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Japanese Picture Marriage and the Image of Immigrant Women in Early Twentieth-Century California

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INTRODUCTION

Picture marriage (*shashin kekkon*) was a common practice among Japanese immigrants in Hawaii and the continental United States in the early twentieth century. Set up by a "go-between," usually a relative or acquaintance of the immigrant man, marriage between a man in America and a woman in Japan was agreed upon after the couple—separated by the Pacific Ocean—exchanged portraits and information on their backgrounds.[1] Immigrants at that time were made up mostly of single men who, in the absence of wives, visited prostitutes and gambled their money away. Working to reform the demoralized immigrant Japanese society, leaders of the Japanese community in America were convinced that marriage would assist their agenda. Moral reform was vital, leaders were convinced, to alleviating conditions that were the major cause of anti-Japanese sentiment in American society.[2] This article focuses particularly on the picture-marriage practice in California, where Japanese immigration was mostly concentrated.

Picture marriage became popular among Japanese immigrants during the first two decades of the twentieth century, when Japanese men, hoping to form a class of independent farmers and producers, developed the

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notion of establishing a permanent settlement in California. There were several practical reasons why this was so. First of all, Japanese immigrants were not permitted to take white American wives. Indeed, there were state laws, such as the anti-miscegenation law of California in 1907, which prohibited interracial marriages between the Japanese and Caucasians. Second, a trip back to Japan solely for the purpose of marriage cost immigrants enormous sums of money, and placed them in danger of being drafted for military service.[3] During the peak period between 1908 and 1920 until the abolition of picture marriage by the Japanese government, it is estimated that over 10,000 picture brides entered the United States.[4] Although they constituted only about one quarter of the immigrant female population, in a symbolic sense, picture brides came to represent the entire population of Japanese immigrant women.

Scholars of Japanese-American history in both Japan and the United States view picture marriage in more than one light. There were its unconventional nature and the problems associated with it. Yet at the same time this particular sort of marriage was viewed as an extended form of traditional Japanese proxy marriage that is placed in opposition to Occidental romantic love.[5] The studies stress the following points: First, most of the picture-marriage couples had actually met each other for the first time upon the bride's arrival at the port of San Francisco. Second, the grooms, having grown old as bachelors in the United States after many years, often used every means to concoct an idealized self-image in their photographs; they sent romanticized photos along with letters that spoke of fictitious success in America, all in order to attract potential brides in Japan. Third, inevitably many brides were keenly disappointed when they finally met their real husbands and realized that the fancy American life they had imagined was actually shabby and laborious. Such disillusionment often led to disruption of the family, including divorce, adultery, and desertion by wives. For disillusioned women who wished to avoid such remedies, the only other choice was to resign themselves to the Japanese ideal of the dutiful wife. This meant being a subservient wife, which in turn reinforced existing stereotypes of Asian women as passive and submissive. The studies conventionally interpret such disastrous consequences as the responsibility of the Japanese men who coaxed women into picture marriage by deceit.[6]

In early twentieth-century Japanese communities in California, however, contemporary Japanese leaders believed that the problems resided rather in the immigrant women, especially the ambition and vanity that the picture brides' longing for a luxurious life in the United States by marriage indicated. Numerous educational and moral reform activities were introduced by Japanese organizations in both California and Japan, including the Japanese YWCA and Rikko Jogakko (Rikko women's school), in order to train these women to be "decent" housewives. Michiko Kawai, chief secretary of the YWCA in Tokyo, visited the Japanese communities across the Pacific in April of 1915 to inspect the Japanese households in the United States. Having done so, she criticized the picture brides she had seen as being "bold, reckless, careless, or rash for crossing the great ocean for America, naively relying on the photographs and letters without investigating character and personal background of the prospective husband."[7] Labeled as "vain women" (*kyoeishin no tsuyoi onna*), picture brides were often criticized as opportunists whose single priority was their own material comfort. Leaders, reformers, and spokesmen for the Japanese communities, including the Japanese press, Japanese associations, and Christian church organizations accused them of being greedy and ambitious. "Vanity" (*kyoeishin*), it was held, was specifically a female trait that would destroy marriage and family, and was thus subversive of the proscribed gender roles in Japanese communities.[8]

This article examines the process through which the concept of the "vain woman" became the dominant perception of immigrant Japanese women during the period of Japanese permanent settlement in California. It examines how picture brides, defined as "vain women," were perceived as threats to the immigrant community's well-being. Since the discourse of vanity was particularly associated with women who had emigrated through picture marriage, this article examines the emergence of the "vain woman" within the context of the development of photography and its use for marriage arrangement among the populace of Japan in its initial phase of modernization. Photography, it will be seen, became a powerful instrument for defining a gender representation and ideology of immigrant Japanese women.[9]

Self-portrait, as social scientists explain, involves the subject's active engagement in creating an idealized self-image according to current social trends.[10] Picture marriage, which involved participants' romantic imaginations, was distinctively a product of capitalism and consumerism, involving the commodification of idealized images of Meiji Japanese women and men through the vehicle of modern photography. For many ordinary Japanese women, picture marriage meat the ultimate in modern, romantic marriage practice. The powerful appeal and usefulness of picture marriage, as well as its risks and susceptibility to conflicting evaluations, will be examined in this paper through the intertwined development of modern marriage practices and the photography industry during the Meiji era.

I EMERGENCE OF MODERN MARRIAGE IN MEIJI JAPAN

As part of its modernization policies, the Meiji government (1868–1912) abolished the clan system and announced the freedom of marriage. These reforms allowed Japanese people to freely select spouses regardless of social status. Western notions of romantic love and gender relations were newly introduced and prevailed especially among the upper class and the rising urban middle class (*shin chusan kaikyu*). Along with this modern phenomenon, external physical beauty in pursuit of a romance became a desirable quality, particularly for women.[11]

Meanwhile, under the Civil Code of 1898, the government legally defined arranged marriages and the patriarchal household system (*ie*), which had been practiced by the upper-class warrior clans, the nobility, and merchants alike during feudalism, as the authentic and traditional marriage and family system. In short, gender ideology in modernizing Japan was a complicated blend of a marriage institution that regarded gender relations as a family affair, and western gender relations that emphasized romance and individuality.[12]

Because of the growth of industry, cities and transportation, and the occupational mobility among the populace resulting from the abolition of the clan system, marriages increasingly came to be arranged between individuals from separate communities and were entrusted to go-betweens rather than being arranged directly between families in the same community. As an outgrowth of the Meiji aspiration for success through education and the establishment of businesses (*risshin shusse*), the criteria for selecting a spouse changed from the familiarity derived from a common social origin to issues of status and position. Women's external beauty, which had been the requisite quality for courtesans during the age of feudalism, became a desirable quality also for ordinary women and thereby for wives.[13] However, while the glory of romantic love was becoming a social trend, the qualities and roles of a "dutiful wife and intelligent mother" (*ryosai kenbo*) were being promoted as the national ideal of womanhood. The concept of *ryosai kenbo* embodied and promoted *shushin*, the system of Japanese civic moral lessons derived from Confucianism, which taught filial piety, loyalty to the emperor and nation, and female submission to the male. *Ryosai kenbo* ideology was promoted in women's higher education by the Japanese government for the purpose of supporting the nation's imperialism and expansionism through training women to become subservient and efficient housewives as well as mothers who would raise loyal and patriotic citizens.[14]

