Photographs of Japanese Picture Brides: Visualizing Immigrants and Practicing Immigration Policy in Early Twentieth-Century United States

Kei TANAKA
(Niigata Women’s College)

I. Introduction

Japanese picture marriage was a form of proxy marriage popularly practiced among Japanese immigrants in the United States during the first two decades of twentieth century. Picture marriage provided wives to single male laborers, the large segment of early Japanese immigrants, who decided to establish permanent residency in the United States. Set up by a “go-between,” marriage between a man in the United States and a woman in Japan was agreed upon after the couple exchanged portraits and information on their backgrounds. The wedding ceremony between the two families usually took place in Japan, often without the groom’s presence. Under the Japanese civil code, after the two families joined by the marriage notified their local government offices and registered the bride in the groom’s family registry, a valid marriage had taken place. So many brides and grooms met each other in person for the first time when the bride arrived at the US port.

* The author wishes to thank Virginia Yans-McLaughlin and Carol Douglass for their assistance with this article.
Picture marriage was promoted among Japanese immigrants by middle-class leaders of the Japanese community as means to the moral reform of their communities. They viewed the Japanese communities as disorderly places. The sex ratio was markedly skewed. At the turn of the century, around 1900, some reports estimated that there was only one Japanese woman for every twenty-four men in the United States.\(^1\) As a result of this uneven distribution, gambling and prostitution found a ready market among single male immigrants. The leaders of the Japanese community worried that such practices tarnished the image of their communities and fueled anti-Japanese sentiment in local society. Hoping to offset such negative evaluations, they took the lead in establishing families, running independent farms, and assuming entrepreneurial functions within the larger Japanese communities.\(^2\)

During the peak period of the picture marriage migration between 1908 and 1920, it is estimated that over 10,000 picture brides entered the United States. Their presence did create a more balanced sex ratio. The total number of the Japanese residents in the United States in 1920 was 111,010, with 72,707 of them men and 38,303 women, making a ratio of 1:1.9 in favor of men.\(^3\) The number of picture brides constituted only about one quarter of the immigrant female population. However, because the picture brides’ arrival in large groups via steamship was so public, attention was drawn to their presence, and by


default they came to represent all Japanese immigrant women, picture brides or not.

Scholars who have studied Japanese immigrants emphasize that Japanese exclusionists and local politicians used picture marriage for their anti-Japanese propaganda and political campaigns. The Japanese exclusionists criticized the marriage practice as "peaceful penetration," a means by which Japanese immigrant men could exploit women as cheap labor, and also increase the number of Japanese by having children, who were automatically granted US citizenship. From the American middle-class perspective of marriage based on romantic love and free will, the picture marriage, according to the Japanese exclusionists, was an uncivilized Oriental practice equivalent to coerced relations, bondage, or prostitution, and perfect evidence of Japanese savagery. Fearful of weakening Japan's position as a world power after its victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, the Japanese government forbade further emigration of picture brides in 1920. So for the Japanese immigrants, picture marriage was actually a short-lived phenomenon.

For US immigration officials like Hart North, San Francisco's immigration commissioner, the man who aimed to implement immigration restriction policies between 1898 and 1909, this seemed like a long time. He later recalled that for about ten years after his resignation from the immigration station, the immigration station and its ruling

4) On the historical analysis of the Japanese picture marriage, see Ichioka, The Issei: Chapter V: Permanent Settlement Masubuchi, "1910-Nendai no Hainichi to 'Shashin Kekkon';" Ikumi Yanagisawa, "'Shashin Hanayome' Mondai to wa Nandattanoka—Sono Gensetsu no Keisei wo Chushin ni—" ('Picutre Brides': What was the Issue?), Aichi Shukotoku Daigaku: Ibunka Komyunikeshon (Aichi Shukotoku University: Multicultural communication), vol. 6 (March 2003); and Kei Tanaka, "Japanese Picture Marriage in 1900-1924 California: Construction of Japanese Race and Gender" (Ph. D. diss., Rutgers University, 2002).
authority, the Department of Labor, had unwillingly allowed the influx of thousands of picture brides.\(^5\)

There was an ongoing, unsettling debate between the US immigration officials and US and Japanese governments over the definition and validity of picture marriage. Exclusionary laws specifically targeting Japanese immigrants did not exist, but immigration officials nevertheless operated under the racialist assumptions underlying restrictions upon earlier waves of Chinese immigrants. The Chinese Exclusion Act, in effect since 1882 although excepting affluent merchants and elites, had denied migration to the United States, naturalization and subsequent US citizenship, and family reunification of Chinese population—the rights which were privileged to European immigrants.

