Re-presenting Japan in Japanese Picture Bride Narratives

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摘要

本篇論文旨在研究二十世紀初期的日本照片新娘。雖然自一九七零年代起，歷史學家及社會學家就開始關注照片新娘的歷史，而日本照片新娘的生命經驗亦呈現於許多日裔美國文學作品中，但是，照片新娘和其日本祖國間的關係卻一直未得到學界應有的重視。本論文透過探討琳達·奧哈瑪（Linda Ohama）的家庭紀錄片《祖母的花園》（Obaachan's Garden）以及真壁知子（Tomoko Makabe）的口述歷史著作《照片新娘：加拿大的日本女性》（Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada），意圖呈現日本照片新娘在日本及日美跨太平洋歷史進程中的重要性。

本論文分為四章。第一章為緒論，簡述照片新娘歷史並闡明在當前照片新娘研究中，照片新娘的日本經驗和日本回憶研究之不足。第二章探討紀錄片《祖母的花園》中照片新娘及其後裔透過不同方式再/建構他們和日本的聯繫。我特別關注此紀錄片中所呈現的日本意象如何展示個人經驗、家庭記憶、族裔歷史以及日本國家歷史間相互交織的關係。第三章則閱讀《照片新娘：加拿大的日本女性》中五位照片新娘的口述歷史。我論述真壁知子如何從一個新移民的角度強調照片新娘在日本史以及日本加拿大移民史中的重要性，並主張日本照片新娘跨國經驗可以幫助我們了解二十世紀初期的日本文化以及區域發展。第四章總結此論文，並思考相關議題未來研究的方向。

關鍵字：日本照片新娘、「一世」女性、《祖母的花園》、《照片新娘：加拿大的日本女性》、日本、日本北美研究
Abstract

This thesis conducts a study of Japanese picture brides in the early twentieth century. Although picture bride history has attracted the attention of historians and sociologists since the 1970s, and their life stories are commonly represented in many Japanese North American literary works, picture brides’ affiliations with their country of origin have not yet been fully investigated. In this thesis, through examining Linda Ohama’s family documentary *Obaachan’s Garden* and Tomoko Makabe’s oral historical project *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada*, I demonstrate Japanese picture brides’ importance in making the cross-Pacific history of both Japan and Japanese North America.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter One serves as an introduction, in which I provide an overview of the picture bride history and discuss the inadequate attention given to picture brides’ Japanese experiences and memories in existing scholarship. Chapter Two centers on the different ways picture brides and their offspring re/connect to Japan in *Obaachan’s Garden*. Attention is given to how the images of Japan presented in the family documentary display the intertwined connections between personal, family, ethnic as well as Japan’s national histories. Chapter Three studies five picture brides’ oral testimonies recorded in *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada*. I examine how Makabe, from a Shin-Issei’s perspective, emphasizes Japanese picture brides’ significance in both Japanese and Japanese Canadian history. I also point out that picture brides’ transnational experiences could enrich our understanding of the culture and regional developments of Japan in the turn of the twentieth century. Chapter Five concludes this thesis with thoughts for future research.

Key words: Japanese picture brides, Issei women, *Obaachan’s Garden, Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada*, Japan, Japanese North American Studies
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Chapter One

Introduction

Modeled upon Japanese tradition of arranged marriage, picture bride marriage (*shashin kekkon*) was a practice commonly adopted by Japanese immigrants in North America in the early twentieth century. Interceded by a “go-between,” normally a relative or acquaintance of the immigrant man, the marriage between the immigrant bachelor and his prospective bride was arranged by the heads of the two households after the couple exchanged their photographs and background information. Fostered by the Gentlemen’s Agreement in the United States and the Hayashi-Lemieux Gentlemen’s Agreement in Canada, both of which limited the immigration of Japanese laborers yet allowed Japanese women to immigrate as wives of residents, the picture bride measure was frequently implemented after 1908.\(^1\) Up until the U.S. and Canadian governments prohibited the entry of all Japanese in 1924 and 1928 respectively, many Japanese women as picture brides immigrated to North America, particularly to Hawaii, California, and British Columbia. Between 1908 and 1924, the so-called *Yobiyose Jidai* (period of summoning families), over 10,000 picture brides arrived in the United States (Tanaka 116), and 6,240 picture brides entered Canada (Ayukawa, “Good Wives” 108). Leading to a considerable increase in the number of the Nisei and rendering Japanese immigrant men from sojourners to permanent residents, the arrival of picture brides set up a milestone in Japanese North American history.

The first wave of large-scale Japanese immigration to North America occurred in the late nineteenth century. The Meiji Restoration in 1868 brought about dramatic socio-economic changes to Japan through urbanization and industrialization, which resulted in social disruption and agricultural decline. Within this context, many farmers found it difficult to

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\(^1\) In the early twentieth century, due to the Japanese colonization during 1905-1945, many Korean women also immigrated to the United States through the picture bride practice. Yet, this thesis will focus on the studies of Japanese picture brides.
survive in Japan and chose to immigrate to North America as *dekasegi rodo* (temporary migrant laborers). The early Japanese immigrants were mostly men, particularly young bachelors. These immigrants initially identified themselves as sojourners, aiming to earn income in foreign lands and eventually return to Japan. Nevertheless, in most cases, the low wages and arduous labor shattered Japanese immigrants’ dream of going back to Japan with financial success. Furthermore, leading hard and lonely lives in a predominantly male society triggered many men to squander their earnings on gambling, drinking and prostitution. Attempting to “reform the demoralized immigrant Japanese society,” the leaders of the Japanese immigrant community believed that summoning wives from Japan was one viable solution to the problems of gambling, drinking and prostitution (Tanaka 115). Besides, Japanese immigrant community also faced the challenges of racial discrimination. In the early twentieth century, growing hostility to increasing Japanese immigration led to anti-Japanese movements. For example, in 1906, San Francisco School Board passed a regulation which required Japanese pupils to attend racially segregated schools. Also, a serious anti-Oriental riot in Vancouver broke out in 1907. In response to public hostility towards Japanese immigrants, the U.S. government signed with the Japanese government in 1907 a Gentlemen’s Agreement, which was followed by the 1908 Hayashi-Lemieux Gentlemen’s Agreement signed between Japan and Canada. Both agreements limited the number of Japanese laborers but allowed the entry for wives and families of those already inhabiting North America. Though blocking the immigration of new Japanese laborers, the two aforementioned agreements fostered Japanese family unification and accelerated the immigration of Japanese women. In the early twentieth century, the moral reformation of Japanese immigrant society and the enforcement of immigration laws in both the United States and Canada entailed the transition of Japanese immigration from the *dekasegi rodo* (temporary migrant laborers) period to the *Yobiyose Jidai* (period of summoning families).
Between 1908 and 1924, the Yobiyose Jidai, there was a huge influx of Japanese female immigrants to North America. Among them, only some were the wives who had been left behind in Japan by formerly domiciled immigrants; the majority were picture brides. Under the anti-miscegenation laws, which prohibited interracial marriages between Japanese and Caucasians, Japanese bachelors sought wives in two ways. First, single men went back to Japan to seek mates and then took their wives to North America. Yet, the trip back to Japan involved a considerable cost in time and money that few bachelors could afford. Additionally, some immigrants were at the risk of being conscripted by the Japanese government if returning to Japan. Therefore, the majority of Japanese bachelors resorted to the second way—the picture bride practice. Instead of returning to Japan, the immigrants were assisted by a go-between in exchanging photos and background information with their prospective spouses. Even though the wedding ceremonies in Japan were usually carried out in the absence of grooms, picture bride marriage was still legally recognized by Japanese government as long as the name of the bride entered the koseki (family register) of the husband. Six months after the marriage registration, the picture bride could apply for a passport to North America to live with the husband whom she had never met. The picture bride system was practical and efficient and hence was commonly adopted by the bachelors.

Throughout the Yobiyose Jidai, 14,276 Japanese picture brides immigrated to Hawaii (Chai, “Picture Brides: Feminist Analysis” 125), 6,321 to the U.S. mainland (Ichioka 343), and 6,240 to Canada (Ayukawa, “Good Wives” 108).

The massive arrival of picture brides resulted in significant demographic changes in the Japanese communities in North America. First, it adjusted the sex ratio. According to the U.S. census, the sex ratio of Japanese American community in 1900 was every female for twenty-five males, yet by 1920 it became one for two males (Glenn 30-31). A similar situation prevailed in Canada and in Hawaii. Additionally, picture brides contributed to an
enormous increase in the number of the Nisei, the North American-born children of the immigrants. Between 1900 and 1930, the number of the Nisei children grew from 269 to 68,357 in the United States (Ichioka 354-55). By 1941, over 60 percent of all 23,149 Japanese Canadians were native born (Oiwa, “A Stone Voice” 122). Yuji Ichioka indicates that “The growth of Nisei children accelerated the transformation of the Japanese from sojourners to permanent settlers as the parent generation ultimately identified its own future with that of its children in America” (355). In this sense, the arrival of picture brides brought about a significant transition of Japanese immigrant community. Japanese North Americans changed their goal from returning back to Japan with wealth to settling in North America.

Although the arrival of picture brides stabilized the immigrant society, the picture bride practice existed for only a short period of time in history. The influx of Japanese female immigrants and the dramatic increase of the Nisei population aroused growing concerns and controversy from Caucasian communities. First, viewed as an extended form of traditional Japanese arranged marriage, the picture bride measure was attacked as “proof of the savagery and primitive nature of Asian marriage customs” because the couples were not married for romantic love (Tanaka 128). Also, anti-Japanese protesters proclaimed that Japanese female laborers exploited a loophole of the Gentlemen’s Agreement through the picture bride practice. According to Ichioka, anti-Japanese agitators asserted that “Female laborers disguised as brides . . . entered the United States, thereby deviously undermining the intent of the agreement” (355). Furthermore, anti-Japanese agitators declaimed that the exponential growth of the Nisei, which resulted from the arrival of picture brides, jeopardized the interest of Caucasian citizens. For example, not permitted to purchase land because of their ineligibility to citizenship, the Issei Japanese immigrants bought land under the name of their children, the citizens of the United States. To reduce the growing anti-Japanese sentiment in Americas, Japanese government ceased issuing picture bride passports in December 1919.
After 1920, Japanese bachelors could only return to Japan, marry, and bring back their wives with them. Four years later, even the last option became unavailable because of the enactment of a new Immigrant Act, which completely excluded immigrants from Asia. In 1928, the government of Canada also instituted a revised Hayashi-Lemieux Gentlemen’s Agreement. As a part of this revision, the picture bride practice was terminated in Canada. ²

Despite the fact that most Issei women are picture brides and they play crucial roles in the growth of Japanese North American community, it was not until the late 1970s that historians and sociologists initiated the studies of picture brides. Yuji Ichioka, a pioneering historian in picture bride studies, challenges the scholarship of his time, which “[has] seldom bothered to study women, especially working-class immigrant women” (345). Ichioka has provided details of picture bride marriage in his article “Amerika Nadeshiko: Japanese Immigrant Women in the United States, 1900-1924,” in which he underlines how picture brides’ presence altered the characteristic of Japanese immigrant society, transforming immigrants from sojourners into permanent residents. Other scholars endeavor to reconstruct the life stories of picture brides in both historical and cultural contexts. For instance, after immigrating to Canada, Tomoko Makabe, a Japan-born sociologist, befriended several Issei women and developed empathy for them. She wrote a biographical book, Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada, which thoroughly recorded five picture brides’ experiences. In addition, Alice Yun Chai has conducted a slide-tape project that includes twenty interviews of picture brides. In her later article “Picture Brides: Feminist Analysis of Life Histories of Hawai’i’s Early Immigrant Women from Japan, Okinawa, and Korea,” Chai further argues that picture brides confronted racial and ethnic oppressions with the help from other immigrant women, religious faith, and the memories of their Japanese female forebears.

² In 1923, the Canada government amended the 1908 Hayashi-Lemieux agreement, reducing the number of male Japanese immigrants from 400 male immigrants per year to a maximum of 150 annually. In 1928, the Gentlemen’s Agreement was amended further to include women and children in the count of 150 and to terminate the picture bride practice (Adachi 137-38).
As picture brides’ life stories attract the attention of historians and sociologists, novelists and filmmakers since the late 1980s have also viewed the experience of Japanese picture brides as a source of inspiration. Works with explicit picture bride theme include: Yoshiko Uchida’s *Picture Bride* (1987), Milton Murayama’s *Five Years on a Rock* (1994), Yoji Yamaguchi’s *Face of a Stranger* (1995), and Julie Otsuka’s *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011). These four novels reconstruct the lives of picture brides. Among visual works, Kayo Hatta directed her feature film *Picture Bride* in 1995 and Linda Ohama produced her family documentary *Obaachan’s Garden* in 2001. As the mothers of the majority of the Nisei, picture brides also commonly appear—albeit implicitly—in texts dealing with the Nisei or even Sansei’s life.³

Readings of picture bride narratives have been heavily influenced by the Asian American literary movement, which emerged in the wake of the American civil rights and ethnic movements in the late 1960s. One of the most important ideologies presented by the Asian American movement is “claiming America.” Defined by Sau-ling C. Wong, “claiming America” is a strategy to “[establish] the Asian American presence in the context of the United States’ national cultural legacy and contemporary cultural production” (16). Attempting to ensure Asian Americans’ American identity, critics at the time of the movement argued that Asian American narratives had been left out of dominant historical and cultural formation of the United States. The subsequent propagation of Asian American literary works in the 1970s and 1980s that center on immigrants and their settlements in Americas could be understood as a response to this cultural movement. Because Japanese immigrants experienced the trauma of internment during World War II and thereby kept silent about their

³ For example, Ito Sawa in Milton Murayama’s novel *All I Asking for Is My Body*, Hatsue in Wakako Yamauchi’s “Songs of My Mother Taught Me,” Tome Hayashi in Hisaye Yamamoto’s “Seventeen Syllables,” and Ruth’s grandmother in Ruth Ozeki’s autobiographical film *Halving the Bones* are all picture brides.
immigrant history in North America, to resurrect the existence of Japanese immigrants in both historical record and cultural memory appears a rather difficult task. In her “From Japan, to Meet a New Husband,” Sue Ferguson indicates that even though the Japanese internment history “has gained a foothold in the country’s consciousness—in large part due to the official apology then-Prime Minister Brian Mulroney issued in 1988,” Japanese immigrants’ stories are still “less familiar” (52). As a result, she underlines the significance of Obaachan’s Garden for it narrates “the story of how many of those wartime internees arrived on Canada’s shores” (52). Renee H. Shea reviews The Buddha in the Attic from a similar perspective. Titling her article “The Urgency of Knowing,” Shea appreciates Otsuka’s portrayal of picture brides’ shared experiences in, as described by Otsuka’s own words, “the invisible world.” Shea particularly focuses on the internment episode of The Buddha in the Attic, which from white townspeople’s point of view depicts the sudden disappearance of Japanese Americans after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and indicates that “Otsuka offers . . . a reminder of where prejudice and fear can lead. She won’t let us forget this chapter in the history books, this episode of America’s polyglot culture, this Buddha in the attic.” Taking Obaachan’s Garden as an example, Rocío G. Davis also states that through uncovering picture bride stories in a family documentary, Linda Ohama, like other Canadian Japanese filmmakers, attempts to “recover and recreate the past, and to claim for their forebears and, by extension, for themselves, a place in Canada’s historical and cultural narrative” (“Locating Family” 3). In this sense, Japanese North Americans’ anxiety about how to claim a place for their community in either Canadian or the U.S. national culture is commonly recognized in picture bride literary studies. In her “Lost in the Passage: (Japanese American) Women in Julie Otsuka’s The Buddha in the Attic,” JaeEun Yoo takes a step further to interpret picture bride narratives, drawing an analogy between Japanese Americans and other minority community in the United States. Like Shea, Yoo also focuses on the last chapter “Disappearance” of The
*Buddha in the Attic* and illustrates a parallel between the anti-Japanese sentiment after the attack on Pearl Harbor and the collective frenzy of rage towards Arab and Muslim Americans after 9/11. According to Yoo, picture bride narratives, which record the traumatic collective experiences of Japanese American community, reflect a repetitive pattern in American history that the rights and liberties of a specific minority have been sacrificed under the excuse of national security. The aforementioned “claiming America” readings appreciate the significance of picture bride narratives as the narratives give voice to Japanese North American community and even to other minority groups. However, while critical attention is mainly paid to the experiences that enable these Issei women as well as the whole Japanese North American community to demonstrate their “indigenization,” namely their sociohistorical presence in the North American memory and history, so as to assert their North American identity, picture brides’ unique life experiences, such as their distinctive marriage measure, their specific immigrating background and so forth, tend to be neglected.