Thus, despite the societal forces encouraging female beauty as an ideal, women's external beauty became a target of criticism by national spokesmen. The anti-beauty discourse attacked good-looking women for being boastful of their physical beauty, lacking in self-discipline, and neglecting the duty of females to serve their parents and husband. To be beautiful, or to try to attain physical beauty, was considered to be an undesirable female trait in the context of *ryosai kenbo* ideology.[15] What emerged from this discourse was a representation of the "vain woman," a woman who managed to make a brilliant marriage by taking advantage of her beauty. As female higher education developed, the definition of the "vain woman" extended to include women who were middle-class, educated, and seen as over-confident regarding their abilities as well as their beauty.

II THE USE OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND ITS GENDERED IMPLICATIONS

The development of photography during the Meiji era played a key role in effecting the changes that occurred in women's social status, particularly in regard to the institution of marriage. The photography trade was tied up with the rise of publishing companies and developed primarily through commodifying the image of certain types of women—popular courtesans, *geisha*, and actresses.[16] By the beginning of the twentieth century, images of *geisha* and actresses were mass-produced and made into postcards, newspaper advertisements and photogravures for beauty contests held by men's magazines that had gained major readership among urban middle-class men (Fig. 1).[17] While these images of professional women targeted male consumers, women's magazines that served ordinary female consumers also came into existence. By the beginning of the twentieth century, these magazines began to feature photogravures of imperial, noble, and upper-class women, including wives and daughters of entrepreneurs and university professors. Thus, the commodification of beauty fostered by the intertwined growth of the

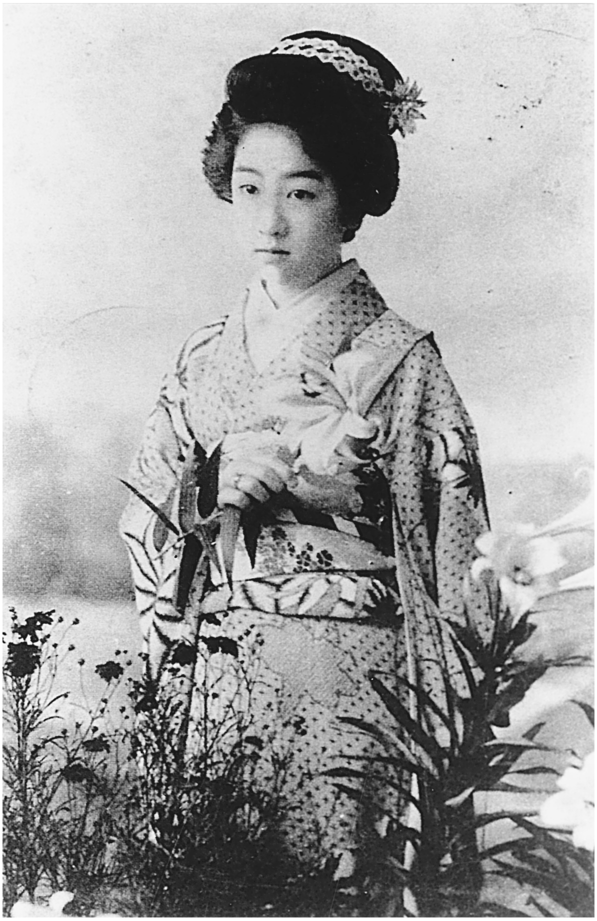

Figure 1. Picture postcard of a young *geisha*. Pola Cultural Institute, ed., *Bakumatsu Ishin Meiji·Taisho Bijincho* (Photo-album of beauties in the last Tokugawa, Meiji and Taisho eras) (Tokyo: Shinjinbutsu Ohraisha, 2003), 78.

publishing and photography industries eventually came to include women of all social classes and the *ryosai kenbo* ideal.[18]

Among these images of model Meiji women, catalogues featuring pictures of daughters of upper-class families in women's magazines appeared in the decade between 1910 and 1920.[19] Interestingly, the families of these girls used women's magazines to display their daughters' pictures in order to advertise for a marriage arrangement with other members of the upper class. Photography had by then become a useful tool in arranging marriages, as “the first step in marriage talks, the sole clue to the personality and character of the future spouses.”[20] As go-betweens became an accepted way of arranging a marriage, photography came to serve both the institution of proxy marriage and the development of exogamy as the nation developed a modern economy. The subjects in the magazines confidently and joyfully appeared in the catalogues as the most fashionable, elegant, upper-class young ladies, dressed in high-quality kimonos with hair tied up in western-style pompadours or chignons.

Because the custom of self-portraiture for women began with courtesans and *geisha*, it was thought indecent and vulgar of the publishers to present the images of upper-class women in the magazines. Conversely, women were also perceived to be shameful and degraded for participating in this commodification of their self-images. For example, in the first nation-wide beauty contest for upper-class women that used self-portraits, which was held in 1907 and sponsored by a major Japanese newspaper company, the seventeen-year-old winner was expelled from school (Fig. 2).[21] Despite these arguments and criticisms, however, upper-class women increasingly participated in the creation of a particular self-image. Some women posed with a sidelong glance, or seated themselves diagonally to the camera, or held a flower, all of these affectations in imitation of the style of female beauty originally used by professional *geisha* and actresses.[22]

As the level of higher education and literacy rose among young women, readers from lower middle- and middle-class households also increasingly sent in their portraits to women’s magazines in order to participate in beauty picture contests. By the second decade of the twentieth century, teenage readers made friends through the “reader’s sections” and exchanged photographs.[23] By 1915, female students had become the major customers, and the photographers visited women’s high schools every day to take orders from students. In order to improve business, photographers started to finish the pictures by retouching them, which pleased their female customers as they sought to create an objectified self image.[24]

As a powerful visual media, photography in Japan created idealized female images by involving women of different social status. The commodification of women’s images developed by readers’ use of them for