Complicating matters politically was the fact that federal officials wanted to expand the US market in Asia, and thus desired good relations with Japan. The US and Japanese governments agreed in an 1894 treaty that “guaranteed reciprocal ‘most favored nation’ rights of residence [be given] to the nationals of each country.”\(^6\) Thus the US government was required to observe the principles of domestic immigration and marriage policy yet needed also to respect the Japanese legal system. The federal policy makers, especially in the Department of State, required discretion in the treatment of Japanese immigrants.\(^7\)

Still, this same decade gave immigration officers time to observe


incoming picture brides. The inspectors, often hiring professional photographers, took or collected photographs of the entering brides. They then kept the photographs, along with their other immigration records.

Using these visual documents as evidence, this article focuses on the connection between visualizing Japanese picture brides and the practice of immigration policy, demonstrating four points. First, incorporating recent scholarship on the history and use of photography and the archives, this paper supports recent studies that understand visual imagery as a social constructivist artifact rather than as a representational one.8) Second, I examine how the politics of observation and visualization of the immigrants shaped US immigration policy and American notions of race and gender. Third, moving beyond the findings of recent studies, I establish that the Japanese case shows the necessity of considering the historical specificity and distinctions between Asian immigrant groups. Not only did Japanese and Chinese immigrants themselves take hold of visual self-interpretations, they chose to represent themselves in different ways. Finally, the use of both Japanese and American diplomatic records allows me to demonstrate a previously unexamined, significant interface between photographic

surveillance and public policy from both sides of the Pacific.

II. On Visualization of Immigrants

While Europeans and Americans of the middle class often used portrait photography to demonstrate their success and prosperity, by the late 19th century photography was employed as an effective instrument of social control. The police, prisons, mental institutions, and immigration stations had rapidly become part of the national structures and institutions intended to control and archive social life. Systematic methods were developed to use photography to record and file the images of people who were defined as deviating from the social order. Criminals, mental patients, and racial and ethnic minorities found themselves in front of cameras, usually photographed in full face or profile, in an attempt to capture their "real" image.9)

The US government was developing surveillance strategies to control state borders, and photography came to be used by immigration officers as an effective tool to control immigration, to visualize and file the images of "disorderly aliens" and to place them under scrutiny. The port and the immigration station where the officers screened entering immigrants were the gate, as it were, to the United States. The US government specifically obliged all Chinese immigrants to submit their portraits for identification at the Angel Island immigration station in San

Francisco. The same was required of Japanese picture brides.

Photography was also used at the Ellis Island immigration station in New York to record incoming European immigrants; however, the practice in that case was unofficial and intended to keep ethnographic records of different immigrant groups. European immigrants were examined on the assumption that they would be admitted, unlike Asian immigrants at the Angel Island immigration station, whose entry was systematically restricted. In short, the Asian population became the subject of photography under the US immigration control system, having been categorized as a racial group deviating from the American social order.

From a Foucauldian perspective the subject of a photograph meant to be used in record keeping is viewed as submissive to the photographer, and there is a certain relationship of power that exists between the viewer and the viewed. The use of photography has a role in an aspect of constructing this power relationship, which is to define the viewer as superior to the viewed.

Recent study on visual culture, however, demonstrates that this power relationship is not static but, rather, fluid and dynamic. According to historian Anna Peglar Gordon, for example, many Chinese immigrants had successfully entered the United States after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was enacted by submitting photographs of themselves in a contrived image, depicting themselves as belonging to the exempted individuals.

---


11) On use of photography at the Ellis Island immigration station to document European immigrants, see Gordon, “In Sight of America,” 170-294.

class of merchants. This suggests that Chinese immigrants, also the subject of photography, actually had some control over creating their self-image. Gordon explains that US immigration policies were put into effect not by the federal government alone but by various agents, including immigrants themselves.13)

III. Visualizing Japanese Picture Brides as Criminals

While we are thankful to Gordon for pointing out how the Chinese constructed self-images to implement and manipulate US immigration policies, which can be argued for the Japanese case as well, the Japanese case has its own historical specificity. That specificity is important to consider; otherwise, we cannot adequately understand how both immigrant behavior and government policy were mutually and historically constitutive of each other.

