steerage of the ship: Chinese immigrants trying to join their families, Filipino and South Asian workers and laborers, and a collection of Japanese women who had been married by proxy in Japan. While the Chinese migrants prepared for an intensive interview in order to prove they could still enter the United States despite the strict regulations from the Chinese Exclusion Acts, the group of young Japanese women prepared to meet their husbands for the first time, having only seen a picture of them up to that point. Still dressed in a typical kimono and sandals, the women ranged from their late teens to early 30s, and they clutched a small suitcase of their personal belongings.

Japanese “picture brides” -- women who immigrated to the United States after getting married by proxy to a Japanese man living in America -- arrived in California barely knowing what to expect. San Francisco was still reeling from the 1906 earthquake, which left the city severely damaged. Amidst the chaos that followed, the school board capitalized on growing exclusionist advocacy to order the segregation of white and Asian children in San Francisco public schools. The resulting diplomatic crisis, in which both sides discussed going to war, was settled through the Japanese agreement to stop granting passports to laborers to immigrate to the United States, if the school board did not segregate Japanese children, and Japanese wives and children could join their husbands and fathers in the United States. Very few young men could

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¹ “United States Immigration Station (USIS).” Angel Island Conservancy, September 16, 2014. angelisland.org.
afford to travel back to Japan and get married; therefore, to continue to send immigrants to the United States, the Japanese government set up the picture bride system. Women began arriving in the mainland United States in 1906, and women continued to immigrate through the end of 1920, when pressure against the women had grown to such an intensity that the Japanese government agreed, on its own accord, to stop issuing passports to picture brides.

From the moment the picture brides entered American society, they were the “picture bride problem.” Why was the “picture bride” system an issue as soon as it started and how did the women navigate that new pressure and their new lives? Which groups in American culture pressured and advocated against the picture brides, and which ones were on their side? Picture brides initially immigrated to the United States to be a social, economic, and moral solution to the Japanese bachelor community living in the American West. By creating families in the American West, they helped to found Japanese immigrant communities and permanently settle the previously migratory laboring *dekasegi-shosei* (student-workers). Picture brides became a target for exclusionists, however, because nativist leagues, led by Asiatic Exclusion League and other organized labor groups, viewed this move toward permanent settlement as a direct economic threat. The exclusionist groups also targeted picture brides because they were a reproductive threat-- their children were American citizens by birth. Lastly, exclusionist groups accused the picture brides of disguising themselves as wives to enter the United States as prostitutes and bring moral corruption to American society.

In order to examine these questions and accusations, this thesis will examine the picture bride system from four different angles.
Chapter One will explore how the Chinese female immigration in the 1880s laid the foundation for the treatment of Japanese picture brides and primed exclusionist groups and immigration officials to make certain assumptions about female Asian immigrants. Chapter one will also explore how the American legislative structure and decisions shaped the picture brides’ world. Roger Daniels, Ronald Takaki, and Martha Gardner have already done significant scholarship on this topic, but I focus on how picture brides specifically fit within the larger framework of Japanese immigration during this period.

Chapter Two argues that despite fitting within a larger legal, racial, and national framework, the picture brides had places to exert their own agency in their new lives. One of those places in the Immigration Station--Angel Island was the main one on the Pacific Coast. I rely heavily on the Investigative Case Files from the National Archives Building in San Francisco for this chapter. These case files revealed the individual worlds of picture brides in the hours or days after they disembark from the boat, and revealed how the picture brides navigated their first moments in the United States. I also leaned heavily on Yuji Ichioka’s *The Issei* throughout this chapter because of my inability to read Japanese sources. Ichioka founded his groundbreaking work in the hundreds of interviews that he did with Issei men and women (included picture brides), and it provided a vivid glimpse into the world of the Issei after they left the immigration station.

Chapter Three analyzes the press coverage of picture brides. While the *San Francisco Call*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Los Angeles Herald* began with stories about pictures with elements of Oriental romanticism, by the end of the decade, the press reported mainly on the exclusionist activities that worked against the picture brides. I also focus significant attention on
the regular shipping reports that appeared in the *San Francisco Call*, which featured frequent mention of picture brides but have not appeared in other analyses of this practice. By 1920, however, these papers elevated the exclusionist agenda, and while they did not actively work against the picture brides, the press served as a vehicle for the proliferation of exclusionist ideas.

Chapter Four is a shorter examination of the work anti-exclusionist whites, such as Sidney Gulick, a pro-Japan interpreter and activist, and Mabel Lamb, a member of the Women’s Home Missionary Society, who served as guardian to many picture brides who arrived in San Francisco between 1911-1913. The role of Protestantism in helping the assimilation of Japanese communities into American society is well-documented, so my focus is on the two levels in which Christian missionaries worked on behalf of the picture brides and the larger *Issei* community. Gulick worked more publicly on behalf of their civic rights, and Lamb and the other leaders at the Women’s Home worked more privately and directly with immigrant women in particular with resources, classes and activities.

While I successful in tapping a wide variety of source bases for my research, I am sorely lacking in one element-- Japanese language documents. I am unable to read or understand Japanese. While I am grateful for the proliferation of existing translations, I focused this thesis around lenses with large English-language source bases.
Chapter 1: The Legislative Structure and Context of the Picture Bride System

From 1908-1920, thousands of Japanese women married Japanese bachelors living in the United States by proxy. The groom stayed in the United States, while the bride went through the marriage ceremony and then joined their new husbands in the United States. These women were known colloquially as Japanese “picture brides” (*shashin kekkon* in Japanese), because they exchanged pictures with their husbands to introduce themselves across the long distance. While the exact number of picture brides that entered the United States is difficult to pinpoint during this time, between 1910 and 1920, the number of married Japanese women in California jumped from 5,581 to 22,193. A large percentage of those women came into the country as picture brides, since it was a common marriage practice at the time for bachelors living in the United States who could not afford to travel back to Japan and get married.

In hearings held by the U.S. Congressional Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, Kanzaki Kiichi reported that a total of 6,321 picture brides had entered through the Port of San Francisco between 1912 and 1920, but that number does not account for any bride who entered California through other ports of entry, such as another port or over the border from Mexico or Canada.

From the 1880s-early 1900s, California witnessed a growing population of single Japanese men, who had originally immigrated to the United States with the intent to stay for only a short period and earn some money to remit back to their families in Japan, but after leasing

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land or starting a business in the United States, decided to stay permanently. As a result of the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907, the outcome of negotiations between Roosevelt and the Japanese Foreign Ministry (more on the Gentlemen’s Agreement later in this chapter), women and children made up a limited group of Japanese immigrants able to enter the United States under the increased immigration regulations. Thus, within this legal framework, the picture bride practice quickly grew in popularity.

The picture bride system was built on the already established Japanese tradition of arranged marriages (mii kekkon), which dictated a much larger role for the family in couple’s marriages--the wedding was seen as a bonding of two families, rather than just a marriage between individuals. In picture bride marriages, the head of household in Japan chose a marriage partner for his family member who was living abroad, typically through an intermediary, or matchmaker (nakōdo) in Japan. Negotiations ensued between the two families, during which the couple exchanged photographs, with the man in the United States sending a photo and information about his life to his parents or relatives. During the negotiations, the families looked into financial standing, genealogy, social standing, education, and health of the prospective spouse and their family. If both parties agreed to the arrangement, a marriage ceremony would commence, notably without the groom present, and the new couple’s names would be added to their family’s registers. In accordance with Japanese laws and customs, this practice was acceptable and legal.

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8 Ibid.
Afterwards, the woman would need to obtain a visa from the Japanese government to the United States and board a ship headed to Hawaii or the West Coast of the mainland. In order to get a passport, she needed to clear the Japanese government’s immigration restrictions: passing a medical exam and proving that she had undergone the correct marriage procedures and added her name to her new family’s registers. This trip was often the women’s first trip to the United States or overseas. Immigration officers viewed the picture brides immediately with suspicion, aware that Japanese prostitutes previously entered the country under the guise of a picture bride marriage.

The Japanese picture bride system, was not the only “proxy marriage” system set up around the world. This system was unique, however, because of the local legislative framework in which it was created and the attention the practice received from local politicians, the sensationalist press, and Christian missionary groups. This chapter will focus on the important legislative decisions made in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that shaped the “picture bride” debate. This legislation includes the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907, the Alien Land Laws of 1913 that resulted from early exclusionist efforts and shaped the economic realities of the new lives of the Issei women, and the Naturalization Laws, dating back to 1790, that blocked the Japanese women from citizenship. This chapter will also discuss its placement within the Japanese exclusion movement, the mounting local political pressure that inevitably led

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9 Board of Special Inquiry Interview with Shimeno Ishisaki, 1910/11/18, File 10437/2-1, Box 467, Immigration Arrival Investigation Case Files, 1884-1944, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, National Archives Building, San Bruno, CA.
to the termination of the practice in 1920 by the Japanese government, and the resulting Japanese American Association conference debating the issue.

**Chinese Women in the Face of Exclusion**

Picture brides were one part of the second large wave of Asian immigration to the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—the first being the Chinese, who were almost completely excluded through various legislation from the 1880s onward, and the third being Filipinos and other Southeast Asians, who began immigrating to the United States in 1899, after the U.S. annexation of the Philippines. Exclusionist groups accused Chinese women of being inferior and immoral, which set the stage for the treatment that the Japanese picture brides faced when they began arriving in 1907. While the picture brides did not encounter the exact same type of discrimination, the arrival and subsequent banning of the Chinese fundamentally changed the way immigration authorities and local politicians treated Asian immigrants in the early twentieth century.

In both the Chinese and the Japanese waves, the initial immigrants who came to America were young, single, men, creating an unbalanced sex ratio within the immigrant population in the American West. Most of traditional scholarship surrounding the Chinese immigration population has described them as “sojourners,” since many held low-level laborer or entrepreneurial middlemen jobs that allowed them to send remittances home to their families, but kept them in temporary status in American society. While historians have debated whether the “sojourner”

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lifestyle was due to Chinese cultural restrictions, pragmatic choices, or careful selection of Chinese immigrants who didn’t have dependent wives or children, the result was that, after the first period of Chinese immigration, the American West had a male-dominated Chinese population, where women wavered between 3.6 (ca. 1890) and 7.2 (ca. 1870) of the total Chinese population.¹³

While women were a tiny portion of the immigrant population, they proved to be a major target for anti-Chinese organizations, who pointed to a growing prostitution industry in urban centers as a sign of the moral decay of the Chinese population. The passage of the Page Law of 1875, which banned the immigration of forced laborers from China or Japan and women “for the purposes of prostitution” was the first piece of national legislation to target “undesirable” immigrant populations.¹⁴ The law discouraged all Chinese women from immigrating to the U.S., making it harder to establish permanent Chinese families or communities.¹⁵ With the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, only a few immigrants--merchants, diplomats, students, clergymen, and travelers--even had the option of bringing women to the U.S. The subsequent renewals and amendments in 1884, 1888, 1902 (the law that made exclusion permanent), and 1904, further limited the Chinese ability to immigrate.¹⁶

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¹⁵ Peffer, “From Under the Sojourner’s Shadow”, 57.
Meanwhile, labor unions, nativist organizations, and sensationalist newspapers spread prejudiced rumors about the Chinese population already living there. The “yellow journalism” of William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, a style of sensationalist journalism the two men’s papers used in the 1880s and 1890s accelerated the anxiety and fear about Chinese immigrants. The articles warning about the “yellow peril” included exaggerated political cartoons that portrayed the Chinese as violent, monstrous, and invasive, inciting xenophobic fears amongst white Californians-- although these cartoons were primarily focused on the male Chinese immigrants.

Figure 1. From an 1885 issue of the WASP, a San Francisco magazine.17

Early Japanese Immigration: Creating a Male Immigrant Community in the United States

The Chinese Exclusion Acts occurred twelve years after the opening up of Japan, which unlocked its previously closed borders in 1868 with the ascension of Emperor Meiji. With its

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entrance onto the international stage, the Japanese government focused on proving it was a world power. Through rapid industrialization and militarization, the Japanese government prepared to combat accusations that the Japanese were “backwards” or “uncivilized.” The government officials also tried to combat these negative stereotypes by only sending out middle class, healthy, intelligent Japanese men to live, work, and study in other countries. Immigration, especially to the United States, was an extension of Japanese nationalistic ambitions and pride; therefore, the government elites only intended on sending their most ambitious and emblematic migrants abroad. In the government’s view, the best pioneers of Japanese immigration were young, and importantly, male.

