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Little House in the Far East: The American Frontier Spirit and Japanese Girls' Comics

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INTRODUCTION

In 1975, an American country girl living with her affectionate family in Walnut Grove, Minnesota, appeared on Japanese TV, captivating viewers in the Far East. She was bright, independent, and sometimes rebellious, which made her even more appealing. She heartily admired her strong, reliable father as well as her beautiful, multitasking mother. She had an exemplary older sister and a younger sister who was still a toddler. A watchdog named Jack was her faithful companion. This pioneer girl was named Laura.

The TV series, *Little House on the Prairie* (1974–83), was originally produced by the American TV network NBC, and in Japan it was broadcast by national public broadcaster NHK (Nihon Hoso Kyokai), where it ran until 1982.¹ Five of the nine *Little House* series of books written by Laura Ingalls Wilder were translated into Japanese in the early 1970s. These books, along with the TV show, were sources of entertainment for Japanese audiences. The other four books—*Little House in the Big Woods*, *Little House on the Prairie*, *The Long Winter*, and *Little Town on the Prairie*—were introduced much earlier, immediately after World War II, to the newly democratized people of occupied Japan.

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In 1879, the actual Ingalls family left Walnut Grove, Minnesota, for the Dakota Territory, where Laura's father found work as a storekeeper and timekeeper at the railroad camp.² In *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, one of the books in the series, Laura and her family temporarily settle in a shanty. While keeping her distance from the "rough men working on the grade and using rough language" in the camp,³ Laura witnesses the construction of a railroad stretching farther west amid the "Great Dakota Boom."⁴ When construction is nearly finished and Laura's relatives decide to move to Montana, she cannot contain her yearning to go farther west. However, her mother, Caroline, is reluctant to move any more, which reveals the differences among her family members with regard to pioneering.

"Why can't we?" Laura said. "There's all the money you've earned, Pa; three hundred dollars. And we've got the team and wagon. Oh, Pa, let's go on west!"

"Mercy, Laura!" Ma said. "Whatever—" She could not go on.

"I know, Little-Pint," said Pa, and his voice was very kind.

"You and I want to fly like the birds. But long ago I promised your Ma that you girls should go to school. You can't go to school and go west. When this town is built there'll be a school here. I'm going to get a homestead, and you girls are going to school."⁵

Laura understands she must go to school and become educated, even though she, like her father, is filled with anticipation and excitement that the idea of moving west inspires.

The following year (1880), the Ingalls family settled in De Smet, South Dakota, farther west but east of Montana, as vividly described in *These Happy Golden Years*. Here, Laura again mentions Caroline's modest objections when Charles expresses his desire to move farther west:

"I would like to go west," he [Pa] told Ma one day. "A fellow doesn't have room to breathe any more."

"Oh, Charles! No room, with all this great prairie around you?" Ma said. "I was so tired of being dragged from pillar to post, and I thought we were settled here."⁶

These repeated conversations about settlement and mobility show the contrast between Pa's pioneering spirit and yearning for the West and Ma's unshakable determination to have their daughters receive a proper education.

Caroline's commitment to women's education permeates the *Little House* series. Laura is torn between the two: she shares Pa's pioneering spirit, yet she knows she must get an education and follow the example of her mother, who was a schoolteacher before getting married.

The mother of the actual Caroline Ingalls, Charlotte Tucker, was from Roxbury, Massachusetts. According to William T. Anderson, she graduated from a female seminary in Boston.⁷ Interestingly, Charlotte, who was born in 1809, was a contemporary of such nineteenth-century women writers as Lydia Maria Child, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, and Margaret Fuller, all of whom were from Massachusetts, as well as Caroline Kirkland, who had emigrated to Michigan from New York. These writers' blunt comments about the West resonate with Caroline's reluctance to move farther west. Meanwhile, Charles's yearning for the frontier highlights the Edenic aspect of the uncivilized territories.

The "American West" has been a source of inspiration behind the idea of "America" since the last century, due in no small part to Frederick Jackson Turner's speech at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. In his essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," which is based on that speech, Turner retrospectively constructs the idea of the West as an inevitable feature of American identity. This idea can also be understood as a later vehicle for introducing democracy as part of an effort to "re-educate" a "lost" country of the Far East, Japan. The significance of America's reorientation strategy in occupied Japan after World War II has been widely studied in the context of history, politics, literature, and cultural studies.⁸ In this article, I argue for a possible cultural connection between nineteenth-century American women writers and 1970s Japanese girls' (*shojo*) culture via the notion of an imagined West—or "mythic West,"⁹ as Richard White calls it—which was introduced by American "soft power," including the *Little House* book and TV series.

I. TWO STORIES BY CHILD: THE TRAGEDY OF THE WEST

In 1828, the Massachusetts writer Lydia Maria Child published her short story "Indian Wife," a tragedy about a Native American woman who commits suicide along with her young son after being abandoned by her white husband.¹⁰ Eighteen years later, Child rewrote the story, with slight differences in detail, and retitled it "A Legend of the Falls of St. Anthony" (1846). In a setting near the well-known St. Anthony Falls in the Minnesota Territory, Zah-gah-see-ga-quay, the daughter of the Sioux chief, marries a

French fur trader against her father's wishes. While her affection for the Frenchman is sincere, he is only interested in ownership of the tribe's land. He takes their daughter, Felice, to Quebec and raises her as white. Zah-gah-see-ga-quay is left with her son, Florimond. When her husband returns after several years, the poor woman, for fear of having her son taken away as well, paddles her canoe carrying her son as well as herself into the Falls of St. Anthony, praying they will go to the "spirit-land together," where the Frenchman "cannot come . . . to separate" them.¹¹

As indicated by Child's revised title, the story is based on a legend, suggesting that Child might have been familiar with the folklore of the Minnesota Territory. Herbert Smith notes that an army explorer named Stephen H. Long was among the first to relate the legend of the Falls of St. Anthony, involving a Sioux woman named Anpetuzapawin.¹² While it is not known for certain when and how Child learned of this Sioux legend, her two stories of a betrayed woman resonate with this tragedy of the West. However, "Indian Wife" and "The Legend of the Falls of St. Anthony" focus on different issues. Melissa Ryan argues that while the first version "focuses on land rights as a conflict between white and Indian, the 1846 version offers a story about gender rights that is ultimately a conflict between man and woman."¹³ If that is the case, then what is the reason for the difference between the two stories?