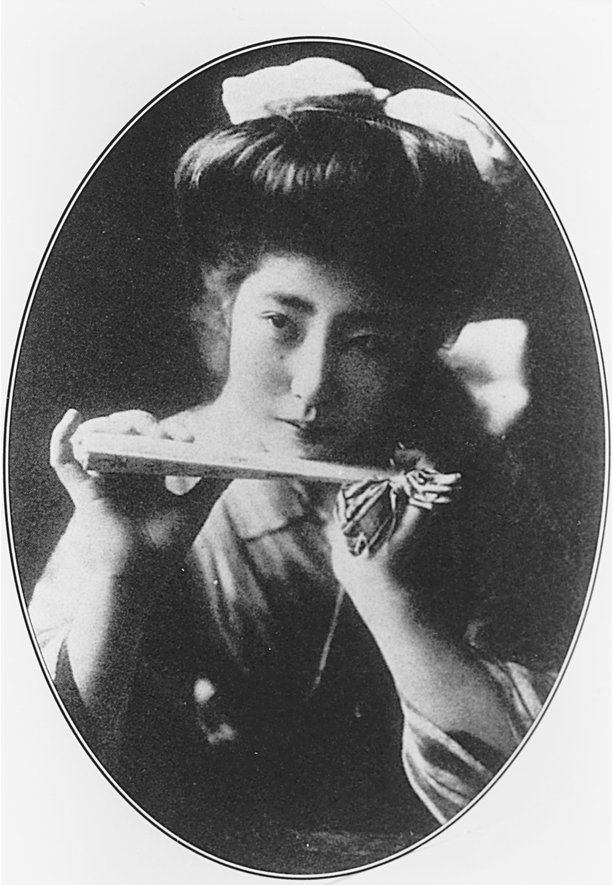

Figure 2. Portrait of Hiroko Suyehiro, the first prize winner. Pola Cultural Institute, ed., *Bakumatsu·Meiji Bijincho* (Photo-album of beauties in the last Tokugawa and Meiji eras) (Tokyo: Shinjinbutsu Ohraisha, 2002), 106.

various forms of advertisements and self-promotion all aimed at making marriage arrangements and new same-sex friendships. Japanese women perceived photography as a way to re-create themselves according to a more desirable esthetic. Consequently, they took great pains with their photographs and enjoyed displaying as well as exchanging the images in public.

III PICTURE MARRIAGE AND ITS GENDERED IMPLICATIONS

Picture marriage in Japan grew out of parallel and intersecting developments in the photography and publishing industries, and changes in traditional marriage practices which were stimulated by Japan's economic modernization. How the picture marriage system came to be used specifically for the purpose of emigration to the United States will now be the focus of discussion.

Picture brides' personal backgrounds were varied: While most were daughters of farmers or fishermen, some picture brides came from lower middle- and middle-class family backgrounds—daughters of Christian ministers, teachers, shop owners, and entrepreneurs, for example. As for their educational background, almost all picture brides had finished eight years of compulsory education; many of them had gone to a finishing school as well. Some also had high school and college educations, and even had careers, for example in teaching and nursing.

One of the strong motivations for marriage and immigration among picture brides was a yearning for what was, unfortunately for them, an over-idealized and romanticized life in a modern, western country. This was particularly the case among the lower middle and middle classes in the cities, the population among which exogamy was most prevalent.[25] Contemporary Japanese-language papers and short novels published in the immigrant communities reveal that women were often more enthusiastic than their parents for arranging their picture marriages.[26]

The power of photography to construct a new self-image and the appeal of romanticized western modernity are evident in Figure 3, which shows a 25-year-old bride who arrived in the United States in 1918 from Fukushima prefecture.[27] In Japan, the bride stayed home and helped around the house after having completed her higher education. In the photo shown, she is neatly dressed, wearing an expensive kimono painted in a beautiful yet modest pattern. She is wearing a high pompadour, a hairstyle she assumed to be still popular in the west, but which was actually outmoded there. Her hands rest in her lap, where she holds a closed fan. She avoids facing squarely front and giving a bold, direct look; instead, she turns her body diagonally and looks softly at the camera. In the photo in question, the bride poses herself in the image of a modern Japanese lady, with a touch of western elements. She appears graceful, beautiful, groomed, and well-mannered. Also evident in Figure 3 is that props and backgrounds were effectively used to create an

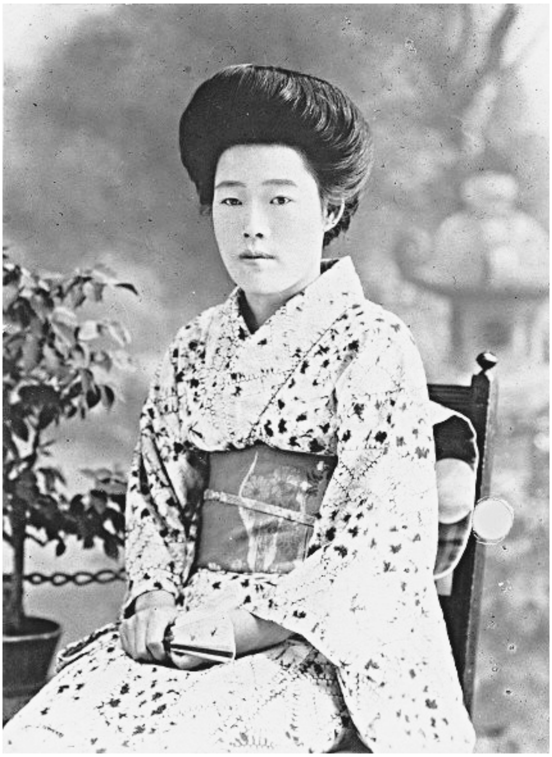

Figure 3. Portrait of a picture bride. File 24–24, Box 18589, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, National Archives and Record Administration-Pacific Region. San Bruno, California.

atmosphere that was a mix of the traditional and modern, the essence of Japanese modernization. A western room with classical furniture, curtains, and a carpet is often chosen as the background. Even if the scene symbolizes high-class tradition, such as the Japanese garden or *ikebana* (flower arrangement), some element of western high culture is present, such as a flower stand, a chair, or a sofa.

Regional and class differences can be detected in the earlier period of picture bride photographs. Middle-class subjects appear relaxed, apparently used to having their portraits taken. This attitude was commonly observed among the brides who had been students, had stayed at home, or had pursued a career, even if they were from rural Japan. Presumably, these women had more opportunities to visit cities, come in contact with

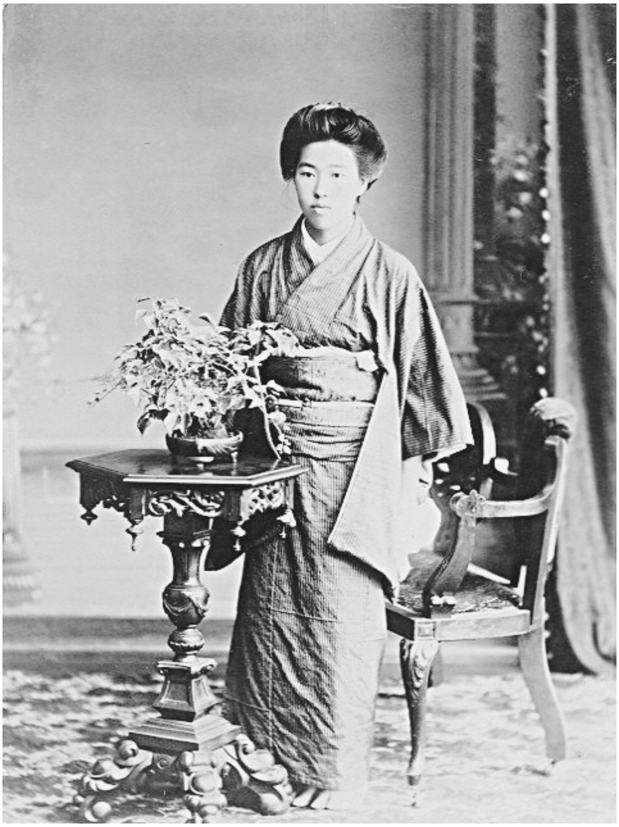

Figure 4. Portrait of a picture bride. File 10–16, Box 10448, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, National Archives and Record Administration-Pacific Region. San Bruno, California.

the latest in culture such as women's magazines, and learn about the idealized modern Japanese womanhood.

