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# **Prostitutes and Picture Brides: Chinese and Japanese Immigration, Settlement, and American Nation-Building, 1870-1920\***

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*Abstract.* By examining the historical period from 1870-1920, this presentation will explore why most Chinese women were excluded from immigrating to the United States because they were assumed to be prostitutes while many Japanese women were allowed to immigrate as picture brides. Lee argues that the U.S. did not pass the Page Law of 1875 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 or issue the Gentlemen's Agreement in 1907 for geopolitical reasons alone, as some scholars have argued. Using archival evidence, she contends that attempts to resolve the competing logics in "settling the west," which called for cheap labor and the permanent settlement of families on the West Coast, explain why the United States responded to the immigration of Chinese and Japanese women differently. These discrepant responses were a product of geopolitics, economic conditions, and class relations in the U.S, along with state and national fears over miscegenation and desires to maintain the imputed racial purity of a "white" national identity. In turn, U.S. immigration laws and policies helped to determine permanent settlement of immigrant communities and the racial and gendered character of the nation. This presentation suggests that nation-building is not simply the "imagining" of a community but is instead a negotiated process involving geopolitics, political economy, and cultural meanings of gender, race, and ethnicity.

## **Introduction**

Waves of immigration have engendered periods of conflict and contestation in constructing the meaning of "the nation" in American history (Dinnerstein et al. 1991, Handlin 1957, Higham 1978, Smith 1997, Takaki 1990). American nativism and anti-immigrant sentiments reached their pinnacle with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, which effectively placed quotas on the numbers of immigrants who could immigrate to the U.S. In particular, the law sought to limit the numbers of immigrants from southern and eastern European countries. Prior to this draconian law and paradigmatic shift in immigration policy, the United States first took steps to limit immigration by those it increasingly found inassimilable,

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the Chinese, who began to arrive in the mid-1850s. How the U.S. responded to changes and challenges wrought by Chinese immigration foreshadowed its response to later immigrants. However, the United States' response to another group of immigrants from Asia was seemingly unexpected given the handling of Chinese immigration. Though Japanese immigrants faced similar nativist discontent arriving on the U.S. mainland some forty years after the first Chinese immigrants, Japanese immigrants were initially greeted with a more favorable set of immigration policies. This is especially surprising considering the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments over the turn of the century. This paper is part of a larger project in which I explain why the U.S. differentially treated the Chinese and Japanese. I argue that geopolitics, political party consolidation, economic conditions and class relations, and racialized fears about a changing national identity determined the dissimilar immigration laws and policies. This explanation is only half of the story however. Eventually, the two immigrants were treated similarly when the Japanese were effectively banned like the Chinese. Though the growing nation-state desired immigrants' labor for expanding and developing nation- and state-building activities, especially in settling the West or West Coast, once these immigrants sought permanent settlement and/or their labor was not needed, political and intellectual elites moved toward their prohibition.<sup>1</sup> They argued that both the Chinese and the Japanese were inassimilable.

In this paper, I focus on how changing economic conditions and labor demands coupled with growing concerns over racial mixing affected immigration laws and policies, which in turn helped to determine Chinese and Japanese family formation and permanent settlement. I

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<sup>1</sup> I recognize the West loosely referred to a region west of the Mississippi but more importantly suggested an area of the nation that was still undeveloped and untamed. In this study, I refer to both the West and the West Coast. The West was an enigmatic concept, and the frontier West shifted in meaning physically, as one generation's West became the next generation's Midwest with each successive westward expansion. The West encapsulated the West Coast in as much as the coast states of California, Oregon, and Washington symbolized rugged underdevelopment.

illustrate this by demonstrating that various political, economic, and intellectual elites endeavored to fulfill two important logics in settling the relatively sparsely populated, newly developing region of the West, which was considered frontier in the early years of Chinese immigration. The first logic was the logic of economic development. This hinged upon the ready supply of cheap labor, provided early in the West by bachelor immigrants in railroad construction and mining. The second logic was the logic of permanent settlement. In order to secure the West to the seats of political, economic, and social power on the East Coast, the state had to ensure that the West was settled. Family settlement provided the easiest and cheapest way to do this. Whether the immigrants who supplied the much-needed labor in fulfilling the first logic would be allowed to permanently settle embroiled the nation in a debate about what defined and who constituted the nation. Politicians, capitalists, labor leaders, moral reformers, medical experts, intellectuals and other elites competed and negotiated the rules and meaning of membership as they contested and compromised the fulfillment of the two logics.

At first, Chinese immigrants constituted a much-needed, cheap, bachelor labor force, fulfilling the first logic. This character was supported by the gender-unbalanced nature of the immigration. As the West and the rest of the country began to experience a recession, politicians, supported very strongly by labor leaders, restricted their immigration. Political and intellectual elites also sought to prohibit permanent Chinese settlement, claiming they could not assimilate into the fabric of the nation nor help fulfill the second logic in settling the West. These elites envisioned and protected an imputed racial purity of the nation.

When the country emerged out of a recession towards the turn of the century, Chinese exclusion helped to produce a labor shortage. The need for labor was most acute in West Coast's increasingly crucial area of agriculture. Japanese immigrants supplied the farm laboring needs.

Because farming benefits from family labor (as opposed to bachelor labor in industries such as mining and railroad construction, in which the Chinese men engaged), Japanese men *and* women could work the land, both helping to continue to fulfill the first logic in settling the West – economic development. In the early years of the immigration, the Japanese faced ethnic differentiation from the Chinese. Though this period was short, this differentiation along with Japan’s geopolitical position helped to secure an opportunity for Japanese men to bring over their wives and to begin to permanently settle. However, political and intellectual elites and labor leaders claimed the Japanese also did not have a rightful claim to full membership into the nation and moved toward their exclusion by implementing various alien land laws. In the process, they helped to racialize the Japanese as inferior and inassimilable, like the earlier Chinese immigrants.

Political and intellectual elites recognized differences in Chinese and Japanese women’s sexuality as a way to define the categories of us and them, of what constitutes an appropriate family, and hence, the nation. Talk about reproduction helped to both legitimize and constitute the morality of politicians and the state (Gal and Kligman 2000). For political elites and leading intellectuals, it was a way of making politics *and* the nation. In the process, the discourse and practices helped to stratify reproduction, create hierarchies of difference amongst immigrants and natives, and define the boundaries of the nation.

### Defining Prostitutes and Picture Brides

The United States banned practically all Chinese women from entering the country by passing the Immigration Act of 1875 or the Page Law and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882;<sup>2</sup> the state assumed that all Chinese women were prostitutes, hence, undesirable and ineligible for

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<sup>2</sup> Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first, last, and only exclusionary immigration law to target a specific ethnic group, was finally repealed in 1943. By then, China was an important ally of the U.S. in its war against Japan.

entry. Many early Chinese immigrants were indeed prostitutes, as were many other early female immigrants.<sup>3</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese women were singled out as being unsanitary and immoral, deviant, for engaging in prostitution (Peffer 1999, Tong 1996). In consequence, they were virtually prohibited from entering the U.S., following the Page Law, which banned the immigration of prostitutes from China, Japan, and other “Oriental” countries, although China was the intended target.<sup>4</sup>

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 marked the culmination of growing anti-Chinese sentiment which had begun to gain strength in the 1870s as Chinese male laborers encountered both a recession and angry European American laborers as they settled in urban centers (Higham 1978; Saxton 1971). The act made no explicit reference to the status of women while excluding male laborers. Both laws were attempts to halt Chinese population growth through immigration and biological reproduction. These exclusionary laws helped to maintain the imbalance in the sex ratio caused by original migration patterns. Chinese men who were already in the U.S. when the exclusionary laws were enacted faced very slim odds of marrying a wife and having children in the U.S. (Hirata 1979a); Chinese men’s access to Chinese women was greatly limited.

While limiting Chinese women’s immigration, the U.S. allowed Japanese women to join their husbands in the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 and 1908.<sup>5</sup> The Gentlemen’s Agreement made it possible for Japanese women to marry Japanese men by proxy and then to join them in

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<sup>3</sup>Hirata (1979) notes that in the early years of Chinese women’s immigration (1850-1860), most of them were prostitutes. However, by 1880, one quarter of the women were not classified as prostitutes in a census taken of San Francisco’s Chinatown. One must evaluate these numbers with a grain of salt for they are based on the perceptions and stereotypes of white male immigration officials and census takers. I discuss these census numbers further in the paper.