Photographs of Japanese picture brides had been filed at the immigration stations almost from the start of the picture marriage practice, in 1903. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Bureau of Immigration and the Department of Labor were becoming the centralized, powerful agency of immigration control, replacing the local immigration stations and officials that once had had a great deal of discretion in the matter of immigration.14) Immigration stations located in Hawaii and the western states began to request from the central bureau in Washington, D.C., a ruling in regard to the validity of picture marriage and status of picture brides. In July of 1903, Frank Sargent,

14) Lee, At America's Gate, 47-48, 68-69.
the Commissioner-General of Immigration in Washington, D.C., gave instructions to Commissioner Joshua Brown at the Honolulu station to closely examine the documents of picture brides as well as the husbands appearing at the station, and to oblige them to remarry at church and to take a new photograph of the bride, which the immigration service would then place in its files.\(^{15}\)

The picture marriage debates between local stations and the central bureau generally began with its legality but ended up in a moral debate, defining that sort of marriage as a system that allowed trafficking in women. Although entry of prostitutes had been banned by the Page Act of 1875, enacted after the increase of Chinese prostitutes, there were more than a few Japanese immigrants who used picture marriage to traffic in women into the United States. The use of photography to record a picture bride as a means to demonstrate moral inferiority became an indispensable part of the immigration control process at the stations in Honolulu, and on the west coast, particularly in Seattle. The images created a racialization of the Japanese population.\(^{16}\)

Immigration stations, however, had to discontinue this practice as the result of negotiations between US and Japanese governments concerning anti-Japanese sentiment, particularly in California. As the number of

---


16) Among the immigration stations on the continental United States, the Seattle station had photographed all incoming picture brides to keep the photographs in file. The San Francisco station had also kept photographs of the brides as early as 1905; however, it seems that the practice of photographing picture brides was not a consistent part of the immigration inspection process at San Francisco station at the beginning of the twentieth century. See Inspector in Charge John Sargent, Seattle, to Commissioner-General, Washington, D.C., 14 December 1908, No. 2977, NARA; and Proxy Marriage Iki Case, File 48066, Box 107, NARA.
Japanese immigrants increased, white Californians increasingly perceived them as an economic threat. The conflict erupted when, in 1906, the Asiatic Exclusion League pressured the San Francisco School Board to segregate Japanese pupils in municipal public schools.\(^{17}\) Reporting the incident, the local newspaper expressed the popular sentiment that "Japanese acquire the distinctive character, habits, and moral standards of their race, which are abhorrent to our people."\(^{18}\) Anti-Japanese sentiment, now seeking expression in school segregation, had reached a point intolerable to Japanese prestige.

The solution reached by the US and Japanese governments was the so-called Gentlemen's Agreement, which came into force in the summer of 1908, when the Japanese government took the initiative and voluntarily halted further issuing of passports for all Japanese labor immigrants into the United States. The government was concerned that the increase of the low-class laborers would make all Japanese immigrants seem to the local white Americans as uncivilized as the Chinese, an outcome which, the Japanese government feared, would create anti-Japanese sentiment. The agreement did, however, allow those Japanese people who had already migrated to the United States to bring family into the United States, including parents, children, and wives.\(^{19}\) For the US government, this was in keeping with the continuing family bias of US immigration law. The Japanese emerged from the negotiation saving face, because US immigration policy concerning family reunification regarded Japanese immigrants as it did whites.

On June 8, 1908, Commissioner-General Sargent conveyed a ruling of

---

18) *San Francisco Chronicle* (6 November 1906).
the Secretary of State to all immigration officials that they must treat courteously the Japanese immigrants applying for admission to the United States and refrain from photographing the immigrants. Nevertheless, he maintained his view that picture marriage was invalid and, subsequently, instructed the officials that “every possible caution of reasonable nature be exercised to prevent the perpetration of imposition and fraud” in connection with picture-marriage immigration.\(^{20}\)

Officers of the local immigration stations, however, demanded that the Bureau of Immigration establish a uniform system to check and control the entry of Japanese picture brides, particularly the resumption of the practice of photographing picture brides. For example, Commissioner North in San Francisco, estimating that 50% of admitted picture bride would become prostitutes, firmly stated: “Until Japanese residents are registered as are the Chinese and until we have authority to take photographs of the women, . . . I do not know how we can improve the present condition.”\(^{21}\) Commissioner John Sargent in Seattle also stressed that the wedding ceremony did not have any binding force for “those heathen Japanese,” and therefore picture brides must be photographed in order to be able to investigate those who fell into prostitution. “This practice,” Sargent stated, “enabled us to identify them thereafter regardless of what name they used when plying their vocation. Photographs are of the greatest aid in identifying these people and without them we are almost helpless.”\(^{22}\) Commissioner Brown in

---

20) Commissioner-General Sargent, Washington, D.C., to Commissioners of Immigration and Immigrant Inspectors in Charge, Brownsville, El Paso, San Antonio, Tucson, Seattle, San Francisco, Montreal, and Honolulu, 8 June 1907, File 51639/8, NARA.