The portraits of brides from rural farms appear different from those of middle-class brides. Although in the early years some pictures were taken outside of the house, most of these women visited a studio to have a portrait taken. They usually wore a plain or patterned, wrinkled cotton kimono, as in the 1913 photo shown in Figure 4, and even those who were dressed up in their best appeared unsophisticated and rustic.[28] Looking rustic in those days meant, for example, wearing an old-fashioned, disheveled Japanese coiffure, and wearing no make-up. The

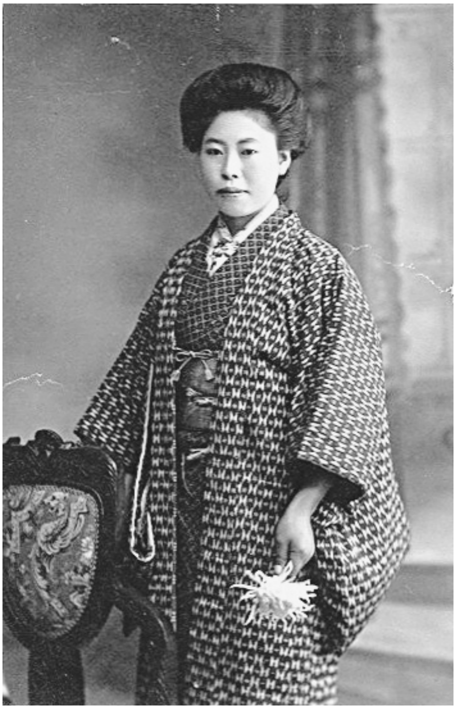

Figure 5. Portrait of a picture bride. File 7–4, Box 14880, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, National Archives and Record Administration-Pacific Region. San Bruno, California.

brides in these photographs commonly look stiff and serious, and there was no observable touching-up in the photographs, suggesting that farm women were unfamiliar with or unaccustomed to the culture of photography. Also, these women could likely not afford the extra cost for retouching portraits.

Nonetheless, by the peak period of picture marriages, farm women also attempted to present themselves as modern Japanese women. For example, the peasant woman from Shiga prefecture (Fig. 5) who arrived in California in 1915 looks no less refined than her middle-class counterparts, with the same aura of a well-educated, cultured young woman.[29] This aura characterizes even the photos of illiterate working-class women who presumably were the least influenced by women's magazines. This suggests that by the time the practice of picture marriages was at its peak, more and more rural farming-class women had become accustomed to having their photographs taken and had become active in the creation of an objectified self-image.

An article on Japanese photography studios in the immigrant community in San Francisco that ran in a 1914 issue of *Nichibei Shinbun, or Japanese American Daily News*, a major Japanese-language newspaper in Northern California, underscores the image-making process that lay at the heart of picture marriages:

> Upon arriving at the studio, a customer is usually not bold enough to tell the photographer that he came for a portrait for picture-marriage arrangement. Instead, he shyly requests the photographer to make him look a bit splendid. . . . [T]he photographer forges the image. When it comes to forging an image, [by the way,] women generally appear too beautiful in the photograph to be true. That is the result of a photographer capturing a woman's natural desire to win a man's heart with her own beauty.[30]

The article contains an observation on the power of photography to create an image, demonstrating that not only the photographers but also the customers—the objects of the camera's gaze—were active collaborators in this image-making. An immigrant man has a picture taken portraying him as a "splendid," successful gentlemen wearing a western-style suit; a woman in Japan is portrayed as a "beautiful" woman, both portrayals in accordance with contemporary Japanese gender ideals. The photographs were even retouched, like a painting, to make their images closer to a visual code of beauty.

IV THE "VAIN WOMAN" IN THE IMMIGRANT JAPANESE COMMUNITY

As mentioned in the introduction, leaders and spokesmen for the Japanese communities, such as the Japanese press, Japanese associations, and Christian church organizations, usually blamed the picture bride when there was trouble in a marriage. They blamed her for disregarding her place as a wife, and, when it happened, for committing adultery and eloping with her lover. The Japanese reformists actually encouraged women to look groomed, elegant, and independent in order to demonstrate their assimilation. Unfortunately for these women, the reformists then targeted these same elements as proof of vanity.

In Japanese immigrant communities, the establishment of patriarchal gender relations and "decent" families was perceived to be the key to the development of communities and to improving the reputation of

Japanese people in American society. Japanese leaders and reformers, therefore, encouraged picture-marriage couples to assimilate to white middle-class customs, particularly in terms of gender. This initiative was meant to dispel anti-Japanese sentiment among their American neighbors, who had used picture marriages as proof of the savagery and primitive nature of Asian marriage customs.

Throughout the emigration and settlement process, picture brides were strictly directed by the Japanese associations and church organizations to pay special attention to clothing, accessories, hair, make-up, and manners. The intention was that they would be able to present themselves as civilized, sophisticated, respectful housewives.[31] Newly arrived brides were taken by their husbands to clothing shops where they were outfitted with western-style dress-suits, corsets, hats, stockings, shoes, and gloves.[32] Husbands were directed to treat their wives respectfully in public, for example, by walking down the street side-by-side, in the manner of an American couple, and by not putting their wives to work outside the home.[33] The Japanese leaders and reformers thus tried to incorporate some aspects of the gender doctrines of middle-class whites into immigrant Japanese gender relationships, mostly for the purpose of demonstrating a positive racial image to the eyes of Americans.[34]

The goal of Americanization, however, was not to create an equal, respectful partnership between husband and wife. The permanent settlement of Japanese immigrants that came along with marriage required them to establish a solid family foundation, and it was considered to be the woman's duty to uphold this foundation. The Japanese leaders and reformers instructed picture brides to maintain the female virtues of the *ryosai kenbo*, which included subservience to their husbands. The Japanese leaders' major worry was that picture brides would become vain and boastful if they were overly liberated and treated respectfully like American middle-class women.[35] Editorials and articles in the Japanese immigrant press criticized picture brides who insisted on equal and respectful treatment from men, or who neglected Japanese female virtues to pursue individual freedom, as selfish, vain, and over-Americanized.[36]

In reality, establishing families within their newly structured communities entailed tremendous challenges and sometimes disruptions for Japanese immigrants in California. For most picture brides, whether settled in rural areas or cities, life in America became an endless cycle of working to help their husbands eke out a living in a harsh environment.