In order to understand the need for picture brides to immigrate to America, it is necessary to discuss why the Japanese immigrant community had such a skewed sex ratio by 1907. Immigration from Japan to the United States first began in the 1880s, with the arrival of middle-class students and intellectuals, who viewed the American West as an opportunity to create a “new Japan” overseas. 18 The Japanese government tasked these immigrants with spreading Japanese civilization in the West, and bettering the relations between Japan and the United States, known as the “peaceful expansionism” mindset. Akira Iriye argued this mindset not only described “the passive emigration of individual Japanese, but could imply a government-sponsored, active program of overseas settlement and positive activities to tie distant lands closer to Japan.” 19 Social workers who had studied and worked in the American West, such as Katayama Sen and Shimanuki Hyodayu, returned to Japan to encourage male youth to leave

for America to study. After attending Yale Divinity School, and committing himself to advocate for the struggling urban student, Katayama Sen returned to Japan and headed an American-sponsored settlement house in Tokyo. There, Katayama and Shimanuki appealed to enthusiastic youth by publishing helpful books on emigration, and encouraging them to extend the power of Japan overseas. From the beginning of the immigration period, there was active, government-sponsored support for male immigration, so it makes sense that mostly young, single, men with few familial ties were the first to leave for the United States. The first generation of Japanese immigrants in the United States became known as the *Issei* generation. Once in the United States, if they were not students, these middle class *Issei* expansionists also worked as labor contractors in San Francisco, Seattle, and Portland, and facilitated the settlement of male Japanese laborers. Some worked on behalf of private migration companies who handled the immigration of Japanese laborers to California between 1894 and 1907.

While not the ideal the Japanese government was hoping for, the other significant population who immigrated in the late nineteenth century were male farmers or laborers who hoped to find economic success in the United States. If they did not have ties holding them to Japan they traveled through the private migration companies, or simply on their own, across the Pacific Ocean to make a new life for themselves.

By 1900, these young, single men made up a majority of the Japanese immigrant population in the United States. The increasing industrialization of Japan during the Meiji restoration and the exaltation of self-made white men in the United States gave hope to rural

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21 Ibid, 25.
22 Ibid, 163.
Japanese men that they could make a quick fortune by working overseas for a few years. They had much less regard for the state’s ambitions, but emigrated for personal or family reasons. Labeled as *dekasegi*, which roughly translates to “working away from home,” they lived a similar “sojourner” lifestyle as many of the Chinese men did, and filled the vacuum left by Chinese labor.23 The white middle class in the United States had grown dependent on paying lower wages to Asian immigrant labor, so new immigrants from Japan often settled into agricultural jobs in California.24 As the *dekasegi* settled into the jobs left by Chinese, however, the exclusionist population in the United States viewed them more and more like the Chinese laborers they so actively campaigned to exclude. The “Sinification” of the Japanese immigrants was one of the root causes of the Japanese exclusion movement that would later target the picture brides.25

The *dekasegi-shosei*, eventually adopted for themselves the name that Californians gave them: “schoolboys.”26 Working as student-laborers in California, *shosei* came to learn English, make some money to pay for their schooling, and gain a knowledge of American society and technology.27 They carried a dream of setting off to America empty-handed, gaining a fortune overnight, and then returning to Japan, wealthy and ready to settle down and start a family.28 They faced a harsh reality, however, when they earned meager wages and were often mistreated in those jobs. They coped through gambling, drinking, and engaging with prostitutes. In many

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24 Ibid, 163.
ways, the *dekasegi* lifestyle mirrored the culture of Chinese laborers that had come before them. Along with the low-paying urban or agricultural labor jobs, the growing gambling and prostitution industries emerging in West Coast cities led to accusations from the white communities of moral corruption in Japanese urban centers and increased the disparagement of the Japanese international image.

The immigration of *dekasegi* only increased the Japanese government’s motivation to select respectable young men to emigrate in order to counter the “undesirable” members of society who were tarnishing Japan’s powerful reputation abroad. *Issei* intelligentsia and elites in the United States looked down on the *dekasegi* laborers as not representative of the Japanese mission overseas. Aware of the discrimination that the Chinese faced in America, *Issei* elites specifically tried to separate themselves from the previous Asian immigrants. The following appeared in an article from the main magazine of the Japanese Patriotic League of San Francisco, the *Aikoku*, whose title roughly translated to “patriotism”:

First, the Chinese in America represent the lower class of the Chinese race, and the Japanese in America the upper-class of the Japanese race. Second, the Chinese are so backward and stubborn that they refuse the American way. The Japanese, on the other hand, are so progressive and competent as to fit right into the American way of life.\(^\text{29}\)

The Japanese intellectuals tried to actively combat the negative stereotypes associated with their laboring forces; however, there was little they could do to prevent their behavior.

A large factor that appeared in both the Japanese and Chinese situation was the minuscule female population in both communities at that time, and the even smaller population of women who were married. By 1900, there was only 410 married women in a community of 24,326

Japanese immigrants. In a similar pattern to the Chinese, many of the early female immigrants were prostitutes who lived in the urban centers along the Pacific Coast. Despite the Page Law, Japanese prostitutes had been snuck into the country, sometimes pretending to be their procurer’s wife. This tradition laid the foundation for exclusionist worries about Japanese deception and the true purposes of the picture bride system, when it begins in 1907.

Both the Issei elite and the exclusionist leaders recognized that the prostitutes appeared to be denigrating the lives of Japanese laborers and introducing sin into the Japanese immigrant community. They worried that the success of the Japanese prostitution industry within these communities would bolster the exclusionist rhetoric that grouped all Asian immigrants into one, inferior race. Consulate reports from 1890-1891 reported 30-50 Japanese prostitutes working in San Francisco, but this is likely a low estimate, as it was measured at the beginning of their main immigration period. The historian Yuji Ichioka describes how one of the notorious brothel owners at the time, Hasegawa Genji of San Francisco, would have women shipped regularly to him from Japan. Although multiple women were detained at the immigration station in 1890 and 1891, Genji was able to release them with writs of habeas corpus and put them to work in his brothels. With reports of men like Genji fresh in their mind, lawmakers could more easily draw parallels between the importation system of prostitutes and the importation of picture brides starting in 1907.

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Japan made some early attempts to quell the negativity towards the immigrant communities. In 1900, the government agreed to limit passports to male or female laborers seeking to enter the United States; however, that limitation waned after a few years. Laborers continued to get passports from Japan to Mexico, Canada or Hawaii, and then eventually crossed the border into the continental United States.34

The Gentlemen’s Agreement and the Foundation of the Picture Bride System

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Japanese American community had very few families in it. They typically sent their children to the public schools available in their area. Additionally, some of the older Japanese men who wanted to learn English attended these schools as well. In 1906, the San Francisco school board decided to segregate Asian students into separate schools from white students, despite the relatively small population of Asian children in these schools. Giving in to the growing pressure from labor and exclusionist leaders, the school board capitalized on the turmoil from the major earthquake that hit San Francisco in 1906 and issued a resolution to send all Chinese, Japanese and Korean students to an “Oriental Public School.” In the first meeting following the earthquake, the Asiatic Exclusion League’s president, O. A. Tveitmoe spoke “of the calamity of the [earthquake] but stated that a greater calamity would follow should the immigration of Mongolians be permitted without restriction.”35 This direct comparison of a natural disaster to Japanese and Korean immigration exemplifies the hyperbolic language being used to sway politicians and League members to pass discriminatory policies such as the 1906 school segregation decision. The school director justified the decision

in a quote to *The Los Angeles Herald*: “For their benefit and for the benefit of the white children, we have thought it wise to provide a separate school for all children of Oriental parentage.”

Due to the ruling in Plessy v. Ferguson, the local school board was within their right to create a separate, but equal school for Asian children. In the case of the Japanese, only 93 Japanese children across 23 public schools needed to be segregated, which numerically, was hardly as sizable of a threat as the exclusionists indicated in their propaganda.

The segregationists also warned of the sexual threat of Japanese men in classrooms with white children. Reports that *dekasagi-shosei* men were taking classes in San Francisco public schools to learn English struck fear into prejudiced white communities about the safety of their children. The segregationists used the common argument of protecting white innocence, whether it was through the protection of women or the protection of children. Stories sensationalizing Japanese men as sexual dangers only stroked the outrage and fear at the core of the segregation decision. California added “Mongolian” to a list of prohibited marriage partners for White people in 1901, and only a few years afterward, in 1909, Japanese were specifically named in California’s miscegenation laws. This label was used liberally in news media and in the enforcement of legislation, and it came to encompass a more general racial group that described anyone that looked like they came from East Asia, despite elites’ best efforts. Local lawmakers continued to make strides to separate and isolate the “unassimilable” Japanese immigrant population.

The school board decision quickly created ripple effects beyond San Francisco, souring relations between Japan and the United States. As early as October 24th, 1906, a Japanese student at the Naval Academy resigned in protest of the decision at the request of the Japanese Embassy in Washington, and Japanese residents appealed to their government to intervene in the matter. Japanese government officials were furious at the treatment of their people abroad. If they did send out emigrants with the intent of creating a “new Japan” in other parts of the world, these barriers to assimilation were particularly hurtful. They cited the Treaty of 1894, which had allowed Japanese immigration to the United States in the first place and guaranteed them the same rights as U.S. citizens.\(^\text{40}\) In the face of this backlash, Ambassador Aoki Shuzo and executive members of the U.S. government-- mainly Theodore Roosevelt, Secretary of State Elihu Root, and Secretary of Commerce and Labor Oscar Straus (he was also responsible for overseeing the Bureau of Immigration) began diplomatic discussions in order to come to a compromise.\(^\text{41}\) While local officials were sure of their decision, Roosevelt felt that the school board decision was impulsive and foolish, and scrambled to repair the damage done to the two countries’ relationship.\(^\text{42}\) He wrote in private that the crisis was “partly [about] labor, and partly a deep-rooted racial antipathy, the extent of which fairly astounds me.”\(^\text{43}\) Roosevelt was in a key position to take these actions seeing as he had recently won the Nobel Peace Prize for brokering the end of the Russo-Japanese war, and had seen first hand the growing strength of the Japanese nation.

\(^{41}\) Ibid, 88.
\(^{42}\) Ibid, 90.
As a result of their negotiations, with both sides compromising, Roosevelt issued multiple measures: the first being a presidential proclamation on March 14, 1907 that Japanese laborers who had passports for Mexico, Canada, or Hawaii would no longer be let into the continental United States, and the second being the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907.\textsuperscript{44} At its core, the Gentlemen’s Agreement was a mutual compromise between the two countries to maintain both military and economic peace. The Japanese agreed to stop issuing passports to laborers, if the U.S. let the Japanese already living there bring over their wives and children and stopped legally discriminating against Japanese children in California schools. This compromise set up the barriers against Japanese laborers in 1907 and laid the groundwork for the disagreements between local and national politicians that shaped the world in which the picture brides entered into when they first started arriving in crowds later that year.

After the passing of the Gentlemen’s Agreement, Japanese women began entering the country in three ways. Some women had previously been left behind by their husbands and joined them in the United States. Others married single men who had the financial means to return to Japan and marry a woman there. The customs surrounding marriage in Japan, however, made this practice tricky, primarily because Japanese men who returned to Japan for too long faced the possibility of being drafted into the military.\textsuperscript{45} While they were deferred while living abroad, they lost that status if they stayed in Japan for more than thirty days, and it often took more than a month to find a suitable wife.\textsuperscript{46} Therefore, one of the most attractive options for these bachelors was the picture bride system. Also known as proxy marriages, this system grew

\textsuperscript{45} Ichioka, “Amerika Nadeshiko”, 342.
in popularity after 1907 since the legal framework already existed in Japan, and it still fit into the Americans’ negotiated rules. Since the grooms were physically absent from their weddings and stayed in the United State, they did not need to take on the financial burden of travel back to Japan and did not risk losing their deferment status, while the families still played an active role in choosing a suitable partner. In order to fill Japanese marriage requirements, the family of the bridegroom was only required to add the bride’s name into their family registry before she left for the United States.