21) Commissioner North, San Francisco, to Commissioner-General Sargent, Washington, D.C., 24 November 1908, No. 1542-1, NARA.

22) For example, Commissioner-General Sargent, Washington, D.C., 24 November 1908, No. 1542-1, NARA; Inspector in Charge Sargent, Seattle, to Commissioner-General
Honolulu also asserted that photographs would become a record to prove immigrants’ marital relationship, and that keeping photographs at the immigration station would be effective in deterring husbands from domestic violence or forcing wives into prostitution.\(^{23}\) Thus, immigration officers were in agreement that Japanese picture marriage was criminal, and they regarded photography as the most convenient means to visualize and record picture brides and their husbands as prospective criminals.

### IV. Use of Visualization by the “Observed”

The visualization of immigrant bodies was thus used by the US immigration officers to implement immigration policy; scholars have not yet documented that the Japanese government, leaders of Japanese communities, and Japanese immigrants also deployed visual imagery to fulfill their own objectives. As mentioned above, the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1908 recognized the family reunification of those Japanese who had already migrated to the United States. Consequently, picture marriage became a popular system through which Japanese immigrants could now legitimately acquire wives.

In an attempt to improve the Japanese racial standing, the Japanese government launched a policy to regulate the socioeconomic status of immigrants. Setting rigid standards for both men and women, the government now controlled the marriages of immigrants, attempting to

---

present Japanese men as independent, self-sufficient and frugal husbands, Japanese women as legitimate housewives, and the Japanese families as the equivalent of white middle-class families. The Japanese foreign ministry delegated the Japanese Association of America and its local branches to issue official certificates necessary for summoning family members. And as a prerequisite to summon a wife or, to marry, a single Japanese man had to prove that his financial resources were sufficient to support a family. A picture bride, for her part, was required to stay with her husband's family for at least six months from the day her name was entered into her husband's family registry. In 1915, a regulation regarding the age difference between spouses was also established. A bride was ineligible for marriage if she was more than thirteen years younger than her groom.24)

Japanese Christian organizations, such as the YWCA, organized by middle- to upper-class Japanese women whose husbands were leaders of local Japanese communities, would also visualize the immigrant Japanese women with a positive image hoping to ensure their smooth entry into the United States. These organizations had long been known for their vigorous educational program for picture brides, collaborating with their Japanese branches as well as with the Emigration Association in Japan in order to accomplish their goals. As an important part of the program, they gave brides some warning and guidance regarding their clothes, conduct, and manners, especially on the steamship and upon landing on the Angel Island, where the brides were first exposed to Americans.25)

And last but not least, individual immigrants themselves were also

24) Yuji Ichioka, The Issei, 159-64.
active agents in the construction of their self-images by using photography for their own ends. Picture brides and grooms both created a modernized or westernized self-image in their self-portraits, which they then exchanged with each other (Fig. 1).\(^\text{26)}\) This very act of self-visualization by the immigrants suggests that, in addition to establishing a marital relationship, the immigrants tactfully fit themselves into the criteria of the immigration policy negotiated by the US and Japanese governments and thus assisted in implementing the formal diplomatic policy.

The resulting legitimate picture marriages increased the number of Japanese families and fostered Japanese land ownership and settlement.

---

in the United States. This fueled the anti-Japanese sentiment among the local farm producers, and subsequently, in 1913, the Alien Land Law was enacted in California to prohibit land ownership by Asian residents who were defined by the federal government as alien ineligible for citizenship, the status included Japanese immigrants.27) Criticisms of picture marriages, questions regarding their validity and morality continually emerged among the officers of Bureau of Immigration or the Department of Labor.