<sup>4</sup> See full text of Page’s speech, which introduced the Page Law in *Appendix to the Congressional Record*, 43d Cong., 2d sess., 1875, pp. 40-45.

<sup>5</sup> The Gentlemen’s Agreement was a series of memos sent back and forth between the U.S. and Japan, culminating in executive decisions by President Roosevelt in 1907 and 1908. In 1907, President Roosevelt issued an executive order that prohibited entry to the U.S. by aliens who held passports issued for destinations other than the U.S., including Hawaii. Japanese were no longer able to use the islands as a stepping stone to immigrate to the mainland.

the U.S. Japanese women faced greater chances of immigrating to the U.S. than Chinese women, though Japanese prostitution was also considered a problem in the early years of immigration (Glenn 1986, Ichioka 1988, Ling 1998). Immigration policy toward Japanese immigrants during the first three decades of their immigration to the U.S. produced a viable Japanese American community. Unlike Chinese immigrants, the Japanese achieved greater gender parity.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### Gender and Nation-Building

Boundary formation around divisions of gender is key to understanding nation-building activities and exclusionary practices centered on racialized differences. A lack of understanding of the relationship between gender and nation has been a weak gap in studies of state and nation-building and citizenship. The seemingly gender-neutral position of early state- and nation-building studies has been to indeed offer a *gendered* perspective on nation- and state-building activities, a masculine perspective (Nagel 1998). Focus on the seemingly public and political work that men do in state- or nation-building activities appears consistent with emphasis on the ideologized dichotomous distinction in the separation of public and private spheres.

However, feminist theorists of the state have long sought to locate the centrality of women and women's work that constitutes and maintains various social institutions, including the state (Laslett and Brenner 1989:383). What many feminist theorists of the state recognize is that women and women's work are not simply personal and private; they crisscross with traditionally public realms of the state and the workplace. Thus, for example, state welfare policies that set up programs of entitlement for men and charitable funds for women and children impact social reproduction as well as constitute and maintain various "public" social institutions



(Gordon 1994). These works suggest the importance of the study of the “politics of reproduction,” where one investigates the “intersection between politics and the life cycle” (Kligman 1998:5). This intersection is indeed one important locus at which the ideologized dichotomous distinction of the public and private can be dissected.

Focusing on the centrality of women and women’s work in state- and nation-building activities does not mean abandoning examinations of how men have organized women and their work. Men have dominated most nation- and state-building activities for they have largely commanded the roles and institutions that have been central in such work. Therefore, to examine the role of gender in politics as well as the gendering of politics, scholars must recognize “*the* major way in which gender shapes politics – through men and their interests, their notions of manliness, and masculine micro and macro cultures” (Nagel 1998:243; emphasis original). Nagel argues researchers must explore how women “occupy a distinct, symbolic role in nationalist culture, discourse and collective action, a role that reflects a masculinist definition of femininity and of women’s proper place in the nation” (1998:252), though women often resist such definitions of themselves.

### Locating Women and Women’s Bodies in the Nation-Building

One useful way of exploring possible links between nation-building, race, gender, and sexuality is to investigate how women as biological reproducers and their bodies serve to mark the physical and symbolic boundaries of the nation and/or the ethno-racial group (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989). The work of nation- building is often achieved through the symbolic and even physical use of women’s bodies by men (Nagel 1998: 243, Mostov 1995) or by the male-dominated state (Bock 1991). For example, Kligman (1998) describes the brutal consequences of

denying women's access to abortion in Ceausescu's Romania. Examining women's participation in national, ethnic, or state activities this way suggests that men's interests and masculine definitions of the nation are achieved through the control of women's bodies, and necessarily, of their sexuality.

If women are to reproduce the nation, both biologically and socially, they are expected to fulfill their roles with honor and propriety. Partly, because women are seen to be the physical bearers of the nation, they must be protected from both outsiders and *themselves*. This is in keeping with patrilineal logic. Men fear that women cannot control their own sexuality, that they will procreate with an "other," or in the case of the nation, a foreigner, thereby threatening the purity of the nation qua patriline. While women may be lauded as the bearers of the family, race, ethnicity, or the nation, they always and simultaneously pose a threat to their integrity. Therefore, sexuality is itself intimately linked with race and racism (Mosse 1985, Stoler 1989, 1995, Bock 1991).<sup>6</sup> *Our* women may be valorized for their purity and chastity while *their* women may be demonized for their sexual practices. Such differentiation can have the useful consequence of disciplining *our* women while further marginalizing *their* women. The articulation of sexual differences produces simultaneously the articulation of racial differences (Stoler 1989, Mosse 1985).

In the case of Chinese and Japanese immigration, alleged sexual differences were equated with reproduction and race. Political and intellectual elites assumed that controlling sexuality would control reproduction and race relations. In my research, I investigate the meaning of this connection, exploring if and how sexuality and reproduction were linked and tied to race. Studies

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<sup>6</sup> Those involved in nation- or state-building activities often make the link between race and nationality. For many, one equals the other to the extent that a "biologically" distinct and unique group of people constitutes a given nation. The logic is circular. What's significant is the use of discursive practices to make the symbolic connection seem natural and real.

of race must examine how the embodied practices that constitute race shift in meaning, especially the ways in which a group of people become racialized and sexualized through the articulation of otherness, thereby constructing relations of racial supremacy and subordination.

## **Data and Methods**

Archival materials on legislative debates and hearings (national, state—California, Oregon, and Washington, and local) on Chinese and Japanese immigration, correspondence records from the Bureau of Immigration (the agency was housed under various federal departments, including the treasury and labor and commerce), documents such as letters and petitions sent to the Senate and House of Representative regarding immigration, and personal papers of key political leaders and intellectual elites make up the bulk of the data. These materials provide insight into what the public discourse and practices were in racializing and sexualizing Chinese and Japanese immigrants. Also, I examine local, state, and national newspapers and magazines around key periods during Chinese and Japanese immigration to gather a picture of what the press informed the lay public regarding these new immigrants.

I use comparative-historical methods as my primary method of inquiry. My examination of Chinese and Japanese immigration allows for comparisons across time. Furthermore, my method of inquiry relies upon historical contingency; immigration policies need not have been implemented as they had. Historical contingency poses a methodological challenge—how can a causal explanation be made? Why indeed were certain immigration policies implemented? One way to address this issue is to employ counterfactual analysis, by exploring why one decision was made over another. For example, what would have happened had Chinese laborers not been banned in 1882, or if the Page Law targeting Chinese prostitutes had not been enacted? Would

Japanese women still have been encouraged to come as proxy brides? No one can be certain what such counterfactual choices would have produced. However, by investigating why these alternative decisions were not made can provide a useful method for understanding why certain ones were (Weber 1978). Employing these methods, I seek to develop a sequence of events where the reflexive interaction of interests and identities forged racialized and sexualized imaginings of Chinese and Japanese immigrants in immigration policies in the context of changing material conditions and a nation-building agenda.

### **Chinese Immigration**

The expanding West of the United States pulled Chinese peasants and laborers who themselves were pushed out of their homeland, suffering from rice scarcities, especially in popular provinces of Guandong and Fujian in the 1840s (Barth 1964). Both the Opium War with Britain from 1839-42 and the Taiping Rebellion of 1850-64 weakened China. Furthermore, the ceding of Hong Kong to Britain at the conclusion of the Opium War opened China to the West. Following such upheaval, China was unable to control the flow of emigration of its people (Hing 1993). The signing of the Burlingame Treaty in 1868 by China and the United States ended the prohibition on emigration by the Chinese government and facilitated trade and diplomatic relations between the two nations (Choy et al. 1994, p. 64). The outflow of immigrant workers from places like China helped to fuel the boom along the West Coast, especially in California or “Gold Mountain” as it came to be known.