Apart from the goal of “claiming America,” many studies of picture bride narratives employ feminist perspectives. While scholars’ “claiming America” concentrates on the issues of racism and Japanese Americans’ civil rights, critics with feminist perspectives are more interested in scrutinizing picture brides’ female subjectivity and agency by analyzing these immigrant women’s negotiation with racialization in the host society as well as the Japanese patriarchal oppression. In his “Under the Burden of Yellow Peril: Race, Class, and Gender in Yoshiko Uchida’s *Picture Bride*,” Montye P. Fuse states that picture brides’ participation in the marriage arrangement demonstrates certain forms of agency. That is, despite the fact that picture bride marriage was usually arranged by the heads of the two households involved, most picture brides acknowledged that immigrating to America was a better option than living in Japan, and hence accepted the arrangement. Yet, he further argues that picture brides’ agency is immediately usurped after their immigration. Taking Hana, the protagonist of
Uchida’s *Picture Bride* as an example, Fuse points out that “Hana’s gender roles . . . as wife, mother, and homemaker are determined by the circumstances of the arranged marriage” (231). Although Hana found her future husband much older than the photographic image and realized that the material comforts of a new life were only illusions, Hana had no choice but to stay with her husband in the United States. As Hana was taught by another picture bride that Japanese wives must sacrifice their happiness for that of their husbands’, the traditional Japanese gender role constantly confined Hana. Fuse claims that Hana in fact has tried to challenge this determined gender role as she falls in love with her husband’s friend, Kiyoshi san. Describing Hana’s affection for Kiyoshi san as “a final attempt to subvert the role of a good wife,” Fuse declares Hana’s failure in terms of her resistance to Kiyoshi san’s sexual advance and her guilty sense toward her husband (232). Su-lin Yu’s interpretation of Uchida’s *Picture Bride* is similar to Fuse’s argument. According to Yu, because Japanese females under the Gentlemen’s Agreement had no other options to immigrate to North America except being a bride of an immigrant, the picture bride practice in this way strengthens the heterosexual marriage and patriarchal authority. Like Fuse, Yu also analyzes Hana’s extramarital affair with Kiyoshi san. Centering on how picture brides’ bodies are constrained within an economy of racial and gender difference, Yu argues that Hana’s body is a site displaying the tension between her desire and responsibility. Although depicted as a sexual subject, Hana eventually represses her own sexual desire and rejects Kiyoshi san’s advance so as to comply with the Japanese gender norms—being a faithful wife. Both Fuse and Yu state that picture brides assert their agency and subjectivity as they agree/choose to immigrate to America or as they get involved in an extramarital affair. Yet, both of them also reveal how the internalized gender expectations in Japanese patriarchal culture continually haunt picture brides’ life after their immigration.

Some scholars from feminist perspectives endeavor to challenge picture brides’ passive
stereotypes through reconsidering these Issei women’s relationship with Japanese traditional gender norms. Esther Mikyoung Ghymn claims that “Hana in Yoshiko Uchida’s Picture Bride displays . . . [an] appealing form of strength” (84). Instead of interpreting Hana’s retreat from the extramarital affair with Yamakaaaa as Hana’s surrender to Japanese gender expectations, Ghymn argues that Hana’s retreat is in fact a demonstration of “the emotional strength of a picture bride” (89). To maintain her image as an upright picture bride, even though Hana loves Yamakaaaa intensely, she rejects his sexual advance and chooses to “[resist] temptation” (Ghymn 91). In this sense, fulfilling Japanese gender expectations could be regarded as a way for picture brides to demonstrate their willpower. Davis in her “Itineraries of Submission: Picture Brides in Recent Japanese American Narratives” complements Ghymn’s argument with more literary examples. According to Davis, picture brides are stereotypically described as “passive, submissive, quiet, gentle and traditional,” yet these Issei women should not be considered victims (38). Analyzing three novels with picture bride theme, Davis argues that picture brides’ submission is not negative but positive because “the Issei women transform required abnegation and self-giving into an instrument of self-affirmation and personal growth” (37). Davis also takes Hana’s retreat from the extramarital affair as an example:

. . . Hana’s decision to remain faithful to her husband is a spiritual victory because it is one she makes freely, setting the course for her life. Her triumph lies in her strength to withstand the temptations that will deter her from the choices she has made. She remains decided and strong not only to endure, but to reap the winnings of the life she has chosen. Her determination to help and sustain her husband will bring her peace. (“Itineraries of Submission” 40)

According to Davis, Hana proves that she is capable of taking her destiny in her hands as she chooses to immigrate, knows her role as a picture bride, and persists in fulfilling that role. Through redefining the seemingly submissive image of picture brides, Davis claims that
picture brides are actually active participants in performing Japanese gender roles.

Great strides have been made in picture bride studies, but some remain to be done. It is notable that scholars in picture bride studies mostly analyze literary works with either an emphasis on the picture brides’ American belonging or a focus on their gender subjectivity. Also, much attention has been given to picture brides’ predicaments during the internment or picture brides’ extramarital affairs. At the same time, picture brides’ connection to Japan, or more generally their stories on the side of Japan, has been neglected. Shih-wen Liao in her article “Picture Brides: Immigration Process and Self-Identity of Premodern Japanese American Women” expresses concerns about the limitations of existing studies of picture brides. Liao indicates that what is lacking in picture bride studies are accounts of picture brides’ “Asian experiences” (66). She particularly includes rich resources in Japanese language, investigating how picture brides’ experiences in Japan continuously affect their lives in North America. For example, she examines the push factors in Japan in the early twentieth century that motivated picture brides to immigrate. Also, she provides explicit information about the education of “good wife, wise mother” in the Meiji period, which strengthened picture brides’ persistence in overcoming the difficulties in the United States.

While Liao’s argument about picture brides’ Asian experiences highlights the importance of picture brides’ Japanese past, Eva Rueschmann offers a different way to imagine the connection between picture brides and Japan. In the article “Mediating Worlds/Migrating Identities,” Rueschmann analyzes Hatta’s Picture Bride, arguing that the scene in which Riyo encountered her Japanese female friend Kana’s ghost at the beach presents an intimate tie between the picture bride and her motherland:

The beach is a liminal space of the imagination, a symbolic meeting place of death and rebirth, leavetaking and homecoming, dream and reality, and ultimately the

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4 Liao’s article misreads Chu-wen Chiu’s Gender and Migration: Asian Brides in Japan and Taiwan, and mistakenly cites Chiu’s words as the words of Lisa Lowe, see Liao 82. Yet this article is still informative as it includes rich resources in Japanese language that are rarely provided or discussed in other scholars’ criticism.
space that connects Hawaii and Japan. Here Kana plays the complex role of mediator between Japanese and Hawaiian culture, a haunting presence through which Riyo may negotiate a new cultural identity in Hawaii while remaining connected to her Japanese heritage. (185)

Rueschmann exemplifies the indivisible relationship between picture brides and their country of origin. Moreover, picture brides’ relationship with Japan is not unitary and unchanging. After picture brides immigrated to North America, their experiences in the new world continually reconstructed their relationship with Japan.

Indeed, the intricate relationship between picture brides and Japan is, implicitly or explicitly, represented in several picture bride narratives. For example, in The Buddha in the Attic, Otsuka presents picture brides’ Japanese connections through her description of the luggage picture brides brought on their way to the U.S. from a first-person plural perspective, Otsuka lists what picture brides considered as “all the things we [picture brides] would need for our new lives” (9). The long list of picture brides’ luggage suggests these Issei women’s limited imagination about their new lives in the United States as picture brides mostly envisioned their future based on their Japanese customs, religions, and memories. The things in their luggage could be classified into several categories. The first group includes Japanese artifacts in practical applications such as kimonos for different occasions and the stationery for writing letters home. Objects in the second group are associated with their religion such as “tiny brass Buddhas” and “ivory statues of the fox god” (Otsuka 9). While the first-person plural narrator claimed that all these were what they “needed” for their “new” lives, a lot of them are mementos of their Japanese past; among them the most obvious are “dolls we had slept with since we were five,” “smooth black stones from the river that ran behind our houses,” “a lock of hair from a boy we had once touched, and loved, and promised to write, even though we knew we never would,” and “silver mirrors given to us by our mothers,
whose last words still range in our ears” (Otsuka 9-10). Perhaps the only one thing connected picture brides to the United States in their luggage is the “English phrase book,” which may practically aid picture brides to communicate with Caucasians in the host society. Even this item bears strong witness to the picture brides’ Japanese origin. In fact, only those who newly immigrate from Japan would rely on an “English phrase book” to survive in North America.

As Otsuka’s description of picture brides’ luggage presents the importance of picture brides’ Japanese past on the journey to a foreign world, other narratives reveal that many picture brides immigrated in hopes of breaking away from their ignoble Japanese past such as their failed love relationships in Japan. Suffering from predicaments such as the marital imperative or premarital pregnancy, many picture brides believed that becoming picture brides introduced a way out of their uncomfortable situations in Japan. For example in Uchida’s *Picture Bride*, Hana’s age of twenty-one made finding a proper husband a matter of urgency. Hana revealed that “this lonely man in America was her means of escaping both the village and the encirclement of her family” (Uchida 4). In *Obaachan’s Garden*, after her failed marriage in Japan, Asayo Murakami also chose to immigrate to Canada as a picture bride. From this viewpoint, Japan seems to be a place where many picture brides wanted to escape from. Yet, their attitudes towards their Japanese past usually changed as they lived in Americas. In *Picture Bride*, Hana kept her regret and doubt about immigration in mind. At the night before her wedding day, she thought that “[p]erhaps she [Hana] had made a terrible mistake in coming to America. In her anxiety to escape the drabness of Oka Village, perhaps she had leaped too far and severed too many roots. Now like a tree transported beyond its native soil . . .” (Uchida 26). Similarly, in *Obaachan’s Garden*, although it seemed that Murakami completely abandoned her Japanese past after her immigration to Canada as she had remained silent about her Japanese past over the past seventy years, she expressed her strong desire of going back to Japan in the documentary. Japan in this sense was no longer a
place from which Hana and Murakami desired to escape, but the homeland they dreamed to go back to. In this thesis, I am particularly interested in the linkage between picture brides and their country of origin: How and why did picture brides change their attitudes towards their Japanese past? How did picture brides physically or emotionally re/connect themselves with Japan after their immigration to North America? How did picture brides’ memories and life stories enable us to understand the early twentieth century Japan? To answer these questions, I propose to analyze two picture bride narratives: Ohama’s documentary Obaachan’s Garden and Makabe’s biographical book Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada.

Concentrating on picture brides’ re/connections with Japan, this thesis also responds to the paradigm shifts in Asian American studies since the 1990s. Prior to the 1990s, the theoretical and cultural formulations of Asian American studies were governed by identity politics. Insisting on “claiming America,” cultural nationalists grapple with identity politics with the premise that Americas are Asian Americans’ home. For example, Maxine Hong Kingston asserts to omit the hyphen from “Asian-American”: “we ought to leave out the hyphen in ‘Chinese-American,’ because the hyphen gives the word on either side equal weight, as if linking two nouns. . . . Without the hyphen, ‘Chinese’ is an adjective and ‘American’ a noun; a Chinese American is a type of American” (“Cultural Mis-readings” 60). Explicitly, cultural nationalists contest the notion of bilaterality, which they believe would undermine their efforts to earn recognition in North American society. In contrast to this cultural nationalist posture, some scholars argue that the ancestral homeland can never be ignored in the discussion of Asian Americans’ identity. Teasing out the tensions between Asian Americans’ ethnic heritage and their American identity, critics such as Amy Ling point out Asian Americans’ plight in the “between worlds.” “Whether recent immigrants or
American-born, Chinese in the United States find themselves caught between two worlds. Their facial features proclaim one fact—their Asian ethnicity—but by education, choice, or birth they are American” (Ling 20). Though these two perspectives differ in their attitudes towards Asian Americans’ Asian origins, both coincide on reinforcing the American identity of Asian Americans. However, these Anglo-centric identity politics has been challenged given the impact of globalization, the dramatic geographic and demographic changes of the Asian American population resulting from the Immigration Act of 1965, and the rise of many Asian countries as global economic powers. As more and more Asian Americans, especially the post-1965 immigrants of Asian middle-class backgrounds, maintain their ties with Asia and North America by frequent visits to both places, Asian Americans’ identity formation and their relationship with both sides are needed to be reconfigured. Since the 1990s, critics such as Lisa Lowe, King-kok Cheung, and Shirley Geok-Lin Lim have pinpointed the ideas of “diaspora,” “heterogeneity,” and “cosmopolitan” in Asian American studies. Focusing on the post-1965 Asian Immigration that are impacted by global capitalism and U.S. wars in Asia and the Pacific, critics take overseas students, Asian middle-class intellectuals, refugees and other new subgroups of Asian Americans such as people of Filipino or Thai descent as examples to argue that it is no longer adequate to comprehend Asian Americans within the scope of North American minority discourses. In alliance with this transnational turn of Asian American theories and criticisms, writers of diverse national origins produce works such as The Book of Salt (2003) and The Namesake (2003), in which the protagonists are presented more like cosmopolitans or world citizens rather than the narrowly defined Asian Americans. Remarkably, while critical attention has been shifted from cultural nationalism and American nativity to transnational connections, the transnational dimensions of picture brides’ experiences have not yet been fully investigated.