Another important aspect about the spirit of the Gentlemen’s Agreement can be seen in the name—the agreement was not only made between gentlemen, but it expected to create gentlemen out of the Japanese. The arrival of women symbolized a transition for the Japanese community: from temporary immigrant community to permanent settlers in the United States. By establishing the basis for a community—the family unit—they intentionally shifted towards settlement in the American West. The historian, Yuji Ichioka, described how Abiko Kyūtarō, the publisher of a prominent Japanese daily called Nichibei Shimbun of San Francisco, argued that the “the dream of returning to Japan was an obstacle to the development of a stable, prosperous immigrant society,” in the early years of the twentieth century.47 This encouragement took on new meaning after the Gentlemen’s Agreement was passed, when the main form of Japanese immigration to the United States was women. By targeting the few Japanese families that existed in California before 1906, the San Francisco School Board actually created an opportunity for the Japanese to build families and communities throughout California.

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47 Ichioka, The Issei, 146.
Naturalization Laws and the California Alien Land Laws of 1913

While the arrival of picture brides helped to establish Japanese families, there was a still a large legal barrier to American assimilation. The Naturalization Act of 1790 allowed the naturalization of “any alien, being a free white person,” and while it was amended in 1870 to include people of African descent, it continued to exclude immigrants of both Chinese and Japanese descent. Another naturalization law, passed in 1906 under Theodore Roosevelt, required eligible immigrants to learn English before they could become citizens. While the Issei (first-generation) immigrants were unable to naturalize, their American-born children were automatically citizens according to the Fourteenth Amendment, and the 1898 ruling under United States vs. Wong Kim Ark, which ruled in favor of an American-born Chinese child born to two immigrant parents still being a citizen by birth.\(^{48}\) Even as Japanese immigrants grew more financially successful and grew into the American ideal citizen, they were unable to access the privileges of citizenship. They were required to occupy a disenfranchised legal status that was used against them by exclusionist groups who maintained that because Japanese immigrants were unassimilable to American culture, the naturalization laws still prohibited them from becoming U.S. citizens.\(^{49}\) Even after the Gentlemen’s Agreement, these organizations argued for stricter enforcement and full exclusion, since immigration authorities should not be letting in migrants who won’t be able to naturalize anyway. At the Asiatic Exclusion League proceedings on November 15, 1908, Ulysses S. Webb--a future state attorney general and one of the writers of the Alien Land Laws of 1913--declared that it was necessary to “repeal the Fourteenth


\(^{49}\) Japanese immigrants would not get the right to naturalize until the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952.
Amendment to the Federal Constitution so that Chinese and Japanese born in the United States might not become citizens.”

Members of the Asiatic Exclusion League and other nativist organizations also had significant roles in politics, both on the local, state, and national level. Through these positions of power, members of the League, such as Webb, pushed through state-level restrictions in California. One of the most important was the California Alien Land Laws (1913, later amended in 1920). This legislation was in direct reaction to the growing success of Japanese immigrants in farming and tilling leased land in the agricultural sectors of California. Especially in the transition to permanent settlement, Japanese immigrants were attempting to work land held by white landowners as sharecroppers or contract farmers. As they were beginning to fill a niche market of perishable crops, the Issei immigrants proved themselves to be ideal laborers. They improved the land they worked on, served as labor bosses over other Japanese laborers, did not require the same living quarters as white tenants, and were willing to pay higher rents for cash-leasing. Additionally the hostility by white labor unions against urban Japanese entrepreneurs encouraged settlers to pursue agriculture.

Emerging from the threat of Japanese economic success, however, was the Alien Land Law (also known as the Webb-Haney Act), which prohibited “aliens ineligible for citizenship” from owning agricultural land or possessing long term leases on it (up to three years). It also prohibited the Japanese from bequeathing or selling land they already owned to another

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51 Ichioka, *The Issei*, 152.
immigrant who was “ineligible for citizenship.” Japanese landholders who had planned to return to Japan could no longer sell their land in California to another alien. Similar legislation had been proposed in the state legislature in 1907 and 1909, but the interventions of Roosevelt, Taft, and California Governor James Gillett prevented it from passing earlier. Under the state administration of Hiram Johnson, a progressive Republican, however, the bill passed after Johnson gave into exclusionist lobbying, despite his initial hesitations and warnings from the Woodrow Wilson administration. He said to the Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, “With such unanimity of opinion, even did I hold other views, I would feel it my plain duty to sign the bill, unless some absolutely compelling necessity demanded contrary action. Apparently no such controlling necessity exists.” Under his six year administration, anti-Japanese organizing grew even stronger. Johnson would later work as a senator until his death in 1945, and was a key player in the Immigration Act of 1924, which banned all Japanese immigration to the United States.

Almost immediately after the passage of California’s Alien Land Law, the Japanese communities searched for loopholes in the law in order to continue their settlement. Only a few months after the law was signed, Japanese farmers created land companies with 65 out of 141 companies being created in July and August of 1913. Issei farmers would also lease or buy the land in the name of their children, who were citizens by birth. By exploiting the loopholes within the law and using their community connections, Japanese agriculture and landholdings grew

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between 1914 and 1920.\textsuperscript{54} Total acreage owned or leased by Japanese farmers grew from 227,246 acres in 1914, to 458,056 total acres in 1920, the peak amount that Japanese farmers would ever cultivate.\textsuperscript{55}

This measure of economic success was also an important factor in whether farmers could call for a picture bride from Japan. Both the Japanese and American authorities judged the financial stability of the husband in determining who could bring over wives, since it convinced American immigration authorities that these women would not be released or sold into prostitution, and these men actually wanted to start a family. While the occupation requirements were stricter from 1907-1915, they changed in 1915-- from July 1st onward, all male residents of the United States could participate in the picture bride system if they had at least $800 in savings, a decrease from the $1,000 requirement that was previously in place.\textsuperscript{56} The Japanese government witnessed the positive effect that the women had on the immigrant community, as they turned from \textit{dekasegi} laborers to husbands and fathers. When the economic restrictions were loosened, even more picture brides entered into the United States. By 1920, there were 22,193 married women in the Japanese population in the United States, a majority who had come to the U.S. through the picture bride system.\textsuperscript{57}

\textbf{The End of the Picture Bride Practice}

The pressure mounted on the picture bride practice between 1916 and 1920. The Asiatic Exclusion League incorporated the termination of the picture bride practice into their main

\textsuperscript{54} Ichioka, \textit{The Issei}, 155.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 155.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 165.
advocacy points. They mainly accused Japanese picture brides of continuing a strange and foreign practice that violated the spirit of the Gentlemen’s Agreement, a diplomatic arrangement that they never believed was harsh enough. In their proceedings from 1906, they include a warning that “the Japanese who come to this country cannot be trusted. They are intelligent and smart, but, with them, smartness means ability to beat the white man. They will not keep an agreement when it is for their interest to break it, and will not pay the obligations if they can avoid doing so.”\textsuperscript{58} In this case, the picture brides exemplified the ways in which the Japanese were trying to fool white America in order to steal economic resources, and social and political power.

In addition, anti-Japanese politicians, such as V. S. McClatchy and James Phelan, were elected to state and national political office and specifically turned their attention towards the importation of picture brides in 1919.\textsuperscript{59} At this point in his career, Phelan has the political and popular power at this point to sway politicians and voters into supporting anti-Japanese legislation, and he was focused on ending the picture bride system. He shared many of the Asiatic Exclusion League’s concerns, and added that due to the picture brides and their fertility, male Japanese farmers had even more of an opportunity to buy up land under the name of their children.\textsuperscript{60}

Again worried about the growing discontent and determined to protect both Japan’s reputation and the Japanese community in California, the Japanese consul in San Francisco, Ota Tamekichi, reached out to both the Japanese government and the Japanese Association of


\textsuperscript{59} “‘Picture Bride’ Called Menace to California,” \textit{San Francisco Chronicle}, March 7, 1919.

\textsuperscript{60} “‘Picture Bride’ Called Menace to California.”
America to help him curb the influx of picture brides within their own community. In September of 1919, after witnessing the organized agitation in San Francisco around the issue of picture brides, Ota recommended that the Japanese government stop issuing passports to picture brides because it would be “taking away the most effective source of agitation from the exclusionists.”

While he waited for authorities in Tokyo to respond to his inquiry, he also convinced the executive board of the Japanese Association of America to support his message.

The Japanese Association of America was a national cultural organization that bonded immigrant communities, maintained their link to Japan, and fought against discriminatory legislation. The association had a central body that oversaw larger network events and decisions and then several local associations amongst the American West that worked on behalf of local communities. On October 31, the JAA’s central body came out in support of Ota’s message saying that the practice “should be abolished because it is not only in contravention of the accepted American conception of marriage, but is also out of harmony with the growing ideals of the Japanese themselves,” but they did so without consulting other local bodies within the JAA.

Local association members were furious with the consul and executive board’s decision. Abiko Kyūtarō, a prominent Japanese newspaper editor, attacked the Foreign Ministry’s decision through his paper, the Nichibei Shimbun. He argued it was cruel for the Foreign Ministry to limit marriage to the 42% of the Japanese male population who were still single and not provide an adequate system to bring over a wife from Japan. Kyūtarō was also angry at the willingness for the consul and the JAA central body to give into the demands of racist exclusionist interests.

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61 Ichioka, The Issei, 173.
63 Ichioka, The Issei, 174.
instead of advocating on behalf of the immigrant community. Representatives of the local associations also met from November 29th through December 1st to discuss the matter and vent their frustrations at the central body’s decision.\textsuperscript{64} By December 1st, every officer and staff member of the central body formally resigned because of the controversy.\textsuperscript{65} Despite the protestations of the Japanese immigrant community, however, the Foreign Ministry of Japan stopped issuing passports to picture brides, starting on March 1st, 1920, acting on the recommendation of Consul Ota. The local associations who had vented to their central body assembled to write up protest resolutions, and almost all the immigrant newspapers editorially condemned the decision of the Foreign Ministry, but they could not alter the decision.\textsuperscript{66}

The Foreign Ministry’s decision shifted the political advantage to the exclusionists, who only four years later, convinced the federal government to pass the Immigration Act of 1924, which barred any alien ineligible for citizenship to enter the country, preventing further immigration from Japan. The picture bride decision was a significant victory for the exclusionist forces whose advocacy influenced the Japanese government to change their policy. After this decision, Japanese women did not begin entering the country again until war brides began immigrating after World War II.

\textsuperscript{64}“Japanese Face State Split on Picture Brides,” \textit{San Francisco Chronicle}, December 1, 1919.  
\textsuperscript{65}Ichioka, \textit{The Issei}, 175.  
\textsuperscript{66}Ibid, 175.
Chapter 2: The Immigration Station: Local Accounts of Picture Brides and their Stories

The exclusionists’ arguments not only influenced policymakers, such as James Phelan, but they influenced the ways in which local immigration authorities conducted the interviews they had with arriving picture brides. The authorities handling the immigration interviews at Angel Island looked for possible women with “immoral character,” because of the accusations made by exclusionists that the picture bride system was a guise for Japanese prostitution. From 1908-1916, all the picture brides on an arriving ship were detained at Angel Island and needed to appear and pass an interview before a Board of Special Inquiry before being allowed to land and leave with their husbands.\(^6^7\) They were marked as “Likely Public Charges” (LPC), which meant that the immigration authorities believed that the women were likely to become dependent on the government for resources, and therefore, were held for questioning at Angel Island and in line for possible deportation. When marked as an LPC, both the picture bride and their intended husbands needed to prove to the Board that they were legitimate immigrants and did not violate any immigration criteria.

The immigration station, however, was a moment that women had a small amount of control over their own outcome because they decided the answers they gave the Board. Although organized exclusionist groups used the picture bride system as a tactic for exclusion, and tried to control how the picture brides were viewed, the women themselves used the small moments of agency they had to ensure entry into the United States for themselves and their fellow brides, and

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\(^{6^7}\) Board of Special Inquiry Interviews, 1910/11/18-1913/02/04, Box 467, 480, 666, Immigration Arrival Investigation Case Files, 1884-1944, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, National Archives Building, San Bruno, CA.
tried to create a successful relationship with their new husband, despite its possible
disappointments.