Before we address this question, let us investigate how the West was represented around the 1840s. Observing shifts in the representation of the American wilderness in the Western regions, Teruhiko Mukai suggests that the wilderness was viewed as a dangerous and horrible realm that simultaneously offered fertility, natural beauty, and hope for the future.¹⁴ N. P. Willis's two-volume *American Scenery* (1840), with illustrations by W. H. Bartlett, describes the sublime natural beauty of the wilderness as well as the power of civilization in urban areas. As Mukai points out, Willis's optimistic perspective on the future is conveyed through the comparison of the Old and New Worlds:

To compare the sublime of the Western Continent with the sublime of Switzerland—the vales and rivers, and waterfalls, of the New World with those of the Old—to note their differences, and admire or appreciate each by contrast with the other, was a privilege hitherto confined to the far-wandering traveler.¹⁵

Beginning with Niagara Falls and ending with Faneuil Hall in Boston,

Willis shows that America contains wide-ranging beauty in both the wilderness and the city, which likely indicated to the newly independent people what they were going to look for—that is, future.¹⁶ At the beginning of the book, Willis says, “He who journeys here, if he would not have the eternal succession of lovely natural objects . . . must feed his imagination on the future. The American does so. His mind, as he tracks the broad rivers of his own country, is perpetually reaching forward.”¹⁷

Willis’s hope for the future is clearly conveyed by the four stanzas he quotes from the poem “The Ages” (1821) by William Cullen Bryant. Looking back at European history, Bryant romantically contrasts the senile, corrupted Europe (“the Cities of the Dead”) with the youthful, developing America (“youthful paradise”).¹⁸ One stanza quoted by Willis includes the following lines: “Look now abroad—another race has fill’d / These populous borders—wide the wood recedes, / And towns shoot up, and fertile realms are till’d.”¹⁹ Bryant’s poem retrospectively redefines and reinforces the image of America as Eden, inviting readers to anticipate the grand future that awaits them. Willis’s *American Scenery* celebrates civilization and the wilderness concurrently, which suggests the notion of “manifest destiny” coined by John O’Sullivan in his 1845 article “Annexation” in the magazine *Democratic Review*.²⁰

Lydia Maria Child revised her 1828 story “Indian Wife” into a tale of racial tragedy in the West, focusing on the gender issues of the time (1846). The reason she wrote “The Legend of the Fall of St. Anthony,” I suggest, was to express subtle opposition to the excessive optimism and hope for the future attached to the western frontier, with its tendency to whitewash problems of race and gender.

II. DEMYSTIFYING THE WEST: MARGARET FULLER

Caroline Kirkland moved from New York to Detroit, Michigan, in 1835. Her family headed farther west in Michigan, where her husband helped found a village called Pinckney in 1837. In 1839, Kirkland published *A New Home—Who’ll Follow?: Or, Glimpses of Western Life*, in which she satirically describes the “literally true” lives of emigrants to the West.²¹ Her acerbic commentary reveals the uncivilized and often revolting character of domestic life on the frontier, including unclean houses, the sudden appearance of rattlesnakes, uneven roads, and uncomfortable inns. Kirkland suggests that the reality of the West might prove disappointing for novice settlers: “No settlers are so uncomfortable as those who, coming with

abundant means as they suppose, to be comfortable, set out with a determination to live as they have been accustomed to live. They soon find that there are places where the 'almighty dollar' is almost powerless."²² For Kirkland, the West, far from being a pastoral realm of the future, is a dangerous, rough, and undomesticated territory that presents settlers with countless difficulties. Kirkland eventually returned East in 1843.

That same year, Margaret Fuller set out on a tour of the Great Lakes. Her travelogue *Summer on the Lakes* (1844) recounts her experience, which took her up to Michigan by way of Niagara Falls and Chicago. Interestingly, Fuller works hard not to be overwhelmed by the sublime natural scenery. Unlike N. P. Willis, who praises Niagara Falls as a "most imposing scene" that arouses "his fullest admiration and astonishment,"²³ Fuller consciously maintains a certain distance from Nature: "Yet I, like others, have little to say where the spectacle is, for once, great enough to fill the whole life, and supersede thought, giving us only its own presence. 'It is good to be here,' is the best as the simplest expression that occurs to the mind."²⁴ Having seen photos in the past of this famous sightseeing spot, Fuller wryly confesses that when she witnesses the actual site, she cannot resist comparing it with its visual representations. For Fuller, Nature is a place humans should not encroach upon without good reason; even though she feels "genuine admiration,"²⁵ she is not arrogant enough to think she can immediately thrust herself into the harmony of Nature: "It was only after a daily and careless familiarity that I entered into its beauty, for nature always refuses to be seen by being stared at."²⁶ The undertone of Fuller's perspective on the West is that there is always already a distance between humans and Nature that should be respected.