Chinese immigrants’ contributions toward the physical manipulation and development of a vast, sparsely populated region, including Montana, Idaho, Nevada as well as the Pacific Coast, were critical for constructing the foundations for future economic growth. Thus, Chinese

immigrant men helped to fulfill the first logic in actualizing the settlement of the West; they provided much needed labor for mining, railroad construction, and services demanded by these labor camps and growing urban centers. As their supposed sojourning character shifted toward permanent settlement and as Chinese immigrant men's desires for bringing over wives and families grew, many political elites saw a potential conflict and a contradiction. Though Chinese immigrants were vital to fulfilling the logic of inexpensive labor for settling the West, their continued presence was a threat to the permanent settlement of the kind of families many politicians and some intellectual elites wanted, that is, "white" families. As their usefulness for serving the labor needs of the newly developing West waned, the U.S. implemented a number of immigration laws, which prohibited many Chinese immigrants from settling permanently. Along with the Page Law of 1875 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Congress denied rights to citizenship through naturalization to any immigrant who was not "white" (McClain 1994:71).<sup>7</sup> These exclusionary practices helped to "resolve" the contradiction.

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<sup>7</sup> There had been considerable confusion and ambiguity surrounding the wording of the amendments to the federal naturalization statute in 1870 and subsequent Congressional attempts to codify the law. In 1870, naturalization rights were extended to "aliens of African nativity, and to persons of African descent" (Act of July 14, 1870, ch. 254, § 7, 16 Stat. 254, 256). Naturalization rights of other nonwhites were uncertain. In 1875, codification of the naturalization laws left out the original 1790 federal statute provision that naturalization rights were limited to free, white persons. Congress in the following year tried to amend the codification and added the words "being a free white person" to the provision, so that the law then read "The provisions of this title shall apply to aliens [being free white persons, and to aliens] of African nativity and to persons of African descent" (Act of Feb. 18, 1875, ch. 80, 18 Stat., pt. 3, 316, 318). When three Chinese immigrants sought to challenge the law by applying for naturalization, the federal circuit court in San Francisco heard the oral arguments for the applicants' case. In his decision, circuit Judge Sawyer explained that the Chinese were excluded from the privilege of naturalization under federal law, for the words "white person" "had a well-settled meaning in common popular speech and in scientific literature" and "were seldom if ever used in a sense so comprehensive to include individuals of the Mongolian race" (McClain 1994:72). Sawyer also explained that Senator Charles Sumner's attempts to strike the words "free, white person" had been attacked and adverted, precisely because it would have extended the privilege to naturalize to the Chinese. Furthermore, the reassertion of those words in 1875 made it clear to Sawyer that Congress did not intend to extend naturalization rights to the Chinese. For discussion on the meaning of white and naturalization laws, see Haney-Lopez (1996).

### Early Immigration and Chinese Female Prostitution

Early Chinese immigrants were mainly male sojourning laborers who came alone, leaving their wives and families behind. Most Chinese women did not travel with their husbands or alone for several reasons. Chinese culture dictated that upon marriage, women became part of the husband's household. While sons were expected to go abroad, if necessary, to support their parents, their wives were expected to stay behind and care for the household and other family members (Hirata 1979a; Hing 1993, Ling 1998). The harsh living and working conditions of mining camps may have also prevented wives and children from relocating with their husbands and fathers (Courtwright 1996; Hirata 1979a, Ling 1998). Chinese women migrated in larger numbers to Hawaii. In Hawaii, contract work with plantation owners was less harsh, and life there was less migratory. This suggests that despite patriarchal limitations, given economic opportunities, Chinese women may have immigrated in larger numbers to the mainland had the exclusionary acts not been passed (Hirata 1979a).

Prior to 1875, early Chinese female migrants who ventured to the U.S. mainland included many prostitutes (Hirata 1979a, Peffer 1999, Yung 1995). This was true for other pioneering immigrant women. In California, the proportion of women who were prostitutes, regardless of ethnicity or nationality, was high. A popular ditty captured this moment in the history of the West:

The miners came in forty-nine  
The whores in fifty-one.  
They rolled around on the barroom floor,  
Then came the native son (Daniels 1988:17)

These lines illustrate the national preoccupation of settling the West and also suggest there were many contradictions. The early need for single male laborers restricted family settlement. A large bachelor society attracted prostitutes, whose sexual practices violated norms of propriety that demanded sex be limited to the family. Sex in the family was crucial not only for its own reproduction but also for the reproduction of the nation. The “native son” that resulted in the “roll” between miners and whores was an embodied product of the contradiction that proved crucial for settling the West as well as an abomination.

Without discounting the important roles that Chinese prostitutes fulfilled, it is also necessary to recognize that they probably accounted for just six percent of the Chinese population in the U.S. at the time of the exclusion laws. There are no clear and exact figures on the numbers of Chinese prostitutes. They were highly dependent upon who did the counting (Peffer 1999). Roughly, San Francisco’s Chinatown, the largest Chinese immigrant settlement, had around 1400 Chinese prostitutes out of about 2000 Chinese women in 1870.<sup>8</sup>

As prostitutes, early Chinese female immigrants played an important role in maintaining the family structure in China and the Chinese community in America. They did this specifically by serving crucial economic functions: maintaining the young single male labor force while providing sex work that is often of great profit to those who control their labor (Hirata 1979a). A relationship between patriarchy and prostitution helps to explain this phenomenon. Prostitution perpetuated Chinese sojourning abroad and supported the migrant labor system in America. Emigrant males often married before leaving home. Newly married wives served their filial duties by staying in the home communities of China and Hong Kong. They were kept under the

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<sup>8</sup> There is no consensus on the exact number of Chinese prostitutes amongst scholars either. Chan (1991) reports there were 1452 prostitutes out of a total Chinese female population of 2022. Hirata (1979a) writes there were 2018 Chinese women, 1426 amongst them prostitutes. Tong (1996) calculates 1565 out of 2499 Chinese women were prostitutes. Peffer (1999) claims there were 2040 Chinese women, 1452 of them prostitutes.

watchful eyes of their families, and the sojourning men were then obliged to send their earnings home to support their families. The Chinese family was preserved at home while the Chinese itinerant laborer continued to work in the U.S. Prostitutes satisfied their sexual desires. The emigrants returned home when they could afford it, sired a child, and if that child was a boy, he later joined his father to work in America.

Though patriarchy prohibited the emigration of "decent" women, prostitutes could still emigrate to the U.S. Hirata argues that their emigration helped to "stabilize and preserve the family because Chinese emigrant males could thereby avoid liaisons which might lead to permanent relationships with foreign women" (1979a:7). Chinese prostitutes could also send money home to their families in China.<sup>9</sup> The importation of Chinese prostitutes met the Chinese men's (and often European American men's) sexual demands while limiting the perceived threat to "white" womanhood (Hirata 1979a:7). Furthermore, according to Hirata, Chinese prostitution was important for maintaining the (European American) American family structure by preventing miscegenation, or racial mixing, between Chinese men and European American women. The patriarchal and patrilineal system that made filial piety and sexual propriety *de rigueur* in China for the women there facilitated the propriety of European American women in the U.S. too.

Economically, Chinese prostitution helped to maintain an artificially cheapened labor pool of Chinese immigrants (Espiritu 1997). Chinese and other ethnic prostitutes tended to Chinese immigrant men working in mining and railroad construction, which were largely bachelor societies of male workers (Courtwright 1996). Without a family to support in the U.S.

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<sup>9</sup> What is clearly evident is that gender and expectations of proper gender roles not only impacted the migratory patterns of Chinese men and women, but they also affected their reception (Yung 1995). On the West Coast, a labor shortage and large bachelor society afforded many women economic opportunities. For example, hired women



and living a bachelor existence, these men were less expensive to sustain and paid accordingly. Even in comparison to other bachelor men working in mining or railroad construction, Chinese workers earned significantly less. For example, European American laborers earned at least two-thirds more than their Chinese counterpart (Daniels 1988, p. 19). Chinese workers' reputation for being cheap and efficient encouraged employers in fishery and canning and manufacturing in cigars, shoes, and garment to hire them (Lyman 1974, p. 73).

For various economic, social, and moral reasons, Chinese women prostitutes "protected" legitimate families. However, this was true in the U.S. only as long as they prevented permanent settlement of Chinese families.