In fact, despite the emergence of many literary and scholarly works concerning the
post-1965 immigrants, the narratives of picture brides as well as those of other early Asian American immigrants have not been read adequately from transnational or diasporic perspectives. Part of the reason may be the split between the “America-identified” Asian American communities and the Asia-born and bi-or multi-lingual immigrants. As Cheung suggests, “if American-born Asians discriminate against so-called FOBs (Fresh-off-the-Boats), some new immigrants from professional classes also tend to look down on the less privileged old-timers and their mono-lingual children and to distance themselves from community involvement generally” (“Re-viewing” 9). Clearly, the Asian American communities who have endeavored to increase their visibility in North American historical and cultural mainstream since the 1960s seldom see their interest as being in common with that of the post-1965 immigrants who maintain dual or multiple national/ethnic affiliations across the Pacific. Several scholars such as Cheung and Wong express their concerns about the push to adopt a transnational or diasporic perspective in reading Asian American literature. They indicate that transnational or diasporic readings may encourage denationalization that is both inimical to Asian Americans’ panethnic solidarity and to Asian Americans’ political gains from the American civil rights movement. Pre-1965 immigrants’ experiences, due to the language barriers of the first-generation, were usually retold by America-born and -raised second generation and manipulated to locate Asian Americans’ roots in North America. In this case, early immigrants’ ties with their Asian origins are frequently neglected, if not erased. According to Wong, “it seems anything that threatens to undermine the demonstration of the ‘indigenization’ (the ‘becoming American’) of Asian Americans must be scrupulously avoided” (3-4). Cheung also indicates that “this desire to be recognized as American has sometimes been achieved at the expense of Asian affiliation. The obsessive desire to claim America has induced a certain cultural amnesia regarding the country of ancestral origin” (“Re-viewing” 6). In many literary reviews, early immigrants’ connections with their
countries of origin are presented not only as past, but also as absent. As described by the narrator’s father in Kingston’s *China Men*, “No stories. No past. No China”—immigrants’ Asian experiences are shrouded so as to “give [Asian Americans] a chance at being real Americans” (14). Moreover, under the force of assimilation discourses, early immigrants’ Asian heritage is often represented as the Old World traditions that should be rejected as Asian Americans “progress” to adapt to the Western modernity. In this sense, the complexities of early immigrants’ transnational experiences tend to be reduced to the binary opposition between the underdeveloped Asia and the civilized North America.

In view of the inadequate attention given to the pre-1965 immigrants’ Asian experience, I propose in this thesis to reconfigure early immigrants’ Asian experiences from a transnational perspective. Shirley Geok-Lin Lim is one of the pioneers who underlines the transnational status and diaspora identity of the pre-1965 immigrants. Through analyzing non-English texts such as the poems in *Songs of Gold Mountain* (1987) and *Island* (1991) written by early immigrants, Lim problematizes the representations and interpretations of immigrants’ Asian connections in the literature and criticism by second-generation Asian Americans. Providing examples from the poems found on the walls of the Angel Island Immigration Station, Lim illustrates the diasporic features in these non-English texts as the detainees call themselves “a member of the Huang clan from Xiancheng,” compare themselves with Ruan Ji,⁵ and express their patriotism towards “our China” (qtd. in Lim 292). As Lim pays attention to the non-English texts written by first-generation Chinese immigrants, I wonder how the diasporic or transnational features of early immigrants’ experiences are presented in other ethnic groups.

In this thesis, I take picture brides’ narratives as examples to explore the intricate relationship between early immigrants and their countries of origin. Even though the two

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⁵ One of the Chinese representative scholars during the period of the Three Kingdoms (A.D. 220-80).
texts I examine are presented in English and none of them are produced single-handedly by picture brides, they draw on first-hand picture bride experiences and involve the cooperation of several Issei women. While concentrating on the transnational dimensions of picture brides’ stories, this thesis would not simply read picture brides as figures of diaspora. Instead, I adopt Wong’s suggestion to intertwine “an indigenizing mode” “with a diasporic or a transnational mode” (17). Attending to picture brides’ linkage to Japan while inhabiting Americas, I argue that picture brides maintain their ties with both Japan and North America, and their transnational experiences should be viewed as significant materials in the making of Japanese North American community’s cross-Pacific history. To be more precise, picture brides’ crossings are not unidirectional though their immigration is commonly simplified to be a physical move from Asia to North America. As will be pointed out in this thesis, picture brides’ crossings bridge Japan and North America; their Asian past and connections with Japan impel Japanese North American community to reconsider and reconstruct their relationship with Japan. In this sense, Japan is not a putative continent of origin, but a perceptible space reconstructed in picture bride narratives.

As I concentrate on picture brides’ re/connections to Japan, this thesis also attend to the recent development of Asian American studies in Asia and rearticulate Franklin Odo’s question: “How closely, if at all, and in what ways should Asian Americans relate to Asia?” (qtd. in Wang, “Editorial Introduction” 165). According to Sau-ling C. Wong, coming alongside the shifts of critical attention to globalization, transnationalism and diaspora in Asian American studies is also “a relaxation of the distinction between what is Asian American and what is ‘Asian,’ and between Asian American studies and Asian studies” (5). Elaine H. Kim in her foreword to Shirley Lim and Amy Lin’s Reading the Literatures of Asian America also indicates that “[t]he lines between Asian and Asian American, so important to identity formation in earlier times, are increasingly being blurred” (xii).
However, despite the fact that the permeability between “Asian” and “Asian American” has increased since the 1990s, Chih-Ming Wang points out the still rigid America-centered Asian American imagination in his article “Editorial Introduction: Between Nations and Across the Ocean.” According to Wang, from the debates between denationalization and diaspora to the unceasing theoretical discussions on Asian Americans’ subjectivity, “Asia remains a constitutive outside of the ever-expanding, never conclusive Asian America. In these discussions, whether theoretical or ethnographical, Asia often exists as a singular reference point rather than as complex and concrete materiality” (166). To further illustrate his points, Wang indicates the significance of adopting inter-Asia or transpacific perspectives in Asian American studies and claims Asia’s shifting position from the receiver to the producer of knowledge. While scholars, mostly based on recent Asian immigration, tend to reorient and reconfigure Asian American studies and regard Asia as a geohistorical nexus and interactive plurality in terms of transnational capitalism, Cold War complicities, and the military intervention of the United States in Asia and in the Pacific, I feel more interested in how the studies of Asian immigrants in the early twentieth century may enrich our understanding of Asia. Through analyzing picture brides’ narratives and drawing critical attention to the Japan before and under the process of modernization and globalization in the nineteenth and twentieth century, I attempt to explore how picture brides’ trans-Pacific trajectories may help constitute an imagination of Asia: How was the early twentieth century Japan diversely represented in these Issei women’s memory? How did picture brides, in spite of the geographical distance, make sense of the rapid transformation of their motherland after their immigration? Also, as “Asian Americans are regarded by Asians as their ‘surrogates’ who are lucky enough to have lived in America” (Wang, “Editorial Introduction” 167), how did these female immigrants re/consider their Asian compatriots and their families left in Japan?

Attempting to investigate picture brides’ linkage with Japan so as to challenge the
ossified imagination of early immigrants’ relationship with Asia, I divide this thesis into four chapters. After this introductory chapter, through analyzing Obaachan’s Garden, I explore in Chapter Two the generational differences within Japanese North Americans from the ways in which the Issei and their descendants re/built their relationships with Japan.

Obaachan’s Garden is a family documentary, directed by the Asian Canadian filmmaker Linda Ohama. At first, Ohama planned to make a family film as a way to celebrate the 100-year-old birthday of her grandmother Asayo Murakami. However, after Ohama started her project, she realized that her grandmother’s past was more complex than she had imagined. Before making Obaachan’s Garden, Asayo’s Canadian family members knew little about Asayo’s past in Japan. All they knew was that Asayo came to Canada in 1924 as a picture bride. Ohama spent five years making this film, telling her grandmother’s stories on screen with interviews, fragments of archival films, and dramatic reenactments. To study the significance of Japan to Japanese Canadians of different generations, I investigate the scattered images of Japan in the film. I argue that Asayo’s life stories revealed and retold in the documentary demonstrate her close relationship with Japan over her seventy years in Canada as well as provide us glimpses of Japan’s national history. Moreover, when Asayo’s Canadian family endeavored to reconstruct Asayo’s hidden Japanese past, they also built their relationship with their ancestral country from the ground up and realized that Japanese Canadian history is not a story beginning at the time when the Issei immigrated and settled in Canada, but started much earlier in Japan.

In Chapter Three, I study Makabe’s book Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada, initially published in Japan. In addition to a preface, an introduction to Meiji women and an afterword, the book is divided into five chapters, transcribing five picture brides’ oral histories. Besides the picture brides’ free-flowing narration of their life, detailed geohistorical

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features of the picture brides’ prefectural origins are provided in each chapter before the picture bride speaks out for herself. My analysis begins by focusing on how Makabe, as a Shin Issei, records picture brides’ life stories and connects herself to the picture bride history in an attempt to establish her own position in Japanese Canadian community. Moreover, through examining the five Issei women’s oral testimonies together with Makabe’s geohistorical research on their home villages, I argue that Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada successfully demonstrates the intertwined connections between picture bride history, Japanese customs and Japan’s regional developments around the turn of the twentieth century.

Overall, this thesis attempts to offer new visions into the studies of Japanese picture brides. By concentrating on picture brides’ connections with their country of origin, I argue that both Obaachan’s Garden and Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada present picture brides as central figures in the making of Japanese and Japanese Canadian history.
Chapter Two

Between Family Memory and National History:

The Hidden Japanese Past in Linda Ohama’s Obaachan’s Garden

*Picture Bride* (1995) is a feature film that depicts Japanese picture brides’ lives on the sugarcane field in Hawaii. The film was well-received by critics and won the Audience Award for narrative feature film at the 1995 Sundance Film Festival. Kayo Hatta, the film’s cowriter and director, was even named “the protector of the picture bride’s stories” in her interview with Gail S. Tagashira. As this name suggests, one of the selling points of the film is its authenticity in illustrating the picture bride history. According to Joe McDonald, *Picture Bride* was based on Hatta’s extensive historical research, her grandmother’s memories, and the interviews with twenty picture brides (52). Hatta in her interview with David Sterritt also stated that “[a] lot of the incidents [in the film] are based on things that actually happened” as “[the] story is kind of a mixture. We composited the different interviews we did into one character.” However, some scholars still question the validity of the film. Peter X. Feng in “Pioneering Romance: Immigration, Americanization, and Asian Women” argues that instead of being a film which is “historically accurate,” *Picture Bride* in fact “depart[s] from historical fact” (39). Concentrating on the ending of *Picture Bride* when the protagonist Riyo realizes that there is no one back “home” waiting for her and eventually decides to stay in Hawaii after meeting her mentor-like friend, Kana’s ghost, Feng defines *Picture Bride* as one of “the narratives of acculturation and assimilation” (39). He indicates that “to the extent that these movies depart from historical fact, they reveal the discursive construction of proto-Asian American communities, projections of contemporary desires to cast Asian migrants in our own images” (39). He further illustrates that Riyo’s choice to stay in America “reflect[s] contemporary Asian American frustrations with being cast as eternal foreigners.”
American-born Asians counter the perception that we are foreign-born by telling the stories of the first migrants to the United States, both to establish how long we’ve been here and also to claim immigrants as ultra-American” (39). According to Feng, Picture Bride is a production with Asian American’s political intent to “claim America” rather than a faithful representation of picture brides’ lives in North America.

Taking cue from Feng’s indication that the “historical fact” of picture bride experiences is often shrouded by political intention and thus lacking authentic voices from picture bride individuals, I propose in this chapter to examine Obaachan’s Garden, a documentary directed by Linda Ohama to record her grandmother’s personal stories as a picture bride in Canada. When documentary films are supposed to be “derived from and limited to actuality,” I wonder if Obaachan’s Garden lends more weight to the authenticity of picture bride experience in the form of documentary (McLane 3). While Feng criticizes Hatta’s Asian American political intention demonstrated in the ending of Picture Bride since Riyo “decides to devote [her life] to America (to becoming American) rather than to Asia (to being Asian),” I am interested in Ohama’s way of presenting her grandmother’s life stories, which may reinforce or depart from what Feng calls the “becoming American” mentality (39). In an attempt to provide an alternative perspective concerning a picture bride’s intricate relationship with Japan, I particularly focus on the images of Japan demonstrated in Obaachan’s Garden.

Obaachan’s Garden has received lots of awards. Remarkably, though it is a documentary about Ohama’s family, it has earned wide acclaim for its historical and educational significance.7 In Resource Links, J. Patrick Romaine indicates that this film is “recommended for senior high to adult students” as “[i]t is a resource that could support

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7 Obaachan’s Garden has won awards, including Audience Choice Award at the Vancouver International Film Festival, and the Newport Beach International Film Festival, the Silver Medal at the Torino International Film Festival, a Genie nomination for best feature length documentary, five Leo Awards and Richmond City Heritage Award.
Social Studies, Family Studies, Media or English classes.” Viewed as “the last living picture bride in Canada” before she died in 2002, Asayo appeared on the screen as a feisty matriarch and, for some critics, turned into a representative of Japanese picture bride (Iuchi, “Asayo Murakami: The Last Picture Bride”). Gregory Strong asserts that *Obaachan’s Garden* “recreate[s] a life representative of many Japanese women emigrants” (11). Merna Forster’s recently published book, *100 Canadian Heroines: Famous and Forgotten Faces*, also includes Asayo’s life stories and states that “*Obaachan’s Garden* will help ensure that a ‘picture bride’ with incredible determination and endurance is not forgotten” (191). In this sense, Asayo’s personal history seems to stand for a typical experience of picture brides. Yet, it is noticeable that even though *Obaachan’s Garden* consists of Asayo’s experiences both in Japan and Canada, including a family trip to Japan organized by Ohama to explore Asayo’s Japanese past, most scholars still confine their attention to Asayo’s life in Canada after her immigration. For example, Ken Eisner points out that “*Obaachan’s Garden* delves deeply into one Japanese Canadian’s century-old story—involving displacement, atomic annihilation and remarkable rebirth” (34). Additionally, Monika Kin Gagnon in her “Cinematic Imag(in)ings of the Japanese Canadian Internment” bespeaks how Asayo’s garden in the film “plays a central role as refuge,” especially during the wartime (281). Moreover, just like Feng who regards *Picture Bride* as a production of Asian American’s desire to “claim America,” Rocío G. Davis also considers *Obaachan’s Garden* a political creation for Japanese Canadians to claim a place for themselves in Canada’s mainstream historical and cultural narratives since the film blends private stories and public histories, “invit[ing] us to revise uncritical historical and cultural perspectives about ethnic or racialized subjects, introducing them into the nation’s political and social records” (“Locating Family” 2).