This chapter will detail the ways picture brides navigated the immigration station, both
early in the picture bride period in Hawaii, as well as in California, mainly relying on the
Investigative Case Files from 1910-1916 from the National Archives in San Francisco. Through
the interview process, the picture brides advocated for themselves and their families in order to
create a positive counter-narrative to the exclusionist agenda that defined the American
legislative structure and immigration policies. Through these methods, the women were
relatively successful at gaining entry into the United States; however, their lives after they left
the immigration station with their new husbands rarely lived up to their expectations. As they
could no longer live up to the Japanese ideal of “good wife, wise mother” because of the
common economic hardships of the Issei community, most women found new ways of
supporting their families that combined Japanese and American ideals.

**Early Picture Bride Arrivals in Hawaii**

The early immigration station’s authorities leaned towards anti-picture bride rhetoric-- if
they were not against the practice, they were confused by it. While picture bride marriages were
clearly legal in Japan, the idea of the groom not being present at his own wedding was unnerving
to white Americans, both civilians and public officials. In 1903, when picture brides arrived in
Honolulu, Hawaii, the Inspector in Charge, Joshua Brown, was unsure how to handle their
claims of marriage. He wrote to the federal District Attorney, R.W. Breckons, in Honolulu to ask
if he was supposed to recognize picture bride marriages as legal and binding in Hawaii. In
Breckons’ response, he asserted, “I believe it to be your duty to hold that such a marriage
relation is invalid.” He made a legal argument that the groom was not under the jurisdiction of Japan at the time of the marriage--since the groom was in the United States--which made the marriage invalid under American law. In order to deal with the picture brides, Brown and the other immigration officers oversaw a policy of “wharf marriages.” A religious figure of the couples’ choosing married the newly-arrived picture bride and her “supposed husband” on the dock where the ship had landed, “according to American customs,” and only then were they deemed officially married and allowed to leave the port.

The “wharf marriage” was an early point of controversy in the Hawaiian Issei community. The Commissioner General of Immigration received a letter from Raymond Brown, Inspector in Charge, with an article from the Hawaii Shimpo, a Japanese newspaper published in Honolulu. Entitled “On the Wharf Marriage,” the article’s author argued, “the Immigration Office at Hawaii, in treating the Japanese women, pays no attention to personal rights nor does it recognize personal freedom. They force such an important matter as marriage ceremonies to be performed at the Immigration Office, an act which even a despotic government would not dare to do.” The article further argued that immigration officers overstepped their authority by requiring Japanese couples to remarry at the wharf, and this requirement did not actually stop women from becoming prostitutes, but instead allowed immigration authorities to judge all Japanese women as prostitutes until proven otherwise. The unnamed Japanese author finished

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68 R.W. Breckons, Commissioner General, to Joshua K. Brown, Inspector in Charge, 1903/05/27, Document 2, File 51520/21, Entry 9, Box 77, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.
69 Breckons to Brown, 1903/05/27, Doc 2, RG 85, NAB
70 Letter from Raymond Brown to the Commissioner General of Immigration, including the Hawaii Shimpo article “On the Wharf Marriage,” 1907/01/02, Document 8, File 51520/21, Entry 9, Box 77, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.
the article writing, “Granted that it is within the lawful province of the immigration officials to examine whether a woman immigrant is a prostitute or not, it is an unbearable insult, a most unlawful proceeding to brand every Japanese woman as one liable to become bad.” This article asked the immigration officers to defend the following questions: what was the purpose of the wharf marriage? Did American officials truly believe that what was, in practice, a symbolic ceremony, ensure against the arrival and trafficking of prostitutes? The author’s argument counteracts the anti-picture bride rhetoric of the early 1900s, which immigration authorities perpetuated through their policies-- which centered around a fear of single Japanese women’s sexuality and alleged promiscuity and the cunning men who supposedly take advantage of them. This article was an early example of the Japanese community pushing back against the immigration procedures which were founded on prejudice.

Additionally, the publication of this article in *Hawaii Shimpo* in 1907 was an early example of the Japanese immigrant community taking a vested interest in the treatment of women trying to immigrate to Hawaii. It is debatable, however, how this article would have reached immigration officials in charge of policy decisions if it had not been translated from Japanese to English and sent to the Commissioner General by Raymond Brown, who included his own multi-page counter-argument to its main points. Brown argued that the Japanese had less respect for the marriage process than Americans do, as evidenced by their ability to marry by proxy. Therefore, the immigration authorities needed to institute the wharf marriages to “cause both parties to have greater respect for the obligation.” The wharf marriage, he believed, was more binding than a Japanese marriage, because a woman’s name could be taken off a man’s

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71 Letter from Brown including “On the Wharf Marriage,” 1907/01/02, RG 85, NAB.
72 Letter from Brown including “On the Wharf Marriage,” 1907/01/02, RG 85, NAB.
record and she would be single again. Brown warned of a “promiscuous lot of single women” who were “dependent on no one but dependent on everyone.” Brown pointed to their possible reliance on the government, which mirrors the Board of Special Inquiry’s arguments for labeling all the picture brides “Likely Public Charges.”

Despite the *Hawaii Shimpo*’s best arguments, local immigration officials who were suspicious of the picture bride system continued to control the wharf’s policies. Wharf marriages continued in Hawaii, and immigration officials instituted and normalized them on the West Coast as well. After passing through the Board’s interview, the picture brides needed to participate in a wharf marriage in order to leave the port in both Hawaii and on the continental United States. This policy only changed in 1917, when the State Department granted legal recognition to picture-bride marriages as a gesture of good will to Japan, making the wharf marriage unnecessary.

Correspondence between local immigration officers in Hawaii and state officials reveal their use of a few early extreme examples of Japanese women to justify immigration procedures. On May 1903, R.W. Breckons, the U.S. District Attorney wrote to Joshua K. Brown about Toki Iguchi, a Japanese woman who entered Honolulu as a picture bride, but was later taken to a brothel by her supposed husband and sold into prostitution. Breckons used the story to warn local inspectors of women being trafficked into prostitution after gaining entry as picture brides. In his letter, Breckons described that Toki Iguchi arrived on Nippon Maru on April 30th, 1903.

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73 Letter from Brown including “On the Wharf Marriage,” 1907/01/02, RG 85, NAB.
claiming she was the wife of Tomokichi Iguchi. Although Tomokichi picked her up from the port, she was later taken to a brothel in Honolulu where he divorced her and left her 30% of her earnings. Through their correspondence, Breckons and Brown debated how to deal with the case—seeing as Toki Iguchi’s case was not the only one of its kind in early 1900s Honolulu. To further his point, Breckons drew attention to the District Attorney’s multiple cases against Japanese men procuring and bringing in prostitutes disguised as wives. He wrote, “Japanese appear to understand that women coming into this country must be married before they are permitted to land,” arguing that Japanese understood the immigration station’s requirements for entry. In a letter about looking out for Japanese prostitutes, his inclusion of this line implies that the Japanese knowledge of the immigration system could help them disguise prostitutes as their wives or deceive women into entering as wives and then selling them into prostitution.76

Early tactics used by American immigration officials to combat these supposed schemes was to photograph every picture bride trying to land in Hawaii, and do an in-depth investigation into their husbands. Worried the women would change their appearance after they became prostitutes, they photographed the women to use as a point of reference for any possible investigations in the future.77 Immigration officials in Hawaii continued to photograph the incoming brides until 1907, when the federal government ordered them to stop, probably because of the recent negotiations that led to the Gentlemen’s Agreement and the financial resources required to photograph every incoming woman. Stopping the photographing of all Japanese picture brides could have also been a gesture of goodwill and trust toward Japan.

76 Breckons to Brown, 1903/04/30, Document 4, File 51520/21, Entry 9, Box 77, RG 85, NAB
77 Letter from John Sargent, San Francisco to Commissioner-General of Immigration in Washington DC, 1908/12/14, Document 33, File 52424/13, Folder 001738-013-0205, RG 85, National Archives in Washington DC.
The stories from the Honolulu immigration station demonstrate the early tactics used by immigration officials to process some of the first Japanese picture brides. The Inspectors in Charge, tasked with protecting Hawaii from “immoral women”, tried multiple tactics to identify and catch Japanese men and women who were trying to sneak through the immigration procedure. The documents from Hawaii also demonstrate early attempts from the Hawaiian Issei community to change the immigration policies, with little success. Once it is clear that the Board interview and wharf marriages were set policies, the Japanese picture brides learned how to navigate them.

Immigration Procedures in California: an Analysis of the Investigative Case Files

Immigration officials first encountered picture brides in Hawaii, and they developed foundational tactics for dealing with them—tactics that would later be implemented and modified in California. At Angel Island, the main immigration station off the coast of San Francisco and the primary point of entry for Asian immigrants seeking to enter California, women were only allowed to land after a wharf marriage, described in the case files as “after legal marriage,” at the dock or a nearby hotel, according to “American law and customs.” Before they could participate in the wharf marriage, the Japanese women answered various questions about their lives in Japan, the knowledge they had of their husband, and their intentions in the United States in front of three inspectors on the Board of Special Inquiry. The inspectors used a common set of questions for the incoming picture brides, specifically about what they were doing in Japan

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78 “Are you willing to be married according to American law and customs?” was the final question of every Board of Special Inquiry interview. The practice continued according to Letter from Daniel L. Keefe, Commissioner-General to the Commissioner of Immigration in San Francisco, CA, 1911/09/29, File 52424/13, RG 85, NAB
before they arrived, where they were headed, if they had seen or met their husband before this point, how much money they had with them, and what they were planning on doing in the U.S., to which the most common answer was simply “household duties.” Based on the women’s answers, the inspectors decided on their admission.

Although the Board initially regarded the women with suspicion-- the inspectors had already labeled the women as “Likely Public Charges”-- as long as they presented themselves as an ideal wives to the Board, the brides could avoid detention at Angel Island. The inspectors expected the picture bride to share a range of information about her life so they could determine whether or not her intentions were legitimate. The similar language seen in the women’s responses suggests that they prepped answers and came into these interviews ready to craft an appropriate image of themselves before the Board. Fujine Suzuki’s answers, for example, are typical of a picture bride. 22-year-old Suzuki arrived on November 18, 1910 on the S.S. Siberia. She stated that she worked as a wife, that she used to work on her father’s farm, but then lived with her husband’s family after she got married. She was able to provide the exact names of the people she lived with from her husband’s family. She confirmed that she had never seen her husband before, but knew that he had been in the United States for four years and was a laundryman in Los Angeles. Although she was a laborer in Japan, she only expected to do household duties in her new home. After the Board questioned her husband, she consented to getting married again, and the Board permitted her to leave.

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79 Board of Special Inquiry Interviews, 1910/11/18-1913/02/04, Box 467, 480, 666, Immigration Arrival Investigation Case Files, 1884-1944, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, National Archives Building, San Bruno, CA.
80 Interview with Fujine Suzuki, 1910/11/18, File 10437/2-1, Box 467, Immigration Arrival Investigation Case Files, 1884-1944, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, National Archives Building, San Bruno, CA.
The interview responses revealed some elements of the picture brides’ world, even though their answers were short and to the point, only revealing the information that the Board explicitly requested. Toshi Oku, a 23-year-old arriving in 1910, answered multiple questions about her previous marriage in Japan, telling the Board that while she had been married before, she stressed that she had no children from that marriage, so that the Board did not expect her to bring Japanese children to the United States. She also told them that she had been working as a farm laborer in Japan, but that she was only coming to the United States to do household labor.\textsuperscript{81} This type of answer was common amongst the picture bride applicants. Since so many came from rural families in Japan, they often needed to work on their family or their prospective husband’s family’s farms before leaving for the United States. In order to present as less of a threat, however, they would not announce whether they were planning on getting a job once joining their husbands, although some did work as laborers in California.

