

Comments on: Dr. Tanaka Kei's
"Marriage as Citizen's Privilege: Japanese Picture
Marriage and American Social Justice"

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Introduction

Issei (first generation) women crossed the ocean via "picture marriage" for myriad reasons. In her paper, Dr. Tanaka explores and negates the conventional narratives of this phenomenon: while it was in a sense natural for the women to follow their parent's decision regarding marriage, they also had their own social and cultural reasons, as well as ambitions and dreams to try married life in the U.S. Complicating the narrative of *Issei* women further, she presents us with this fascinating paper in which "picture brides" and grooms are presented as more active agents in the discriminatory immigration policy/control and bilateral relations that Azuma calls "between two empires."¹ In so doing, Dr. Tanaka introduces a number of interesting questions of the politics of observation and visualization of immigrants by US government officials, Japanese exclusionists and the immigrants themselves. In line with Anna Pegler Gordon's argument that "immigration policy has always been about making immigrants visible,"² Dr. Tanaka's key thesis in this paper is that "the politics of observation and visualization of the immigrants was used by US government officials and Japanese exclusionists to shape US immigration policy and American notions of race and gender, while the same strategy of self-visualization was used by Japanese immigrants in an attempt to protect their right to marriage."³ The "politics of observation and visualization" was an intricate process by which the representation of Asian women as prostitutes and laborers was created, documented, and disseminated.

I. Politics of observation and visualization

At the turn of the twentieth century, the leaders of the Japanese community in America set for the "picture marriage" as a means of moral reform of their community. Dr. Tanaka gives us a detailed analysis of the ways in which Japanese Christian organizations, such as the YWCA, "would also visualize the immigrant Japanese women with a positive image, hoping to ensure their smooth

entry into the United States.”⁴

On the part of brides and grooms, Dr. Tanaka points out that “picture brides and grooms both created a modernized or westernized self-image in their self-portraits, which they then exchanged with each other,” while presenting some photographic evidence. Dr. Tanaka then argues that “individual immigrants themselves were also active agents in the construction of their self-images by using photography for their own ends.”⁵ Nevertheless, I find this argument still needs to be supported empirically. Among participants of the screening process, her explanation is centered on the efforts of the Japanese government, Japanese Associations, and the YWCA, rather than exploring the narrative of how self-visualization was done by individual immigrants. Indeed, she vividly demonstrates efforts by the Japanese government, the Japanese Christian organizations, and the Japanese Association of America, which “designed to demonstrate both the bride’s and groom’s willingness to conform to the gender and moral requirements stipulated by the Japanese government,”⁶ with full supporting sources excavated both in Japan and the U.S. As Dr. Tanaka notes, the YWCA’s involvement was significant in giving “brides some warnings and guidance regarding their clothes, conduct, and manners, especially on the steamship and upon landing on Angel Island, where the brides were first exposed to Americans.”⁷ She also complicates the collaboration within Japanese community by presenting members of YWCA, while often showing scornful and class biased attitudes toward “picture brides,” found the Japanese Association “to be thoughtless, depriving the immigrants of the right to marriage” in 1919.⁸ On the other hand, Dr. Tanaka does not fully explain the motives behind immigrant couples who “even submitted their family portrait after the bride had already been admitted to the United States.”⁹ This is why I found the “self-visualization” argument needs more empirical evidence and I would like to hear more from Dr. Tanaka on the reasons why they did such a demonstration.

Like other historiography, conventional Japanese migration/immigration history has relied on written documents, while photographic documentation has been largely overlooked. Meanwhile, there are some important works on “picture brides” which use oral history materials. For example, using oral interview sources, Yanagisawa Ikumi also problematizes the images of “picture brides,” who have been narrated as mere victims or passive objects of the traditional marriage system, by presenting interviews of some *Issei* women who said that the groom in the U.S. was no stranger at all, and was known from childhood or through familial or neighborhood relationships.¹⁰ Can these oral interviews be useful primary sources to understand the “self-visualization” process and its supporting documents/evidence? What are other possible primary sources to support the active engagement of immigrants in utilizing their modernized images shown in the photographs? Considering how central photographs were to both the picture bride system and Tanaka’s self-visualization argument, I would have liked to see more photos with explanatory captions.