Whereas scholars center on Asayo’s experiences in Canada so as to legitimately “place Asian Canadian persons as elements of the portrait of Canada” (Davis, “Locating Family” 3),
Roy Miki in “Global Drift: Thinking the Beyond of Identity Politics” interprets *Obaachan’s Garden* as an example of Japanese Canadian’s floating identity. Given that identity formation is “an always provisional formation” that is “always being interrupted by shifting spaces and times” (153), Miki states:

> What I found so compelling was that Ohama’s film itself had become, through the unexpected disclosure of Asayo’s secret, an effect of a global drift. As Asayo releases her secret, in that very gesture, the identity formation of Japanese Canadians, which had been formed linearly through its negotiations with the Canadian nation-state, was altered by the more malleable and spatially more encompassing signs of “Japan” in their history. We might say that the film performs an opening that releases Japanese Canadians from the need to be constantly vigilant in declaring themselves “Canadian” and not “Japanese.” (154)

Although Miki does not provide further analysis of the Japanese images or stories in the documentary, his succinct criticism indeed opens a new critical perspective: unlike *Picture Bride* that is criticized by Feng as one of “narratives of acculturation and assimilation,” *Obaachan’s Garden* should be viewed as a demonstration of how the Japanese Canadians attempt to rebuild their relationship with their ancestral country.

Miki’s illuminating argument encourages us to reexamine Japanese Canadians’ transnational history, particularly their connections with Japan. Yet, since Miki explicitly indicates that it is “the unexpected disclosure of Asayo’s secret” that propels Ohama’s family to reconfigure their identity formation, I wonder what are the “signs of ‘Japan’” Miki mentioned here. Through an analysis of the images of Japan presented in *Obaachan’s Garden*, I propose to scrutinize Asayo’s as well as her offspring’s connections to Japan so as to question the domestic paradigm in the making of Japanese North American history. As Asayo’s hundred-year life story is inextricably intertwined with the history of Japan, what are
the images of Japan presented in the film? How do these images enable us to understand Asayo’s life and self? Additionally, how does the revelation of Asayo’s Japanese stories serve as a catalyst to foster her Japanese Canadian family members’ relationship with Japan?

*Obaachan’s Garden* opens with a five-minute prologue. The camera moves from a rural area of naked trees to a little girl walking through the field. The little girl is Asayo’s great granddaughter, Caitlin. A series of questions are asked through Caitlin’s voice-over: “How do we learn about things that have happened before us? And what about memories? Are these memories always real? And what about what we dream or wish for? Can they become real one day?” These questions make manifest Japanese Canadians’ curiosity about the past they did not know, a past of which Asayo’s concealed Japanese memories constitute an important part. This interest in the past, moreover, is linked to the granddaughter’s present life and her dreams and wishes. Asayo’s past life as such is connected to Caitlin’s present life. The memories before Caitlin was born become essential for Caitlin’s understanding of herself and her future.

After the prologue shows Caitlin’s arrival in a field of cherry blossoms, the image suddenly turns into black-and-white, taking the audience back to Hiroshima Prefecture in 1923: the young Obaachan wore kimono, sat in a dimly-lit Japanese-style room, and soliloquized her experience of the Great Kanto earthquake in 1923 and her subsequent separations from her first husband and her two daughters, Fumiko and Chieko. Despite the fact that this sequence is a dramatization, the director enhances the validity of the stories by superimposing the old Asayo’s voice-over in Japanese on the appearance of the young Obaachan (played in the documentary by one of Asayo’s granddaughters). Moreover, a huge amount of archival footage about the Great Kanto earthquake, the victims of the earthquake, the Imperial Palace as well as images of two little Japanese girls that embody Asayo’s missing daughters are all inserted in this dramatization. This presentation of Asayo’s stories
in Japan, however, is soon interrupted by the talking head of Asayo, who rejected to provide other information about her Japanese experiences: “That’s enough now. I have nothing else to say. Zero. Zero. Zero.”

Asayo rejected to remember. Yet one should not forget that it was indeed Asayo’s rejection gesture that initially pushed Ohama to make Obaachan’s Garden. At first, Ohama was thinking of celebrating Asayo’s 100th birthday. Her intention was to take this birthday celebration as the highlight—one of the most glorious moments of Asayo’s life—to commemorate Asayo’s successful life in Canada. However, when the five generations of Asayo’s family assembled at Alberta for the birthday party, Asayo was absent from the scene. She refused to attend it. As Ohama stated in the film, “of course everyone is disappointed. But no one understands what she’s feeling.” In order to figure out Asayo’s feelings, Ohama could not but change her filming plan. Initially set to be a family film that would conclude at the extended family’s grand gathering on Asayo’s 100th birthday, Obaachan’s Garden now takes this failed birthday party as a point of departure. Moreover, instead of celebrating Asayo’s successful assimilation to Canada, as Ohama originally planned for her film, Obaachan’s Garden now drives toward a different direction—to explore Asayo’s past, which was previously unknown to her Canadian family members. The birthday party, though being a failure, ironically opened the door to the revelation of Asayo’s hidden past.

Interestingly, despite Asayo’s frequent rejection to reveal her Japanese past, Asayo could still be recognized as a co-producer of Obaachan’s Garden since it was her rejection gesture that motivated Ohama to probe into her concealed Japanese past. In several interviews, Ohama underlined Asayo’s participation in the film’s production: “Every time my grandmother told me something[,] I just knew she was leading us somewhere” (Strong 11); “I think my grandmother wisely manipulated the situation. She knew I was a filmmaker; she knew I wanted to tell her story; and she led me into her story for two-and-a-half years before
she revealed the other half. I was in so far at that point, I couldn’t turn around” (qtd. in Amsden 31). According to Cynthia Amsden, it is at the juncture when Asayo deviously revealed her Japanese past little by little that “the subject became the auteur” (30). Asayo changed the film’s direction, circuitously leading her Canadian family as well as the audience into her intricate connections with Japan. Yet, on the other hand, she was undemonstrative and cowardly when being asked to confront her Japanese past. The bond between her and Japan was never brought to light before the documentary project. At first sight, it seems that she completely abandoned her Japanese past after she came to Canada as she kept all her past in silence over her seventy years in Canada. Ohama claimed at the beginning of the film: “For us, Obaachan has been our Japaneseness. But we’ve never really understood very much about her or the culture. . . . [M]ore of what we know is from what’s not said than what is said, which leaves a lot of things buried in that silence.”

As the scattered pieces of Asayo’s Japanese experiences were revealed and retold in the film, however, the importance of Japan becomes undeniable in one’s understanding of Asayo. Asayo’s stories depicted in the film could be roughly divided into four stages: life in Hiroshima, early immigration life, the evacuation during the Second World War, and the postwar years. In-between these linear constructions of Asayo’s stories, glimpses of Japan’s national history are introduced to indicate the existence of an underside of Asayo’s life and self.

**Life in Hiroshima**

An ingenious irony presented in the beginning of *Obaachan’s Garden* is that even though the violin is a western instrument, playing the violin is a way for Asayo to ease her homesickness. Asayo named the violin her “number one friend.” In a reenactment, she asserted that the violin “made me dream about life back home.” Indeed, Asayo’s violin has a
special significance in representing Japan in the Meiji era (1868~1912). Asayo was born in Onomichi, Hiroshima in 1989. As Ohama pointed out in the documentary, “when she [Asayo] was born, Japan had just emerged from the feudal age, opening its doors to foreigners and western ideas for the first time.” It was a time for Japan to transform quickly from an isolated feudal society to a modern nation. Intensive westernization was carried out in practically all areas, and drastic social, economic, and cultural transformations ensued. One of the transformations is the Meiji government’s systematic introduction of western music from the 1870s. According to Margaret Mehl’s research in “Going Native, Going Global: The Violin in Modern Japan,” the violin became “one of the most widely disseminated (if not the most widely disseminated) Western instruments in Japan” during the Meiji period. Asayo indicated in the film “[o]ne day my mother brought me a violin and eventually, I followed street musicians around the town and learned many popular songs this way.” The popularity and ready availability of the violin during what Mehl describes as the “violin craze (vaiorin ryūkō)” age in the early-twentieth century Japan was clear in vision.

If Asayo’s violin exemplifies Meiji Japan’s westernization in its everyday materiality, Asayo’s childhood education demonstrates one of the measures the Meiji Japan adopted to reform its people’s mentality. Asayo stated that she had “the best lessons” and “studied to be a teacher.” She then provided more details about the Meiji period’s education system: “[b]oys were trained to serve the emperor to make Japan strong, and girls were taught to become good wives, to serve their husbands and produce healthy sons.” Here, what Asayo mentioned is the compulsory education, instituted by the Meiji government from 1872 on, following the model of American and French education system. The education system prescribed new roles for Japanese men and women in preparation for Japan’s development into an imperial power in Asia. In alliance with nationalism and imperialism, both men and women were taught to be loyal subjects of the emperor. Yet, as men were expected to take their knowledge into public
realms so as to help building the nation, women were expected to learn the skills needed for
domestic roles as wives and mothers in the future. Historically, it was the moment when the
Japanese prominent gender expectation of “good wife and wise mother” was initiated.
According to Andrew Gordon, an eminent scholar of modern Japanese history, “in Tokugawa
Japan, women, especially samurai women, had been seen as relatively unteachable and not
much in need of formal education. They were not given any public role of importance” (113).
Yet, during the Meiji period, even though women’s role was still confined to the home,
female education was highlighted. As Gordon points out, “[t]o raise children well in a new
era, the mother had to be literate. She had to know something of the world beyond the home.
If her sons were to serve the state in the military, the home had to play a quasipublic role as
incubator of these soldiers” (113). Regarded as the nurturers of future soldiers, Japanese
women of the Meiji era were expected to be well-educated, and in a certain degree, Japanese
female’s status had been promoted. Asayo’s brief introduction about her childhood offers
clues to how she was cultivated by the sociocultural formation of the Meiji era.

Precisely, Asayo’s immigration in 1924 should also be viewed as a part of the
modernization process of Japan. Alongside the dramatic domestic transformations through
the Meiji Restoration, Japan speedily shifted from a marginalized feudal country to a global
imperial power and gained control over Korea and Taiwan around the turn of the twentieth
century. Being a model modernizer in the non-Western world, Japan altered its relationship
with the world. It became a distinguished participant of the international trade, importing and
exporting both products and people to other countries. Picture brides as such could be
understood as exemplary Japanese figures that joined the global flows of capitalism and
endeavored to make themselves an integral part of the global system during the time of
Japanese modernization.
Early Immigration Life

As suggested in the documentary, Asayo still followed several Japanese customs after immigrating to Canada. For example, Asayo and her family had Japanese-style meals. The family made pickled radishes (takuwan), sticky rice cake (mochi) and the Japanese alcoholic drink (sake). Also, a reenactment portrays that young Obaachan and her husband followed the tradition of Japanese bath, bathing in the wooden tub and scrubbing their backs mutually. Furthermore, Asayo claimed in a talking head that “I liked flowers the best. I picked them and placed them on the altar with my prayers. Flowers for the spirits.” Asayo’s fascination with flowers in Canada was thus closely connected with her Buddhist religion to offer flowers on the altar in honor of Buddha and the spirits of ancestors.

Indeed, Asayo’s immigration did not diminish her affiliation with her homeland; it even strengthened the affiliation. For instance, Asayo kept writing letters home even during the wartime and had traveled back to Japan several times. Besides, the fact that a newcomer was introduced into the Japanese Canadian community in terms of his/her prefectural hometown made Japanese immigrants enter the new world with the label of their origin. Yasu, one of Asayo’s friends in Steveston, described her first impression about Asayo. “I remember that day when I first heard your name. That woman from Onomichi they said. Just like that writer, Fumiko Hayashi.” Not surprisingly, Alice Yun Chai in her “Picture Brides: Feminist Analysis of Life Histories of Hawai’i’s Early Immigrant Women from Japan, Okinawa, and Korea” indicates how the picture brides’ prefectural origin affects their interpersonal relationships in the alien land. According to Chai, “Japanese and Okinawan women identified more closely with other women from the same home villages, cities, or towns for ancestral and religious ties, fellowship, mutual aid, and informal networks” (131). The intimacy between individuals in the Japanese immigrant community is profoundly determined by their Japanese past.

Here, a few words will be added to the celebrity writer from Onomichi Yasu called to
mind when being introduced to Asayo. Fumiko Hayashi was a Japanese female novelist and poet. She won immense popularity for her *The Diary of a Vagabond* (放浪記) in the 1930s, when Asayo had already immigrated to Canada for quite a while. Apparently, even after leaving Japan, immigrants in Canada still followed the news and trends of their homeland. Furthermore, by telling the stories of free spirited women, Hayashi’s works were famous for their strong feminist consciousness. After her immediate success with *The Diary of a Vagabond* in 1930, Hayashi herself traveled overseas, visiting China and France. From 1938 on, she was even sponsored by the Japanese government, sent overseas to both China and Korea as a war correspondent. Hayashi reported positively on Japanese imperial governments’ administration. Read in this light, the comparison between Asayo and Hayashi bears witness to Japanese immigrants’ habitual way of thinking beyond national division. Despite the fact that Asayo had immigrated to Canada while Hayashi remained a Japanese national, Asayo could be like Hayashi because they shared the same Japanese prefectural origin (and maybe also because both were modernized women).

**Wartime Evacuation**

The film’s title, *Obaachan’s Garden*, refers to the rebuilt garden in Steveston, B.C., where Asayo were evicted from during World War II. The hostility towards Japanese reached its climax in Canada during World War II. The uprooting is a collective trauma for all Japanese Canadians. As Ohama indicates in *Obaachan’s Garden*, in February 1942 the government of Canada authorized the removal of all persons of Japanese origin. 21,000 Japanese Canadians, be they Issei or Nisei, Japanese aliens or Canadian citizens, were ordered to leave the “restricted area,” moving 100 miles inland from the West Coast. That

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8 Fumiko Hayashi’s *The Diary of a Vagabond* was first serialized from 1928 to 1930 in the journal, *Nyonin geijutsu* (Women’s Art). And what turned into the prologue of the book was initially published in the journal *Kaizō* (Reconstruction) in 1929. The complete story appeared as a separate volume in 1930 issued by *Kaizōsha* (Reconstruction Press). According to Joan E. Ericson’s *Be a Woman: Hayashi Fumiko and Modern Japanese Women’s Literature*, the book “became an immediate best-seller” (121).
order inaugurated a process through which Japanese Canadians were uprooted from their homes, deprived of their property, confined in the internment camps, and forcibly dispersed across Canada or repatriated back to Japan. As all Japanese Canadians were treated as “enemy aliens,” Japanese immigrants were torn between their Japanese ancestral origin and their Canadian residency.