Fuller's distant attitude toward the West reveals her denial of the West as Edenic. She is honest about her prejudice against the West and the slogan used to promote westward movement: "I come to the west prepared for the distastes I must experience as its mushroom growth. I know that where 'go ahead' is the only motto, the village cannot grow into the gentle proportion that successive lives, and the gradations of experience involuntarily give."²⁷ Indeed, Fuller refuses to "confound ugliness with beauty, discord with harmony," and although the West sometimes wins her accolades, her skepticism is ubiquitous throughout the travelogue. The severity of life in the West deprives the emigrants of sufficient time for valuable consideration: "There is nothing real in the freedom of thought at the West, it is from the position of men's lives, not the states of their minds."²⁸

Gender issues also arise in *Summer on the Lakes*, which was published a

year before her monumental feminist work, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). According to Fuller, a serious problem with the West is that women are not accommodated there because it is not their choice to go there: “It has generally been the choice of the men, and the women follow, as women will, doing their best for affection’s sake, but too often in heartsickness and weariness.”²⁹ Having seen emigrants from New England in the West with their “habits of calculation” and proclivities toward greed and vulgarity, Fuller characterizes the West as a depraved place.

It should be mentioned, however, that Fuller does not deny that women have flexibility in the West. Her concern is that East Coast women cannot adapt to the environment of the West because they cling to old traditions that do not fit with the still rough society:

Seeing much of this joylessness, and inaptitude, both of body and mind, for a lot which would be full of blessings for those prepared for it, we could not but look with deep interest on the little girls, and hope they would grow up with the strength of body, dexterity, simple tastes, and resources that would fit them to enjoy and refine the western farmer’s life.³⁰

It is noteworthy that, despite her unfavorable observations of the environment, Fuller hopes little girls will grow to appreciate where they live and produce “original growth.”³¹ “The Spirit of imitation” and “reference to European standards” are what Fuller cautions against in the West;³² she worries that mimicry will spoil the energy of little girls, who otherwise would be strong enough to enjoy their own lives in the West. Fuller impressively emphasizes the need for good schools “planned by persons of sufficient thought to meet the wants of the place and time, instead of copying New York or Boston.”³³ Thus, while the future author of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* rejected the pastoral image of the West as a dream-filled place, she recognized the potential to engender a new, original type of young girl there. Fuller, recognizing the difficulties those women face, demystifies the West in the midst of westward expansion while also placing trust in the girls born there with a western mindset.

III. THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE IN THE WILDERNESS: CATHARINE MARIA SEDGWICK

Published a year after Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes*, John O'Sullivan's "Annexation" (1845) demonstrated to Americans how western expansion, by insisting on the legitimacy of US authority over Texas and California, fulfilled the "manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions."³⁴ Accordingly, railroad construction expanded to the West. In June 1854, Catharine Maria Sedgwick was invited to the opening ceremony of the Chicago and Rock Island Railway, a line connecting Chicago and the Mississippi River. "The 1854 Grand Excursion," joined by eastern celebrities ran from Chicago Station to Rock Island, Illinois, where the tourists took a steamship to the Falls of St. Anthony in the Minnesota Territory.

After returning East, Sedgwick wrote an article for *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* called "Great Excursion to the Falls of St. Anthony: A Letter to Charles Butler, Esq., by One of the Excursionists." Sedgwick sincerely praised the tour as "an illustration and proof of the advancement of true civilization,"³⁵ though her reference to "true civilization" is not as transparent as it seems. Emphasizing the "inevitable and indissoluble Union" of the "Free West to the East" by the railroad,³⁶ Sedgwick vigorously celebrates the beauty of the West and America's possession of it: "Their guests were invited not to admire their state, or to envy or covet their wealth, but to see—most of us for the first time—the inappreciable riches and untold beauty of our own country—our own inalienable possessions."³⁷ She reiterates that the railroad represents "*union*" and "brotherhood,"³⁸ a connector between the Atlantic and the Pacific, which reconfirms that the vast spread between the coasts is the "land of promise prepared for them [settlers] by the universal Father."³⁹ Sedgwick even introduces the Declaration of Independence as if to legitimize O'Sullivan's manifest destiny by using the authentic document containing the "glorious truth announced 79 years ago, and *not yet quite digested*."⁴⁰

She continues, quoting the Declaration of Independence with a minor alteration: "We hold these truths to be self-evident:—that all men are created free and equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."⁴¹ It is quite likely that Sedgwick was aware of the contemporary political situation in Kansas and Nebraska. Peterson and Roise note that the Great Excursion was conducted right after passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in May 1854,

which allowed for popular sovereignty over the issue of slavery and foregrounded the confrontation between slave states and free states.⁴² The “unity” rhetoric Sedgwick uses in the article thus implies an ironic reference to the current division between North and South while extolling the wonderful union between East and West.

We should remember, however, that the Declaration of Independence is a monumental document that insists on a right of “separation.” How does Sedgwick reconcile the notions of separation and unity in the rhetoric of independence? Why does she add alterations to the Declaration such as “free and equal”?

I believe that the reflecting men and women of our excursion party felt, as they never felt before, the great mission of their children and their neighbors who are going West. And are they not all going to the West? Was there not something prophetic in the exulting shout that broke forth, the hurras and the waving of hats, when our party, in their arrow-like progress, first caught sight of the Mississippi?⁴³

Here, Sedgwick again reminds us of the significance of westward movement and the hope for a bright future, while subtly inserting “men and women” to describe the tourists. It is likely that Sedgwick was thinking of another well-known declaration issued in 1848, the Declaration of Sentiments. Written and delivered by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in Seneca Falls, New York, at the first women’s rights convention, this declaration of women’s independence clarifies that “all men and women are created equal,”⁴⁴ making a small but important alteration to “all men are created equal.” Sedgwick, a mere sojourner from the East, possibly saw the West as a place where women’s separation from men, as well as equality with them, might be achieved.