#### Attacking Chinese Sexuality, Protecting "White" Women and Families

As the West Coast's economy and infrastructure further developed, especially following the completion of the transcontinental railroad, permanent settlement of European American families became more plausible. The increasing number of women, and in particular, European American women who moved to the West Coast, illustrate the changing character of the frontier West from a rugged bachelor society to an extension of the civilized East Coast. For example, in 1850, "white" women constituted just one quarter of the total population in California (not including American Indians, who were not officially counted in the Census as part of the total population). By 1870, they made up about 36% of California's population. In other West Coast states such as Oregon, the ratio of "white" women to men was almost even. Settlement of women afforded settlement of families in the region.

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performed work normally done by women in the family. Thus, women worked as domestic servants, laundresses, *and* as prostitutes (Hirata 1979b).

Chinese immigrant men, once so crucial to the economic development of the region, became a threat to the fulfillment of the second logic of settling the West, permanent settlement of European American families. Whether real or imagined, political elites and labor agitators regularly characterized Chinese men as a threat to “white” womanhood, which denoted their evil and potential peril to the West. For example, in 1869, the national paper *Harper’s Weekly* ran a cartoon titled “Pacific Railroad Complete,” depicting a Chinese man in traditional clothing locked arm in arm with a European American woman, perhaps on their day of union, standing before the “Church of Confucius” (Choy et al. 1994:134). This Chinese man was a direct challenge to “white” men’s sole claim over “white” women. Negative portrayals of Chinese reached a national audience through these popular presses.

Another popular national publication at this time, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, also regularly offered illustrations and stories, which warned of the lecherous ways of Chinese men. In one drawing, a scene of New York City’s opium dens show two Chinese men grabbing a European American woman who is collapsing, perhaps as the result of opium addiction. The sketching portrayed a common fear: the capture of European American women by foreign men like the Chinese who led innocent “white” women into a life of prostitution or other licentious sins (Choy et al. 1994:107). Despite the prevalence of such consternation in the popular media, some police officers noted they had never known this to be true (California State Senate 1878:209). Chinese men threatened the sanctity of “white” women’s purity as well as the crucial role that European American women’s settlement ensured for the West. The Chief of Police for San Francisco, James Rogers, submitted a report to the California Senate (discussed further below) outlining the activities and effects of the Chinese in the city. He complained that “white” men and women visited opium dens were during all hours of the day and night. He also wrote

that the police department have even found “white women and Chinamen side by side under the effects of this drug—a humiliating sight to any one who has anything left of manhood” (California State Senate 1878:217). Politicians and other government officials found both the activities and the increasingly closer proximity of the Chinese to the European American settlers, especially women, abhorrent. As the West and the rest of the nation slipped into an economic recession beginning in the 1870s, the contradiction embodied in Chinese immigration was easily reconciled as both their labor and threat to permanent settlement were resolved through a series of exclusionary policies.

Passage of the Page Law in 1875 did not ensure that Chinese men would be kept from European American women. However, it made permanent settlement by Chinese immigrants less likely. Furthermore, politicians passed the Page Law as the first part of a two-prong attack on Chinese immigration, which culminated with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. Following the enactment of the Page Law, politicians, intellectual elites, and moral reformers continued to rely on public discourse that characterized the Chinese as morally degenerate, focusing the public’s attention on Chinese women’s sexual deviance in particular. They claimed Chinese women were debauched and sinful. Such were the claims made in California about the impact of Chinese prostitution in San Francisco. Newspaper editors, missionaries, and government officials decried their negative effects on society, fingering the Chinese as especially dangerous and a threat to “white” families. For example, during the passage of the Page Law, moral crusaders and physicians with anxieties over the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases singled out Chinese prostitutes as sources of contamination. The medical community at one point alleged there was a special strain of syphilis unique to Chinese immigrants. J. Marion Sims, president of the AMA and world-famous gynecologist, in his official address at the

centennial jubilee of the AMA in 1876, claimed syphilis had reached epidemic proportions and sounded the alarm about the particularities of the “Chinese syphilis tocsin.” He claimed Chinese prostitutes on the West Coast had already spread syphilis not only to men, but to boys as young as eight and ten (Peffer 1999:103). Young boys were supposedly going to Chinatown where the price for sexual favors were “so cheap” but led to venereal diseases (California State Senate 1878:153). Frequenting Chinese brothels would not only bring shame upon the men and their families, but it could kill them; Chinese prostitutes presented both moral and physical threats to families. Testifying before the special committee on Chinese immigration of the California State Senate, Dr. Toland, founder of a medical school and member of the San Francisco Board of Health, cried the hospitals would be filled with invalids due to syphilis if Chinese prostitution were allowed to remain (California State Senate 1878:169). Though the American Medical Association’s research in syphilis concluded there was no special “Chinese strain,” medical professionals and moral crusaders and political elites who heeded their words nonetheless branded the Chinese and their potential for contaminating the body and the family as particularly virulent, all of which imperiled the West and the nation.

#### Protecting “White” Families and Settlement: Move Toward Total Exclusion

By halting Chinese women’s immigration, the Chinese men’s immigration and settlement in the U.S. was undermined. The Page Law helped to solidify the unbalanced sex ratio amongst the Chinese. Hoping to extend exclusion to Chinese men, anti-Chinese politicians on the West Coast, particularly those in California, and other exclusionary advocates sought to “educate” the national public about these evils and possible peril, hoping to elicit fears that would lead to national legislative action (Gyory 1998). This was the impetus for commissioning a special

committee on Chinese immigration by the California State Senate in 1878 when it called on some sixty witnesses in an effort to evaluate the impact and value of continued Chinese immigration to the Pacific Coast (Sandmeyer 1991:61). In the memorial sent to Congress following the hearings, the committee described the Chinese in the U.S. as “the dregs of the population” who were mainly of the criminal class. It claimed that practically all of the women were engaged in prostitution. Furthermore, the report reiterated the growing fears over the Chinese “menace” depicted in the illustrations described above (California Legislature 1878). The conclusion to be made was that cheap Chinese labor and the immoderation of Chinese women was threatening the future of the West.

The diseased Chinese with their depraved ways threatened the nation and the fulfillment of the second logic in settling the West. The permanent settlement of the West by European American families would have to compete against the artificially cheapened labor of Chinese immigrant men, the lecherous ways of the Chinese men, and the diseased debauchery of its women. Politicians and other elites called the permanent settlement of Chinese dangerous for American civilization. In testimony before the California State Senate, David Louderback, a judge and a former prosecuting attorney in San Francisco, called the presence of Chinese “degrading to the white race” (California State Senate 1878:159). Referring to both the prevalence of opium dens and prostitution, many testifying before the California Senate responded negatively to the supposed moral effect the Chinese presence would have on California and the nation. A San Francisco police officer stated continued Chinese settlement would be “ruinous to the community” (California State Senate 1878:146).

Political and intellectual elites engaged in a public discourse that focused on the detrimental harm that continued Chinese immigration and settlement would have on the

settlement of the West. They cited the perils that Chinese immigration would engender for the West Coast and the nation as reasons for exclusion. In a letter sent to the U.S. Senate in December 1881, the Board of Trade of San Francisco urged the Senate to pass legislation restricting Chinese immigration by claiming the following regarding Chinese immigration:

It is evident that a continuance of an unrestricted Chinese immigration is prejudicial to the interests of the Pacific Coast, tending to prevent a desirable immigration from Europe and our Eastern States and causing a prejudice which operates against the settlement of our unoccupied lands by permanent settlers (Senate Documents, RG 47A-H10.1, Box 110).

By passing the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, politicians, supported by intellectuals and moral reformers, endeavored to control Chinese immigration and prevent permanent settlement was paramount. As a group, Chinese immigrants without replenishment from new immigration or natural reproduction, aged. This was a trend that did not reverse itself until well into the twentieth century. In many ways, bringing Chinese immigrant men to labor in the work necessary for building the West and letting them wither was part of the grand plans of fulfilling the national expansion for many political elites. In a letter to historian, writer, and publisher Henry Bancroft, Judge Lorenzo Sawyer, a federal district judge in California, outlined a pattern of immigration that would be most beneficial to business, capitalist development in the West, and the nation. Writing about Chinese men, he stated

If they would never bring their women here and never multiply and we would never have more than we could make useful, their presence would always be an advantage to the State . . . so long as the Chinese don't come here to stay . . . their labor is highly beneficial to the whole community . . . the difficulty is that they are beginning to get over the idea that they must go back. Then they will begin to multiply here and that is where the danger lies in my opinion. When the Chinaman comes here and don't bring his wife here, sooner or later he dies like a worn out steam engine; he is

simply a machine, and don't leave two or three or half dozen children to fill his place (Bancroft Manuscript, Letters, Bancroft Library).