II. Social justice and marriage from the perspective of "integrated race policy"

Though Dr. Tanaka does not use the term transnational or according to Azuma, "inter-National," to describe the nature of the spheres of social justice, Dr. Tanaka presents marriage as a contested domestic and "inter-National" terrain of social justice.¹¹ It is clear from her paper that the struggles for social justice were started before settling down in the U.S., or even before embarking from ports in Japan. Meanwhile, within the constraints of a conference presentation, Dr. Tanaka does not examine citizenship, or other social and civil rights issues of Japanese immigrants. While Chinese and Japanese immigrants had spheres of social justice in common, their experiences were distinctive, both domestic and "inter-National"/transnational. Therefore, it does not seem clear if the struggles for social justice by early Chinese immigrants can be discussed as linear precedent of the Japanese cases Dr. Tanaka explores in detail in this paper.

Nonetheless, the immigration policy/control and spheres of social justice were indeed deeply interrelated within "a broader racial and ethnic remapping of the nation."¹² Suggested by Mae Ngai as "integrated race policy," the control over "picture marriage" seems to have been implicated in tandem with other "racial and ethnic remapping of the nation" in the early twentieth century, in particular, with anti-miscegenation laws in California.¹³ In the early twentieth century, laws prohibiting "Mongolians," "Chinese," "Japanese," or "Koreans" from marrying whites were enacted in fourteen states: Arizona, California, Georgia, Idaho, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Virginia, and Wyoming. California, which attracted many migrants from China and Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, amended the following anti-miscegenation laws to include "Mongolians.":

Cal. Civ. Code § 69 (1880): "No license must be issued authorizing the marriage of a white person with a negro, mulatto or mongolian"

Cal. Civ. Code § 60 (1905): "All marriages of white persons with negroes, Mongolians, or mulattoes are illegal and void."¹⁴

Dr. Tanaka touches upon anti-miscegenation laws as "practical reasons why this marriage practice became prevalent among Japanese immigrants" and briefly mentions them as "prohibited inter-marriages between the Japanese and Caucasians." However, this seems the very intersection of the federal immigration control and the local racial-sexual policing, where issues of social justice and "rights to marriage," are intricately connected and disciplined at both federal and state levels. Considering the current political climate with regards to these issues, I would have liked a more extensive analysis here.

As shown above, California's anti-miscegenation law was amended in 1905 "at the height of the anti-Japanese movement, the state legislature sealed the breach between the license and marriage laws and invalidated all marriages

between ‘Mongolian’ and white spouses.”¹⁵ As Clare Jean Kim articulates, “White opinionmakers constructed a ‘Mongolian’ or ‘Asiatic’ racial category and located it via triangulation (relative valorization and civic ostracism) in the field of racial positions,”¹⁶ the lawmakers in California amended Section 60 of the Civil Code to forbid Japanese from marrying out whites by lumping Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans into the ethnographical nomenclature: “Mongolian.” Were these laws and agreement amended and concluded at the same timing merely coincidentally? Rather, it seems that we can examine the relations between California’s consummation of the anti-miscegenation measures in 1905 and the Gentlemen’s Agreement in 1908 as a constitutive process of the racialization of Asian immigrants, by putting it in the broader context of “integrated race policy” in the U.S.

III. “Proxy” or “Picture” marriage?

Dr. Tanaka points out that “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.”¹⁷ As Dr. Tanaka also discusses, however, at the news of decision to abolish “picture bride” immigration made by the Japanese government and Japanese Association in 1919, the Japanese defended their practice by pointing out that other European migrants practiced the similar marriage. Indeed, “proxy marriage” or “arranged marriage” was widely practiced among, Italian, Greek, and Jewish migrants from Europe.¹⁸ While Dr. Tanaka mentions that the picture marriage was a form of proxy marriage, the Immigration Act of 1924 declared that “the term ‘wife’ and ‘husband’ do not include a wife or husband by reason of a proxy, or picture marriage,” which brings one simple question to mind: why did this law separate the words, “proxy” and “picture” marriage in the first place? Did the former target Southern and Eastern Europeans, whereas the latter being written with Japanese female migrants in mind? In addition, my understanding is that Italian and Greek migrant wives were seldom labeled as “picture brides” in the early twentieth century. Was the coinage of “picture brides” out of “picture marriage” mostly applied to Japanese female migrants, and if so, what was the reason for this? As Dr. Tanaka examines in detail, Japanese brides were targets of “special inquiry,” which “gave immigration officials a prerogative to collect photographs of the interrogated immigrants to file with the immigration records.”¹⁹ Was this extensive photographic control and photographs taken (which were later disseminated as exclusionist propaganda) at the San Francisco immigration station on Angel Island since 1911 an origin of the term “picture brides”? Or if not origin, did it create an opportunity for dissemination of the term “picture brides”? As the actual practice was essentially similar, in which brides marry grooms that most have never met (arranged through go-betweens),

how has discrimination differed with respect to "proxy marriage" vs. "picture marriage"? How did images of relative savageness and under-civilization affect the realm of immigration policy?