Sedgwick confesses that if she were asked to live in the West, she would “answer without hesitation, no! . . . Let the young go. They should.”⁴⁵ Likewise, Sedgwick only provides brief commentary on the natural scenery on the way to the Falls of St. Anthony, reminiscent of Fuller’s attempt to maintain distance from the sublimity of Nature. Western scenery, for Sedgwick, is a mimicry of the picturesque Old World: “Midway up the bluff, you sometimes see a belt of rock, reminding one of the fragments of Roman walls on the Rhine. . . . These mere rocks of lime and sandstone so mock and haunt you with their resemblance to the feudal fortresses of the Old World.”⁴⁶ She does not express excitement over the sublime scenery in

which N. P. Willis identified Americanness. Honoring “true civilization,” Sedgwick expects future generations to cultivate the soil for equality.

IV. PICTURESQUE AMERICA AND THE MYTHIC WEST

Laura Ingalls Wilder was born in 1867 in Wisconsin in the midst of westward expansion. Her mother, Caroline, was also born in Wisconsin, but, as mentioned, Caroline’s mother, Charlotte Tucker, was from Massachusetts.⁴⁷ Tucker moved west with her Connecticut-born husband Henry Quiner, who drowned in Lake Michigan.⁴⁸ With her New England roots, Wilder might have inherited her mother’s eastern sensibility—the kind Fuller asserts in *Summer on the Lakes*. In her autobiographical works, Wilder fashions Laura as the kind of independent frontier girl Fuller and Sedgwick would have appreciated as the girl of the future.

As westward expansion continued throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, its representation was remystified through visual representations and popular culture. In 1872, the poet William Cullen Bryant edited the first volume of *Picturesque America; or, the Land We Live In*, a book containing illustrations of natural scenery. In the preface, Bryant highlights the newness and unity of the United States: “A rapid journey by railway over the plains that stretch westward from the Mississippi, brings the tourist into a region of the Rocky Mountains rivaling Switzerland in its scenery of rock piled on rock, up to the region of the clouds. But Switzerland has no such groves on its mountain sides.”⁴⁹ Both N. P. Willis and Bryant evoke rivalry with Switzerland as they try to differentiate America’s natural beauty from that of Europe and emphasize the uniqueness of the American sublime. The West thus became established as a symbol of Americanness.

The dime novel was another vehicle for remystifying the West. From the time of the first appearance of “story papers” (weekly newsprint periodicals with illustrated stories) in the 1830s, popular fiction was widely circulated throughout the century. As Michael Denning notes, “these papers, which had circulation in the hundreds of thousands, were aimed at the entire family, containing a carefully-balanced mixture of serialized adventure stories, domestic romances, western tales, and historical romances.”⁵⁰ Among these popular fiction publications, the Beadle’s Dime Novels series, established in 1860, gained huge popularity. According to Denning, the publisher printed four million dime novels during its first five years, and sales of each title ranged from 35,000 to 80,000 copies.⁵¹ Beadle’s Dime Novels focused especially on westerns and pioneer adventure stories,

drawing on the lineage of James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*.⁵²

The ultimate remystification of the West occurred in 1893, three years after the census of 1890 proclaimed the disappearance of the frontier line. Frederick Jackson Turner's speech and essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" retrospectively explained the meaning of the frontier and its cultural and social effects on the American mind. "This perennial rebirth," Turner stated, "this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character."⁵³ As it moved westward, the frontier became increasingly Americanized, producing individualism and democracy.⁵⁴ Turner delivered his frontier theory to the American Historical Association in Chicago during the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, where Buffalo Bill's Wild West show attracted as many as 18,000 people.⁵⁵ The same year, Thomas Edison founded the film production laboratory Black Maria, which produced western-themed short films, including *Buffalo Bill* and *Bucking Broncho*.⁵⁶

The multilayered imagery of the West depicted by antebellum female writers such as Child, Kirkland, Fuller, and Sedgwick was simplified and remystified via an optimistic American exceptionalism that held sway at the turn of the century. The American West was now an export product of American culture. As Emily S. Rosenberg notes, "The cowboy exemplified popular values," and Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, attracting popularity among foreign audiences when it toured Europe, "demonstrated that the American Western formula had universal appeal."⁵⁷ The Turnerian frontier had thus become a cultural and political bullet to propagate American ideology (including Japan, discussed in section 5).

Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* series began with the 1932 publication of *Little House in the Big Woods*. She then successively wrote and published *Farmer Boy* (1933), *Little House on the Prairie* (1935), *On the Banks of Plum Creek* (1937), *By the Shores of Silver Lake* (1939), *The Long Winter* (1940), *Little Town on the Prairie* (1941), and *These Happy Golden Years* (1943). Although she began her writing career in 1911 as a columnist for a local Missouri newspaper, it was the *Little House* series for young girls that brought her national fame.

As Anita Clair Fellman argues in *Little House, Long Shadow*, Wilder's version of the frontier fits with Turner's frontier theory: "The version in their [Wilder's and Turner's] books bears many points of resemblance to Turner's frontier thesis, as modified by their gender, but their conclusions

were not necessarily his.”⁵⁸ Wilder’s belief in self-reliance, Fellman suggests, can be viewed as a modification of Turner’s male-centered frontier theory, though it is uncertain whether Wilder ever read “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” However, the fact that Turner (b. 1861) and Wilder (b. 1867) were both from Wisconsin offers a plausible explanation for their congruous views of the frontier.⁵⁹ Published during the era of the Great Depression and World War II, the *Little House* series can be clearly seen as encouraging readers to reconfirm America’s foundational principles: individualism, self-sufficiency, freedom, and democracy.