In *Obaachan’s Garden*, the reenactment of the New Year’s Eve in 1941 vividly demonstrates the complexities of Japanese immigrants’ political orientation. On the scene, though it was a New Year’s Eve celebration, all immigrants were anxious about how the government and the public in Canada would react to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. While young Obaachan and her friends avoided discussing about the war since, as Asayo pointed out in the talking head, “as women, we [Asayo and other female immigrants] learned to put our feelings inside,” their husbands directly expressed their helplessness and anger towards the rampant anti-Japanese sentiment in British Columbia. As one of the men posed a series of questions regarding their favorable outcome of the war, no one could answer easily, until one man suddenly stood up, toasting in honor of the Japanese emperor: “Long live the emperor! To the emperor!” Meanwhile, others followed him to shout “Banzai,” a Japanese term meaning “Long live the king.”

As the sequence of these immigrants’ shouting of “Banzai” dissolves into an archival footage of Japanese soldiers’ feverishly yell of “Banzai,” these immigrants were compared in a way to their patriotic compatriots. According to Eiichiro Azuma in “Helping Japan, Helping Ourselves: The Meaning of Issei Patriotism,” before the end of the 1930s when the tensions between Japan and the Western powers steeply increased, “standard interpretations draw little distinction between the nationalism of those still living in the homeland and that of overseas Japanese” (163). Indeed, even though Japanese immigrants lived overseas, they witnessed, if not experiencing in person, the developments of Japanese nationalism, militarism, and
imperialism. As Azuma indicates, during the rise of Japanese militarism in Manchuria in the early 1930s, many Issei collected and sent money as well as other relief supplies for the Japanese soldiers in China and their families left behind in Japan (164-65).

Although Obaachan’s Garden does not mention this sort of immigrants’ monetary and material support for Japan, it introduces a few glimpses of the Imperial Japan’s rise and fall. As indicated above, the Japanese people of Asayo’s generation experienced the Meiji Restoration, which modernized Japan and turned it into a nation resembling western colonizers. Before their immigration, all immigrants were educated to be faithful subjects of the emperor. Historically, Japanese emperor is the highest authority of the indigenous religion of Japan, Shinto, since he and his family are believed to be the direct descendants of the sun-goddess. During the Meiji era, the emperor’s legal and cultural authority was even elevated. According to Gordon:

From the 1880s through the 1930s, the imperial institution became an all too-powerful unifying force. It served as a touchstone for personal, social, and national identity. It came to link individuals to immediate communities of family, workplace, and neighborhood—and beyond that to the imagined community of nation and empire. (70)

The emperor became the political and cultural anchor of all Japanese, and this emperor-centered nationalism is explicitly presented in Obaachan’s Garden. The documentary includes an archival footage of Emperor Hirohito’s enthronement, in which the jubilant atmosphere prevailed. All men bowed to the emperor, showing their respect and loyalty to him. Ohama’s voice-over suggests Asayo’s great esteem for the emperor. According to Ohama, “in 1926 Hirohito became Japan’s new emperor, she [Asayo] avidly started collecting anything to do with the royal family and her clippings became a big part of the family albums.” Also, believing the emperor to be a living god, when Asayo mentioned her
two missing daughters who she thought were taken to live near the Imperial House, she emphasized that “they are near the Emperor now, so they are fine.” Even after the outbreak of World War II and the evacuation of Asayo’s family to Manitoba, Asayo kept her faith in the Japanese emperor and believed that her two missing daughters were well-protected in Japan.

Like her compatriots, Asayo’s enormous faith in the Japanese emperor was eventually destroyed because of the two atomic bombs that dropped on Hiroshima (August 6) and Nagasaki (August 9) and the ensuing surrender of Japan in 1945. In the documentary, there was a reenactment depicting young Obaachan’s emotional breakdown after hearing the news of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima. She took her violin, cried out her Hiroshima family members’ names, and staggered on a barren field. As the camera frame switches back and forth between scenes of Obaachan’s emotional breakdown in Canada and the fearful images of the victims of atomic bombing, the immigrants’ psychological trauma is presented as parallel to the wartime sufferings of Japanese nationals. Ohama’s voice-over indicates: “For the entire nation, their belief was destroyed. The emperor was no longer a living god, but human. It was unimaginable that god could fail her [Asayo].” Japanese surrender left deep emotional scars for all Japanese, including those already immigrated to Canada. The end of World War II stood for the fall of the emperor-centered Japanese nationalism and the beginning of the demilitarization in Japan.

**Postwar Years**

Even though World War II was over in 1945, it was not until 1949 that all the restrictions were lifted and Japanese Canadians were regranted their freedom to live wherever they chose to in Canada. According to Ohama’s research, as soon as traveling to Japan was allowed, Asayo made several trips back to Japan to find her two daughters. To help the audience envisage the Japan Asayo visited during the postwar years, a vibrant Japanese melody
accompanied the sequence starting from a moving train, then quickly shifting to an image of a woman enjoying the mountain view from a carriage window. The audience as such were invited to see from Asayo’s point of view: images of a street performance by amputated war survivors are succeeded by blast destroyed buildings, a billboard providing information about the coming Floral Festival, high school students in uniforms, and finally the busy and lively streets. This thirty-second-long sequence implicitly suggests the stunning pace of postwar Japan, which underwent a reconstruction from a site of destruction and poverty to a place of prosperity.

Asayo did not get any valid information about her missing daughters during these postwar trips. Yet, even though Asayo finally stopped traveling back to Japan, she kept her connections with it. In 1992, Asayo was introduced to Prince and Princess Takamado during the Japanese Royal family’s visit to Canada. After her absence for her 100th birthday party in 1998, Asayo finally told her Canadian family about the two children she left behind in Japan. This revelation propelled Ohama to change the focus of her original plan of making a documentary for Asayo’s Canadian life to exploring Asayo’s Japanese experiences. Ultimately, Ohama’s documentary not only makes Asayo’s secret tie with Japan known to the public, but also bridges her Japanese past to her Canadian life when the Canadian family members planned her reunion with Chieko, one of the missing daughters, in the rebuilt garden in Canada on her 103rd birthday.

Certainly, Obaachan’s Garden provides a perfect picture of Asayo’s life story and offers glimpses of Japanese national history when revealing her intimate connections with Japan. Yet, what should not be neglected is that this documentary also accounts for Asayo’s Canadian family’s changing relationship with their ancestral country. Due to Asayo’s ambivalent attitude towards her Japanese past, many details of Asayo’s Japanese experiences,
as demonstrated above, were not told by herself, but disclosed through the Canadian family’s investigation and their trip to Japan. In the following, I shift my attention from Asayo to her offspring. I argue that when urging Asayo to retell her Japanese past, Asayo’s Canadian family members are also pushed to foster their relationship with Japan.

Ohama has made efforts to offer a “true” vision of Asayo’s life story. In the director’s diary posed on her official website, “LINDA OHAMA- Award Winning Director & Producer,” she states that “I began to develop Obachan’s Garden to tell the story of 100 years of life, through her [Asayo’s] eyes.” Also, according to Amsden’s “The Power of Memory,” Ohama has claimed that “I tried to be true to my grandmother’s feelings and the way she saw her world through all those years” (31). Ohama also mentions Asayo’s reaction after watching Obachan’s Garden. “She [Asayo] looked at me, motioned around her heart and said: ‘That is my real story’” (qtd. in Louis B. Hobson, “Garden of Love”). Undeniably, Ohama has endeavored to reconstruct her grandmother’s life in Japan. For instance, when she discerned the omissions of Asayo’s memories, she hired a researcher in Japan, and planned a trip to Onomichi to find out the facts of Asayo’s life in Japan. Also, in her director’s dairy, she claims that in order to genuinely present the Japan in different periods, “I put out a ‘wish list’ search via emails, for ‘archival footage from Onomichi as close to my grandmother’s time there as possible.’”

By claiming the “truth” value of Obachan’s Garden, Ohama foregrounds the Canadian family’s intention to “claim Japan” as part of their family history. This intention for the Canadian family members to “relive” Asayo’s Japanese experiences is mostly obviously seen through the fact that in all reenactments in the documentary, young Obaachan is played by Natsuko Ohama, who, like the director, is a granddaughter of Asayo. By reenacting several significant events in Asayo’s life, Natsuko Ohama absorbed Asayo’s memories into her own experiences. On a similar note, the last scene of Obachan’s Garden also shows the Canadian
family’s attempt to reclaim their cultural heritage. In the dramatization, young Obaachan and Caitlin are shown together with the former happily teaching Caitlin how to play the violin. As a group of Japanese lined up and walked through the field, young Obaachan chose to follow them, hence leaving the violin for Caitlin. The film ends with the image that Caitlin played her great grandmother’s violin, symbolizing the passing on of Asayo’s Japanese heritage to her Canadian offspring.

The documentary as such records the process of how the Canadian-born family rebuilt their connection with Japan. Because of Asayo’s silence about her Japanese past over the seventy years, the Canadian family’s connection with Japan was rather tenuous before the making of this documentary. In the film, Ohama confessed that “all our lives we her family here [sic] in Canada never imagined other children, another family or a life could exist for her. This was never part of our story. For us, Obaachan’s life really begins in 1924 when she left Japan.” Asayo’s revelation of her hidden past hence became a turning point for her Canadian family. Natsuko, one of Asayo’s Canadian-born daughters described her feeling when hearing the existence of her half-sisters: “This is where Alice goes down the rabbit hole. All of a sudden people are appearing that you didn’t know existed before. The ocean parts and life become more complicated [sic].” Endeavoring to verify Asayo’s account of her missing daughters and fill in the gaps of Asayo’s memories, the three generations of the Canadian family, including Chizuko, Ohama and Caitlin, decided to visit Asayo’s hometown, Onomichi, for the first time.

The family’s visit to Japan functioned as a self-journey, significant to the whole family. It was not only a trip to find their relatives left in Japan, but a trip to discover their own root. As Caitlin said, “[c]oming to Japan is very special for me and my whole family, because when we get back, we can tell them about the things that we see here.” It would be an exaggeration if I state that the Canadian family members regain their intimate connections
with Japan simply through the visit, yet the film presents how the Canadian family reconstructs their understanding about Japan through the trip. According to Caitlin, “[w]hen I first time heard about great grandma’s secret, having relatives in the Imperial Palace, I thought that not many people have relatives close to the Emperor, and in Japan the Emperor is considered a god so maybe I was a goddess. I guess it is somewhat like a fairytale.” Despite the fact that these are Caitlin’s naïve words, they suggest that the Japanese Canadian family knew little about their ancestral country before the family trip to Japan, and the way they considered their relationship with Japan was rather imaginative. However, the Canadian family members constructed actual connections with Japan during the trip. They visited Asayo’s parents’ grave and her family home “that dates back several centuries.” This trip to Asayo’s hometown reinforced the Canadian family’s identification with Asayo’s Japanese past. Black-and-white images of Japan in old times such as Japanese daily activities and Taiko drumming at the festivals are interlaced with what the Canadian family saw during their trip. Caitlin comments her feeling of the trip: “I was really enjoying the feeling that like I was back in time. I was great grandma’s age maybe about four years before she was going to leave for Canada.”

Apparently, the Canadian family in their trip won access not only to the contemporary Japan but also to the old Japan in which Asayo had been lived. During the trip, Ohama’s family eventually gathered the useful information about Asayo’s two missing daughters. Even though Fumiko, Asayo’s oldest daughter, passed away four years ago, Ohama still visited her family, recorded Fumiko’s daughter’s recitation of the poem written for Fumiko, and included Fumiko’s photographs in the documentary. While Fumiko’s daughter appreciated Ohama’s retelling of Asayo’s Japanese past, which complemented Fumiko’s life stories and thus made Fumiko no longer a person “who had no past,” Fumiko’s family history in return also becomes an integral component of Ohama’s family history. Additionally, as the Canadian
family eventually found Asayo’s another daughter, Chieko, and planned her reunion with Asayo in Canada. Chieko symbolically becomes a member of Asayo’s Japanese Canadian family. From this perspective, Ohama’s family is largely expanded. Their family history is no longer a story beginning in 1924 in Canada, but started much earlier in Japan.

In effect, the trip to Onomichi commenced the Canadian family’s close connections with Japan. For instance, Ohama immeasurably strengthened her relationship with Japan after this family trip. In her director’s dairy of Obaachan’s Garden, Ohama affirms the importance of this trip to Japan and the filmmaking of Obaachan’s Garden: “The research and filming also took me to Japan and my beloved Onomichi for the first time. Strangely, that town has always felt so familiar to my soul, something that I cannot ever explain even today. I can only personally experience this feeling and be inspired to create.” After Obaachan’s Garden, Ohama directs A Sense of Onomichi (2007), in which she poetically explores the spirit of her grandmother’s hometown and praises how this town has captured the imagination of great artists. Also, according to Sue Frugson, Ohama embarked a 15-city tour in Japan to promote Obaachan’s Garden (53). As her official site records, during the past decade, she was frequently invited to several groups, schools, and universities in Japan to present a series of lectures on Japanese Canadian history or her experiences as a Sansei Canadian film director. She even made great efforts to promote cultural and educational ties between Japan and Canada. She has created a series of free workshops on art, food, and storytelling for youths in Japan. After hearing the news about the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, she immediately held a charity concert in the Vancouver Japanese Canadian community. She and her daughters also organized a quilt project, in which young Canadians wrote a cloth letter, expressing their cares to the Japanese kids in the devastated areas. The making of Obaachan’s Garden indeed changes the Canadian family’s relationship with Japan and enables them to establish strong affiliation with their ancestral country.
In conclusion, *Obaachan’s Garden* invites us to view Japanese picture brides’ experiences from a transnational perspective. As Asayo and her Canadian offspring collaborated in reconstructing and representing Asayo’s Japanese memories, their relationships with Japan are enacted on the screen. The images of Japan, offering glimpses of Japan’s national history, allow us to approach Asayo’s concealed Japanese experiences and help us know her from a new perspective. Through searching and revealing Asayo’s Japanese past, Asayo’s Canadian family also build their relationship with Japan from the ground up and “claim Japan” as part of their Japanese Canadian history. By retelling a hundred-year life story of a Japanese picture bride, *Obaachan’s Garden* indeed displays the intertwined connections between personal, family, ethnic as well as national histories.
Chapter Three

From a Shin-Issei’s Perspective: 

Tomoko Makabe’s Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada

In his “A Stone Voice: the Diary of a Japanese Transnational Migrant in Canada,” Keibo Oiwa accentuates the significance to break the silence of Japanese Canadians and find their own voices in making history. Based on his research and observation about Japanese Americans in the 1970s and 1980s, Oiwa claims that Japanese Canadians seemingly “had never played a creative role in their own history” and thus Japanese Canadian history has been “a history in the passive voice—a history in which a people, instead of being the main actors and thinkers, were the objects of other people’s action and thought” (125). According to Oiwa, as Japanese Canadians were commonly presented in history as victims of discrimination, incarceration and dispersal, Japanese Canadian history was reduced to what the persecutors did. In order to complement this kind of “history in passive voice,” he suggests that we should turn to first-hand accounts of Japanese Canadians’ experiences, particularly in terms of what they “felt, thought, or wished to do (or failed to do),” so as to provide an insider’s view of Japanese Canadian history (125). Nevertheless, Oiwa at the same time admits that finding the active voice of Japanese Canadians, especially the voices of the Issei, is not an easy task. Indeed, before the redress movement in the 1980s, Japanese North Americans had often been characterized as reticent people who avoided saying anything about their past. Even though some Nisei and Sansei had endeavored to break the silence and articulated their own history since the late 1970s, the Issei remained largely silent, saying

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nothing about their experiences even to their own children. The image of muted Issei has been vividly presented in Japanese North American narratives. For example, in Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* (1981), the protagonist Naomi describes her Issei aunt, Obasan, as a person who lives “in stone”—that is, a person who lives without expressing in words her deep thoughts and feelings (32). Also, in *Obaachan’s Garden* (2001), the documentary director Linda Ohama indicates that her grandmother kept her past in silence over the seventy years in Canada and “more of what we [Ohama’s family] know is from what’s not said than what is said, which leaves a lot of things buried in that silence.”