While insisting that the marriage system was legal according to the Japanese Civil Code, the Japanese government, together with the Japanese Association of America, defended the morality of picture brides by pointing out the tight screening system established with Japan itself.28) For example, the Consulate-General of Japan in Ottawa stressed, in his statement to Superintendent of Immigration, in 1915, that the Japanese Consul would issue a certificate to a groom for calling the bride only after “careful investigation of the case and after his satisfaction of the bona fides of the parties concerned,” and therefore, “no fraud [sic] can be perpetrated.”29) Indeed, both picture bride and groom went through the several levels of a screening process carried out by individual participants, the Japanese government, the Japanese

27) Daniels, Asian America, 138-44.
29) Consulate-General of Japan, Ottawa, to Superintendent of Immigration Scott, Ottawa, 3 May 1915, A Short Statement, Nichibetikan ni Okeru Honpojin Kekkon Koryoku Torishirabe Ikken (Concerning the discussions among Japan and the United States upon marriage effect of Japanese), MT 3.8.2.212, DRC, FMJ.
Christian organizations, and the Japanese Association of America, designed to demonstrate both bride's and groom's willingness to conform to the gender and moral requirements stipulated by the Japanese government.

V. A Fact-Finding Survey of Picture Brides in 1916

The practice of recording the photographs of picture brides, which had been discontinued by the Bureau of Immigration in 1908, was actually resumed in less than three years at the San Francisco immigration station on Angel Island.30) Samuel Backus, the Commissioner at the San Francisco station, focused on the controversial aspects of the validity of picture marriage, and put the brides in the category of special inquiry, a type of administrative review of cases suspected of being illegal entries, in this case because they were suspected of moral turpitude. Backus separated wives who had not been married through the picture marriage arrangement from the picture brides, to put the former through the general inspection. The advantage of special inquiry, unlike the general inspection, was that it gave immigration officials a prerogative to collect photographs of the interrogated immigrants to file with the immigration records. Backus considered that keeping photographs of brides with the immigration records would also be useful in the future when the US-born Japanese descendents began claiming American citizenship. His point indicates

30) The San Francisco station had been collecting photographs of the picture brides at least since 1911. The Seattle station also resumed to require picture brides to submit their photographs at least since 1914. Memorandum for the Commissioner-General, 3 January 1914, File. 52424/13, NARA.
Fig. 2. Photograph of a picture-marriage couple presenting their exchanged portraits to the immigration inspectors. National Japanese American Historical Society. San Francisco, California.

the significance of controlling the entry of women as a means of controlling the growth of the Japanese population.31)

The special inquiry went as follows: First, a picture bride was interrogated alone by three inspectors assisted by an interpreter, and then her groom was brought into the room to be interrogated likewise. The bride and groom presented the exchanged portraits of the spouses for marriage arrangement to the inspectors so they could match them with the real persons (Fig. 2). After the bride and groom were approved for entry, their portraits were confiscated, glued on their immigration records, and kept at the immigration station (Fig. 3).

At this moment, the personal portrait was transformed into an archival record, and the meaning of the photograph also changed. These personal

31) Commissioner Backus, San Francisco, to Commissioner-General Caminetti, Washington, D.C., 23 December 1913, File 12022/3, NARA.
portraits used initially to present themselves as modern, civilized individuals suitable for marriage and admission to the United States. The photos were then passed into state archives where they could be deployed at any time and used for the state’s surveillance and control purposes.

In addition to the already existing representation of them as prostitutes, by the early 1910s the picture brides became to be regarded as laborers. In 1914, for example, Commissioner Backus in San Francisco reported to then Commissioner-General and noted Japanese
exclusionist Anthony Caminetti that the brides were largely placed in the occupation of common laborers such as working in the farm field with their husbands, so that the immigration officers were actually “admitting Japanese laborers in the guise of wives.”

The ideology of gender roles prevalent among the middle-class white Americans considered it immoral to have women work outside home. In reality, this standard was not applied to thousands of wives on American farms who regularly participated as members of the family economy in household production and seasonal outdoor labor. However, if the picture brides were defined as laborers, their migration would be charged by the US officials as the violation of the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1908.

Therefore when asked the purpose of entry to the United States by the inspectors during the special inquiry, brides commonly answered that they had come to join their husbands as housewives, and grooms testified without exception that they had the financial means to support a wife and intended to have the wife keep house only. A typical exchange, involving a sharecropper in Alameda County, California who sent for a bride in 1913, went as follows:

Q: What do you expect your wife to do if landed?
A: I expect her to work at home, cooking and taking care of it.
Q: Will she help you on the ranch?

---

32) Commissioner Backus to Commissioner-General, Caminetti, 6 January 1914.
33) On ideology of white middle-class gender roles, for example, see Mary Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class: the Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865 (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1981). For women as labor force, see Alice Kessler Harris, Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in America (New York; Oxford University Press, 1982); and Deborah Fink, Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).
Fig. 4. Portrait of a picture-marriage couple. File 10450/8-7, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, National Archives and Record Administration-Pacific Region. San Bruno, California.