Those brides who married farmers and laborers and settled in rural areas in California had to work in the fields and adjust to life in primitive agricultural settings, while those who settled in urban areas often worked as domestic servants for American families or as waitresses in Japanese restaurants.[37]

Kyuin Okina, a writer for *Nichibei Shinbun*, explains that the most tragic cases of family disruption typically occurred when Japanese wives living in the rough conditions of the American countryside entered into adulterous liaisons with "city slickers," "good-looking, flattering, and smart" Japanese men who had temporarily taken up laboring work on the local farms. Some instances of adultery also occurred between women and the farm leaders under whom their husbands worked as laborers, since the leaders had the most access to appealing aspects of "civilization and culture," such as living in desirable middle-class houses. This illuminates how women who strongly desired an idealized version of masculinity could come to pair up with modernized, sophisticated men who carried the image of *risshin shusse*. It was part of what they had envisioned before coming to the United States. Okina's perception is that these desertion cases were inevitable within such an environment.[38]

Articles reporting adulteries and notices in which husbands searched for their missing wives, which included photographs of missing lovers, appeared in Japanese-language newspapers every day during the peak period of picture marriage. These incidents were usually first reported to the local Japanese association by the deserted husband; the message was then circulated in the newspapers.[39] The publication of articles and inquiries on deserting lovers was, as the historian Yuji Ichioka concludes, "a means of social control."[40] These articles were, in general, more critical of the wives than of their lovers, which suggests that the Japanese female ideal of *ryosai kenbo* was redefined and observed as the norm.[41] The newspapers often humorously embellished and distorted the stories in order to increase readership, which suggests that the Japanese press not only prescribed the "right" gender role ideology for the Japanese immigrants but also commodified the stories and images of adultery for popular consumption.

The typical outline of these stories involved a "vain" picture bride disliking an unrefined farm labor husband, and running off with a handsome, sophisticated man. The picture bride was often depicted in the articles as a "vain woman" who would take advantage of marriage with a hard-working, sincere Japanese farmer simply to indulge her vanity. On March 2, 1911, an issue of the *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (the *Japanese Daily New World*) reported that a picture bride, H. I., who hated her hard-working but "rustic" husband, ran off with H. M., a good friend of her husband. The article reported that H. I. was attracted to H. M.'s "handsome face, street-wise manner, and sophisticated attitude."[42]

Different articles in the *Nichibei Shinbun* in 1913 reported on I. S., a picture bride from Kagoshima prefecture who deserted her husband soon after her arrival. The article describes her husband as a "simple, sincere farmer" living in Southern California. Meanwhile, I. S. is described as "a twenty-year-old, rather sophisticated beauty at the peak of her womanhood." On top of that, "she had been a primary school teacher back in her hometown" and was known as a "vain, frivolous, modern woman." The articles conclude that "I. S. was planning to desert her husband even before her arrival," and denounce as "frivolous" her reasons for coming to America. The July 5, 1913, issue of the *Shin Sekai Shinbun* reported another adultery story about a twenty-year old picture bride from Yamaguchi prefecture, who came to "*onna-hideri-no Amerika* (a Japanese community in America that lacks women) with the ambition of abusing her freedom in the country where money and liberty are abundant." The bride started to turn a cold shoulder to her husband as soon as they moved to a country farm after their honeymoon in San Francisco. The article proposes that her attitude possibly derived from her desire to abuse the "freedom of women's rights."[43]

The well-educated picture bride leaving her unrefined husband for a modernized lover was also depicted in short stories read among the Japanese immigrants. Kyuin Okina's short story titled "Kumogakure" (Vanishing), printed in 1912 in the *Taihoku Nippo* (the *Great Northern Daily News*), the major Japanese newspaper of Seattle, is about an educated, refined, upper middle-class bride from Tokyo. The bride, named Okishi, is married to a Japanese laborer in the United States, and dreams of living in the "civilized country of America with a liberated man." A romantic, egalitarian relationship with a modernized man is what she envisioned for a "new woman's lifestyle," having seen and admired "a stylish western woman swaggering along side-by-side with a man" in a park when she was still in Japan. However, her husband Hamada is not at all modernized, even though he has lived in the United States for ten years. Okishi is disappointed that he "has not even graduated from primary school, does not enjoy reading books, and cannot even read newspapers" but only works diligently to save money. Okishi, disillusioned at the contrast between her vision and the reality, elopes with Nakayama, an educated, young Japanese man whom she met at church.

Okina, by portraying Okishi as representative of her kind, describes the educated modernized picture brides as desperate and miserable women, who agonize over their farfetched dreams. While waiting for Nakayama in the park, Okishi is pensive: "There is a young white couple, liberated and free, being playful and flirting with each other—which is something I could never even dream about if I were in Japan. Will I ever attain such a life? If I keep living the way I do now, I would probably never, ever, attain such things as a civilized lifestyle or a liberated man." Her desire for the far-reaching white civilization is paralleled by her observation of some white women's bodies, to which she compares herself. Wearing a western dress and a hat, on her way to the park where she is meeting Nakayama, Okishi "[sees] several American ladies—some [are] elaborately dressed, some [have] a good physique, and still others [have] beautiful complexions. Each time she encounter[s] these ladies, feeling as if she [is] disqualified as woman, Okishi curse[s] herself for being a Jap." As she arrives at the park, seeing three white girls playing there, Okishi "looks at her hands, which she used to find white, but now seem so yellow." The picture bride portrayed by Okina is aiming to achieve civilization by dressing like westerners; however, despite her efforts, she feels frustrated and deprived of self-esteem as she becomes aware that the civilization is race-specific. Okishi, representing the intelligent, modernized Japanese woman, recognizes that both her material body and her idealized hopes for marriage fail to provide the beauty, modernity, or civilization she longs for, even in America.[44]

In contrast to the contemporary writer Okina's sympathetic and compassionate delineation of the picture bride, community newspapers used a sarcastic and mocking tone, describing these brides as selfish and overconfident. A series of articles that appeared in 1912 in the *Shin Sekai Shinbun* reported the elopement of T. T., a "modern and modish woman," with tailor shop owner, Y. She is described as being "stylish," "[u]nlike a fisherman's daughter," and "engrossed in grooming herself, since the date of her arrival, doing her face and hair."[45] The report clearly portrays T. T. as a "vain woman" ambitious to become westernized, and criticizes her arrogance in forgetting her lowly origin. One article in the series displays photographs of T. T. and Y. (Fig. 6), showing a beautiful, refined, westernized lady wearing a white dress with flowers at her bust, her left