The multiple reasons for Issei’s voicelessness have intrigued much scholarly interest. It is widely believed that Issei’s reticence was induced by years of racial prejudice as well as the embarrassment and fear incurred by World War II. In the prewar, wartime, and immediate postwar periods, the Issei remained silent, obliterating their Japanese past in an attempt to enable themselves and their offspring to be recognized as North Americans. Remarkably, Issei’s voices were extremely marginalized not only outside but also within the Japanese Canadian community. Before the 1980s, a sentiment akin to self-hatred permeated Japanese Canadian community. It was a time when Issei, along with the traditional Japanese customs and manners they embodied, was regarded as humiliating to Japanese North American community. As Midge Ayukawa, a Nisei historian, suggests, “people of my generation” often felt “the shame of being Japanese” and thus “I have rejected everything about my heritage” (qtd. in Ferguson 53). Meanwhile, some scholars indicate that Issei’s silence, to some extent, could be viewed as a manifestation of their Japanese cultural heritage. Indeed, nonverbal communication and indirect speech are part of Japanese culture. According to Tsukasa Nishida, “[t]he emphasis on action rather than words is expressed in many sayings in Japan, such as ‘Express in deed not in words’ . . . ‘To say nothing is a flower.’ . . . Verbalization is considered a means of covering one’s timidity, ill will, or weakness” (45-46). Kogawa in an
interview with Susan Yim indicates that many Issei have preserved this cultural legacy as she observes that “To the issei, honor and dignity is expressed through silence” (qtd. in Cheung, Articulate Silences 126). Additionally, some feminist scholars further illustrate Issei’s cultural reticence, arguing that Issei women’s voicelessness reflects their double oppression from racial discrimination and Japanese patriarchal culture. Apart from these political, cultural and gender issues embedded in Issei’s silence, it is notable that Issei’s limited English proficiency has fundamentally foreclosed their communications with not only Caucasians but also their English-speaking offspring. According to Oiwa, due to the linguistic barrier, “it became difficult to distinguish what the issei did not want to talk about from what they wanted to talk about but could not express” (“A Stone Voice” 126). Despite the fact that some Japanese North Americans have gained revitalized interest in their Asian legacy since the late 1970s, the language barrier has continually hindered cross-generational conversations and caused many miscommunications between Issei and their descendants.

Tomoko Makabe’s Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada, which I propose to analyze in this chapter, is created in the early 1980s to retrieve Issei women’s voices to make their own history. Makabe, a post-Second World War immigrant (Shin-Issei), became an overseas student in Canada in the early 1970s and received her PhD from the Department of Sociology at the University of Toronto. During her school years in Toronto, her transnational experience and her proficiency in Japanese enabled her to make acquaintance with several Issei women. As Makabe reported, “when they [Issei women] heard I was from Japan, they seemed to grow nostalgic, and sometimes, a normally taciturn individual would become voluble” (Picture Brides 1-2). Hinging on her seamless interactions with Japanese female immigrants, Makabe in Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada dispels the stereotype of quiet Issei women and foregrounds the linguistic barrier between Japanese Canadian generations. According to her, “[t]he Issei have a chronic source of discontent” because “a
practically, impenetrable language barrier between them and their Nisei (second-generation) children” continually “prevents them from holding real conversations” (Picture Brides 2). On account of their poor English ability, Issei women were unable to fully express themselves within Japanese Canadian community. Moreover, based on Makabe’s research, Issei women are also gradually forgotten by their Japanese compatriots in Japan as she found that “[e]migration, in the form of temporary labour, has become a far-off memory even for the old [Japanese] people” (Picture Brides 73). Makabe felt worried about that Issei women’s voices might be permanently buried in the history when senility steadily took its toll on these women’s health and memories. Thus, she began her project to record Issei women’s life stories from the late 1970s and eventually in 1983 published Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada in which she offers a detailed transcription of five Issei women’s oral testimonies. The first edition of this book appeared in Japan. Twelve years later, it was translated into English and published in Canada. According to Makabe, during the years in Canada, she observed that many Sansei and Yonsei “have a strong sense of regret and sadness” because “they have been unable to relate to their grandparents and it was too late for many even to get to know them as persons” (Picture Brides vii). Thus, she expects the English version of this book could “deepen the understanding between the generations in our community” (Picture Brides viii). As Makabe emphasizes picture brides’ significance in both Japanese and Japanese Canadian history, Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada is not simply a work to recover Issei women’s muted voices, but also a work that paves a new way to understand picture bride experiences. In Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada, Makabe actually builds up the linkage between Japan and Japanese Canadian society and features Issei women as central figures in the making of Japanese Canadian cross-Pacific history.

Undeniably, Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada has its limitation in historical
representation as Makabe relies on merely five individuals (four in Toronto and one in Alberta) to represent a large number of Japanese picture brides in Canada. Yet, it is crucial among picture bride narratives, for Makabe presents Issei women’s transnational experiences from a Shin-Issei’s point of view. Though Makabe is a post-Second World War immigrant elite, who is often considered different from prewar working-class immigrants in terms of her class and identity formation, she feels that she shares similar transnational experiences with Japanese picture brides, demonstrating great empathy for them. She evinces her intensive interest in the history of Issei women because she regards them as her precursors. As she claims, “my role was to follow in their footsteps—to try to live and to work as an immigrant and as a member of the minority group of Japanese Canadians” (*Picture Brides* 1).

Significantly, Makabe not only focuses on these Issei women’s Canadian indigenization but also highlights their Japanese experiences. She insists that the study of Japanese picture brides’ transnational experiences should incorporate thorough investigations on these Issei women’s prefectural origins. In effect, she records in her book her visits to the hometowns of the five picture brides and offers a comprehensive geohistorical research of them. Given that Makabe’s personal involvement in her making of Japanese picture bride history offers interesting materials for inquiry, studying the oral testimonies of the five Issei women is not the sole purpose of this chapter. Rather, I argue that Makabe’s own position as a Shin-Issei should be investigated first since it may enrich our understanding of the Japanese picture bride history.

Based on the five Issei women’s memories and their life accounts, *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada* is written in the form of oral history. However, technically, Makabe did not follow the principles of preparing, conducting, and processing oral historical interviews when producing the five Issei women’s testimonies. According to Donald A. Ritchie’s definition in *Doing Oral History*, “oral history collects memories and personal
commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format” (19). However, as Makabe admits, she learned Issei women’s life stories not through formal interviews but through her frequent chats with them. Also, she had no forethought to choose who would appear in the book. She eventually retold the five picture brides’ life stories simply because their experiences were those she “was able to hear in particular detail” (Picture Brides 4). Additionally, while Ritchie points out the necessity of recording the interviews because “[b]y preserving the tapes and transcripts of their interviews, oral historians seek to leave as complete, candid, and reliable record as possible” (24), Makabe did not use a tape recorder until at the middle stage of her project. She even admits that only part of the interviews was preserved in tapes and some materials in the transcripts “were supplemented by [her] memory and [her] notes” (Picture Brides 5). Given Makabe’s unorthodox way to collect Issei women’s voices, Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada cannot be regarded as a strict oral historical work. Nevertheless, Ellen Scheinberg in her “In Their Own Words” indicates that just because Makabe did not adhere to the principles of traditional oral history interviews, she created certain flexibility, which allowed her interviewees more space to narrate their own stories. According to Scheinberg, Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada is praiseworthy since it “succeed[s] in using oral history” to “give voice” to the muted Issei women (204). She admires Makabe’s “commitment to let the narrators speak for themselves” and suggests that Makabe’s “open interviewing style,” which enables Issei women to “tell their stories without any direction or interruption from the researcher,” is “more democratic than the traditional method of interviewing” (205). Without the historian’s interference in traditional interviews, Makabe’s interviewees were more likely to express themselves freely. From Scheinberg’s point of view, the testimonies recorded in Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada are
supposed to be more “authentic” than traditional oral historical interviews.

Remarkably, while Scheinberg points out Makabe’s unique style of interviewing picture bride individuals, what I am particularly interested in is how Makabe demonstrates her position as a Shin-Issei in the making of picture bride history in *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada*. As mentioned above, Makabe in the beginning of the book defines herself as the follower of Japanese picture brides. In fact, Makabe’s emphasis on her linkage to Issei women is indicative of Shin-Issei’s eagerness to join the Japanese Canadian community in the 1970s and 1980s. From the 1960s on, the Canadian government initiated to revise its immigration regulations and eventually removed the exclusionary policies against immigrants of Asian ancestry in 1967. According to the amended immigration law, the criterion for individuals to gain their admittance to Canada was determined by their occupational skills rather than by their race or nationality. Yet, while the Canadian government opened its door for Asians with occupational skills to immigrate to Canada, the number of Japanese new immigrants was relatively small.\(^{11}\) It is believed that the small number of Japanese new immigrants in Canada should be attributed to the postwar economic conditions of the two countries. Indeed, during the postwar years, Japan’s economy expanded at a stunning pace, whereas Canada experienced its economic recession. According to Patricia E. Roy, “[a]s the revival of Japan’s economy made it an important country for trade and ultimately a source of investment in Canadian industry, Japan became a partner and friend, not a foe. Thus, Canada had to pay attention to Japan’s interest in shaping its immigration policies and symbolically announced the revisions of 1967 in Tokyo” (*The Triumph of Citizenship* 306). Notably, while the Canadian government welcomed immigrants from Japan, Roy indicates that “Japan’s

\(^{11}\)According to Patricia E. Roy’s research in “The Re-creation of Vancouver’s Japanese Community, 1945-2008,” with the exception of 1973, when 1,020 arrived, fewer than 1,000 Japanese arrived in Canada each year between 1949 and 1992. As Tatsuo Kage indicates in “Postwar Japanese Immigrants and Their Involvement in the Community,” compared to those from Hong Kong, India, Korea, Lebanon, Pakistan, the Philippines and South Vietnam, fewer immigrants were from Japan. He further suggests that “Hong Kong and India sent around ten times as many immigrants as Japan in the 1970s” (14).
prosperity meant that relatively few Japanese wanted to emigrate to Canada” (*The Triumph of Citizenship* 306). Similarly, Tatsuo Kage in “Postwar Japanese Immigrants and Their Involvement in the Community” also pinpoints that “Japan had become an economic superpower. It was, therefore, not easy for a person with skills and experiences in Japan to achieve a better financial status in Canada. So it seemed that there were few reasons for Japanese to emigrate” (14). Given the small number of Shin-Issei in Canada, many of them felt anxious to become involved in the local Japanese Canadian community. *The Bulletin*, a reputable bilingual (English/Japanese) magazine in West Canada, announced in 1970:

> We have to be aware that immigration from Japan was interrupted for many years [:] therefore, we notice some discrepancies in thinking and the point of view between us new arrivals and those who have been here for many decades. However, we have to adjust ourselves in the new environment as quickly as possible since we intend to stay here permanently. . . . In other words, we should strive for bridging the gap between us and the longtime residents. (qtd. in Kage, “Postwar Japanese Immigrants in the Vancouver Area” 3)

Obviously, notwithstanding the different mentalities between Shin-Issei and the members of settled Japanese Canadian community, Japanese new immigrants were encouraged to integrate themselves into the established Japanese Canadian community during the 1970s. From this perspective, the project of *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada* and Makabe’s emphasis on her intimate connections with Issei women could be understood as her endeavor to establish her position in Japanese Canadian community. She shows that as a Shin-Issei, she has not only lived up to the daring spirit of her female predecessors, but also contributed to Japanese Canadian community in preserving Issei’s unheard voices and bridging the generational gap generated from the language barrier.

> It is worth pointing out that as a Shin-Issei or, more precisely a Japanese overseas
student, Makabe not only attempts to become an approved member in Japanese Canadian community but also holds fast to her Japanese identity. According to Chih-Ming Wang’s *Transpacific Articulations: Student Migration and the Remaking of Asian America*, as overseas students have engaged in the writings and political activities on both sides of the Pacific, we may consider them “trans/national intellectual subjects with deep commitments to both place [sic] of ancestry and of residence” (1). Concentrating on Chinese foreign students’ transnational experiences, Wang suggests reading overseas student writings in both English and Chinese, and analyzing the texts within the tension of translingual and transcultural practices. Wang particularly indicates that overseas students’ choice of languages mirrors themselves: “[i]f writing in English represents for foreign students a translingual passage toward acculturation, writing in their mother tongue signals a reluctance to let go of Asia, a promise to keep Asia ‘in the heart’” (*Transpacific Articulations* 12). Explicitly, although Makabe claims that “I felt I wanted to establish myself in this society [Canadian society]” (*Picture Brides* 1), she always keeps Japan in her mind. Her dual affiliation to Japan and Canada is demonstrated when she continuously publishing books in both countries, including the bilingual versions of *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada*, *How Can Japanese Management Make a Positive Contribution: Redesigning the Organization for Productivity Improvement* (1991), *The Canadian Sansei* (1998), and カナダ「地域」と「国」を旅する (*Canada in Perspective of Its Regions*) (2011).