A: It isn’t my intention to have her do so.
Q: If it becomes necessary will she also help you on the ranch?
A: I do not mean to allow her to work outdoors.34)

Some couples even submitted their family portrait after the bride had already been admitted to the United States (Fig. 4).35) This is an example of immigrants’ own use of photograph to challenge the common notions of picture brides as prostitutes or forced laborers and

34) A Meeting of a Board of Special Inquiry at Angel Island Station, Department of Commerce and Labor, File no. 12939/20-17, Box 734, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (hereafter cited as RINS), NARA.
35) For example, File 10450/8-7, Box 498; File 13043/20-30, Box 750, RINS, NARA.
to construct their own social reality.

The confiscated photographs and records of picture brides were actually used by the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization in 1916, following a request for an investigation on picture brides by matrons of Women’s Home of Episcopal Church, after four Japanese picture brides were rescued by the Home from spousal abuse and forced prostitution. On December 31, 1915, Commissioner-General Caminetti ordered Commissioner Edward White in San Francisco to investigate the actual living conditions of picture brides, with the purpose of proving “what evils have resulted from the admission of [picture brides]” and determining “further proceedings.”

Commissioner White selected records of eighty picture brides who had been admitted to the United States in January, February, and April of 1915 and then located in California. He sent twenty-five records to the Sacramento station, and fifty-five to Los Angeles station. Immigration inspectors at the two stations launched a search for the brides, visiting one after another at home, with the records and photographs of the brides in their hands. They questioned the selected picture brides and husbands about their financial status, family life, way of living, number of children, and community environment, as well as questioning the neighbors about the reputations of the couples in the community. They then sent reports to commissioners at San Francisco and Los Angeles stations. Tracking the brides was often bewildering, physically as well as financially, for the investigators, especially when

36) Law Officer, Parker, for the Commissioner-General, Washington, D.C., to Commissioner Backus, San Francisco, 31 December 1915, File 54012/113; 52424/13, NARA.
the family had moved from the original address. An inspector C. H. Hannum is reported to have sought advice in this respect from Commissioner White, who instructed him to continue the survey to find out whether picture brides were being put to work in any way other than being housewives at any cost.\footnote{38) Inspector Hannum, Sacramento, to Commissioner White, San Francisco, 3 May 1916, file 400/262; Commissioner White, San Francisco, to Inspector Hannum, Sacramento, 5 May 1916; and Memorandum, File 52424/13, Box 550, NARA.}

Contrary to what the Japanese exclusionists Caminetti or North expected, the investigation concluded that the Japanese families were overall in favorable condition. Based on my research into forty-eight cases out of a total of eighty cases, thirteen brides were reported as working outside the home, thirty-two brides as staying home as wives, and three brides either missing or deceased. None of them was reported as being engaged in prostitution. Furthermore, forty-five Japanese families were evaluated highly by the inspectors in regard to their way of living, character, and reputation, using words like “responsible,” “successful,” “reliable,” “respectable,” “law-abiding,” “industrious,” “getting along nicely,” “well dressed,” “prosperous,” “well recommended,” and, in regard to their homes, “neatly/comfortably furnished.”

After the investigation, the officers at the Angel Island immigration station stopped the practice of filing photographs and records of picture brides. The last picture brides to have their photographs confiscated were those brides who arrived on July 9, 1916. After that, picture brides were not placed in the category of special inquiry any longer except in the case of a bride younger than sixteen, or a bride likely to become a public charge.\footnote{39) The estimation is based on the author’s interview with William Greene, an archival specialist at NARA-Pacific Region at San Bruno.}
Interestingly, the change occurred before 1917, when a new immigration law was established to introduce a literacy test for immigrants, and Japanese picture brides were finally defined as wives by the US government. Upon joining World War I in 1917, the US and Japanese governments established the Lansing-Ishii Agreement and allied themselves against Germany.40) This international situation led the US government to compromise with the Japanese Foreign Ministry and to formally acknowledge the picture brides as bona fides wives and exempt them from the obligation of a literacy test as well as remarriage after entry. It is puzzling why the immigration officers ceased subjecting picture brides with special inquiries before the US government had agreed to recognize them as wives. Yet, this change implies that the officers, who had been obsessed with filing photographs of picture brides despite the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1908 having been established, came to hold a conviction from the survey of 1916 that brides sent by their husbands were actually wives, and nothing but wives.