Westward expansion of the nation and permanent settlement of European Americans was imperiled by Chinese immigration. The kinds of families desired in the making of the nation, in settling the West, were not the kind constituted by Chinese immigrants. Making the claim that Chinese immigrants could not assimilate into the national fabric even more forcefully was Senator James Blaine of Maine, a Republican who eventually became the party's presidential nominee in 1884. A fervent supporter of Chinese exclusion, he spoke before his colleagues on the Senate floor in 1879 on whether the Senate ought to undertake efforts to abrogate the Burlingame Treaty, which treaty was limiting congressional efforts at limiting Chinese immigration.<sup>10</sup> He argued

The Asiatic cannot go on with our population and make a homogeneous element. The idea . . . comparing European immigration with an immigration that has no regard to family, that does not recognize the relation of husband and wife, that does not observe the tie of parent and child, that does not have in the slightest degree the ennobling and civilizing influences of the hearthstone and the fireside (Congressional Record, 45<sup>th</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session, February 14, 1879:1301).

In the explicit message that Chinese immigrants did not care about the family was an implicit message that *their* kinds of families were unwanted and could also threaten *our* kinds of families. For example, gender imbalance in the Chinese immigrant community was evidence of the inferiority of the Chinese people. The senator failed to remember that the Senate was partly responsible for the unequal sex ratio, having passed the female exclusionary Page Law. In both

cases, Chinese immigrants and their sexuality were demonized for the explicit purpose of controlling their immigration.

### Summary

Politicians regulated Chinese immigration and permanent settlement by first controlling the landing of Chinese women, that is, who came, how, and when. There was no explicit mention of Chinese women in the original exclusion act or various amendments that followed (Chan 1991:108). Thus, the Page Law continued to determine whether or not Chinese women were appropriate for landing. Wives of merchants, who were not part of the banned class of immigrants outlined in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, could also immigrate. These laws had the effect of “producing” two classes of women: rich merchants’ wives and whores. There were very few of the former; those who claimed to be members of the exempted class were interrogated and often refused landing. Thus, in the minds of most European Americans, there were plenty of the latter. All Chinese women were prostitutes.

Controlling immigration and permanent settlement eventually included exclusion of Chinese men, especially after a depressed economy had less need for the usefulness of their cheapened labor. Political and intellectual elites claimed moral legitimacy in their efforts to curb Chinese immigration and “secure” the nation. By doing so, they articulated the legitimate boundaries of the nation. These elites in particular saw growing Chinese immigration as exigent and a threat to the permanent settlement of European American families along the West Coast. National leader argued the latter were the appropriate bearers of the nation and the former a menacing threat.

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<sup>10</sup> They included limits on Congress’ ability to govern Chinese immigration. Until this aspect could be resolved in a future treaty negotiation, all Congressional attempts to alter Chinese immigration policies faced dubious prospects.



## **Japanese Immigration**

The Page Law and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and its various amendments were very successful in greatly curbing Chinese immigration. Political leaders and business elites, particularly those on the West Coast, sought increased immigration from elsewhere for fully expanding the West. Continued development and settlement remained critical for the increasingly imperialistic expansion of the young nation-state. However, as with the earlier immigrants from China who both contributed toward as well as threatened the fulfillment of the nationalist ideal, Japanese immigrants also embodied a contradiction. They provided critically necessary labor during a time of shortage, particularly in an industry that was vital to the expansion of the entire nation. Yet they also potentially undermined permanent settlement of the increasingly important West Coast. Again, the U.S., motivated by these internal dynamics and swayed by various interests, sought to resolve these contradictions through a set of immigration policies that sexualized and racialized Japanese immigrants. However, in this case the process had a very different outcome.

### Early Immigration

In one important way, early history of Japanese immigration differed from that of the Chinese. Unlike a weak Chinese state, Japan had come to occupy a more formidable position as an important geopolitical player. The Meiji Restoration of 1868 led to the subsequent transition of a feudal society into a modern industrialized one (Eisenstadt 1996). During the early years of the transition, Japan permitted very few members of its citizenry to leave. From 1860 to 1880, when China had allowed almost 200,000 laborers to come to the United States, Japan permitted

just 335 emigrants. Students, bureaucrats, and statesmen mostly represented this small number (Hing 1993; Ichioka 1988).

Like the early Chinese immigrants, early Japanese laboring immigrants were well received by employers. Young and healthy men needed to work the sugar plantation fields of Hawaii made up the majority of the early immigrants in the 1890s. Offers of work on sugar plantations in Hawaii eventually drew tens of thousands to the islands. Some of these workers pursued further on to the mainland, moving mainly to the West Coast states of California, Washington, and Oregon after Hawaii was annexed as a U.S. territory in 1898 (Kimura 1988). The 1890 U.S. Census reported just 2,039 Japanese residents in the United States.<sup>11</sup> More than half were in California (Ichioka 1988, p. 8).

Along with Japanese immigrants who moved to the mainland through Hawaii were many who came directly from Japan, having been encouraged to find work in the growing agricultural industry. For example, large farm owners in the Pacific Northwest sent labor contractors to Japan to seek workers. In many ways, this route of commanding much needed laborers to the West Coast was more simple and common and less expensive than bringing up workers from Mexico. The lack of an internal infrastructure prohibited the mass migration of Mexican immigrants until the second decade of the twentieth century (Massey et al. 1987). The trans-Pacific voyage was offered by numerous shiplines, which reduced the cost to acceptable levels for many willing to make the journey.

Most in demand were those willing to work the land. And though many Japanese immigrant men, like the Chinese, entered heavy industries such as mining and railroad maintenance many of them were agricultural laborers. Agricultural business associations and

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<sup>11</sup> United States refers only to the mainland.

other business elites called for greater immigration. Following successful exclusion of Chinese immigrant laborers, many business leaders called upon Congress to encourage immigration from places such as Japan. In California where demand for agricultural workers outpaced a supply of workers, some farmers even asked for a relaxation of the Chinese Exclusion Act (Higham 1963, p. 107). Politically, this remained impossible as labor unions refused to ease up on their calls for a complete ban on Chinese immigration. Hence, a steady stream of immigrants from Japan was a quick fix for many employers, especially those in agriculture on the West Coast.

The Japanese laborer might have appeared quite similar to Chinese laborers in the eyes of Americans. However, unlike the early Chinese laborers, Japanese agricultural workers had greater financial independence, for they were not fleeing poverty and hunger. Many Japanese men and women came from entrepreneurial or farming families, entering farming upon arrival in the U.S. (Glenn 1986, p. 27).

Farming often calls for numerous hands on the field. Unlike bachelor industries such as mining and railroad construction, farming benefits from the added source of labor provided by women and children. Thus, along with independent farming, many Japanese immigrant men worked toward the goal of bringing their wives and any children to join them in the U.S. Similarly, plans for permanent settlement of families were probably in the making for many Chinese before exclusion. In 1860 roughly five percent of Chinese immigrants were women. The same was true for Japanese immigrants in 1900. However, whereas Chinese immigrant women numbers dwindled following the Page Law and the Exclusion Act of 1882, the number of Japanese immigrant women continued to increase, particularly after the Gentlemen's Agreement.

As with Chinese and many other immigrant groups, the earliest female Japanese immigrants to the mainland U.S. included prostitutes. They probably made up a fair number of

Japanese women who settled in the U.S. prior to 1900. Between 1861 and 1900, the U.S. immigration statistics recorded 1,195 female arrivals, while the Japanese government recorded the issuance of 2,036 passports destined for the U.S.<sup>12</sup> By 1890, the Japanese consulate in San Francisco reported there were thirty prostitutes in the city working. By 1898, there were at least 161 Japanese prostitutes in California, practically in every major Japanese settlement, including Los Angeles, which had eight, San Francisco, which had thirty-eight, Fresno, which had thirty, and Sacramento, which had fifteen (Daniels 1988:105).