The women, however, were not the only ones initially regarded with suspicion. Their husbands needed to corroborate the answers given by their wives, and answer additional questions, mainly about their financial standing and their ability to support a wife. In the midst of organized pressure to keep Asian labor out of the American workforce, it was even more important that these men present themselves as respectable and financially stable. They needed to prove to the Board that their wives were not coming to the United States to work and create additional economic competition. Generally, the Board accepted a husband’s finances as long as they had the proper paperwork, which is appropriate considering the financial checks imposed by

\textsuperscript{81} Interview with Toshi Oku, 1910/11/18, File 10437/11-2, Box 467, Immigration Arrival Investigation Case Files, 1884-1944, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, National Archives Building, San Bruno, CA.
the Japanese consul and the Japanese government in Tokyo. There were only a handful of husbands who were unprepared to face the Board. For example, in 1910, when Yoshitaro Tamura came to meet his wife, Moyo Tamura, his case was deferred because he had left his money in his hotel and did not provide sufficient evidence of his financial standing. He was told by the Board to return in a few days and submit his ledger or another form of proof of adequate economic status, and his wife was kept at Angel Island until then. In addition to financial paperwork, the men were expected to produce a letter from the Japanese Consul, Matsuzo Nagai, vouching for their respectability, legitimate marriage, name of wife, occupation, and financial standing. While these letters appeared in a majority of the case files, the Board did not deny a bride if her husband did not have time to acquire a letter, he only needed to report that he had tried to obtain one. The leniency of this requirement suggests that there was some level of subjectivity to these interviews--while the consul’s letter was expected, the Board was looking more broadly for trustworthiness and respectability on the part of the prospective husband. To ensure this, some men would bring additional letters of support and recommendation from their business partners, landowners or employers to present to the Board. For example, Kageichi Shirane, a farmer who raises pigs and chickens brought a proof his leases of farmland and his bank book when he came to the port to pick up his wife, Sasayo.

Since the inspectors used formulaic questions and only noted distinctive or unusual results, very few got turned away or were accused of being prostitutes after appearing before the

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82 Interview with Yoshitaro Tamura, 1910/12/09, File 10443/12-27, Box 480, Immigration Arrival Investigation Case Files, 1884-1944, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, National Archives Building, San Bruno, CA.
83 Interview with Kageichi Shirane, 1910/12/09, File 10443/12-15, Box 480, Immigration Arrival Investigation Case Files, 1884-1944, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, National Archives Building, San Bruno, CA.
inspectors. In over forty case files, the Board called for the deportation of only one picture bride, on the grounds that her passport was only valid through Hawaii, not the continental United States, but even she ended up getting admitted eventually. Fuji Akahashi, a bride on the S.S. Siberia in November 1910, needed to reappear multiple times in front of the Board of Special Inquiry because of a simple clerical error on her visa that only permitted her to travel as far as Hawaii, and not all the way to the West Coast. After noticing that she had the wrong destination, her hearing in front of the board was extended and became much more detailed. The board dug into her marriage process, her life in Japan before and after the marriage, the communication she had with her husband before she arrived in the U.S.--there was very little of it--and why her passport said she was going to Hawaii, which she didn’t have an answer for. As the Board had been primed to search out anyone who may be using the picture bride system to cover up “immoral purposes,” so they extended her interview and tried to get as much information as possible, even information that was not explicitly related to her passport error. Akahashi was only able to enter the United States after she presented a cablegram from the Foreign Ministry in Japan that was sent on her behalf from the Japanese consul in San Francisco after being held at Angel Island for ten days. It verified their mistake and vouched for her morality and legitimacy.

Akahashi’s answers also reveal more information about how the picture bride system works in Japan. When asked about her marriage process, she described an impersonal experience through middlemen who “told me that the marriage had been consummated and arranged

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84 Interview with Fuji Akahashi, 1910/11/18, File 10437/9-1, Box 467, Immigration Arrival Investigation Case Files, 1884-1944, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, National Archives Building, San Bruno, CA.
satisfactorily,” after receiving her and her potential husband’s photographs. Although she lived in her husband’s home in Japan, so she was able to answer detailed questions about the family she had met in Japan, she had very little information about her actual husband, including how long he had been in the U.S., his job in the U.S., his previous marriages, or how she would be assisting him once they left the port. She only communicated through the middlemen, who informed her when the marriage had been confirmed, so she did not even appear before an official to record the marriage.85 This uncertainty was a common experience for picture brides.86 Immigrating to the United States was an intimidating and uncertain experience. It follows that these women would try their best to prepare for this interview that they knew was going to happen once they landed, which could have contributed to the formulaic structure of the interviews and their answers. When compared to the other interviews, Akahashi’s prepared information probably would have allowed her to land on the first try if her passport had been correct.

The interviews demonstrate how the picture brides built their own narrative in a system where they had very little agency. While the answers seem simple, the interviews suggest that the picture brides tailored their responses to get a positive result from the Board. It was clearly successful, considering the Board gave extensive interviews to only a few brides, and let the rest go freely after they participated in the wharf marriage.

85 Interview with Fuji Akahashi, 1910/11/18, Box 467, RG 85, NARA-Pacific Region.
The First Meeting

Picture brides carried a range of emotions with them as they arrived in the United States. Just as Japanese men had high expectations of their new lives in America, women’s expectations of their new lives often differed drastically from their new realities. Picture brides were often motivated to leave Japan for the opportunity for adventure, for economic success, or to escape the traditions and customs entrenched in Japanese society. In Shika Takya, a Japanese emigrant published the results of an informal survey she had taken amongst the other passengers on her ship to America, reporting the following reasons for emigration:

1. Hopes of becoming rich.
2. Curiosity about this civilized country called America.
4. Sexual anxiety in those who had passed marriage age.
5. Dreams of an idyllic, romantic life in the new land.
6. Lack of ability to support self.
7. Filial obedience: sacrificing self to obey parents’ wishes.

These answers demonstrate that families did not just compel these women or force them through a patriarchal social structure to begin a new life in America. Many followed their parents’ orders and took advantage of the opportunity to remit money to the families. Many hoped that this marriage would allow for a new, successful life, especially in the land where the American Dream remained a hopeful goal to many who arrived on its shores. Girls from poor farming communities dreamed of a new lifestyle with material resources unimaginable in their homes in Japan. For women who were slightly older, picture bride marriage calmed their anxiety that they would never get married.

87 Walz, Nikkei in the Interior West, 32.
88 Walz, Nikkei in the Interior West, 33.
89 Ichioka, The Issei, 166.
The pictures the brides received of their potential husbands contributed to this dream. Husbands would send much younger pictures of themselves, deceiving these women and their families into thinking they were marrying handsome men much closer to the ages of the brides (See Figure 1 for example photo of husband). Potential husbands dressed up in their finest clothing and sometimes touched up the photographs to remove blemishes or baldness. They wore Western clothing (which compared to the traditional Japanese dress seen in the photos of the women), and tried to look suave and confident. Even though the marriage was arranged mainly through their families, these husbands still wanted to be desirable, so they portrayed themselves as successful business-owners or farmers and looked their best in their photographs.

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Figure 1. The photo Inosuke Suzuki sent to his potential wife, Fujine Suzuki.  

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90 Ichioaka, *The Issei*, 167.
91 Interview with Fujine Suzuki, 1910/11/18, File 10437/2-1, Box 467, Immigration Arrival Investigation Case Files, 1884-1944, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, National Archives Building, San Bruno, CA.
The investigative files show that there was often a 7-15 year gap between the ages of the spouses. Although a few were distantly related to their partners, many had never seen their husbands before or had only met them when they were very young, and many of the brides were frequently disappointed when they saw their husbands for their first time. Mary Hirata spoke of her mother’s experience immigrating as a picture bride to Tacoma, WA, and her stories of the other women, “here were these old men waiting for these young girls...a lot of them just ran away, after seeing their husbands in person.” While Hirata’s mother knew what she was getting herself into, because she was slightly older when she immigrated, she recollected that many of the young girls in their late teens or early twenties were unpleasantly surprised with their new marriages. They had no way of verifying information about their husbands before they left Japan, even when they were fed decidedly false information by their husbands. One bride expected her husband to be a fruit-growing landowner, but was shocked when he was a vagrant gambler instead. Faced with limited options, however, most of the women left the immigration station with their new husbands.

**Lives After the Immigration Station**

After the women were given permission to land by the immigration inspectors, they were matched with their husbands at the port, if they were prompt about meeting the arriving ship. Some husbands who were coming from farther into the Interior West left their new wives waiting at the port for days or weeks. Once they did eventually meet, their husbands would initiate them into American society by giving them a parcel with new American clothing or

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92 Maya Hirata, “Mother’s Arrival as “Picture Bride”, Densho Encyclopedia.
taking them to a local clothing store to get outfitted with a Western wardrobe. The women struggled with the tight corsets and restricting and uncomfortable shoes, which differed greatly from the flat Japanese sandals they were used to. With the pointed toe of the lace up boots that a woman was expected to wear, their new shoes were nearly impossible to walk in at first.

They also struggled with the economic circumstances of their new reality. While they many had answered truthfully to the inspectors that they were only going to do “household duties”, since they were supposed to live up to the Japanese ideal of “dutiful wives and intelligent mothers”, few immigrant women could confine themselves solely to those roles. This ideal developed amongst the bourgeois class during the Meiji period, and was economically unrealistic for rural Japanese mothers and Japanese immigrant women. Depending on their husband’s occupations and geographic location, many needed to find a job either where their husbands work or nearby to those places of work. It was common in California for women to work on the agricultural farms where their husband was a sharecropper or cash tenant, since so many Japanese immigrants entered agriculture as their main form of livelihood, and these women already had the basic skills that would aid them in this work. Picture brides who moved to urban areas worked in laundries, bathhouses, bars, markets, restaurants, boarding houses, and pool halls, or became domestic servants, seamstresses, or cannery workers. It was a difficult and strenuous life, and definitely not the “idyllic, romantic lifestyle” they had imagined. Additionally, exclusionists would later argue that the Japanese had an unfair economic advantage

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94 Ichioka, *The Issei*, 167; *San Francisco Call*, 1911/12/29 shipping report
because they allowed their women to work, while ignoring the structural economic realities that forced these women into labor. At the heart of the exclusionists’ arguments was the unrealistic expectation that women could confine themselves to the home, which was an impossibly high standard for these immigrant women who worked to survive in a world where the legislative and racial discrimination in the United States already put them and their husbands at a disadvantage.

Despite the wives’ frequent disappointment at their new husbands, the immigrant family unit became a foundational block in the formation of Japanese immigrant society in the American West. Picture brides developed into Issei women, who were tough and hard working. Although they may have been naive on the journey over, they soon learned to cope with their new reality. A majority of the women stayed with their husbands, encouraging them to switch careers from laborers to businessmen or farmers so they could truly provide for their family. The divorce rate was only 1%. Although they were not always happy marriages-- there was no measure of compatibility before these marriages were arranged-- couples usually stayed together, and birthed a large Nisei (second-generation) population.

Sometimes the unhappiness and hardship, however, were too much to bear for these young women. Kakeochi ads (desertion ads), appeared in Japanese newspapers in California. They described young women who had left their husbands, either on their own, or with another man. After describing their physical description and origin in Japan, the deserted husbands would often offer rewards for any information that would help them find their wives. One kakeochi ad submitted by Kojima Aizo about his wife, Tsuta, who had run off with Miki Jokichi,

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that appeared in the *Shin Sekai*, a popular Japanese-language newspaper in San Francisco.

Ichioka narrates, “A native of Wakayama Prefecture, Miki was described as 33 to 34 years old, 5 feet 2 inches, 115 pounds with dark complexion and a scar at the nape of his neck. A native of Yamaguchi Prefecture, Tsuta was described as 28 years old, 5 feet, 110 pounds, with fair complexion. The notice stated that the two had vanished together on December 12.”

Newspapers also ran stories about the desertions as a way to attract readers and as a shaming technique to remind women to stay with their husbands. The Japanese Associations also treated women who deserted as outcasts, and told their members to ostracize the women and the men they had run away with if they were seen. Whether or not they ran with another man, or just ran away from an unhappy marriage, women who left their husbands often needed to resettle in a place that had a small or non-existent Japanese population.

As participants in a system that, on the surface, does not give the picture brides a lot of power, these Japanese women found ways to exert their own agency-- whether that be through navigating the Board or handling a disappointing marriage. They discovered small ways to control their lives even as they started a new life in the United States. The press, however, did not prioritize the ways picture brides controlled their own destiny, instead portraying them as meek, helpless, and needing protection from the dangerous Japanese man. The mainstream press coverage of picture brides from 1906-1920 emphasized the ways that the picture bride system furthered the exclusionist agenda.

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100 Ichioka, *The Issei*, 169.
Chapter 3: Press Coverage of Picture Brides

Between 1906 and 1920, Japanese picture brides fascinated the writers at the San Francisco Call, San Francisco Chronicle, and Los Angeles Herald. Coverage of the brides’ activities ranged from a report of how many had arrived on ships that day, to the conditions they stayed in on Angel Island, to full features on the picture bride marriage process and its effect on American public policy. Sensationalist media coverage fueled exclusionist rhetoric, giving a platform to labor leaders and politicians who were advocating for stricter immigration reform.