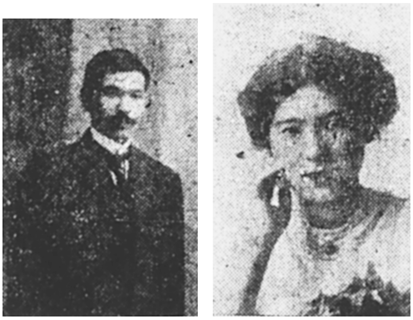

Figure 6. Photographs of T. T. and Y. *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (the *Japanese Daily New World*) (13 November 1912).

hand lightly touching her white cheek. Her hair is parted in the center and tied gently in the back. Y. also looks handsome and modern, wearing a suit, a high-collared shirt and tie, with nicely trimmed hair and mustache—the image of a supremely modern gentleman who has achieved *risshin shusse*.[46] The photographs support the article that describes T. T.; that is, instead of fulfilling her role as a dutiful wife, she is driven by crass materialism and desire to run off with Y., a man who appears to have become successfully modernized.

Harsh criticism of "vain" picture brides was also repeated in the writings of Japanese Christian organizations which promoted education among picture brides. In the years when local anti-Japanese activists used the negative perception of picture marriages for their propaganda, these Japanese Christian organizations in turn became merciless in their criticism of picture brides. Takako Takanashi, for example, a scholar of Japan Women's College, wrote a scathing article for the April 1919 issue of *Joshi Seinen-kai* (Young women's world), a magazine published by the Japanese YWCA. Takanashi described the picture bride as "a pretentiously modish, ignorant, inexperienced virgin," "a reckless woman who comes to America believing that a man she saw only once, in a single picture, will provide her with her dream of elegant western living." Dumfounded by the picture brides' shameless ambition, Takahashi concludes her article with a question: "Who raised the girls to disregard such an important life issue as marriage?"[47] She makes no reference to the importance of providing picture brides with care and support because they are the ones crucial to building stable Japanese families in America;

on the contrary, the evaluation of picture brides is derisive and dismissive.

CONCLUSION

This article has discussed how Japanese picture brides in early twentieth-century California came to be regarded as examples of the "vain woman." The modern technology of photography, which made possible the creation, commodification, and exchange of self-images (*i.e.*, photographs) and the development of the picture marriage system, was a crucial medium for the emergence of the image and discourse of the "vain woman."

Japanese modernization, from which emerged the social trend of glorifying romantic love, also saw the re-establishment of a conservative ideal of womanhood—*ryosai kenbo*—which was incongruent with the trend of romantic love that valued external female beauty. Out of these opposing phenomena emerged the discourse of the "vain woman" that criticized external female beauty as a sign of arrogance. Society's evaluation of women who used self-portraits to present and commodify their image was ambivalent and conflicted. A woman was appreciated for being beautiful; yet, her act of creating a beautiful self-image seemed to suggest self-conceit or vanity, and hence was subversive of the female ideals of *ryosai kenbo*. Picture marriage thus entails both positive and negative evaluations of female identity.

The marriage method practiced by Japanese immigrants was one that included romance, but romance was subordinated to the gender roles structured around the *ie* ideal, the modern Japanese family structure and civic moral system. Under the leadership of Japanese reformists and organizations, the Japanese community aimed to construct a collective Japanese consciousness by modeling the Japanese-American family around the *ie* concept, even as it tried to Americanize the community.

Japanese wives, defined as the major homemaker, were especially under public scrutiny for their observance of the *ryosai kenbo* ideal. A picture bride who indulged in romance and obsessed about her appearance was suspected of being a "vain woman" who would disrupt the family system and thus endanger the restructured Japanese communities. In turn, a disrupted Japanese community would degrade the reputation of all Japanese settlers and increase the local anti-Japanese sentiment. Thus, the "vain woman" became the target for criticism, scorn, and reform. She became the scapegoat for all the problems within a patriarchal family system, which was in the process of reconstructing the morals of the disordered immigrant Japanese society.

NOTES

[1] In the literature of Japanese immigration history, this sort of arranged marriage (*shashin kekkon*) practiced by Japanese immigrants in Hawaii and the continental United States has been translated into English as "picture-bride marriage," "picture-bride practice," or "picture marriage." This article uses "picture marriage," because the term is a direct translation from the Japanese term.

[2] For the major scholarship studying the topic of Japanese picture marriage and picture brides in early twentieth-century United States, see Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885–1924* (New York: Free Press, 1988): Chapter V: "Permanent Settlement"; Alice Yun Chai, "Picture Brides: Feminist Analysis of Life Histories of Hawai'i's Early Immigrant Women from Japan, Okinawa, and Korea," in Donna Gabaccia, ed., *Seeking Common Ground: Multidisciplinary Studies of Immigrant Women in the United States* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1992); Eileen Sunada Sarasohn, *Issei Women: Echoes from Another Frontier* (Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1998); Eithne Luibheid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002): Chapter 3: "Birthing a Nation: Race, Ethnicity, and Childbearing"; Rumiko Masubuchi, "1910-Nendai no Hainichi to 'Shashin Kekkon' " (Anti-Japanese sentiment during the 1910s and 'picture marriage'), in Soken Togami, ed., *Japanizu Amerikan: Iju kara Jiritsu e no Ayumi* (Japanese American: the path from emigration to independence) (Kyoto: Minerva Shobo, 1986); Ikumi Yanagisawa, " 'Shashin Hanayome' Mondai towa Nandattanoka—Sono Gensetsu no Keisei wo Chushin ni—" ('Picture Brides': What was the Issue?), *Aichi Shukutoku Daigaku: Ibunka Komunikehshon* (Aichi Shukutoku University: Multicultural communication), vol. 6 (March 2003); Kei Tanaka, "Japanese Picture Marriage in 1900–1924 California: Construction of Japanese Race and Gender" (Ph. D. diss., Rutgers University, 2002); and "20-Seiki Shoto no Nihon·Kariforunia 'Shashin Hanayome' Shugyo—Nihonjin Imin Josei no Jenda to Kurasu no Keisei—" (Training Picture Brides in Early Twentieth Century Japan and California: Construction of Gender and Class of Immigrant Japanese Women), *Shakai Kagaku* (The Social Sciences), no. 68 (January 2002).

[3] Ichioka, *The Issei*, 164; Kazuo Ito, *Hokubei Hyakunenzakura* (Issei: A History of Japanese Immigrants in North America) (Tokyo: Nichibo Shuppan, 1969), 243–44.

[4] Japanese Association of America, *Zaibei Nihonjinshi* (History of Japanese in America) (San Francisco: Japanese Association of America, 1940), 90; Masubuchi, "1910-nendai no Hainichi to 'Shashin Kekkon'," 297–98. The Gentlemen's Agreement of 1908 further fostered the picture-marriage practice. To reduce Japanese immigration and to alleviate rising anti-Japanese sentiment in California, the Japanese government voluntarily stopped issuing passports to Japanese labor immigrants to the United States, and entry was limited to wives and families of immigrants previously admitted. Consequently, it fostered Japanese family unification and increased the influx of female immigrants. See Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 44; and Ichioka, *The Issei*, 71–72.