VI. Visualizing Japanese Picture Brides for Anti-Japanese Propaganda

The anti-Japanese movement on the west coast states waned temporarily during World War I but flared up again after the war. Behind the scenes was the US government passing up Japan in their

40) Acting Secretary of State Polk, Washington, D.C., to the Secretary of Labor Wilson, Washington, D.C., 30 July 1917, File 894.4054/19; Secretary of Labor Wilson, Washington, D.C. to Secretary of State Lansing, 20 August 1917, File 894.4054/20, NARA.
naval armament race, which resulted in US-Japan relations no longer being a top priority for the US government. In addition, the Americanization movement developed as a nation-wide campaign that fiercely increased the sentiment of nativism and xenophobia against immigrants. Anti-Japanese sentiment thus increased among the people in California, where numerous nativist organizations were established; local politicians and mass media further inflamed the movement.41) The exclusionists targeted their criticism at picture marriage, connecting picture brides’ reproduction with the alleged Japanese plan of invading California.

Along with many immigrant groups, the Japanese birth rate and population had increased by 1920. The American-born Japanese population in the United States was 29,672, which consisted of 26.7% of the total Japanese of 111,010. The Japanese percentage of the total population in the United States was as small as 0.1%. Even in California, the state most heavily populated by Japanese, the Japanese composed only 2.1% of the total population in 1920.42)

The exclusionists’ anti-Japanese propaganda was made concrete in 1920 by a revised Alien Land Law in California, which effectively banned Japanese immigrants not only from owning but also from renting land in California, as well as by the abolition of picture brides.43)

The strategy that anti-Japanese activists used for their propaganda


42) Ichihashi, Japanese in the United States, 72; Daniels, Asian America, 115.

43) Daniels, Asian America, 144-47.
expresses a visual impression derived from the view of entering picture brides at the Angel Island in texts. Through the texts, readers of newspapers were able to reconstruct the visual image of picture brides in their minds. For example, on March 7, 1919, Senator and anti-Japanese activist James Duval Phelan reported in the Examiner, a major local newspaper in San Francisco, that he saw “the presence of 120 Japanese women, 40 of whom were waiting to join husbands whose photographs they had married in Japan . . . . [They] become the mothers of children who are thus native born and entitled to hold property.”

Valentine Stuart McClatchy, another fierce activist and owner of local newspaper, the Sacramento Bee, described in the July 26, 1919, issue, “62 of Japanese picture brides with their missions of child-bearing and laboring,” who were admitted into the United States. The brides “who held to their kimono-and-obi and their flapping footwear,” McClatchy reported, “never ceased to smile and salaam” while displaying “gleaming teeth” throughout the inspection.

A view of an enormous number of picture brides on the deck waiting to land or landing on Angel Island was, actually, a typical depiction in photographs by immigration officers or a hired professional photographer (Fig. 5).

Visitors, as a rule, were prohibited from taking photographs of immigrants at Angel Island, and those who would borrow the photographs stored at the station had to get permission from the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization. At the request of the Japanese government and the Japanese Association of America, the

44) San Francisco Examiner (7 March 1919): 1, 4.
45) Sacramento Bee (26 July 1919).
47) Rene Bache, writer, Washington, D.C., to Officer in Charge, San Francisco, 21 May 1915, NARA.
Fig. 5. Photographs of picture brides waiting to land on Angel Island. National Japanese American Historical Society. San Francisco, California.

Still, it is not hard to imagine that the activists and media used the photographs of picture brides taken at the Angel Island immigration

Fig. 6. Photograph of picture brides published in newspapers (title unknown, circa 1919). National Japanese American Historical Society. San Francisco, California.

station as reference for their anti-Japanese propaganda. So with the rise of nativism in the United States, the anti-Japanese activists and immigration officers had a close connection with each other.49)

It was a common recognition among the anti-Japanese activists that the view of picture brides’ entering at the ports would be the most striking and thus effective in agitating anti-Japanese sentiment among the viewers. Japanese Consulate-General Tamekichi Ohta in San Francisco, being panicked over the revival of the anti-Japanese movement, reported to Minister of Foreign Affairs Yasuya Uchida that the California Oriental Exclusion League had “a plan to film picture brides and show the film throughout the nation”, because “the sight of picture brides entering into the United States is especially striking to the people in general”. To keep

49) On connection between the Asian exclusionists and immigration officers, see Lee, At America’s Gate, 71-72.
hostile Americans from filming picture brides, the Japanese government requested the presidents of steamship companies to divide the brides into small groups and to land them at different times, especially in the evening when filming was difficult. Consul-General Ohta, feeling overwhelmed, finally demanded that the Japanese Association of America voluntarily announce the termination of picture brides.50)