An overriding theme of the picture bride coverage, however, was a paternalistic sympathy for the women themselves. They were portrayed as victims of arranged marriages or an immoral prostitution ring, but also heralded for their bravery and courage in traveling across the ocean to marry someone they had never met before. Analysis of the articles about picture brides in the San Francisco Chronicle, the Los Angeles Herald, and the San Francisco Call demonstrate a belief in the submissive nature of Japanese women, by suggesting they played a passive role in their own marriage, and emphasizing the domination of Japanese men in determining the morality of these marriages and the community.

Previous scholars of immigrant portrayal in print and media focused on the way newspapers and cartoonists advanced the exclusionist rhetoric through the denigration and dehumanization of immigrant groups. They amplified the “danger” and “unassimilable” nature of the alien populations, most notably with Southern and Eastern European men, Irish men, and Chinese men. Marion Marzolf writes how mass media “already serving as an informal information network linking the nation, amplified the voices of the nation’s leaders in politics,
business, and labor.”102 The main anti-picture bride advocates were key leaders in those fields. Marzolf argued that the newspapers transformed over the course of the 1910s from the sensationalist trends of the prewar era to a pillar of objectivity by the early 1920s. By using an air of objectivity, newspapers delivered selective opinions and stories and presented them as fact, which helped advance restrictionist ideas around the country.103 While Marzolf made several connections between the role of the press in advancing the arguments of the restrictionist movement targeting Southern and Eastern European populations, he does not analyze how the press covers female Asian immigration.

Bradley Hamm’s examination of newspaper coverage of Asian exclusion delved into the major themes that emerged from the opinion and news pieces from seven newspapers all over the country in May 1924. Hamm’s time period of focus was four years after time period of this thesis, his themes can still be adapted to the coverage of picture brides. He analyzed articles from The New York Times, The New York Herald Tribune, The Chicago Daily Tribune, The San Francisco Chronicle, The San Francisco Examiner, The Louisville Courier-Journal, and The Chicago Defender from April and May 1924 and expanded on previous scholarship by Joel Williamson and Thomas Heuterman.104 He identified three major press mentalities that appeared in newspapers in 1924 when public debate centered around the possibility of exclusion: the “Asian as Incompatible Alien”, “Asian as Overachiever”, and “Asian as Loyal Invader.”105 All

105 Hamm, “Redefining Racism: Newspaper Justification for the 1924 Exclusion of Japanese Immigrants,” 60.
three arguments were used in the exclusionist agenda against picture brides.\footnote{For articles about picture brides that fit into these mindsets: “Asian as Incompatible Alien”, see “Works Favors Rigid Barriers For Orientals” from the \textit{San Francisco Chronicle} on July 15, 1916; “Asian as Overachiever”: see “Japan Violating Gentlemen’s Agreement” from the \textit{San Francisco Chronicle} on January 1, 1917; “Asian as Loyal Invader”, see “Where They Promise to Love, Honor, and Obey a Photograph,” from the \textit{San Francisco Call}, October 10, 1909.} While most of the articles he analyzed were male-centric, he did include a quote about Japanese women for the mentality of “Asian as Overachiever.” He quoted the San Francisco Chronicle’s article entitled “The Real Japanese Menace” from May 1924, which said:

\begin{quote}
Japanese brides are far more objectionable immigrants than Japanese men. They work in the field like men and their coming means several Japanese citizens per bride, who can be landowners because [they are] born in this country and who can still live in the colonies, leading a dual life of American citizens and Japanese subjects.\footnote{Hamm, “Redefining Racism: Newspaper Justification for the 1924 Exclusion of Japanese Immigrants,” 62.}
\end{quote}

Although this author wrote this article four years after the end of the picture bride practice, and so treatment of the subject material is not exactly the same, in this article, the author portrays Japanese women as both an economic and reproductive threat to the white population in America. The author criticized the Japanese women for having children because the creation of families symbolized Japanese permanent settlement, and therefore, continued threat from a group they believe to be “unassimilable,” as seen in articles entitled “Japan Violating Gentlemen’s Agreement” and “Picture Bride Menace”, both from the San Francisco Chronicle.

The press “mindset” towards Japanese picture brides was partially captured by Hamm’s category: “Asian as Incompatible Alien,” which covered the articles that argued the Japanese were not inferior or superior, but “different and unassimilable.” There was an element of sympathetic curiosity and a desire to protect the picture brides from Japanese men. Most emblematic of these themes were feature articles written in the early 1910s for the \textit{San Francisco Chronicle}.\footnote{For articles about picture brides that fit into these mindsets: “Asian as Incompatible Alien”, see “Works Favors Rigid Barriers For Orientals” from the \textit{San Francisco Chronicle} on July 15, 1916; “Asian as Overachiever”: see “Japan Violating Gentlemen’s Agreement” from the \textit{San Francisco Chronicle} on January 1, 1917; “Asian as Loyal Invader”, see “Where They Promise to Love, Honor, and Obey a Photograph,” from the \textit{San Francisco Call}, October 10, 1909.}
*Call* and *San Francisco Chronicle*. The authors of the feature pieces highlighted the strange nature of the picture bride system, and how they are unable to imagine American girls participating in an equivalent system, but how they admire the “tiny representative of womanhood” that undergo this process. Unlike prejudices toward Black, Hispanic or even Chinese minorities, which were characterized by a solidification of white supremacy through the dehumanization of the other, the Japanese were seen as a separate, but not necessarily inferior, people that should stay within their own sphere of influence. The reporters specified that the two races were simply too different to coexist in the same community, exemplified by the two very different marriage practices.

**Feature Pieces on Picture Brides**

Newspaper reporters for the *Call, Chronicle* and *Los Angeles Herald* used the picture bride marriages as a prime example of this racial incompatibility and different way of life. The fascination with these articles appears in the exploratory feature articles about picture brides, which encapsulated the Oriental romanticism of the picture bride system and the paternalistic sympathy towards the women themselves. In a feature in the San Francisco Sunday Call from October 10, 1909, entitled “Where they Promise to Love, Honor, and Obey a Photograph”, the author portrayed the Japanese brides in a sympathetic, but pitiful light. The author described the women as “submissive” and “diminutive,” but also pointed to the “confidence which this little daughter of Nippon must have in mankind in general,” and questioned, “Can we imagine any

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108 “Where They Promise to Love, Honor, and Obey a Photograph,” *San Francisco Call*, October 10, 1909.

American girl of the same age in like circumstance, starting on a similar journey with a corresponding object in view?” Through these descriptors, the author suggested that these women were victims of a much larger system, and the paternalistic tone of the beginning of the piece emphasized the author’s belief in Japanese women’s submissiveness and a rigid sense of Japanese gender relations, in which the husband was the “lord and master,” and serve him and his family. As can be seen from the Shika Takya’s survey, the Board of Special Inquiry interviews, and their role in maintaining the Issei family, the picture brides did not just arrive to serve their husbands.

The author of the Call feature then described the marriage process, which he isolated as a very foreign process from “those controlled by our own American custom.”110 He argued that the entire process, from sending for a wife, to the family’s control in choosing a spouse, to the ceremony without the groom, is a strange process entirely different from the marriage customs in America, which were focused on independence and love-matching. The article then delved into a defense of the “wharf marriage” and its necessity in the protection of Japanese women who may be brought into the United States for “immoral purposes,” again de-emphasizing the woman’s agency in the marriage.111 The burden was placed on Japanese men to protect and support their wives, which appeared earlier in the longer interviews and required identity certification of the husbands who came to the port to pick up their wives. The husbands were both responsible for the well-being of these women and the masterminds behind the alleged prostitution rings in

110 “Where They Promise to Love, Honor, and Obey a Photograph,” San Francisco Call, October 10, 1909.
111 “Where They Promise to Love, Honor, and Obey a Photograph,” San Francisco Call, October 10, 1909.
Japanese communities in major cities in California. It reflected the patriarchal hierarchy in place in both American and Japanese communities.

The author also argued Americans did not recognize picture brides for the same reason it did not recognize polygamous marriages—because of moral degradation. The author worried about the moral implications of the breakdown of the marriage ceremony, which stemmed from the moral importance of marriage in Christianity.\textsuperscript{112} The feature pieces that appeared in the early 1910s demonstrated a unique fascination with the whole marriage practice, as if arranged marriages were completely different than American customs. The exploratory tone of the feature pieces about photograph marriages ignored the similarities that picture bride marriages had to arranged marriages that had existed in the United States since its founding. Instead articles appeared in the \textit{San Francisco Chronicle} such as “The Picture Brides of the Flowery Kingdom” by Lucia Porter in 1911 or “The Picture Brides” by Ruth Thompson in 1914, which explored and explained the practice as a strange tradition that must be better understood by the American people. While the articles did not explicitly support the exclusionist movements, they supported the messages being purported by the Asiatic Exclusion League and other nativist leaders by isolating the picture bride system.

\textbf{Shipping Reports in the \textit{San Francisco Call}}

In addition to exploratory opinion pieces on the picture bride marriages, the \textit{San Francisco Call} reported on the arrival of picture brides at the San Francisco port. \textit{The Call} reported daily on the departures and arrivals of different ships, news from the ocean, pertinent

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{112} “Where They Promise to Love, Honor, and Obey a Photograph,” \textit{San Francisco Call}, October 10, 1909.
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\end{footnotesize}
weather tips, and passengers and goods that were arriving from other countries. Appearing regularly under a section entitled, “Movement of Vessels in All Parts of the World,” a short article described which ships had recently arrived in San Francisco, the goods and the people that were on board. The main liners were the Chiyo Maru, Tenyo Maru, Nippon Maru, Korea, Siberia, and Persia. Amongst reporting cabin passenger lists and the amounts of valuable goods such as silk and tea, the *Call* also noted specifically how many “Asiatics” were in steerage and how many, if they had an exact number, Japanese picture brides were in steerage. While other nationalities were listed, they were rarely numbered and tracked in the same way as the Japanese picture brides were in these reports. Starting in February 1910, but becoming regular in 1911, the *Call* also regularly reported on the number of Japanese picture brides that were arriving on Japanese liners. In a report from March 9, 1912, the *Call* remarks, “The Pacific Mail liner Manchuria, Captain Andrew Dixon, arrived yesterday from the orient with... 40 Asiatics in the steerage. The Asiatics included about 20 Japanese picture brides. The liner’s cargo included raw silk worth more than $1,000,000 and a large shipment of tea.”

The article then goes onto describe an unnamed Filipino passenger who tried to commit suicide and then name all the white American passengers on board by name.

A ship’s voyage across the Pacific took several weeks to accomplish, but the various ships making that voyage meant that picture brides were arriving every few weeks. In 1911 and 1912, reports about the brides appeared in *The Call*, on average, monthly, with 3-46 brides arriving on each ship. While the standard report was a short paragraph at the end of the write up about the arrival of each liner, they sometimes were the main news of the day. On May 12, 1911,

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113 “Manchuria Arrives from the Far East”, March 9, 1912, *San Francisco Call.*
the Call reported in its shipping headline that the 45 picture brides arriving on the Chiyo Maru was the largest shipment of picture brides on one vessel to date.\textsuperscript{114} The headline of the article was “Liner has Wives for 45 Japanese”, which represented an early attempt to shed light on the growing phenomenon of picture brides and contributed to the typical presentation of wives through their relation to their new husbands.

It is notable that the Call felt that the number of picture brides was necessary information to include in the paper. Amongst details about the weather and the material goods being brought to the ship, which travelers and sailors who read the Call needed to know at the time, the paper’s readers also specifically noted when picture brides were arriving at their shore. While subtle, these reports could have increased the heightened fear around the “picture bride problem”, and contributed to the perception that they were invading the United States, even though the actual number of women per ship stayed consistent around 20-30 per ship for the years that the picture brides were consistently reported and did not necessarily indicate an increase.

The specific mention of their arrival suggested that the picture bride was a unique and notable immigrant—distinguishable from other “Asiatics”. Even if the paper did not have an exact number they would mention that “a majority” or “a large number” of brides were arriving on a particular ship. This type of reporting occurred during the early half of their main period of immigration, but the article did not include a definition of “Japanese picture brides--just the statistic. This type of reporting suggests that the Call’s readership knew who these picture brides and why they were coming to the shore.