[5] For example, Ichioka, *The Issei*; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in the United States* (Philadelphia:

Temple University Press, 1986); and Linda Tamura, *Hood River Issei: An Oral History of Japanese Settlers in Oregon's Hood River Valley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[6] For example, see Ichioka, *The Issei*; Sarasohn, *Issei Women*, and Ito, *Hokubei Hyakunenzakura.*

[7] Michiko Kawai, "Tobei Fujin wa Seiko Shitsutsu Ariya" (Is the immigration of Japanese women successful?), *Joshi Seinenkai* (Young women's world), vol. 13, no. 11 (December 1916): 612, 614, cited in Tanaka, "20-Seiki Shoto no Nihon·Kariforunia," 310–11. Hyodayu Shimanuki, the founder of Rikko Jogakko, also stresses in his book that a woman qualified to become a picture bride should not be "vain." See Shimanuki, *Rikkokai towa Nanzoya* (What is Rikkokai?) (Tokyo: Keiseisha, 1911), 137–47.

[8] For criticisms and warnings made to picture brides for their "vanity" by Japanese church organizations, see Rokuichi Kusumoto, "Beikoku Kashu Engan no Doho (Japanese brethren on the West Coast of California)," *Joshi Seinenkai*, vol. 11, no. 7 (July 1914): 374–80; "Tobeisha no Shiori (Guide for emigrant women)," vol. 14, no. 6 (July 1917): 279; *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (*Japanese Daily New World*) (28 June 1912): 5; *Nichibei Shinbun* (*Japanese American News*) (28, 29 and 30 June 1913): 5; and (1 November 1914): 3. Criticism by the Japanese associations, see *Shinsekai Shinbun* (8 April 1916): 3; and (15–16 and 17 August 1916): 3. By the Japanese press, see *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (6 and 24 June 1909); (14 December 1910): 1; (7 September 1912): 2; (10, 11 and 12 October 1913): 2; (10 April 1916): 1; (11 August 1920): 4; *Nichibei Shinbun* (29, 30 and 31 January 1913): 3; (3 September 1914): 1; (3 April 1914): 7; (26 October 1914): 6; and (15 October 1916): 7.

[9] This study is based on my research conducted at the Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, National Archives and Record Administration, San Bruno, California where marriage arrangement photographs of picture-marriage couples were housed. From the extensively large volume of photographs, I selected photographs of 120 picture-marriage couples from the odd-numbered years between 1907 and 1919, 10 couples for the years 1907 and 1909, and 20 couples, for the years 1911, 1913, 1915, 1917, and 1919.

[10] Rika Sato, "Shashin to Josei—Atarashii Shikaku Media no Tojo to 'Miru/Mirareru' Jibun no Shutsugen (Photography and women: advent of the new visual media and emergence of self who is 'watching/being watched')," Akiko Okuda, ed., *Onna to Otoko no Jiku: Nihon Joseishi Saiko* (Time and space between women and men: Japanese women's history revisited), vol. 9 (Tokyo: Fujiwara Shoten, 2000); Junko Saeki, "Shashinshu ni Natta Meiji no Onna" (Meiji women in self-portrait albums), Pola Cultural Institute, ed., *Bakumatsu·Meiji Bijincho* (Photo-album of beauties in the last Tokugawa and Meiji eras); Richard Chalfen, *Turning Leaves: The Photograph Collection of Two Japanese American Families* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991); Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); and Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[11] On the freedom of marriage and praise for female beauty, for example see Shoichi Inouye, *Bijinron* (Stories of beauty) (Tokyo: Ashahi Shinbunsha, 1995), 64–76. On the prevail of romantic love and its influence on gender relations in Meiji Japan, see Teruko Inouye, "Ren'aikan to Kekkonkan no Keifu" (Genealogy of romance and marriage), *Nihon Joseishi Ronshu* (Essays on Japanese women's history), vol. 4 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Bunkan, 1998), 221–38; Mitziko Sawada, *Tokyo Life, New York Dreams: Urban Japanese Visions of America, 1890–1924* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), Chapter 5: "The Road to Success," and Chapter 7: "Maiden of Japan,

Women of the West"; and Junko Saeki, *'Iro' to 'Ai' no Hikaku Bunkashi* (Comparative history of culture on 'affair' and 'love') (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shinposha, 1998).

[12] See for example, Emiko Ochiai, "Kindai Kazoku wo Meguru Gensetsu" (Discourse on modern family), Shun Inouye, Chizuko Uyeno *et al.* ed., *Kazoku no Shakaigaku* (Sociology on family) (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1997); Kazuye Muta, *Senryaku toshite no Kazoku: Kindai Nihon no Kokumin Kokka Keisei to Josei* (Family as strategy: founding nation state and women in Japan) (Tokyo: Shin'yosha, 1997); and Chizuko Uyeno, *Kindai Kazoku no Seiritsu to Shuen* (Rise and fall of modern family) (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1994).

[13] Inouye, *Bijin-ron*, 66–68, 82–86.

[14] Muta, *Senryaku toshite no Kazoku*; Shukuko Akiyeda, "'Ryosai Kenbo Shugi Kyoiku' no Itsudatsu to Kaishu—Taisho, Showa Zenki wo Chushin ni—" (Deviation and recovering of 'ryosai kenbo education' during the Taisho and early Showa eras), Okuda, ed., *Onna to Otoko no Jiku*, 451–80; and Sharon H. Nolte and Sally Ann Hastings, "The Meiji State's Policy Toward Women, 1890–1910," Gail Lee Bernstein, ed., *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 152, 172.

[15] Inouye, *Bijinron*, 9–19, 52–56.

[16] By the 1870s, photography in modernizing Japan had become increasingly used to serve wealthy, upper-class Japanese for taking personal and family portraits on special occasions for the family records. By the 1890s, although a photograph cost about 10 *sen* and so was expensive, this custom became at least accessible and subsequently popular among the different social classes. Ambitious young men of various social backgrounds who moved from rural communities to the cities, hoping to enter the new middle-class through education and establishing business, increasingly had their portraits taken as proof of their success. For the advent of photography in Meiji Japan, see Tokuhiko Matsumoto, "Bunmei Kaika no nakano Shashin" (Photography in Westernizing Japan), Takeshi Ozawa, "Shashin no Makuake" (Dawning of photography), both in: *Nihon Shashin Zenshu* (Complete series of photography in Japan), vol. 4 (Tokyo: Shogakugan, 1985); and Kotaro Iizawa, *Nihon Shashinshi wo Aruku* (Tracing the history of photography in Japan) (Tokyo: Shincho-sha, 1992).