Wilder’s frontier does not, however, merge completely with the simple, optimistic myth of the West. In this regard, Wilder as a novelist contributes to the tradition of American women’s literature, possibly comparable to Child, Fuller, or Sedgwick. What is most impressive throughout the *Little House* book series is how Laura fashions herself as a self-made woman. In *The Little Town on Prairie* (1941), shortly after she hears the Declaration of Independence and the song “America” during a celebration in De Smet, a new idea occurs to her:

The crowd was scattering away then, but Laura stood stock still. Suddenly she had a completely new thought. The Declaration and the song came together in her mind, and she thought: God is America’s king.

She thought: Americans won’t obey any king on earth. Americans are free. That means they have to obey their own consciences. No king bosses Pa; he has to boss himself. Why (she thought), when I am a little older, Pa and Ma will stop telling me what to do, and there isn’t anyone else who has a right to give me orders. I will have to make myself be good.

Her whole mind seemed to be lighted up by that thought. This is what it means to be free. It means, you have to be good. “Our father’s God, author of liberty—” The laws of Nature and of Nature’s God endow you with a right to life and liberty. Then you have to keep the laws of God, for God’s law is the only thing that gives you a right to be free.⁶⁰

Laura’s strong affirmation here reveals her understanding of the Declaration as giving her license to obey and pursue her own will. Since no one else can give her orders, she must “make herself be good,” which might imply her unstated desire to make herself a “god.”

The pioneer girl Wilder creates (based on her own life) is much like the one Fuller anticipates in *Summer on the Lakes*, a girl “with the strength of body, dexterity, simple tastes, and resources that would fit [her] to enjoy and refine the western farmer’s life.” Wilder skillfully distinguishes Laura, a western pioneer girl, from her mother Caroline and her sister Mary, both of whom embody the genteel eastern standard for women, while the younger Carrie and the last-born Grace are depicted as the ones who need Laura’s protection. The *Little House* series, inheriting the dual traditions of the mythic West and female literary genealogy, supports the American cultural expansion that occurred during the latter half of the twentieth century.

V. LAURA IN THE JAPANESE CONTEXT:
THE PIONEER GIRL IN *SHOJO* MANGA

If Rosenberg’s argument that “the American Western formula had universal appeal” is correct, it is no surprise that Japanese people enjoyed western movies, even before World War II. These visualizations of an exoticized, sublime West were eventually exported to areas outside the United States, including Japan, and the West thus became a symbol of the United States. Westerns were introduced to Japanese audiences as early as 1924, when *The Covered Wagon*, directed by James Cruze, was released in Japan (fig. 1).⁶¹ As Jane Tompkins suggests in *West of Everything*, the



Figure 1. *Kinema Junpo* no. 150 (1924), 10–11. National Diet Library.

western genre is usually understood as a masculine world that excludes female discourse and language.⁶² After World War II, however, Japanese readers discovered *The Long Winter* by Laura Ingalls Wilder that, like the works of Fuller and Sedgwick, shed light on western life through the eyes of a young girl.

After World War II, Japan was governed by the US General Headquarters/Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (GHQ/SCAP), which initiated the country's democratization process. In 1946, the United States Education Mission visited Japan to help improve Japanese education. The mission's report states, "Our greatest hope, however, is in the children. Sustaining as they do, the weight of the future, they must not be pressed down by the heritage of a heavy past. . . . We are not devoted to uniformity; as educators we are constantly alert to deviation, originality, and spontaneity. That is the spirit of democracy."⁶³ The report frequently mentions the ultimate goal of a democratized Japan, which is to respect each student as an individual and accept differences among learners. From 1945 to 1952, occupied Japan, as a new frontier, was to be cultivated by Westerners. During this time, all media were censored by the GHQ/SCAP under the "democratic" policy.

In *Popular Ideologies: Mass Culture at Mid-Century*, Susan Smulyan analyzes the GHQ/SCAP's strategy for teaching democracy through American films. Employing the umbrella term "democracy" to cover the multilayered ideologies in these movies, the GHQ/SCAP used American films to "reorient" Japanese society. Because ideological stability is intractable, especially in popular culture, Smulyan notes, they [the Occupation authorities] saw films as uncomplicated propaganda promoting the American way of life, and yet they failed in their attempt to use movies as simple ideological instruments."⁶⁴ In this way, the American films, originally intended to indoctrinate the Japanese public with American values, created a space for escapism.⁶⁵ This simultaneous consumption of ideology and escapism in occupied Japan can be understood as a reiteration of the turn-of-the-century remystification of the American West, while once more using it as a way to promote "democracy."

Westerns, however, were not highly recommended by the US Civil Information and Education Section (CIE). This was because westerns inevitably contain undesirable characteristics such as violence, vengeance, and racism, to name a few. Although Japanese audiences enthusiastically welcomed the revival of westerns, the GHQ/SCAP was concerned about the effects such movies might have on their audiences.⁶⁶ The increasing number of westerns released in occupied Japan showed, however, that their

popularity could not be ignored. According to Hiroshi Kitamura, while only three westerns were released in Japan in 1946, forty-four were released in 1951,⁶⁷ including *Tall in the Saddle* (1944; released in Japan in 1946), *High, Wide and Handsome* (1937; first released in Japan in 1937, revived in 1946), *Our Vines Have Tender Grapes* (1945; released in Japan in 1946), *Union Pacific* (1939; first released in Japan in 1940, revived in 1947), and *Boom Town* (1940; released in Japan in 1947).⁶⁸ In addition to movies, reorientation of Japanese values was conducted using printed materials. To accomplish the democratization of Japan, the textbook selection committee decided to send US textbooks to Japanese educational institutions. American education libraries were established in eleven major Japanese universities.⁶⁹

Such education in democracy through written materials was also promoted by the SCAP translation program (1948–51), a bidding system for Japanese publishers to acquire the translation rights to foreign books exclusively selected by the CIE. The front page of the May 26, 1948, issue of *Nippon Dokusho Shimbun* reported on the bidding system, providing the titles of one hundred books to be translated, adding the slightly ironic comment, “The selected titles do not necessarily contain literary merit or excellent entertainment, for most of them are the choices of the CIE. Rather, they were selected for their usefulness in supporting Japanese people in fulfilling their duties under the Potsdam Declaration.”⁷⁰ Among the one hundred titles to be translated was Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *The Long Winter*, which was published in two volumes in 1949.