The numbers of prostitutes should be viewed with some skepticism. In both Japanese and American reports, insufficient information, access, and reliance on stereotypes may have over or under-estimated the real numbers. Nonetheless, what is clear is that Japanese prostitutes were visible to both the Japanese and American governments, and public outrage began to grow. Likening the Japanese prostitution to the problem associated with the Chinese decades earlier, the *San Francisco Daily Report* in 1892 declared, “The importation of Japanese women for immoral purposes promises to become as notorious as the Chinese slave trade” (Ichioka 1988, p. 37).

Many Americans on the West Coast recognized that the Japanese were replacing the Chinese in a myriad of places and positions. In 1891 the *San Francisco Bulletin* had the headlines “Undesirables; Another Phase in the Immigration from Asia; Japanese Taking the Place of the Chinese; Importation of Contract Laborers and Women.” The newspaper warned that “like the Chinese they come in contact with our white girls in the lighter occupations, and many a family that would disdain to employ a Chinaman now sees nothing wrong in hiring Japanese as cooks, chambermaids and housemaids” (May 4, 1891, cited in Hata 1978:125-6). Given the success of the Chinese exclusion laws, these new immigrants filled a vital role in

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<sup>12</sup> United States refers only to the mainland.

supplying much-needed labor. Along the West Coast, anti-Japanese movement leaders detected the changing face of the West Coast, which was becoming more permanently settled by European American families. As the newspaper headline suggests, “white” families ought to have been weary of the imminent physical threat that Japanese immigrants, men in particular, posed to European American women. Thus, if the presence of Japanese men on the West Coast resolved the need for labor, it also created the potential conflict of racial mixing.

#### 1900-1914: Bringing Picture Brides, Protecting “White” Women and Families

Japanese laboring men continued to immigrate to the mainland. Anti-Japanese and immigrant leaders, labor unions, and opportunistic politicians on the West Coast pressured President Roosevelt to negotiate with Japan to limit the landing of laborers, which led to the Gentlemen’s Agreement. The Gentlemen’s Agreement assured that the Japanese government would discontinue the issuance of passports to Japanese laborers, including those seeking to move from Hawaii onto the mainland. Japan was able to assert its position as an increasingly more powerful state to demand better treatment for its subjects. The U.S., in trying to both keep in check Japan’s power and aver its own positioning (while appeasing domestic interests) agreed to negotiate with Japan rather than declare unilateral decisions on immigration policies as it had with respect to China. Thus, geopolitics helps to explain the shift in immigration policies. An earlier recognition and admiration of Japan’s strength became the focus of fear as Japan succeeded in war against China in 1895 and Russia in 1905. Policymakers saw unilateral exclusion of Japanese as a way to control and limit the activities of a potential enemy. However, Japan’s geopolitical position quieted any such attempts, and the state gave up on efforts to fully exclude Japanese immigrants. Furthermore, the United States did not want to offend Japan for it

wanted to keep its trade doors open. For its part, Japan was largely concerned with the imposition of a one-sided exclusionary policy such as the Chinese Exclusion Act and thus, preferred a self-imposed restriction. Such a restriction would not threaten its efforts to present itself as a more important geopolitical player with colonist aspirations modeled after Great Britain. Japan was very concerned with the treatment of its subjects, less for any humanitarian concerns, but more for the image-making processes in which the growing nation-state was involved.

By signing the Agreement, Japan agreed to voluntarily limit the emigration of Japanese laborers. However, in return, the United States was to allow the reunification of Japanese wives and children with their husbands and fathers (Nakano 1990, p. 30). Japanese prostitutes, like their Chinese counterpart, were banned from immigration. Nevertheless, the agreement reached between the U.S. and Japan was much more even-handed than the completely one-sided actions of the U.S. in the exclusion of Chinese in 1882.

Though Japanese laborers as a class were prohibited from immigrating, those already in the U.S. could call for their wives, children, and parents to join them. The Gentlemen's Agreement changed the decidedly male character of Japanese immigration to a female one. In a letter to the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Labor and Commerce noted the striking shift from movement of males (86.7 percent of Japanese admitted prior to the Agreement were men) to that of women (just 41.6 percent were men following the agreement) (RG 85, Entry 9, File 52424/13B, Folder 1, Letter to Secretary of State, August 25, 1919:5). Under the agreement, the Japanese American community doubled in size over the next two decades through both immigration and natural reproduction. Japanese men brought over their wives from Japan. They also married by proxy their Japanese brides in Japan and brought them to the U.S. According to

custom and tradition, a marriage handler or “go-between” brought the families of both parties together. Often dictated by financial concerns, the bride and her family accepted a marriage offer from men who regularly claimed to be successful small farmers or shop owners in the U.S. Young women married men they had never seen, believing they were joining handsome rich men in America. More often than not, men who conspicuously looked older and less handsome than those in their pictures greeted the brides. Small farms and shops were usually tiny parcels of land or dilapidated storefronts where the men worked but not owned. Many Japanese men, desperate for companionship, sought wives with grandiose claims to land and riches and pictures of themselves in borrowed suits. Many times, the pictures were over ten years old. The age gap between bride and groom was on average over a dozen years (Glenn 1986).

These brides were euphemistically called “picture brides” or “photograph brides” by American immigration officials and politicians though it elicited a negative response from the Japanese government, which eventually asked for the end of the use of such language in reference to its emigrants (RG 85, Entry 9, File 52424, Folder 13B). Immigration officials classified only about half of all Japanese wives landing in the U.S. as “picture brides.” For example, in 1910, according to Bureau of Immigration records, 418 Japanese women arrived as photograph brides. Another 371 women Japanese women landed as “regularly married.” Similar breakdowns in status continued for the next three years. By 1913, 513 women landed as picture brides. Women who were married prior to embarking for the U.S. numbered 650 (U.S. Bureau of Immigration, RG 85, Entry 9, File 52424, Folder 2).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Despite these numbers, some immigration officials and politicians claimed 90 percent of all Japanese women landing were picture brides. These numbers were not supported by actual immigration data. For example, immigration officials claimed 90 percent of Japanese women landing in San Francisco were picture brides. Partly based upon pressure from the Japanese Association of America, this figure was amended to 41 percent (RG 85, Entry 9, File 52424/13A, Folder 2).

Some immigrant inspectors believed the picture bride practice was a “cover” for the prostitution trade.<sup>14</sup> There is no way of knowing the exact number of Japanese picture brides who entered prostitution, either by choice or coercion. Like Chinese women, many Japanese women were trafficked against their will or duped into prostitution. Also, some Japanese women entered prostitution temporarily to help support their families, a common occurrence for women at a time when few other economic opportunities existed (Rosen 1982). The pattern of family settlement that occurred following the Gentlemen’s Agreement suggests most Japanese women were indeed wives, coming to the U.S. to form families.

Dual conceptions of Japanese women, as prostitutes and as wives, provided opportunities for immigration, which served many purposes. The conflicting, and sometimes contradictory, characterizations of Japanese women’s sexuality helped to contain Japanese immigration. Notions of sexual depravity, definitions of Japanese women as prostitutes, underscored the racialized difference alleged by various economic, political, and intellectual elites. However, initially, depictions of the Japanese woman as wife ensured two useful qualities. One, Japanese women could potentially protect European American women from menacing Japanese men. Individual cases of Japanese men’s preying upon “white” women caused much consternation amongst moral crusader and politicians, who often used the topic to further their own political gains. This illustrates Gal and Kligman’s (2000) argument that reproduction makes politics. Politicians could claim moral legitimacy over the issue of immigration and the regulation of sexual and racial relations by suggesting the potential perils to the nation that continued Japanese immigration and settlement posed. I discuss this at greater length below with an examination of Senator Phelan’s remarks on Japanese immigration.