VII. Conclusion

The control policy of Japanese immigrants consisted of the visualization of immigrants. It was not only the US Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization or Japanese exclusionists who used photography as a means to watch and control immigrants; the Japanese government, Japanese associations, church organizations, and immigrants themselves, who seemed to have no power of visualization, actually produced, controlled, and manipulated the representation of individuals, as well as of the collective Japanese. While Japanese exclusionists used images of

50) Telegram from Consulate-General Ohta, San Francisco, to Foreign Minister Uchida, Tokyo, 5 October 1919, *Nihon Fujin no Shashin Kekkon ni Yoru Tobei wo Nihon Seifu ni oite Kinshi Suruyo Rinsei no Ken* (Regarding request for the Japanese government to terminate picture-marriage immigration of Japanese women); Telegram from Consulate-General Ohta, San Francisco, to Foreign Minister Uchida, Tokyo, 9 October 1919, *Shashin Kekkon Fujin no Tobei Tokyo no Katsudo Shashin Satsuei Bokshiho ni tshuki Zaibei Taishi e Rinsei no Ken* (Regarding a request for the Japanese Ambassador in respect of preventing filming of the arrival of picture brides); and Chief of Commerce Tanaka, Tokyo, to the presidents of Toyo Kisen (Oriental Steamship Lines), Osaka Shosen (Osaka merchant ship company), and Nihon Yusen (Japan mail steamer company), 14 October 1919; *Honpo Shashin Kekkon Fujin no Beikoku Joriku no sai no Katsudo Shashin Satsuei no Kuwadate ni taishi Tekigi Sochiho Shiji no Ken* (Regarding the instruction to prevent the filming of Japanese picture brides upon their landing to the United States), *Tokokinshi Ikken, Nihon Gaiko Bunsho*, 1919, vol. 1, 67-70, and 72-74.
the entry of picture brides into the United States to arouse fears concerning inundation by an inferior race and threats to American society, the Japanese immigrants attempted to present themselves as a civilized race fit to live in American society.

The US-Japanese relations were also crucial in influencing immigration policy and control. The Japanese government was keenly aware that some Americans used picture marriages as a demonstration of Japanese racial inferiority. In the context of international diplomacy, the negotiations regarding the marriage and status of immigrants were pivotal for the Japanese government, which sought to assert independent sovereignty and domestic policy on marriage and to have that police power respected by the US government. While aiming to follow the domestic immigration policy, the US government recognized the control of entry and marriage of Japanese immigrants involved diplomacy between the two nations.

This study of visualization of Japanese picture brides demonstrates that the power relations that emerged between the viewer and the viewed were not unilateral. Immigration agents regarded photography as a convenient and effective tool not because it depicted the real body of immigrants but because it defined the “reality” of the immigrants as the observers/controllers and the observed/immigrants wished it to be. The agents used these visualizations to implement US immigration policy, which was designed to support the hegemony of white middle-class Americans.

| 투고일자 : 2007.11.28. |
| 심사(수정)일자 : 2008.4.16. |
| 게재확정일자 : 2008.4.23. |
【Abstract】

Photographs of Japanese Picture Brides: Visualizing Immigrants and Practicing Immigration Policy in Early Twentieth-Century United States

Kei TANAKA
(Niigata Women’s College)

This article demonstrates that the photography and visual documentation of immigrants was used as the powerful tool by the US immigration officials for controlling Japanese immigrant women. The paper examines images of early twentieth century picture brides held in the National Archives and Record Administration-Pacific Region as an instance. It argues how the visual regimes including portraits, identification photographs, and visual surveillance of immigrants became central to the restriction of specific racialized immigrant groups and the implementation of US immigration policy.

The entry of Japanese women to the United States through picture marriage drew the attention of immigration officers, leading them to the innovation of using photographs intended for marriage agreements for visually documenting entering immigrant women. The immigration officials, together with local politician and media, viewed the marriage practice as the Japanese device to traffic prostitutes or increase Japanese population in the United States. Officers at different immigration stations thus started to collect the ID photographs and portraits of the entering picture brides. They used photographs to investigate the status of individual picture brides already in the United States, and thus they enforced the immigration policy as well as shaping the racialized idea about the Japanese immigrants. The paper argues, as well, that the Japanese government, Japanese immigrant associations, and immigrants themselves also actively used photography, including their own self-representations in these images, to construct an image of white middle-class respectability.

Key Words
Japanese immigrants, picture bride, photography, representation, immigration policy