Not all of the auctioned books were translated and published. The translation was supposed to be completed within four months of winning the contract, and the book was supposed to be published within six months.⁷¹ Three of Wilder’s books managed to get translated and published through the SCAP program (*The Long Winter* in 1949; *Little House in the Big Woods* and *Little House on the Prairie* in 1950). In a preface to *The Long Winter* written exclusively for Japanese audiences, Wilder warmly suggested that even though we speak different languages, we should share the things that are truly valuable—namely, being honest, making full use of what we are given, finding happiness in the small things in everyday life, being cheerful when we suffer, and having courage in the face of danger.⁷² It is no wonder that *The Long Winter*, in which the Ingalls family endures an unexpectedly long and painful winter in an isolated town, was introduced first before earlier titles of her series. With its story of suffering and survival, the book might have resonated with Japanese readers following defeat in the war. Thus, it can be said that democratic education for the Japanese was partly

achieved through Wilder's western novels.

That said, it would be hasty to conclude that *The Long Winter* had an immediate influence on Japanese children in occupied Japan. Researching the supposed popularity of *The Long Winter*, Nami Hattori has not yet found a second printing, despite an advertisement from the publisher on the second volume that a second printing of the first volume was forthcoming.⁷³ More information and data are needed to analyze Japanese acceptance of the three books from the *Little House* series after World War II. We can at least say, however, that these early translations of Wilder's books sowed the seeds of American western idealism, which would later become evident in Japanese girls' *shojo* culture.

At the same time, during the 1950s and 1960s, various American TV shows were broadcast in Japan. The first foreign TV drama broadcast in Japan was *Cowboy G-Men* (April–October 1956). After that, Japanese viewers were entertained by a succession of TV western series: *The Cisco Kid* (1956–57), *The Lone Ranger* (1958–62), *Rawhide* (1959–65), *Cheyenne* (1960–61), *Laramie* (1960–63), and *The Big Valley* (1965–67), among others.⁷⁴ In 1975, a few years after the translations of *Farmer Boy*, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, and *These Happy Golden Years* appeared in print, the TV series *Little House on the Prairie* started to be broadcast by NHK, Japan's only public broadcaster.

During the 1970s and 1980s, girls' culture, often called *kawaii* (cute) culture, flourished in Japan. With girls' preference for American country-living styles, it can be argued that the *Little House* series, along with *Anne of Green Gables*,⁷⁵ had a significant impact on *kawaii* culture. There have been numerous "fancy goods" for girls, including American characters like Holly Hobbie—a girl wearing a big bonnet and quilted apron—and original Japanese characters such as Tiny-Candy (fig. 2). These characters, along with Laura from the TV show and *otome-tick* (girlie) comics, offered girls opportunities to be familiar with an American way of living. In the mid-1970s, summer resorts in highland areas of Japan such as Hara-mura and Kiyosato started building villages with small country-style inns and B & Bs, attracting visitors from all over Japan.⁷⁶ In the early 1980s, the legendary store Depot 39 appeared in Jiyugaoka, selling country-style merchandise imported directly from the United States.

Western and country styles thus merged with Japanese girls' culture, including the genre of *shojo* manga. In 1979, the famous manga writer Yumiko Igarashi launched the first installment of *Maimie Angel* in the popular girls' comics magazine *Nakayoshi*. Maimie Warren is an American



Figure 2. A “fancy” Holly Hobbie desk lamp from 1974, author’s collection.

girl living in a town called Spring City with her mother and two sisters (fig. 3). Her father, who had longed to move west, died before the story begins. Maimee’s cousin Alman (similar to Almanzo) lives in a town in Wyoming called Red Rock Fields, and Maimee’s family decides to move to farther West to follow the deceased father’s dream. Maimee has another purpose of her own: to find a boy named Johnny, her childhood sweetheart whom she had promised to marry. The Warren family joins a covered wagon caravan in Independence City headed for Oregon via the “Orange Road.” On the way to Oregon, Maimee learns that Alman’s parents were killed by a vicious ranch owner, Mr. Dalton, in Red Rock Fields and that Johnny’s father was also lynched. Now, Johnny seeks an opportunity for vengeance.

Mixing elements of the *Little House* series and western movies with revenge plots, *Maimee Angel* foregrounds a pioneer girl with an independent spirit and feminine agency. During the time when *otome-tick* manga, which mostly focus on the everyday lives of ordinary girls, was at the height of its popularity, *Maimee Angel* presented a girl who followed her own conscience. In the middle of their westward travels, Maimee’s mother and sisters decide to go back to Spring City because of the mother’s illness. Maimee, remembering Johnny and Alman, who are supposed to wait for her in the West, returns to the caravan alone: “I don’t want to see a rich man or a gentleman in the East! The place I’ll go is. . . . The West is the only place I



Figure 3. Yumiko Igarashi, *Maimee Angel*

should go! I'm not going back to Spring City! Beverly, Jodi, Mom, I'm sorry, I'm going back to the caravan!"⁷⁷

Maimee is not a female character who is always inside cabins or covered wagons. She trusts her own decisions and goes where she thinks she needs to go. She thinks and acts in the wilderness. In manga fiction, girls can do anything, and they show us just how much they can accomplish in a world traditionally reserved for men. Maimee even fires a gun to help Johnny, whom she finds after her long journey west (fig. 4). Set in a *gaikoku* (foreign country), *Maimee Angel* builds a fictional world of unfettered imagination in the wilderness. Maimee offers the audience a simulated pioneer experience, helping them to escape from their everyday school lives, in which girls are often compelled to behave according to prescribed gender roles.