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<sup>14</sup> See report by Special Immigrant Inspector Marcus Braun on his investigation and report of the white slave traffic for the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization in 1908 (U.S. Bureau of Immigration, RG 85, Entry 9, File



In some instances, even without political or public attention devoted to rather rare instances of Japanese men and European American women pairings, the response to and treatment of individuals involved in such relations exemplified the stereotyped assumptions about the continued yellow peril. For example, a European American woman named Louise McElwain and her Japanese husband named Manzo Goto were arrested and investigated by the Bureau of Immigration in 1914 when it was suspected that Mr. Goto had led Ms. McElwain into prostitution. In interviews, she did confess that she earned money for sex with Japanese men, though she contradicted this statement on several occasions. During one of these interviews, the investigators asked if Mr. Goto ever slapped her, suggesting violence. When Mr. Goto was ordered deported for having committed the crime of prostitution, the Bureau of Immigration sought to send Ms. McElwain back to her parents with the hope that she could be “reformed” (U.S. Bureau of Immigration, RG 85, Entry 9, File 53770/113, Box 661).

Many Americans feared foreign men were leading native “white” women into lives of prostitution (Hobson 1987; Rosen 1982). Ms. McElwain’s entrance into some prostitution work was not unusual. As mentioned earlier, many women, with limited opportunities for financial independence, moved in and out of prostitution during their life course (Rosen 1982). Japanese men or other foreign men were not necessarily to blame for these women’s entrée into prostitution. However, to the immigration officials, she represented the fallen woman who fell victim to the lecherous Japanese male. She like other “white” women had to be protected from the likes of Manzo Goto.

Second, aside from keeping Japanese men from European American women, Japanese women’s labor contributions in agricultural work were fundamentally important for economic development in the West. Families working the field, as opposed to single men, were beneficial

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51520/21, Box 32).

for agricultural capitalists. The understanding that these wives' labor was advantageous is highlighted by the efforts made by rice farmers in Texas and Louisiana to help Japanese men secure proxy brides from Japan. In 1909 Rihei Onishi brought back six Japanese women who were proxy brides to join their husbands, tenant farmers on land leased from Mr. Onishi (U.S. Bureau of Immigration, RG 85, Entry 9, File 51835/6, Box 13, "Japanese Rice Growers in Texas").

Demand for labor was one important reason why the state did not proceed to focus on immigration of Japanese prostitutes alone. As was true in the Chinese case, the competing claims and needs for settling the West posed numerous challenges and contradictions. The need for settlement of "white" families *and* for labor secured opportunities for Japanese families to settle also. Protecting and expanding an imagined community called for delicate balances of these competing interests. Eventually, the nation-building activity of settling European American families firmly supplanted all other claims. This became especially apparent as Japanese families claimed land ownership, threatening the physical boundaries of the nation.

#### Post-1914: Move Toward Exclusion and the End of the Picture Bride Practice

The growing Japanese immigrant settlement that was the result of the Gentlemen's Agreement began to present itself as a bigger threat to the nation and national identity than the initial fears over racial mixing. Less than a decade after the agreement was reached, public discourse began to shift toward a more singular, demonic view of Japanese women and sexuality.

In 1916 the San Francisco Labor Council, affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, addressed a letter to President Wilson, writing, "There exists a great and growing menace to the People of California and of the United States, namely the unrestricted immigration of

Japanese women known as ‘Picture Brides’ [who are] contributing to the increase at a rapid rate of the native born Asiatic population of California” (U.S. Bureau of Immigration, RG 85, Entry 9, File 52424/13A, Folder 2).

By the close of the decade, newspapers ran front-page stories, calling attention to the menacing advance of the Japanese people. The *Seattle Star* had headlines that read, “Japanese Picture Brides are Swarming Here.” The newspaper printed numerous articles, “educating” the public about a practice it found fraudulent. The newspaper also warned the landing of these brides threatened the racial purity of their state and the rest of the Pacific Coast. In bold letters, the newspaper wrote, “WHITE OR JAP—WHICH? Shall the Pacific Coast be Japanized?” Following the headline was an article based on an interview by the author Miller Freeman with S. K. Arima, an editor of a Japanese daily. Freeman wrote:

It is not a question of how energetic, or industrious, or able, or moral the Japanese are, nor how prolific their women are. Admitting they are a great race, the question still remains: “Shall this Coast be under white control, or under the Japanese?”

“Mr. Freeman seems to fear that Japanese women will bear many children,” says Arima. “I would ask him whether any human, or body of humans, has the right to restrict birth of any race.”

Arima misses the point. We can readily agree that, from a moral standpoint, it is NOT right to impose birth restrictions upon any race. But birth control is NOT the issue. Let the Japanese multiply as rapidly as nature will permit them in Japan. It is their right. It is their privilege.

But it is also the right of the Americans to have and to hold their own country against Japanese invasion and ownership. It is because Japanese women are prolific that they present a menace to the Pacific coast. We do not deny their right to give birth to children. But we view with alarm the ever-growing population of Japanese on the Pacific coast.

We do not want on this coast the strife and the agony which the South has had to endure over the negro question. The negroes were not to blame. They were victimized and exploited. Nevertheless their presence in the South led to a bloody four years’ war among brothers.

This we would avert on the coast.

If we check the ever-growing racial irritation NOW, we can avoid war. As we delay, the remedy will have to be more drastic (U.S. Bureau of Immigration, RG 85, Entry 9, File 52424/13C).

By the middle of the 1910s, the benefit of preventing racial mixing by ensuring Japanese men's access to Japanese women had produced two menacing problems: American-born Japanese children and the buying of precious land by Japanese immigrants. First generation Japanese immigrants, the Issei, were able to buy land through their native-born citizen children, the Nissei, especially when various Alien Land Laws prohibited non-citizens from buying land in states like California, Oregon, and Washington. Taking of land and of "white" women were symbolic and physical challenges to the nation. Articulating these concerns was a former Congregational minister named Ralph Newman who argued, "Near my home is an eighty-acre tract of as fine land as there is in California. On that tract lives a Japanese. With the Japanese lives a white woman. In that woman's arms is a baby. What is that baby? It isn't Japanese. It isn't white. It is a germ of the mightiest problem that ever faced this state; a problem that will make the black problem of the South look white" (Daniels 1978:59). This Japanese transgressed twice. First, he claimed physical ownership of land. He possessed private property, which is so fundamental to the basis of the development of the nation. Newman, however, cried such possessions were only legitimate takings for some, not all who set foot on the nation's soil. Second, by cohabiting with a "white" woman, this Japanese man sullied the purity of the nation. In particular, the offspring represented the ultimate violation; it was the product of racial miscegenation. The "white" woman was a traitor to her race and the nation. We can better understand perhaps why the minister saw the actions of this Japanese man and his "white" wife as the precipice of racial and national ruin when we remember the theoretical argument earlier.

Women and their bodies represent the boundaries of the nation, both physically and symbolically. Hence, women and their bodies can stand in for the physical boundaries of the imagined community of the nation, land. In many ways women, land, and nation become interchangeable in the nationalist or nation-building discourse.

Politicians joined in denouncing Japanese settlement and potential threats associated with their reproduction. Senator James D. Phelan of California began to attack the picture-bride practice in 1919. Phelan, in anticipating his 1920 reelection campaign, found Japanese women as easy targets. He and others called the picture-bride practice uncivilized “Asiatic” custom, “a throwback as it were to barbarism by which women were married off without regard to love or morality” (Daniels 1988:173). Romantic love as the basis of marriage is a recent development in western societies. Economic necessities often dictated marriage relations (Coontz1988). However, these politicians distanced Japanese customs and values from American customs and values by suggesting in their political rhetoric that the latter was associated with greater individualism. The practice of marrying by proxy, which had allowed “decent” women to immigrate as wives, was now considered crude and immoral for it failed to recognize proper notions of love. For example, in a letter to the Secretary of State Phelan suggested the government cease to recognize the practice, forcing the men to return to Japan for a “legitimate wedding, according to American laws, and almost universal usage.” He believed this would arrest and reduce the influx of Japanese women (RG 85, Entry 9, File 52424/13B, Folder 1, Letter from James Phelan to the Secretary of State, July 24, 1919:3).