Certainly, Makabe’s mindset as an overseas student also accounts for her attention to Japanese picture brides’ transnational experiences. If we compare *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada* with Ohama’s *Obaachan’s Garden*, we would find that although both texts make efforts to recover picture bride stories, Makabe adopts a strikingly different attitude towards Japanese materials from that of Ohama, a Canada-born and -raised Sansei. Feeling her grandmother’s life stories would not be complete without drawing in her Japanese
memories, Ohama incorporates amounts of images of Japan. These images of Japan—the archival footage and the recording of Ohama’s family trip to Japan—are extravagantly used in the documentary, providing glimpses of Japan’s national history such as the Meiji Restoration, the developments of Japanese nationalism and imperialism, the two atomic bombs during World War II as well as Japan’s postwar economic growth. While Ohama draws on Japan’s national history so as to reconnect Japanese Canadians with their ancestral country, Makabe writes *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada* not only for Japanese Canadian community but also for her compatriots in Japan. According to Wang’s “Thinking and Feeling Asian American in Taiwan,” “[t]o study abroad was not meant only as a passage to individual career development; an overseas student was also a national asset expected to be a ‘knowledge element’ (zhishi fenzi 知識分子) organic to his/her society” (143). Indeed, overseas students from Asia are usually expected to devote what they have learned in the western countries to their country of origin. From this point of view, *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada* was written not only for picture brides as integrated members in Japanese Canadian community but also for recovering some missing pieces of Japan’s history. Regarding Issei women’s transnational experience as part of Japan’s lost history, Makabe foregrounds the presence of Japan in the picture bride stories and provides a geohistorical research on the five picture brides’ hometowns.

Here, it should be clarified that *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada* is not the only text that explicitly points out Issei women’s prefectural origins. Yet, in most picture bride narratives, Issei women’s Japanese origins are presented in abstract and obscure ways. For example, in Kayo Hatta’s *Picture Bride*, even though we know that the protagonist Riyo is a “city girl” from Yokohama, we do not have any lasting impression about Yokohama in the early twentieth century. Also, in the first chapter of *The Buddha in the Attic*, though Julie Otsuka points to the diverse prefectural origins of Japanese picture brides, such as Kyoto,
Nara, Yamaguchi, and Yamanashi, to name a few, she only uses one or two sentences to roughly describe the characteristics of Issei women from these different origins. For instance, Otsuka depicts that those females from Kyoto “were delicate and fair, and lived [their] entire lives in darkened rooms at the back of the house,” those from Nara “prayed to [their] ancestors three times a day,” and those from Tokyo “had seen everything, and spoke beautiful Japanese” (7-8). Yet, in the subsequent chapters of the novel, readers have no clues about how the different prefectural origins may influence picture brides’ new lives in North America. Additionally, although Ohama in Obaachan’s Garden has recorded her family trip to Onomichi, her grandmother’s hometown, we could hardly acquire any insider’s knowledge about Onomichi since that was Ohama’s first trip to Japan, and Ohama herself did not know much about the place when she filmed this documentary. Notably, unlike other picture bride narratives that pay little attention to Issei women’s prefectural origins, Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada provides a section that introduces each picture bride’s home village before bringing in their testimonies. In the following, I will read Makabe’s geohistorical research on the five picture brides’ hometowns respectively and investigate how picture brides’ transnational experiences are inextricably intertwined with Japan’s culture and regional histories.

Mrs. Maki Fukushima

The first picture bride appears in Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada is Mrs. Maki Fukushima, who came from Towa-cho (東和町), Oshima-gun (大島郡), in Yamaguchi Prefecture (山口県). The Seto Inland Sea (瀬戸内海) separates the island of Shikoku (四国) from the Honshu mainland (本州). Oshima, also known as Yashiro Island (屋代島), means “big island” in Japanese. It is the third largest island in the Seto Inland Sea, just after Awajishima Island (淡路島) and Shodoshima Island (小豆島). According to Makabe’s
research, because the rapid stream area between Oshima and the Honshu mainland is “so
dangerous,” it was believed that “no bridge could be built” across the narrow strait before
1970s (41). Attributed to the Oshima Bridge built in 1976, nowadays the island could be
easily accessible by car, and the bridge even changed the local lifestyle in Oshima. In fact,
because Oshima mainly consists of mountains and hills and features little cultivable land,
there has been a long tradition for the islanders, in order to survive, to leave their hometown
and become migrant workers. Nevertheless, as Makabe indicates, because of the bridge,
many Oshima young people, who had migrated to work on the mainland such as Hiroshima
or Osaka, could return to Oshima and become commuters (41). Moreover, in alliance with the
improved transportation of the island, people in Oshima began to develop its tourist industry,
gaining profit from the beautiful scenery of the island. Indeed, the Oshima Bridge is quite
important for the regional development of Oshima, and motivates migrants to return to the
island. However, at the same time, the island’s migration tradition and history also gradually
fade out in public memory. According to Makabe, “emigration . . . from the island began as
an extension of the custom of migrant work which had been carried on for a very long time”
(41). Yet, when she visited Oshima in the early 1980s, she found that “[I]looking at the
Oshima of today, there is no telling how greatly the toil and suffering of the emigrants
affected the lives of the people of the island. Emigration, in the form of temporary labour, . . .
has left no traces, no matter where one looks on the island, and no matter with whom one
speaks” (42-43). 12 Particularly, Makabe regards Mrs. Maki Fukushima’s stories as the
missing pieces of Oshima’s regional history, and suggests interpreting her picture bride
experience in terms of Oshima’s migrating tradition.

As mentioned above, due to the limited natural resources, Oshima’s men had engaged

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12 Even though Makabe in the early 1980s found that the emigration history was almost forgotten by Oshima’s
local people, the history was gradually recovered during the 1980s and 1990s. In 1999, The Museum of
Japanese Emigration to Hawaii was opened in Ohshima, and has become a tourist attraction of the island. For
more information about the Museum of Japanese Emigration to Hawaii in Oshima, visit their website
historically in migrant work. And when the Japanese government in 1884 initiated its project to send government-sponsored contract workers to Hawaii, working overseas became another attractive option for Oshima people and many Oshima men applied for job offers from the project. As Makabe points out, on the first boat loaded with Japanese emigrants to Hawaii, 30 percent of the 944 men were from Oshima and thereafter “Oshima-gun became a precursor for regions sending emigrants to Hawaii and North America” (42). While the ways in which Japanese emigrants moved to North America varied over time as a result of the shifting immigration laws of the United States and Canada, the number of Oshima men migrating to North America had been steady from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s.

Mrs. Maki Fukushima was born in 1892, when people in Oshima had gripped with emigration to North America. Comparing her home village with other neighboring villages in the 1910s, Mrs. Maki Fukushima indicated that her home village—Towa-cho—sent relatively fewer emigrants to North America since people of her village could still “get along without going abroad” at that time (44). Yet, Mrs. Maki Fukushima admitted that she had been fascinated with the idea of going to North America owing to her family’s economic hardship. Before she was born, her father had sold the family land and engaged in the transportation business between the island and the mainland. When she was growing up, the business was gradually falling off and her family eventually went bankrupt. Inspired by her cousin, a temporary worker who went to Hawaii and then earned himself his own tailor shop in Seattle, Mrs. Maki Fukushima assumed that it was extremely easy to make money in America and longed to work there. As Mrs. Maki Fukushima indicated, “I didn’t know what kind of men he was, but I was happy as long as I could get to America. . . . I wanted go somewhere to make money . . . , and not bother to get married” (47). When Mrs. Maki Fukushima entered the picture bride marriage, she considered herself more a worker than a bride. More precisely, Mrs. Maki Fukushima believed that she was one of the early temporary workers from Oshima,
who would earn big money in America and then return to her hometown. According to Mrs. Maki Fukushima’s original plan, she and her husband would have stayed in Canada about three to five years. She remembered well the words her grandmother told her before her departure to North America: “Going to America is like going to climb a golden mountain. So I’ll wait for you to come back with money” (47). Besides, her mother-in-law also soothed her that “[y]ou’re coming back soon, so don’t be sad; just go. And you’re not to cry when you leave” (47). It is clear that as Mrs. Maki Fukushima departed from Oshima, she did not plan to settle in Canada.

Mrs. Maki Fukushima’s mentality as a temporary worker greatly affected her life in Canada. She admitted that she and her husband had kept up “the migrant worker spirit” in Canada and thus they were “concentrating on going back to Japan” (54). Indeed, Mrs. Maki Fukushima had maintained intimate relationship with Oshima. In 1920, during her third pregnancy, she went back to her hometown with her husband and two sons. As her husband traveled back to Canada few months later, she stayed in Japan for about one and a half year. In 1922, she left her three children in Oshima with her mother, and went back to Canada. As she stated, “[b]y getting the children looked after, we’d both be free to work, we thought, and we really would save up some money this time” (54). Obviously, Mrs. Maki Fukushima firmly believed that she would return to Japan after making enough money in Canada. Her next trip back to Oshima occurred three years later, when her mother, who was responsible for taking care of the children, was sick. This time, she and her husband built their own house in Oshima. For about two or three years, Mrs. Maki Fukushima and her three children lived in Oshima as her husband went back to Canada to work alone and send money back to them. In this period, Mrs. Maki Fukushima’s family adopted a lifestyle that was quite similar to that of other migrant workers’ family—men left to engage in temporary work either in the mainland or in foreign countries, and women stayed on the island, nurturing the children.
Even though Mrs. Maki Fukushima eventually took her three children with her to Canada in 1927, reunited with her husband, and decided to settle down in Canada, she kept her house in Oshima without selling it. As Mrs. Maki Fukushima recalled, during the wartime, when her husband died and the children all grew up, she seriously considered going back to her home village and living in the house alone. Despite the fact that Mrs. Maki Fukushima finally chose to stay with her children in Canada, her migrant worker mentality, her frequent travel between Oshima and Canada as well as her long residency on the island during the 1920s all suggest that her picture bride experience is not only the outset of Japanese Canadian history, but also a segment of Oshima’s regional history.

**Mrs. Hana Murata**

The second picture bride appears in *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada* is Mrs. Hana Murata, who came from Ooyabu (大藪), a small old town in Inukami-gun (犬上郡), Shiga Prefecture (滋賀県). Nowadays, Ooyabu is amalgamated into the city of Hikone (彦根市). Like Oshima Island, where Mrs. Maki Fukushima was born and raised, Ooyabu had been a village of emigrants, thanks to its geography and location as well. Ooyabu was located on the eastern shores of Lake Biwa. It was a purely agricultural district before Japan’s rapid urbanization and industrialization in the 1950s. For centuries, people living in Ooyabu had used water from the lake and depended on the streams from it to irrigate their farmlands. Yet, the lake occasionally flooded, causing severe damage to farmlands around the lake.

According to Makabe, because of the floods, many people in the east basin of Lake Biwa left and became temporary workers or trade men in Osaka and Kobe. Also, a few of them applied to be the government-sponsored contract workers to Hawaii in the late 1880s. It was the great flood of 1896 that led to a massive emigration to North America from the eastern shore of Lake Biwa and made this district the so-called “East Lake emigrant villages” (Makabe, 71).
Indeed, based on the statistics provided by Lake Biwa Comprehensive Preservation Liaison Coordination Council and Lake Biwa Comprehensive Preservation Promotion Council, the flood of 1896 caused serious damage, including 111 casualties and 7,885 collapsed houses (5). Makabe explicitly points out that because of the flood of 1896 which transformed “the entire village zone” “into a lake,” residents there “found themselves forced to abandon their homes” and “from 1897, emigration continued to increase, especially to Canada” (72). Indeed, many Japanese emigrants to Canada were from Shiga Prefecture, especially from Ooyabu and its neighboring villages, Hassaka (八坂) and Mitsuya-mura (三津屋村). As many migrant workers and their families from these villages moved to North America in the early twentieth century, their home villages transformed into “American Villages” and the emigrants there developed their specific lifestyle (Makabe, Picture Brides 73).

Remarkably, Mrs. Hana Murata’s life stories foreground some typical characteristics of “East Lake emigrant villages.” Mrs. Hana Murata’s father and her uncle were the migrant workers who left as a consequence of the flood in 1896. As Mrs. Hana Murata stated, she grew up in an ordinary migrant family: her father went abroad, working as a fisherman, while her mother stayed in Ooyabu, taking care of the children. The whole family mainly relied on the remittances her father sent back. Despite the fact that this was a common pattern of life in many emigrant villages in the early twentieth-century Japan, Makabe particularly underlines the emigrants’ monetary support for their hometowns in the East Lake American villages. As Makabe indicates,

It is certain that the East Lake “American Village” profited by the money sent by its emigrants. Though it was a remote fishing and farming village, almost all the residences had tile roofs, and it ranked at the top in the prefectural tax records up to that year, 1931; and on three occasions, it had received a certificate for full payment of national taxes. Bank savings in 1931 were reported to be more than
Clearly, compared with other districts of Japan, the East Lake emigrant villages were relatively wealthy because of its emigrants’ remittance. Mrs. Hana Murata’s experience verified Makabe’s historical research. In Mrs. Hana Murata’s oral testimony, she described her childhood, stating that “[t]hanks to my father doing that work overseas, I grew up without wanting anything. There was more than enough rice at home, and we always had enough to eat” (75). Additionally, her family even rebuilt their house with the money her father made in Canada. Since working abroad was indeed a better choice than being a farmer in Ooyabu, it is no wonder that the emigration craze broke out in Ooyabu. According to Mrs. Hana Murata, “it was unusual to find a family in her village without a man who had emigrated” (72).

Significantly, the considerable amount of money the early emigrants brought back from Canada to the East Lake emigrant villages represent their absolute determination to return to their hometowns. As Makabe indicates, “[t]here was some competition in remitting money, so that there were even people who ended up sending nearly half of their income. This may have been the habit of the ‘returning type of immigrant’ who aims at going home in the course of time” (73). Also, Ayukawa in her *Hiroshima Immigrants in Canada 1891-1941* also mentions this feature of emigrants from the East Lake emigrant villages. According to Ayukawa, “[t]he money these people earned in Canada, mainly by labouring in sawmills and by operating shops around Vancouver’s Powell Street, did much more than keep their relatives alive. Almost 70 percent of the Shiga immigrants . . . returned to their villages, bought land, built majestic homes, and donated money to the local Buddhist temple” (xix).

Interestingly, even though Mrs. Hana Murata suffered from her two failed marriages and strove to live in Canada as a career woman alone, she closely followed the custom of the East Lake emigrant villages—keeping sending remittances home and made preparations for her return to Ooyabu someday. As Mrs. Hana Murata indicated, she began sending money home
as soon as she started to work in Canada. And her mother deposited part of the money into the bank under her name and also bought some land in her name. Moreover, after her younger brother, who went to Canada as a temporary worker for more than twenty years and repatriated to Japan during the war, died in 1964, she constantly provided financial aid for her brother’s family. Mrs. Hana Murata claimed that she actually went back to Ooyabu in 1969 and planned to “stay for a good long time” (90). However, she found that the land her mother bought for her was appropriated by the Japanese government during the wartime because she was recognized as “an absentee landlord” (85). She even went to court but still failed to reclaim the land. She stated that she had originally planned to “come back to Japan when I was old and live on my pension from Canada” (90). Yet, because of the loss of her land as well as the fact that her mother and brother were dead, she could only live with her in-laws if she wanted to stay in Ooyabu. She claimed that “the feeling was completely different, so it wasn’t the country that I used to know” (90). Although Mrs. Hana Murata finally chose to return to Canada, she still had the dream to go back to her hometown one day. As she proclaimed, “I’m always thinking of my home town. I want to see it again. My family’s grave and my own grave are over there. . . . Every day I think I’ll go and see, but I can’t travel alone. And there’s nobody asking me to come back” (91). Preparing her own grave in Ooyabu’s temple, wishing to be buried with her ancestors, and moaning that “there’s nobody asking me to come back,” Mrs. Hana Murata obviously considered herself a forgotten member of the Ooyabu community.