CONCLUSION

Yumiko Igarashi expresses her affection for western movies in the preface



Figur4. Yumiko Igarashi, *Maimie Angel*

to *Maimie Angel*: “I was a big fan of the movie *Shane*. I saw it when I was in ninth grade. Since then, I have frequently watched western movies and TV shows and was so impressed with their frontier spirit. The dream of going west represents the conflict between Nature and us, as well as our inner struggle to make our dreams come true.”⁷⁸ Though she does not mention the *Little House* series, it is reasonable to assume she was aware of either the TV show or the books. *Maimie Angel* ends with the happy reunion of Maimie and Johnny, following the romantic love formula of *shojo* manga. Nevertheless, this work also inherits the discourse of the mythic West in popular culture. Throughout 1979, *Nakayoshi* sold about 1,800,000 copies a month,⁷⁹ distributing a fantasy and a realm of escape to girls all over Japan.⁸⁰

Nineteenth-century women writers such as Child, Kirkland, Fuller, and Sedgwick provided a female perspective on the West that included negative and ironic twists. Yet, they also anticipated a new girl who could survive life in the wilderness. They must have had no idea how far the West would expand.

Frederick Jackson Turner described a “perennial rebirth” of American life on the frontier line.⁸¹ Thus, the West extended to the Far East, where it was reborn in Japanese *shojo* culture via the *Little House* series and the democratization policy. This need not be regarded as the Americanization of *shojo* culture or the American domination of Japanese popular culture. Rather, *shojo* manga discovered an unrestricted realm for Japanese girls—the mythic West—and expanded into areas that girls had yet to reach.

NOTES

This article is partially based on papers I delivered at the workshop on Manifest Destiny at Seikei University, November 13, 2014, and at LauraPalooza 2015 at South Dakota State University, July 18, 2015.

¹ In Japan, seasons 1 through 8 were broadcast from 1975 to 1982, and season 9 was released in 1991. According to an article on NHK’s website (“Akai san nooto” [Mr. Akai’s notebook], the purchasing manager of NHK was very impressed with its representations of family affection and humanity, the prairie (which Japan does not have), and the attractive casting, so he strongly recommended the show at the meeting in 1974. <http://www.nhk.or.jp/archives-blog/sp/genre/drama/84157.html>.

² Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, ed. Pamela Smith Hill (Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2014), 151–52.

³ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, rev. ed. (1939; repr., New York: Harper, 1971), 76.

⁴ South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office, *South Dakota’s Railroads*, 16–18, <http://history.sd.gov/Preservation/OtherServices/SDRailroad.pdf>.

⁵ Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 126.

⁶ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *These Happy Golden Years*, rev. ed. (1943, repr., New York: Harper, 1971), 138.

⁷ William T. Anderson, “The Literary Apprenticeship of Laura Ingalls Wilder,” *South Dakota History* 13, no. 4 (1984): 285–331.

⁸ See, e.g., Takeshi Matsuda, *Soft Power and Its Perils* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Susan Sumulyan, *Popular Ideologies: Mass Culture at Mid-Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Hiromi Ochi, “Democratic Bookshelf,” in *Pressing the Fight: Print, Propaganda, and the Cold War*, ed. Catherine Turner (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 89–111; and Noriko Suzuki, “Ekkyo suru seibu: GHQ nihon minsyukaseisaku to amerika bungaku [The transgressing West: GHQ’s democratization policy for occupied Japan and American literature],” in *Reisen to Amerika* [The Cold War and America], ed. Akira Murakami (Kyoto: Rinsen-

Shobo, 2014), 23–52.

⁹ Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), Kindle edition, chap. 21.

¹⁰ Lydia Maria Child, “Indian Wife,” in *The Coronal* (Boston: Carter, 1831), 162–80.

¹¹ Lydia Maria Child, “The Falls of St. Anthony,” in *Hobomok and Other Writings on Indians* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 211.

¹² Herbert G. Smith, “The Winona Legend,” *Minnesota History Magazine* 13, no. 4 (1932): 367–76. Smith asserts that Long was “the first to relate the story of Black Day Woman [Anpetuzapawin] and the Falls of St. Anthony” (367), leading to various literary works in which the legend appeared throughout the nineteenth century (367–68).

¹³ Melissa Ryan, “Republican Mothers and Indian Wives: Lydia Maria Child’s Indian Stories,” *ESQ* 56, no. 1 (2010): 58.

¹⁴ Teruhiko Mukai, *Amerikan uirudanesu no shoso* [On several aspects of the American wilderness] (Tokyo: Eihosha, 2000), 17.

¹⁵ N. P. Willis, *American Scenery*, vol. 1 (London: George Virtue, 1840), iii.

¹⁶ Mukai, *Amerikan uirudanesu no shoso*, 20.

¹⁷ Willis, *American Scenery*, 2.

¹⁸ William Cullen Bryant, “The Ages,” in *The Poetical Works of William Cullen Bryant Vol. 1*, ed. Parke Godwin (New York: Appleton, 1883), 58, 65.

¹⁹ Qtd. in Willis, *American Scenery*, 3.

²⁰ John O’Sullivan, “Annexation,” *Democratic Review* 17, no. 1 (1845), 5.

²¹ Caroline Kirkland, *New Home—Who’ll follow?: Or, Glimpses of Western Life* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, n. d.) Kindle edition, preface.

²² Kirkland, *New Home*, chap. 14.

²³ Willis, *American Scenery*, 4.