While I can only speculate at the newspaper’s purpose of reporting these numbers, these types of reports ultimately served the exclusionist rhetoric, by failing to address the stories behind these women’s journeys and grouping them under the title of picture bride, which as addressed earlier, carried specific connotations and prejudices. Specifically with a conservative, working class readership such as the Call’s, it supported ideas being championed by labor union leaders who advocated against picture brides. These reports exemplified Japanese women as items of interest and isolated them as foreign, while simultaneously downgrading them to the same level as the value of goods on board. The Call’s readership was distinctly interested in the shipping news of the world, so the inclusion of picture brides in these reports denotes a key interest in the arrival of these women, and exactly how many were coming into California. Especially in a climate when they were seen as threatening, unassimilable aliens, their inclusion in these types of press reports contributed to the degradation of Japanese as a racial group and provided evidence that the influx of picture brides was significant enough to campaign against.

Additionally, the note in the reports which specified that the “Asiatics were in the steerage,” brought to mind the image of 70 to 110 Asian immigrants crowded into the dark and damp underbelly of the ship. The identification of the steerage passengers automatically stratified the ship’s passengers, and only helped to fuel rhetoric about the undesirability of Asian immigrants to the United States. The picture brides were almost always steerage passengers, because as young women, traveling alone, and often coming from laboring families back in Japan, they could not afford and were not welcome on the upper decks, and the Call specifically identified that fact.

115 “Manchuria Arrives from the Far East”, March 9, 1912, San Francisco Call.
Notable stories from these journeys also made it into these shipping reports. In an article entitled, “Mayor of Tokyo Leaves on Liner: Tenyo Maru Sails for Far East Crowded with Passengers and Carrying Rich Cargo,” the Call reported on the variety of passengers aboard the shipping vessel heading back to Asia.\footnote{“Mayor of Tokyo Leaves on Liner,” \textit{San Francisco Call}, November 2, 1910.} While the title of the article points to the importance of the Tokyo mayor leaving on this ship, the majority of the report is about the nearly 400 Asian passengers in steerage, several of whom were being deported from the United States. The Call reported that a “Japanese woman came here as a picture bride, but was deported on the ground that she was an immoral person,” but did not go into greater detail.\footnote{“Mayor of Tokyo Leaves on Liner,” \textit{San Francisco Call}, November 2, 1910.} The inclusion of that particular detail was surprising since most of the women who appeared before the Board of Special Inquiry at Angel Island as “Likely Public Charges” passed through their examinations and were able to land. This article appeared in the early stages of the picture bride movement, when organized resistance had begun but was not in its height.

Toward the end of 1912, the Call’s reports of the picture brides became less frequent and more general—often just reporting the number of “Asiatics in steerage” and mentioning that a large number or a majority of those passengers were picture brides.

Picture brides also appeared in the news when they were being held at Angel Island, or when a particularly notable case showed up. An article from 1911 detailed two sixteen year-old picture brides who were unable to land because they qualified as minors in the United States and were not old enough to consent to marriage.\footnote{“Photograph Brides Too Young to Marry”, \textit{San Francisco Call}, April 6, 1911.} Tayo Tomokiyo and Noe Towata both arrived at Angel Island, but were not permitted to land despite their claims that they were the wives of two

\footnote{“Mayor of Tokyo Leaves on Liner,” \textit{San Francisco Call}, November 2, 1910.}
\footnote{“Mayor of Tokyo Leaves on Liner,” \textit{San Francisco Call}, November 2, 1910.}
\footnote{“Photograph Brides Too Young to Marry”, \textit{San Francisco Call}, April 6, 1911.}
men living in Alameda, CA. The article strikes a similar tone in its reporting to the previous Call feature, by distinguishing additional ways that this marriage practice was distinctly foreign and against traditional American marriage values. First, they were too young to marry, as the title details, which contributed to rumors of young women being taken advantage of by manipulative Japanese men and brought to the United States to be prostitutes, which raised suspicions about the true nature of these unions. Additionally, the article noted that Tomokiyo and Towata “attempted to land yesterday to remarry their husbands”, and that one “married [her husband]--or his photograph--in Japan, according to the customs of the country...both say they want to land and marry their husbands according to American law.” The numerous references to the unique Japanese marriage laws suggests an incompatibility between the two countries’ policies and provided ample evidence for the unassimilable nature of the Japanese as an immigrant population.

The Termination of the Picture Bride Practice as Told by the Chronicle

Newspapers not only reported on the women themselves, but they also documented the national and international interest in the picture brides and the debate that swirled around their arrival in the United States. As early as 1905, the San Francisco Chronicle documented both the national debate around the implications of the influx of picture brides and the ways in which Japan reacted to the treatment of picture brides in the United States. Some of the early coverage in 1905 included the Japanese consul, Colonel Uyeno, putting in a formal complaint to the Department of Labor and Commerce about the lack of recognition of photograph marriages. The Chronicle reported that he spoke on behalf of his government in demanding to know why Japanese marriage practices were not being recognized as “did Swedish or English or Russian or
French.” During a time period in which Japan was gaining greater prominence on the world stage, the consul’s actions suggested that the respect of Japanese emigrants was especially important at this moment, and the acknowledgement of it in *The San Francisco Chronicle* implies the United States was aware of this expectation.

While the *Call* cared less about the picture brides over the course of the 1910s, as witnessed by the more general reporting of picture brides in their shipping reports, the *Chronicle* reporters became increasingly conservative over the course of the 1910s. At the beginning of the decade, the paper printed a variety of exploratory pieces on the picture brides and the practice. Described as “little butterfly ladies”, early articles about picture brides push a theme of Oriental romanticism that can be seen in many of the feature pieces describing picture brides. In the early articles, the *Chronicle* journalists wrote about the picture brides with the same mix of admiration and pity as other publication’s writers. In an article printed in May 7, 1911, Lucia Porter explored why picture brides came to America and how Methodist missionary societies helped them transition to American society. Porter was quick to write about how all the decisions during the matching process were made by the families and the groom and “the girl in question is never consulted.” She described the picture brides as “the doll-like little people with their piquant faces and childish ways are too often women at heart and women rebelling against the fate that has cast them into this alien and to be owned by a man whom they have never seen.” Simultaneously, these women were infantilized, forced to be passive recipients of their lives, but also sympathetic characters.

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119 “Japan Takes Lovers’ Part,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 4, 1905
120 This article was written about a year into the Russo-Japanese war.
By 1916, however, the *Chronicle*’s was reprinting anti-Japanese speeches from exclusionist politicians such as John Works, Everis Anson Hayes, and James Phelan. On March 7, 1919, the *Chronicle* ran a whole article on Phelan’s visit to Angel Island and his reasons on why he planned to combat the ‘Picture Bride Menace’ that was attacking California.\(^{121}\) He cited the typical reasons for exclusion: the picture brides have too many children, who are legally citizens and can therefore own land on behalf of their parents. The picture brides and their families were buying up the best land in California and driving out white agricultural labor.

Phelan also noted that 2,045 Japanese picture brides came into the United States through San Francisco in 1918 alone, which the Japanese consul Ota needed to correct in an article the next day. Ota made it clear that only 564 picture brides had arrived in San Francisco in 1917, and although he didn’t have the exact number for 1918, he was confident it was not close to 2,045.

The subsequent articles covered Phelan’s state campaign to ban picture brides, the Japanese Association of American conference discussing the consul and JAA central body’s recent condemnation of the practice, and the final termination of the practice from Japan.\(^{122}\)

The newspapers’ coverage of picture brides ultimately elevated the exclusionist agenda--the Chronicle was even thanked by the Asiatic Exclusion League in 1906--by reporting on the picture bride practice itself, the number of picture brides entering California and the larger debates about their impact and assimilation into American society. As Marzolf describes in the 1920s, the California press uplifted the voices of the influencers in labor, business, and politics,

\(^{121}\) “‘Picture Bride’ Called Menace to California.” *San Francisco Chronicle*. March 7, 1919.

and their opinions on picture brides, but it did not elevate the voices of the Japanese women themselves.
Chapter 4: Anti-Exclusionist Whites and Christian Missionary Work

While a majority of scholarship on Japanese immigration has focused on exclusionist forces working to keep picture brides and other Japanese immigrants out of the country, less attention has been paid to anti-exclusionist groups and individuals who advocated on behalf of the Japanese. Some of the strongest pro-Japanese advocates were Christian organizations and missionaries, who saw the potential for new Christian converts in the immigrant population, especially the Japanese who were viewed as ready to join Western civilization. Picture brides, in particular, signified the Japanese bachelors’ purposeful decision to get married and their openness to civilizing their population. The role of Christianity--specifically Protestantism--in assimilating and advocating for Japanese immigrants was foundational in creating the Japanese-American family unit, and was an essential way that picture brides could argue against claims that they were unassimilable to American society and culture.

The ties between the Japanese and Protestant missions stemmed from the Christian missionary success in Japan. Some Japanese nationals accepted and converted to Christianity, embracing the Westernization of Japanese culture during the Meiji Restoration. The Japanese elite in particular cooperated with missionaries because they taught cosmopolitanism, liberal education, and sophisticated cultural development, which was the logical next step to compete on an international level with Western powers. Former Japanese samurai, in particular, turned to Christianity during the Meiji period, which didn’t always happen in China and India. Irwin Scheiner, a scholar of the Meiji Protestant period, argued that samurai on the losing side of the

Meiji Restoration turned to Christianity as a way to restructure their identity and put them back on a course to power.\textsuperscript{124} For example, under the teaching of Captain L.L. Janes, the Kumamoto band became one of the largest and most influential Protestant groups in nineteenth-century Japan-- in a school where Janes refused to learn Japanese.\textsuperscript{125} Although the converts were alienated by some members of their outside society, Protestant missionaries in the United States witnessed this success as an ability and a willingness on the part of the Japanese race to convert and assimilate into American culture.

Many of the Japanese immigrants’ biggest advocates were former Protestant missionaries in Japan. They used the positive experiences they had with Japanese nationals as fodder for their defense of the Japanese American immigrant community. Most were advocates for the Japanese more broadly, and did not specify picture brides in particular. During the San Francisco school board debate, Herbert Johnson, a Methodist missionary in Japan and the superintendent of the Japanese Methodist churches from 1904-1925, refuted the common argument that the Japanese were unassimilable, stating, “unlike the Chinaman, the Japanese adopt our clothing, and so far as possible, our methods of living,”\textsuperscript{126} and they were rapidly “assimilating to our civilization.”\textsuperscript{127} Exemplary of the ways that missionaries used conversion in Japan to their advantage in the United States, Johnson gave credit to the missionaries working in Japan for their success, saying, “It is generally admitted that the Christian religion, through the faithful efforts of Protestant

missionaries, has been a prime factor in bringing about the notable changes outlined above. Many there are who boldly assert that Japan is already Christian in spirit.** He went on to argue for a change in naturalization laws to let immigrant Japanese apply for U.S. citizenship—a notable, but unpopular argument during this period. Johnson was directly responding to claims made in the San Francisco Call about the unassimilable nature of Japanese immigrants, demonstrating that there was some debate amongst the white population in California. The anti-exclusionist side, however, was significantly overpowered by the exclusionists’ organized power in the labor unions, politics, and the press, especially by the beginning of the 1920s.

Many religious leaders had been pro-Japanese advocates throughout the 1910s. They came out in opposition against the 1913 Alien Land Laws, accusing the laws of being discriminatory in practice, even if they did not explicitly mention Japanese immigrants. The Interdenominational Peace Committee of Pacific Coast Churches, in a statement signed April 24, 1913 and sent to Governor Hiram Johnson, Lieutenant Governor A.J. Wallace and the California Senate, wrote that they “opposed any race discrimination in the treatment of the proposed Alien Land Bills”, and the San Francisco Methodist Preachers’ meeting and Presbyterian ministers of San Francisco and the Bay Area passed a “strong resolution protesting against discrimination.” While not specifically referencing the Japanese population, it was clear that the Alien Land Laws were targeting Japanese farmers who had agricultural success from 1900.