In the letter Phelan, continued his attacks, echoing comments made by Minister Newman. He wrote, “She also bears children, and, born on the soil, are American citizens, and take real estate as citizens; in other words, the Japanese are circumventing the law.” The referred law was

the Alien Land Law. These Nisei children were as a dangerous of a threat to the American nation as were their parents. Though American born, they could not be assimilated. Whereas the possibility of Japanese men socially and biologically mixing with “white” women had been considered the gravest danger facing the nation, Japanese fecundity was now equally menacing. Phelan had specific remedies in mind, writing, “The Chinese Exclusion Law has operated to reduce the number of Chinese form year to year, but so long as women are admitted from Japan, so prolific are they, that even with an exclusion law, we shall have the economic evil of their presence for a great many generations. The Japanese are, as you are aware, non-assimilable, and we are inviting, unless checked, a race problem more serious than that in the south. Every day is a day lost, and therefore action is earnestly demanded” (RG 85, Entry 9, File 52424/13B, Folder 1, Letter from James Phelan to the Secretary of State, July 24, 1919:2). The imagery suggested by comparing the Japanese to both the Chinese and blacks in the south were doubtfully unclear to his audience.

Referring to Phelan’s letter, the Commissioner General of Immigration made similar analogies in a memorandum addressed to the Secretary of Labor and Commerce. He wrote, “[T]his particular Japanese immigration has differed from the old Chinese immigration. The Chinese brought very few of their women to this country. The consequence is that American born Japanese are increasing in numbers by leaps and bounds, while the problem arising from American birth with respect to Chinese has always been of comparatively little consequence” (RG 85, Entry 9, File 52424/13B, Folder 1, Letter to Secretary of Labor and Commerce, July 30, 1919:1-2).

Sensing rising anti-Japanese sentiments, Consul Ota Tamekichi recommended to the Foreign Ministry that Japan discontinue the practice of issuing passports to picture brides.<sup>15</sup> He argued this would take “away the most effective source of agitation from the exclusionists” (Daniels 1988:173). Japanese in the U.S. soundly protested the recommendation. Nonetheless, the Foreign Ministry informed the Japanese ambassador to the U.S. on December 6, 1919 its decision to end the practice of issuing passports to picture brides beginning March 1, 1920.

The practice of the proxy bride marriage had helped to alleviate earlier sex ratio imbalance, avoid the development of a bachelor society to which the Chinese community had succumbed, and foster the growth of a permanent Japanese American settlement. The end of the practice meant that some 24,000 single, adult males, most of them laborers without sufficient means to return to Japan to marry and bring back a bride were forced to lead a life of bachelorhood. Though these single men had earlier posed a threat to purity of “white” womanhood, the risk of letting them sire native born Japanese American children endangered the taking of the nation’s land. As Japanese Americans bought land along the West Coast, the physical boundaries of the nation appeared to be in imminent risk of falling into “foreign” hands. Japanese workers, wives included, were in less demand on the field as Mexican workers began to fill agricultural capitalists’ labor needs (Almaguer 1992; Massey et al. 1987). The competing claims and contradictions in settling the West were resolved by preventing any further Japanese settlement. Nevertheless, by the time the Japanese government was forced to end the practice, the Gentlemen’s Agreement had been successful in creating a second generation of Japanese, the Nisei, which numbered 30,000 in 1920. Soon, it would outnumber its first generation, which began to atrophy as many of its members became disillusioned and returned to Japan (Daniels

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<sup>15</sup> Laborers, who made up the bulk of picture bride applicants, were never the class of people the Japanese government desired to send as representative of country. In its own nation-building and colonist projects, class

1988:154). They had become discouraged of their life in America as it pushed for further exclusions, passing the Immigration Act of 1924, which barred immigration from all Asian countries (Glenn 1986:22). Earlier geopolitics that had protected Japan from acquiescing to unilateral decision-making were not sufficient to mitigate the effects of growing anti-immigrant sentiments that led to this and other draconian immigration control laws.

### Summary

Sexualizing (and racializing) Japanese women was effective for containing their immigration. Again, settling the West required negotiating contradictions. The need for labor brought an influx of Japanese men and many Japanese female prostitutes. When competing labor interests were resolved with passage of the Gentlemen's Agreement, Japanese women were provided with an opportunity to immigrate as wives. Their characterization as wives and as prostitutes helped to regulate the Japanese immigrant community. Their immigration was carefully *contained*; Japanese men were allowed access to Japanese women. These policies and the associated discourse helped to stratify reproduction. While Chinese immigrants had been essentially prevented from reproducing themselves, for a short but important period Japanese immigrants had this opportunity. However, political and intellectual elites motivated by nation-building efforts to secure and permanently settle the West Coast eventually sought to prohibit Japanese reproduction and settlement. Move toward the exclusion of the picture bride practice coincided with concerns this "loophole" in their immigration also endangered the nation, as Japanese Americans began to buy land. These varying state responses marked sexual (and racial) differences. The quest to define who belonged and who did not to the nation sexualized the new immigrants.

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differences troubled Japan.



## **Conclusion**

Calling attention to differences in sexuality identifies who may be moral and degenerate, good or bad, in or out. Thus, not only do sexual boundaries mark racial and ethnic boundaries, but they also can be used to racialize those boundaries, attaching positions of superiority or inferiority (Mostov 1996; Stoler 1989). Constructing these boundaries gave rise to and provided rationale for nationalist expansion at the end of the nineteenth century. Specifically, westward expansion and securing the West presented two challenges. The first challenge was physical settlement through economic development, in particular, through agricultural development. The second challenge was permanent settlement of families in the region. These challenges posed two logics and demands. The logic of economic development called for large pools of cheap, available labor. The logic of permanent settlement called for stable populations of families to take root. As a nation-building activity, the settlement of the West ensured that the vast resources of the region could be harnessed for production and consumption on the East Coast while it also helped to create a growing market for East Coast production. Permanently settling the West with families also secured the expansion of the seats of power from the East Coast (especially Democratic and Republican parties), helping to consolidate state powers across an increasingly vast expanse of territory.

Chinese and Japanese immigrants both aided and threatened these nation- and state-building goals. Chinese immigrant men provided much needed labor initially. When European American female settlement began to rise and became permanent, Chinese immigrant men faced both a declining demand for their labor and growing nativist fears over racial mixing. Eventually, Chinese men and their female counterpart supposedly threatened moral decency and particularly

virtues of “white” womanhood with their lewd sexuality and drug use. Sexually unbalanced immigration and characterizations of Chinese women’s sexuality as debauched helped to elevate the status and role of European American women, *their* reproduction, and *their* families

As Chinese exclusion laws kept these immigrants out of the country, the nation began to recover economically, and the nationalist zeal to expand resumed its quick pace. Capitalists brought in labor from elsewhere. Japanese immigrants, many of whom entered farming, filled labor needs. Though newspapers and popular journals also regularly depicted Japanese women as prostitutes, they were allowed to enter as wives, helping to keep Japanese men from mixing with European American women while also forming families on farms, which benefited from such arrangements. Their success on the land eventually proved to be too successful, stirring fears that the Japanese immigrants would overrun the West Coast and eventually the entire nation. In particular, political and intellectual elites saw the Japanese efforts to settle their own “proper” families (a concern of the Imperial government and the Japanese American community) as a challenge to their own notions of what kinds of families were appropriate for constituting the nation. Miscegenation and the families forged by racial mixing were even greater assaults.

Given patriarchal and patrilineal relations that defined who ought to reproduce for the nation, it is easy to understand how the family as the fundamental unit of the nation was so closely regulated. In seeking to protect the family writ large, the nation, political, economic, and intellectual elites pursued the enactment of state policies, which regulated the formation of *certain* kinds of families and ethnic and racial collectives. Political and intellectual elites deemed “white” women the appropriate bearers of the nation, which helped to demarcate the first hierarchical level of difference in this stratified reproduction. Chinese immigrants were prohibited from reproducing and permanently settling, while Japanese immigrants had a small

yet vital window of opportunity to form families. Reproduction was further stratified between these immigrants and European American women and amongst the immigrants themselves. Immigration policies and the discourse surrounding them defined what kinds of work and reproduction were necessary for the nation. In turn, these laws and policies defined and determined the shape, size, and character of these immigrant communities and their permanent settlement in the United States.

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