Mrs. Yasu Ishikawa and Mrs. Tami Nakamura

Both the third and fourth picture brides introduced in Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada, Mrs. Yasu Ishikawa and Mrs. Tami Nakamura, came from Hiroshima Prefecture (広島県). The former was from Yuki (油木町), a mountain area in the district of Jinseki-gun.
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(...神石郡) and the latter was from Hiroshima City (広島市). According to the statistics provided by Ayukawa, among the first three groups of the government-contract workers who embarked for Hawaii in 1884, the largest number were from Hiroshima Prefecture: 963 out of 2,859 (Hiroysha Immigrants 9). Just like Oshima Island and the east basin of Lake Biwa, Hiroshima Prefecture was also known as a major source of emigration to North America during the prewar period. Significantly, unlike Oshima Island and the east basin of Lake Biwa, where people left for migrant work because of its limited natural resources, Hiroshima has been one of the prominent regions in Japan since the late sixteenth century, and it was the destination for many internal migrants and even immigrants in the early twentieth century.13

As early as 1589, Hiroshima was founded by Mori Terumoto, a great warlord who made it his capital and constructed Hiroshima Castle. In the Meiji Era, it developed as a major urban city. During the 1880s, Hiroshima constructed its harbor and thereafter became an important port in Japan. Mrs. Yasu Ishikawa and Mrs. Tami Nakamura were born in this period as Hiroshima grew into a prosperous urban center of Japan. In this section, I attempt to underline Mrs. Yasu Ishikawa and Mrs. Tami Nakamura’s schooling in Hiroshima with a view to presenting how picture bride experiences may enrich our understanding about the regional education system in Hiroshima.

In 1872, the Meiji government declared a four-year compulsory elementary education for all children. Mrs. Maki Fukushima, who came from Oshima Island, went to the primary school in the village until the sixth grade, and then her father contacted a schoolteacher to organize a night school for the children in her family. They learned abacus, reading, writing, and ethnic. However, as Mrs. Maki Fukushima stated, since the night school was not formal education, “[p]ersonally, it didn’t amount too much at all, and that’s why I’m uneducated”

13. In her Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory, Lisa Yoneyama points out that “[f]ollowing the devastation caused by Japan’s colonial takeover of Korea in 1910, large numbers of Koreans began to migrate to Hiroshima. . . . Because Hiroshima had grown into a modern, industrial city of the colonial metropolis, many from North and South Asia migrated to Hiroshima to seek opportunities for employment and education” (152).
(45). She further indicated that “I’m sure that when I was born in 1892, there was compulsory education. But the people in the village never used writing, so they thought they didn’t need an education. Around then, a lot of the women hadn’t ever gone to school. . . . And some girls came to school carrying small children, their younger siblings, on their backs” (45). Through Mrs. Maki Fukushima’s testimony, it is suggested that the compulsory education was not adequately implemented in her home village and female education was remained neglected in Oshima Island. Similarly, people in Ooyabu did not underline the significance of female education. Mrs. Hana Murata received only four-year primary school education. If children in her home village attempted to continue their education, they had to take a long tramp to Hikone. Thus, Mrs. Hana Murata quit her education after the fourth grade, and according to her, “there were only one or two children from the village every year who went on the girls’ high school in Hikone” because “in those days, studying wasn’t as important for a girl as needle work” (75).

While both Mrs. Maki Fukushima and Mrs. Hana Murata claimed that they were “uneducated” (45; 75), Mrs. Yasu Ishikawa and Mrs. Tami Nakamura had relatively good education in Hiroshima. Mrs. Yasu Ishikawa stated that she graduated from “the upper primary school course” and after that she went to supplementary classes for a year (104). She originally planned to pursue further studies in a medical school, but because her grades were not good enough, she finally went to a school for midwives in Osaka for two years. In addition to formal education, she also learned how to play the lute, the chikuzen biwa. Mrs. Yasu Ishikawa’s good education greatly affected her life in Canada. First, her education accounted for her dissatisfaction with her picture bride marriage. She fiercely criticized her first husband: “he wasn’t smart. We didn’t have anything in common to talk about. . . . I could have put up with an ordinary man, but really, this one was below average” because he “didn’t have anything between his ears” (104-05). Additionally, her schooling as a midwife rendered
her economically independent in Canada and enabled her to leave her first husband.

Compared with Mrs. Yasu Ishikawa, the other Issei woman from Hiroshima City, Mrs. Tami Nakamura, had even higher educational background. Her father being a lieutenant, Mrs. Tami Nakamura lived in the center of Hiroshima, the Fifth Divisional Headquarters near the Hiroshima Castle, and received free education for the officers’ children there. After completing six-year education in the primary school, she passed the exam for the prefectural school for girls and then studied in the girls’ high school for four years. According to Mrs. Tami Nakamura, the girl’s high school was a place providing “a bride’s education,,” and she learned sewing and the koto (a Japanese harp) there (130). Interestingly, as Mrs. Tami Nakamura indicated, students in the girls’ high school could even take either English or Embroidery as their optional subject. People in Hiroshima City as such not only maintained their Japanese traditional culture but also relished on western culture in the early twentieth century. Briefly, the four Issei women’s cases bring to the fore Japan’s regional disparities in educational development in the turn of the twentieth century.

Mrs. Miyo Hayashi

Mrs. Miyo Hayashi, the last picture bride appearing in Picture Brides: Japanese Women, was from Higashi Kokubu (東国分), Aira-gun (姶良郡) in Kagoshima Prefecture (鹿児島県). Higashi Kokubu was one of the villages at the coast of the Okuma peninsula (大隅半島).

According to Makabe, due to the limited arable land and the declining fishing resource, Kagoshima Prefecture was a well-known source of internal and external migration. Based on her research on local histories, Makabe indicates that a steady stream of emigrants from every part of the prefecture left for North and South America. While I in the previous sections concentrate on how picture brides’ life stories may demonstrate part of Japan’s regional histories, in this section I shift my focus to the factors that motivated Mrs. Miyo Hayashi and
her husband to immigrate to Canada and illustrate how their transnational experiences shed light on some social customs of the twentieth century Japan.

Mrs. Miyo Hayashi’s husband chose to move to Canada and settle down there permanently because of the custom of primogeniture in Japan. According to Y. Scott Matsumoto’s research on Japan’s family formation, “[t]he privilege of masculinity and the custom of primogeniture made the rankings of a son over a daughter and an eldest son over his younger brothers largely unquestioned values” (55). It is clear that the sex and birth order determines whether an individual could inherit his/her parents’ possession in Japan. As Mrs. Miyo Hayashi indicated, “My husband came to Canada in 1906 when he was 16. His family had a big farm, but he was just a second son, so even if he’d stayed at home, he wouldn’t have inherited the property. So he thought he’d go somewhere else, to a foreign country” (158). Certainly, Mrs. Miyo Hayashi’s husband was not a unique example since many Japanese men left their home town due to the custom of primogeniture. In his study of Japanese immigration to Hawaii and the United States in the early twentieth century, Bill Ong Hing points out that “[b]y tradition only the oldest son inherited the parents’ land. Apparently other sons were free to leave, and they often did” (55). Additionally, John Sibley Butler provides similar opinion, mentioning that in terms of the practice of primogeniture, “the search for a better way of life in America was spearheaded by second and third sons of Japanese families” (9).

While the case of Mrs. Miyo Hayashi’s husband highlights the tradition of primogeniture in Japan, Mrs. Miyo Hayashi’s case reflects the dowry custom in Japan. For centuries, wedding trousseaus of a bride has been significant in Japanese culture since the dowry represents the social rank of both the bride’s and groom’s families. Mrs. Miyo Hayashi was in a common predicament that poor Japanese females suffered—she could not afford appropriate dowry owing to her family economic hardship. Being a picture bride as such
introduced a way for her to escape this embarrassing situation in Japan in the turn of the twentieth century. Mrs. Miyo Hayashi explained: “if they [her older brothers] married me off in Japan, I’d need a lot of things, and that meant a great deal of expense. So if I were to get married and go to America, all they had to do was send me over here. That’s why these marriage talks came off” (160). Interestingly, when Mrs. Miyo Hayashi described that “[F]or my trousseau, all I had was kimonos that I sewed myself, and I brought lots of those,” she also brought attention to the specific dowry practice at her time (160-61). As the art history researcher Monika Bincsik indicates, wedding trousseaus are important sources for studying Japanese cultural history since the ideal content of a dowry alters in different periods. Harald Fuess further clarifies this point in his research: “the dowry of a bride usually included clothes and furniture” in the late nineteenth century Japan (82). Fuess foregrounds the significance of the clothes a bride brought with her into the marriage. He indicates that “village women also wove their own kimonos for their dowries and a bride’s reputation in her new community often depended on the quality of the clothes she brought into marriage, as they revealed her dressmaking skills” (82). From this perspective, Mrs. Miyo Hayashi’s dowry—the clothes she weaved by herself—not simply represented her low social rank, but served to indicate the craftsmanship required for every woman in the turn of the twentieth century Japan.

In conclusion, Tomoko Makabe’s *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada* records Japanese picture brides’ life stories in the early twentieth century from a Shin-Issei’s speaking position in the late twentieth century. By recognizing Japanese picture brides as her predecessors and retelling their buried life histories, Makabe successfully writes in-between her Japanese and Japanese Canadian affiliations. Her Japanese background enables her to provide a different perspective in the making of picture bride history. Offering attention to the
linkage between Issei women and their Japanese origins, *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada* demonstrates how picture brides’ life stories were inextricably intertwined with Japan’s culture and regional histories, which enables Japanese picture brides to claim a place in Japanese history.
Chapter Four

Coda

While Japanese picture brides have gradually gained their visibility in North American history from the 1970s on, their connections with their country of origin, Japan, remain marginalized, if not overlooked, in most picture bride texts and studies. Since the existing picture bride narratives are usually written within the framework of American nationalism, one goal of this thesis is to open up that framework by adopting a transnational view to understand picture brides’ position in-between Japan and North America. In this thesis, I have tried to bring to the fore Japanese picture brides’ significance in making Japanese North America cross-Pacific history. In an attempt to provide an alternative reading of picture bride stories, and present Japanese Canadian history from a different perspective, I study two picture bride narratives that involve the cooperation of Issei women, and pay particular attention to how these women’s Japanese memories and experiences are reconstructed in their life stories.

In Chapter Two, I investigate *Obaachan’s Garden*, in which Linda Ohama, a Japanese Canadian Sansei, adopts profuse images of Japan to represent her grandmother’s hidden past. Through revealing her grandmother’s Japanese past, Ohama interweaves picture bride stories with Japanese national history as well as establishes Japanese Canadians’ affiliation with their ancestral country. In Chapter Three, Tomoko Makabe’s *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada* in the form of oral history records five picture brides’ life stories. As a *Shin-Issei*, Makabe considers Japanese picture brides significant figures in the making of both Japanese and Japanese Canadian history. Reading the five Issei women’s testimonies along with Makabe’s geohistorical research on their home villages, we comprehend picture brides’ transnational experience as an integral segment of Japan’s history. Additionally, the
knowledge of Japan’s customs and regional developments in the early twentieth century immensely enriches our understanding of picture bride history.

Concentrating on how Japanese picture brides relate to their country of origin as well as how the images of Japan are presented in picture bride narratives, this thesis projects a study of larger scope in the future. For instance, future work could pay attention to Japanese American cases since the two texts I scrutinize here are both Japanese Canadian picture bride narratives. As for the relationship between Japan and Japanese picture brides immigrating to Hawaii, one could look into Alice Yun Chai’s “Hawaii’s Early Picture Brides’ from Japan, Okinawa, and Korea” (1986) wherein Chai recorded twenty picture brides’ interviews. Also, since Okinawa and Korea were both Japan’s colonies during the early twentieth century, Chai’s work may offer useful materials for further investigation on how Issei women from colonizer and colonized areas held different point of views towards their origins. In addition to Japanese American cases, I also plan to delve into other picture bride narratives in Japan. Portrayals of picture brides’ life stories could be found in Miyoko Kudo’s 写婚妻：花嫁は一枚の見合い写真を手に海を渡っていった (Picture Brides: Brides Went across the Sea with a Piece of Matchmaking Photograph) (1983) and Ikumi T. Yanagisawa’s “ハワイに渡った日本人「写真花嫁」たち：最初の「写真花嫁」から最後の「写真花嫁」まで” (“Life Histories of Japanese ‘picture brides’ in Hawaii: From the First ‘Picture Brides’ to the Last”) (2006).14

Japanese picture bride narratives should be comprehend beyond the scope of North American minority discourses. Through analyzing Obaachan’s Garden and Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada, hopefully, my thesis has reconsidered picture brides’ complex affiliations with their country of origin even after they immigrated to North America.

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14 The English title of 写婚妻：花嫁は一枚の見合い写真を手に海を渡っていった provided here is my translation.
Moreover, this thesis also hopes to take Japanese picture brides as one case among many to rethink how Asia is represented in Asian American narratives, particularly in those delineating pre-1965 immigrants’ transnational experiences. Finally, I expect this study of Japanese picture bride history may help us better understand the foreign bride, or the mail-order bride, phenomenon in Taiwan. Nowadays, more and more Taiwanese males choose to marry foreign brides who mainly come from Southeastern Asia, and the mail-order marriage has drawn much attention in both the public and academia. In her preface to the Chinese version of Julie Otsuka’s *The Buddha in the Attic*, Pei-Hsiang Li, a foreign bride from Cambodia and also the executive secretary of TransAsia Sisters Association in Taiwan, indicates that there are similarities shared between foreign brides’ and picture brides’ transnational experiences. For example, both Japanese picture brides and foreign brides face communicating difficulties as they try to adapt themselves to different cultures. Moreover, as Christine S.Y. Chun in her study of the mail-order industry points out, “[t]he modern mail-order bride industry in some ways mirrors the arranged marriages of the past, where families sent ‘picture brides’ from their homelands to lonely men in foreign countries” (1155). Here, I certainly do not claim that mail-order brides’ experiences should be read in analogy to Japanese picture brides’ experiences. Despite the fact that Japanese picture brides in the early twentieth century could be regarded as the archetype of the current mail-order brides, there are differences between Japanese picture bride practice and Asian mail-order bride system since they developed from two distinct historical contexts. Indeed, while Japanese picture brides were married to their compatriots, contemporary mail-order brides commonly enter into marriage with foreigners. Being aware of the similarities and differences between Japanese picture brides and mail-order brides, I plan to extend my research to mail-order brides and inquire into more female immigrants’ transnational experiences in the future.
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