Anti-exclusionist organizations also argued that exclusion was against Christian values. In a pamphlet in the early 1920s, after the picture bride had already stopped by Japan, the Standing Committee of American Workers amongst Orientals argued that the exclusion

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128 Snow, Protestant Missionaries, Asian Immigrants, and Ideologies of Race in America, 1850-1924, 95.
129 Ichioka, The Issei, 154.
measures being proposed were neither fair, American, nor Christian. The Committee had previously had joined the Japanese Association of America to argue that these types of laws would develop “a hostile spirit” between the East and West, and hamper continued commercial prosperity.130

Other advocates included Sidney Gulick, a Christian missionary and former interpreter in Japan, who was a vocal defender of the Japanese Americans in the United States, including a specific argument for picture brides. Although his argument centered around the way that the picture bride practice spoke to the good nature of Japanese men, he actively worked to counteract the exclusionist arguments being made against their arrival. Gulick was another member of the clergy who had lived in Japan and therefore felt that they could defend the nature of the Japanese people. After moving back to the United States in 1913, Gulick was appointed the secretary of the department of international justice and goodwill of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America.131 Gulick and other Christian leaders worked to counteract the anti-Japanese agitation that increased over the course of the 1910s, through writing persuasive pieces and advocating through Christian organizations and missionary societies.132 He worked more broadly on the “New Oriental Policy”, which argued that the United States should impose a quota system based on the amount of Japanese immigrants that they could “assimilate” into American society. Since he refused to believe that assimilability was based on biological characteristics, Gulick pointed to dress, rituals, and religion, as ways that Japanese immigrants could become more

“American”-- a term defined in many different ways depending on who you asked. While he was pro-Japanese, some of his ideas-- including mandatory civics education, support for the eugenics movement, and government censorship of the press to prevent the spread of anti-immigrant stories-- were not entirely democratic or free from racial bias.

To Gulick, “Christian conversion” and “Americanization” were almost synonymous, as they were with many of the pro-Japanese missionary organizations. Although the state officials allowed the wharf marriages to take place with either a Buddhist priest or a Christian minister, to the Protestant missionaries, Buddhism and Shintoism (called “Mikado-worship” amongst exclusionist advocates) were markers of a foreign culture that were to be left behind in Japan. Gulick’s photos showing assimilated Japanese couples or families either had Japanese Christians, or Japanese immigrants with no religion, pointedly leaving out the Eastern religions that dominated Japanese culture.

In his 1914 book, *The American Japanese Problem*, Gulick spent a chapter focused on defending the main source of agitation in that decade, the arrival of picture brides. His main argument was that their intent to marry women from Japan, symbolized the Japanese men’s intention to assimilate and civilize their population, despite the prejudice and discrimination they had seen in the U.S. He spoke of how their “desire to have and rear families” was “highly creditable to Japanese manhood.” Additionally, Gulick argued that the picture bride system ensures that supposed threats of intermarriage between whites and Japanese are non-existent. He argued, “But if this impulse to keep the race pure is in truth generally felt by them, then that

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which is probably the strongest single cause of opposition to Japanese in California is
groundless--namely, fear of race intermarriage and mongrel offspring. Is not this race tendency
on the part of Japanese one of their commendable traits?” While picture brides did not entirely
The picture bride system only served to expand the options of Japanese women available to a
man in the U.S., counteracting many of the early fears of interracial mixing and biracial
offspring.

Gulick drove his point home by arguing that the picture brides movement was created, in
part, in response to criticisms from the anti-Asiatic movement. Gulick believed that the Japanese
wanted to prove that they were assimilable and civilized, especially as they switched their aim
toward permanent settlement. Gulick’s defense suggested that they were not passive recipients of
anti-Asiatic prejudice, but changed who emigrated from Japan in response to both changing laws
and attitudes. The picture brides were supposed to be a solution that served both the Japanese
immigrant community and proved to the exclusionists that the Japanese were non-threatening
and civilized. Although they were an intended solution to the tension felt on the East Coast, the
picture brides were instead another source of threat to the vocal few who would not compromise
on anything less than full exclusion.

Gulick’s arguments, while in defense of the practice, still reflected a patriarchal bias. He
centered his arguments on how the picture brides demonstrated the strong family values of the
Japanese men, and how they mainly helped the men who were unable to return home because of
financial restrictions and unable to marry white women because of interracial marriage laws. He

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spoke little of how the women benefited from coming to America, probably because he was providing counter-arguments to specific points made by exclusionists. It did not occur to him the ways that women could benefit from immigrating would help his case.

There was also significant Christian female activism in California on behalf of the Japanese immigrants. The Methodist-affiliated Women’s Home Missionary Society worked in a tradition dating back to the 1870s of female American missionaries working overseas with Japanese women across class, occupation, and geographic area. Early female missionaries and members of the World Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), who arrived in 1886, promoted a Christian education, commitment to monogamy, and a condemnation of the “sin” of prostitution to both urban and rural Japanese women.\textsuperscript{137}

After women began arriving in the United States in more substantial numbers, missionary societies worked with middle class Issei church women as pro-Japanese activists in northern California. During the beginning of the twentieth century, they focused their efforts on combating the prevalence of Japanese prostitutes by encouraging the immigration of “civilized picture brides” from Japan.\textsuperscript{138} Rumi Yasutake argues that the dual-focus on the abolition of prostitution and conversion to Christianity were a result of a larger mission to instill a new ethical system in the Japanese community.\textsuperscript{139} Although defined by their class and gender, these women were able to exert more influential roles within the sphere of Christian-based activism,

\textsuperscript{139} Yasutake, Transnational Women’s Activism: The United States, Japan, and Japanese Immigrant Communities in California, 1859-1920.
especially as they tried to change the master narrative surrounding the Japanese immigrant community.

One of the praised members of the Women’s Home Missionary Society, Mabel Lamb served as a guardian for many of the women coming into the United States. Her “self-imposed duty” as their guardian included investigating the husband, attending the marriage, checking up on the brides until she was satisfied they were ready to live without her supervision. The guardianship served as a protective measure for these women early on in the decade. Originally a deaconess in Berkeley, she also worked at Grace Church in San Francisco and was praised for her work at both places in the annual report released by the national missionary society. In the report, they also noted, “In August [of 1910], she consented to assume for the year the care of the Japanese Home of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society in San Francisco, where there is a large service for her to render to these strangers within our gates.” In her role as the head of the Japanese Home, Lamb would directly work with picture brides entering the country, and other Japanese and Korean women who lived in the Ellen Stark Ford home in San Francisco. It is unclear, however, whether Lamb continued to serve as a guardian later in the decade as the number of picture brides entering through San Francisco significantly increased.

While Lamb worked specifically with picture brides, the Women’s Home also worked more broadly with Japanese and Korean immigrant women in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Honolulu. In a report on the “Japanese and Korean Work on the Pacific Coast” to the national

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141 “The Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Managers for the Year 1909-10, Hand Book for 1911” (Women’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1910), 207.
administrative body in the 1909 national report, C.B. Perkins, the secretary from the home, praised Lamb’s work with the residents of the home and wrote that they had success in converting some of the Japanese girls to Christianity, their main goal:

Several of the girls have grown to young womanhood and have stepped out into the world to carry with them the seeds of gospel truth which have found a lodgment in their young hearts and which will grow and bear fruit to God’s glory. Their places have been filled by others who greatly need the kind of help we are giving them, and thus the work goes forward--here a little and there a little, and the full results of the work will not be known until the great harvest time shall come.  

Perkins’ description gets to the heart of why Methodist women worked so hard on behalf of the Japanese women-- their home served as center for conversion. The services they provided both helped new immigrant women get accustomed to American society, but it also provided an opportunity to expose the residents to Christianity. It is clear from the annual reports that they did not work solely with picture brides, but any Japanese woman that was open to Christian values or their activities. While their overall goal was to convert as many women as they could to Methodism, these women tailored their work to race and gender, as they did all over the country. They tried to provide helpful services for urban immigrant women. For example, in 1912, they described the activities they were hoping to use at the Los Angeles Japanese home, which included speaking “the language fluently, hold mothers’ meetings, Bible, cooking, and sewing classes for the women, day nursery, kindergarten, and Sunday school for the children.” These social services would have been especially helpful to picture brides who had recently arrived and were learning how to be proper wives and mothers, while also trying to juggle jobs and families.

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143 “The Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Thirty-First Annual Report of the Board of Managers for the Year 1911-12, Hand Book for 1913” (Women’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1912), 181.
The Women’s Home Missionary Society also sent deaconesses to Angel Island, mainly to help European immigrants, but would report that they would try their best to help “Oriental” girls as well. They included “ensure they are married” in the list of tasks and duties they accomplished at Angel Island. Particularly because a majority of the immigrants coming into Angel Island were Asian, it was inevitable that missionary women would come in contact with picture brides who arrived on ships to the immigration station.\textsuperscript{144} From their reports, it seems that a majority of the Methodist missionaries’ productive interaction came from their work at the Japanese and Korean-centered homes along the Pacific coast. While they did less political activism than their male counterparts, missionary women worked on a local level to assimilate Japanese women, especially those living in urban areas, to American society. They worked closely with individual immigrant women to ease their transition through classes and social services, while also pursuing their personal goal of Christian conversion. The work of Methodist women helped to further the pro-Japanese policies of advocates like Johnson and Gulick by providing tangible examples of Japanese immigrants who were able to convert to Christianity and further assimilate into American culture. The Japanese women themselves, whether or not they were picture brides, came to the Women’s Home for a variety of reasons, but their participation in the home’s services and activities helped to strengthen the connection between Christian women’s activism and Japanese immigrant communities.

While the arrival of picture brides marked the transition to permanent Japanese settlement in the American West, Christianity and Christian moral values played an essential role in building the foundation for the Japanese-American community in California. Japanese immigrant

\textsuperscript{144} “The Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Thirty-First Annual Report of the Board of Managers for the Year 1911-12, Hand Book for 1913”, 188.
women connected and developed social bonds through church groups and Methodist homes such as the ones previously described. Through these bonds they developed a Japanese American community identity founded in Western Christian values as they applied to the Japanese immigrant experience. While only some couples converted to Christianity--others continued to practice Buddhism or Shintoism--those that did were provided with resources and services from Christian organizations that viewed these conversions as a successful step in God’s mission. Working on both spiritual and social levels, Christian conversion was a favorable option for many recent immigrants who felt lost or in crisis. Christianity served a similar purpose recent immigrants as it did to the Kumamoto Band who were in identity crisis after the Meiji Restoration. Particularly for picture brides, who needed to quickly adjust to a completely new relationship and lifestyle, some found solace in the security and comfort of Protestant Christianity as it was explained to them by missionaries such as Mabel Lamb.

Fundamentally, these missionaries were open and welcoming to these young women, in contrast to the immigration authorities, mainstream newspapers, and politicians who accused the picture brides of bringing moral decay, economic competition and racial inferiority to the United States. Although they may have been patronized or treated well only so that they would join the church, these organizations must have been a welcoming surprise amidst a culture of discrimination, especially in the women’s homes where they were provided with direct services. It is unfortunate that the grassroots work being done in these homes was overshadowed by the negative, anti-Japanese stereotypes being perpetuated in newspapers and politics.
Conclusion

Described as the “girls of cherry blossom land,” the “wily Oriental,” and “little alien brides,” picture brides initially sparked the attention of the surrounding interest groups because of the picture bride practice. Japanese officials encouraged them to immigrate so they could solve the social and moral issues faced by the male immigrant community, but the practice confused the other populations in California. Californian immigration officials questioned whether the proxy marriages counted as real marriages, readers of local newspapers questioned how a young Japanese girl could travel across the ocean to marry someone she had never met before, and labor leaders questioned why these women were suddenly working alongside their husbands. Despite the confusion from outside forces, many picture brides struggled to establish themselves and their families as first generation immigrants. However, they were, at their core, one of the foundational components of the Japanese immigrant community in the United States. Their ability to enter and survive was fundamental to establishing a Japanese-American presence in the West.

As I did more research for this thesis, the more I read language such as, “picture brides were imported for the Japanese men in the United States,” or “following her parents orders, the bride emigrated to the United States.” While the familial and patriarchal powers did have significant influence during this time period, I would be remiss to gloss over the influence the picture brides had in the local Japanese communities. Further areas of research could examine the transition from bride, just off the boat, to working immigrant wife. Additionally, researchers could examine if the picture bride experience differed based on urban vs. rural settlement, or a different geographic comparison. Lastly, one area that I wish I could have spent more time on
were the runaway (*kakeochi*) ads and strategies employed by *Issei* women to leave unhappy or abusive relationships.


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