[17] Sato, "Shashin to Josei," 201–4; 208–9.

[18] Ibid., 212–24.

[19] Ibid., 214–18.

[20] Sawada, *Tokyo Life, New York Dreams*, 151–54; Kunio Yanagita, *Meiji Taishoshi Sesohen* (History of the Meiji and Taisho eras: social conditions), vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1976; first published, 1930), 33–60.

[21] Saeki, "Shashinshu ni Natta Meiji no Onna," 93–95; Inouye, *Bijinron*, 29–34; and Shoichi Inouye, *Bijin Kontesuto Hyakunenshi* (A hundred-years history of beauty contest) (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1997), 8–30.

[22] Sato, "Shashin no Josei," 218–20.

[23] Ibid., 222–24; Kunimitsu Kawamura, *Otome no Inori: Kindai Josei Imeji no Tanjo* (Pray of virgins: birth of the image of modern woman) (Tokyo: Kinokuniya shoten, 1993), 126–32.

[24] Masao Tanaka *et al.*, "Jinbutsu to Shozo" (Individual and portrait), *Nihon Shashinshi Zenshu*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1986): 125.

[25] Sarasohn, *Issei Women*, 21, 32, 33, 39, 51, 59. A Japanese Community newspaper also reports that the picture brides were largely from the middle-class family. See *Nichibei Shinbun* (3 August 1916): 3; and (6 May 1917): 3. While picture marriage was spread among the middle-class as an exogamous custom, for brides from rural working

and farming classes, it would have originally been established as a type of endogamous custom. It is estimated that the idea of picture marriage was spread among the rural working and farming classes by word of mouth from neighbors who had already sent brides to the United States. Working class picture brides were usually from the same villages where the grooms originated and from whence chain-migration and mass labor-migration to Hawaii and the Pacific Coast had proliferated. Kawai, "Tobei Fujin wa Seiko Shitsutsu Ariya," (Is Japanese female migration into the United States successful?) *Joshi Seinenkai*, vol. 13, no. 10 (November 1916): 551.

[26] For example, *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (1 January 1913); Kyuin Okina, "Kumogakure" (Vanishing), *Okina Kyuin Zenshu* (Complete works of Kyuin Okina), vol. 5 (Toyama: 1972), 352–56.

[27] File 24–14, Box 18589, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (hereafter cited as RINS), National Archives and Record Administration, San Bruno, California (hereafter cited as NARA).

[28] File 10–16, Box 10448, RINS, NARA.

[29] File 7–4, Box 14880, RINS, NARA.

[30] "Zaiso Hojin Shokugyokan" (Occupations of the Japanese in San Francisco), *Nichibei Shinbun* (30 July 1914): 3.

[31] For a guide for newly arrived women authored by the Japanese Association of America, *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (15–16 and 17 August 1916): 3. For guides issued by the Japanese Christian organizations, especially by YWCA, Yokohama YWCA, *Tobei Fujin Kokoroe* (Instruction for Japanese women going to America) (1915); and Michiko Kawai, "Tobeisha no Shori: Seiyo Reiho" (A guide for Japanese traveling to America: western manners), *Joshi Seinenkai*, vol. 14, no. 6 (July 1917). See also Tanaka, "20-Seiki Shoto."

[32] Sarasohn, *The Issei*, 107; and Ito, *Hokubei Hyakunenzakura*, 313.

[33] *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (2 October 1913): 2; (1 January 1920): 3; and Teruko Kumei, *Gaikokujin wo Meguru Shakaishi: Kindai Amerika to Nihonjin Imin* (A social history concerning foreigners: modern America and Japanese immigrantion) (Tokyo: Yuzankaku, 1995), 142–43.

[34] Glen, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride*, 22–26; and Ichioka, *The Issei*, 190–92.

[35] Rumi Yasutake, "Transnational Women's Activism: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Japan and Beyond, 1858–1920" (Ph. D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 1998), 254–55.

[36] *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (14 December 1910): 1; (3 September 1912): 3; (7 September 1912): 7; (10 April 1916): 1; (15 October 1916): 1; (13 August 1919): 2; (11 August 1920): 4; *Nichibei Shinbun* (29 January 1913): 3; (31 January 1913): 7; (26 October 1914): 6; and (15 October 1916): 1. Also, see Kumei, *Gaikokujin wo Meguru Shakaishi*, 142.

[37] For example, see Ito, *Hokubei Hyakunenzakura*, 133–60; Sarasohn, *Issei Women*, 91–146; and Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride*, 67–79, 109–17.

[38] Okina, *Okina Kyuin Zenshu*, vol. 1, 70–73; vol.3, 171–72.

[39] For example, see *Sacramento Valley News* (11 November 1913): 9; *Nichibei Shinbun* (18 February 1916): 7; *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (8 September 1912): 4; *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (21–26 October 1916); Shakuma Washizu, "Rekishi Inmetsu no Nageki" (Grief for demolish of history), no. 55, *Nichibei Shinbun* (31 May 1922); and Okina, *Okina Kyuin Zenshu*, vol. 3, 36.

[40] Ichioka, *The Issei*, 170.

[41] For example, see *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (17, 18 April, 3 May 1908); *Nichibei Shinbun* (2, 15 July 1913, and 17–19 February 1916).

[42] *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (2 March 1911). Also ibid. (30 June 1911).

[43] *Nichibei Shinbun* (28, 30, 31 January, 19–21 February 1913). Also *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (5, 6 July 1913). In a different article reporting on a Japanese man who sent his "vain bride" back to Japan, the husband in question was referred to as a "manly man." See *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (3 July 1919).

[44] Kyuin Okina, "Kumogakure," 352–56.

[45] *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (7–15, 16 November 1912); *Nichibei Shinbun* (8 November 1912).

[46] *Shin Sekai Shinbun* (13 November 1912). In some articles, picture brides showed remorse for their vanity. The January 1, 1913 issue of *Nichibei Shinbun* runs a New Year's resolution sent by a picture bride, M. Y. In the resolution, M. Y. confesses her original disappointment in her rustic husband and shabby life in America; however, after learning her husband was gentle, she came to a realization that "she came to America out of her vanity" and admitted that she had been wrong. M. Y. concludes the resolution vowing to fulfill her duty "for the future prosperity of the Yamato race." (*Nichibei Shinbun*, 1 January, 1913). Different articles told a story of a picture bride who was raped by her villainous husband. Following the incident, the bride was said to have shown regret for coming to America to satisfy her vanity (*Shin Sekai Shinbun*, 12, 13, 16, and 17 April, 1914). Because the role of these newspapers was to control the morals of the community, these articles are also estimated to have demonstrated to the readers the cause and effect of the picture brides' vanity in order to suggest prescribed gender roles.

[47] Takako Takanashi, "Shashin Kekkon no Hanashi" (Story of picture marriages), *Joshi Seinenkai*, vol. 16, no. 4 (April 1919).