Conclusion

A new book has come out in June 2009 on "war brides" and "picture brides," the product of joint international scholarship. The editor of this book, Shimada Noriko, has suggested the possibility of comparative studies on "proxy marriage" and "picture marriage." According to Shimada, one of the remaining inquiries of this book is to explore the experiences of the "picture brides" by locating them into a framework of global female migration history.²⁰ New studies have shed light on Korean "picture brides" in the U.S., but it is not yet clear how their experiences differed from Japanese "picture brides."²¹ Likewise, there are endless questions to be explored in the experiences of female migration through "picture marriage" and "proxy marriage."

In conclusion, I would like to quote Dr. Tanaka's very intriguing argument once again: "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."²² While this argument still needs more empirical evidence, incorporating photographic sources and other written works both in Japanese and English, Dr. Tanaka's work is absolutely novel and explores new horizons of Japanese migration/immigration history.

Notes

1. Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
2. Anna Pegler Gordon, "In Sight of America: Photography and United States Immigration Policy, 1880-1930" (Ph. D. diss., University of Michigan, 2002).
3. Tanaka Kei, "Marriage as Citizen's Privilege: Japanese Picture Marriage and American Social Justice," *Proceedings of the NASSS 2009*, p. 132.
4. Tanaka, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
5. *Ibid*, pp. 138-139.
6. *Ibid*, p. 139.
7. *Ibid*, p. 138.
8. *Ibid*, p. 145.
9. *Ibid*, p. 140.
10. Yanagisawa Ikumi, "'Shashin Hanayome' wa 'Otto no Dorei' datanoka—'Shashin Hanayome' tachi no Katari wo Chushin ni (Were 'Picture Brides' 'Slaves of their Husbands': Documenting Story Telling of 'Picture Brides')" in Shimada Noriko ed.,

- Shashin Hanayone Sensou Hanayome no Tadotta Michi: Jyosei Iminshi no Hakkutsu*, (Crossing the Ocean: A New Look at the History of Japanese Picture Brides and War Brides), Akashi Shoten, 2009, p. 50.
11. Eiichiro Azuma, "Transnational Asiakei Amerikajinshi: Kan Kokkakan Paradaimu no Kanousei," (Transnational Asian American History: The Possibilities of an "International" Paradigm) *Amerikashi Kenkyu* (Journal of American History), vol. 30 (2007), pp. 51–53.
 12. Mae Ngai, "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924," *The Journal of American History*, vol. 92 (1999), p. 71.
 13. There are extensive literatures done on social justice and anti-miscegenation laws: See for example, Megumi Dick Osumi, "Asians and California's Anti-Miscegenation Laws," in *Asian and Pacific American Experience: Women's Perspectives*, Nobuya Tsuchida ed., (1982), Peggy Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of 'Race' in Twentieth-Century America," *The Journal of American History*, vol. 83 (1996), Leti Volpp, "American Mestizo: Filipinos and Antimiscegenation Laws in California," *U. C. Davis Law Review*, vol. 33 (2000).
 14. The change in 1905 consists in the insertion of "Mongolians" after "negroes."
 15. Volpp, *op. cit.*, p. 803.
 16. Clare Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans" *Politics & Society*, vol. 27 (1999), p. 109.
 17. Tanaka, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
 18. Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 149–155.
 19. Tanaka, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
 20. Shimada, *op. cit.*, p. 296.
 21. Rha Kyung, "Korean 'Shashin Hanayome' no Kokusai Ido—Shirarezaru Imin Jyoseitachi no 'Saihyoka' (Transnational Movement of 'Picture Brides': 'Reconsideration' of Untold Stories of Migrant Women)," *Ibid*, pp. 86–112.
 22. Tanaka, *op. cit.*, p. 139.