²⁴ Margaret Fuller, “Summer on the Lakes,” in *The Essential Fuller*, ed. Jeffrey Steel (New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1992), 71.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ O’Sullivan, “Annexation,” 5.

³⁵ Catharine Sedgwick, “Great Excursion to the Falls of St. Anthony: A Letter to

Charles Butler, Esq., by One of the Excursionists,” *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine* 9 (September 1854), 320.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 321.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Peterson, Penny, and Charlene K. Roise, “*Merrily over the Prairie: The Grand Excursion Ventures to Saint Anthony Falls* (Minneapolis: Community Planning and Economic Development, City of Minneapolis, 2004), 2.

⁴³ Sedgwick, 321.

⁴⁴ “Declaration of Sentiments,” in *American Literature: A Prentice Hall Anthology*, vol. 1 (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991), 1733.

⁴⁵ Sedgwick, 325.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ In *Little House in the Big Woods* (1932), Wilder mentions that Caroline bakes Johnnycake, a New England dish made of corn. See Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods*, rev. ed. (1932, repr., New York: Harper, 1971), 226.

⁴⁸ John E. Miller, *Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder: The Woman behind the Legend* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 17.

⁴⁹ William Cullen Bryant, *Picturesque America; or, the Land We Live In*, vol. 1 (New York: Appleton, 1872), iii.

⁵⁰ Michael Denning, “The Figure of the Dime Novel in American Culture,” in *Popular Culture in American History*, ed. Jim Cullen (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 83.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Henry Nash Smith, *The Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950; repr.: Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 92. Shunsuke Kamei, *Sakasu ga kita!* [The circus is come!] (1976; repr., Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2013), 182–90.

⁵³ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (1920; repr., New York: Penguin, 2008), 2.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 4, 30.

⁵⁵ Martin J. Manning and Clarence R. Wyatt, eds., *Encyclopedia of Media and Propaganda in Wartime America*, vol. 1 (New York: ABC-Clio, 2011), 233.

⁵⁶ Charles Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 50.

⁵⁷ Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 35.

⁵⁸ Anita Clair Fellman, *Little House, Long Shadow: Laura Ingalls Wilder’s Impact on*

American Culture (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 70.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶⁰ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, rev. ed. (1941, repr. New York: Harper, 1971), 75–76.

⁶¹ *The Covered Wagon* (1923, released in Japan in 1924) was selected as the most entertaining movie of 1924 by *Kinema Jumbo*, the oldest Japanese film journal. Other western movies released in Japan from the 1920s to the 1940s include *3 Bad Men* (1926, released in Japan in 1927), *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1936, released in Japan in 1936), *The Plainsman* (1936, released in Japan in 1937), *Stagecoach* (1939, released in Japan in 1940), *Union Pacific* (1939, released in Japan in 1940), *Destry Rides Again* (1939, released in Japan in 1941).

⁶² Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: Inner Life of Westerns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 47–68.

⁶³ *Report of the United States Education Mission to Japan, Submitted to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Tokyo, March 30, 1946* (Tokyo: Kokusai Tokushin Sha, 1946), 1.

⁶⁴ Susan Smulyan, *Popular Ideologies: Mass Culture at Mid-Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 83.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁶⁶ Hiroshi Kitamura, *Haisen to hariuddo: Senryo-ka Nihon no bunka saiken* [Defeat and Hollywood: Occupied Japan and reconstruction of Japanese culture] (Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2014), 125.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶⁸ Go Ousaka and Saburo Kawamoto, *Ooinaru Seibugeki* [The great western movies] (Tokyo: Shinshokan, 2001), 261–85.

⁶⁹ Shizuko Shiba, “Establishment of the Textbook and Curriculum Library and US Home Economics Education Books under Occupation (1) : Outline of the Library and its Design and Background,” *Nihon Kateika Kyoiku Gakkaishi* 40, no. 2 (1997), 40.

⁷⁰ *Nippon Dokusho Shimbun*, no. 443, May 26, 1948, 1. My translation.

⁷¹ Noboru Miyata, *Hon-yakuken no Sengoshi* [A history of translation rights after World War II] (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobo, 1999), 96–97.

⁷² Laura Ingalls Wilder, “Shinainaru Nihon no kodomo tachini,” in *Nagai fuyu* [*The Long Winter*], vol. 1, trans. Aya Ishida (Tokyo: Kosumoporitan-sha, 1949), 3–4. The original English text could not be obtained; therefore, I translated Aya Ishida’s Japanese translation into English.

⁷³ Nami Hattori, “Haisengo no Nagai fuyu [The long winter after defeat],” *Okina Mori* [The big woods] no. 11 (2015), online newsletter, <https://sites.google.com/site/almanzo-laura/bigwoods/11> (accessed August 23, 2015).

⁷⁴ Go Ousaka and Saburo Kawamoto, 261–85.

⁷⁵ The animated TV series *Anne of Green Gables*, directed by Isamu Takahata, was broadcast from January to December 1979.

⁷⁶ Mari Shimamura, *Fansii no sekai: Kawaii ga hito, mono, kane wo shihaisuru* [The world of fancy: Kawaii controls people, goods, and money] (Tokyo: Nesuko, 1991), 36–38, 187–90.

⁷⁷ Yumiko Igarashi, *Meimi Enjeru* [Maimee angel], (1979–80, Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1989), 363. My translation.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2–3. My translation.

⁷⁹ *Zasshi Shimibun Sou Katarogu, 1980 nen ban*. [The catalogue of magazines and newspapers, 1980] (Tokyo: Media Research Center, 1980), 210.

⁸⁰ In 1979, 70.2% of purchasers were girls between the third and sixth grades, and 27.2% were girls in seventh and eighth grade (*Zasshi Simbun Sou Katarogu*, 210).

⁸¹ Turner, *Frontier*, 2.