

Refugees in Japanese America: Immigration, Gender, and Wartime Memories during the 1950s

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1. Cold War U.S. Refugee Policy and Japanese America

A type of migrants, the “refugee,” appeared in immigration politics in the United States after the Second World War. The collapse of the Axis powers and the reconstruction of the geopolitical order under the Cold War cast light on the people displaced from their homeland. The United States played a leading role in institutionalizing refugee migration in Europe. The U.S. government enacted its first Displaced Persons Act of 1948 to authorize the admission of 400,000 wartime European refugees and displaced persons to the United States. The act was renewed as “Refugee Relief Act” in 1953. It reduced the number of refugees to 200,000 and extended the coverage to refugees from non-European regions. Under the new refugee law, Asia became a new area of concern in U.S. refugee policy.¹⁾ For example, the Act allowed 2,777 Chinese to enter to the United States as refugees from the Chinese Communist revolution.²⁾ The U.S. government also applied the law to South Korea and Japan to accept people who were displaced after the Second World War and the Korean War.

This paper focuses on the new Japanese immigration to the United States under the category of “refugees.” Japan suffered not only from the catastrophic devastation after the war but also from the rapid reform under the U.S. occupation. In addition, “overpopulation” was another crisis for postwar Japan. Japanese soldiers and civilians returned from former colonies in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia.³⁾ Approximately 4.5 millions Japanese went back to Japan in 1945 and the number of returnees reached 6 million by 1950.⁴⁾ Wartime destruction, drastic regime changes, and overpopulation turned Japan into a possible source of displaced people and refugees. The Japanese government recognized the crisis and planned a large volume of emigration to Latin America.⁵⁾ The reform in the Refugee Relief Act made Japanese refugee possible under the shift in U.S. politics in Asia during the Cold War.

The new refugees under the Refugee Relief Act were part of the international migration of Japanese across the Pacific since the late 19th Century. Before the Second World War, Japanese immigrant communities spread over the Pacific: in Hawaii, North America, Latin American, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific islands.⁶⁾ The migration between Japan and the United States involved the trans-Pacific world.⁷⁾ The Pacific War halted the movement and also forced many

Japanese to move to internment camps in the United States, Canada, and other regions around the Pacific.

The end of the Second World War reactivated the movement. Besides the massive volume of returnees from former colonies and the new emigration to Latin American countries, Japanese Americans moved back and forth between Japan and the United States. The postwar revival of trans-Pacific mobility made border control a new social agenda for political sovereignty and identity formation in post-occupation Japan.⁸⁾ Interestingly, Japanese Americans themselves were key actors, as “gatekeepers” of the new trans-Pacific migration⁹⁾. They committed to campaigns for immigration policy reforms to allow new immigration from Japan to the United States. Not only did they demand legal reforms, but they also took parts in the enforcement of new immigration programs under the reforms.

This paper unravels how Japanese Americans committed to the new refugee program and how they accepted the refugees as new members of the Japanese American communities in postwar US-Japan relations.

Who moved to the United States as a Japanese refugee? What impact did the new refugee make on the Japanese American community? Through the examination of the relationship between Japanese Americans and the new refugees, this paper discusses the legacy of these refugees in Japanese American history and its implication on current refugee issues.

2. New Age of Japanese Immigration to the United States

The catastrophic devastation caused by the Second World War transformed the institutional and ideological framework of international migration between Japan and the United States. The U.S.-Japan relations after the American occupation regulated the new trans-Pacific migration. In 1952, the San Francisco Peace Treaty became effective and Japan was restored as an independent state. It wielded its state power in controlling human movement in and out of its territory. At the same time, the U.S.-Japan Security Pact also came into force. Thus, U.S. military servicemen enjoyed the privilege of moving into Japan as an exceptional category under the Japanese immigration policy. In the same year that the American occupation ended, the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (McCarran and Walter Act) allowed new Japanese immigration under the national quota system. Since 1924, Japanese immigration was barred because the U.S. Supreme Court in 1922 defined the Japanese as “aliens who were not eligible to be naturalized as American citizens”. The McCarran and Walter Act lifted the ban on naturalization of Japanese in the United States and enabled the new entry of Japanese as immigrants. Moreover, the War Bride Act of 1947, the Refugee Relief Act of 1953, and other minor reforms in federal immigration policies enabled new Japanese immigration to the United States. According to the official statistics of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the 1950s was the decade that had the highest number of Japanese immigration to the United States after the Second World War (**Figure 1**).

Refugees in Japanese America (MINAMIKAWA)

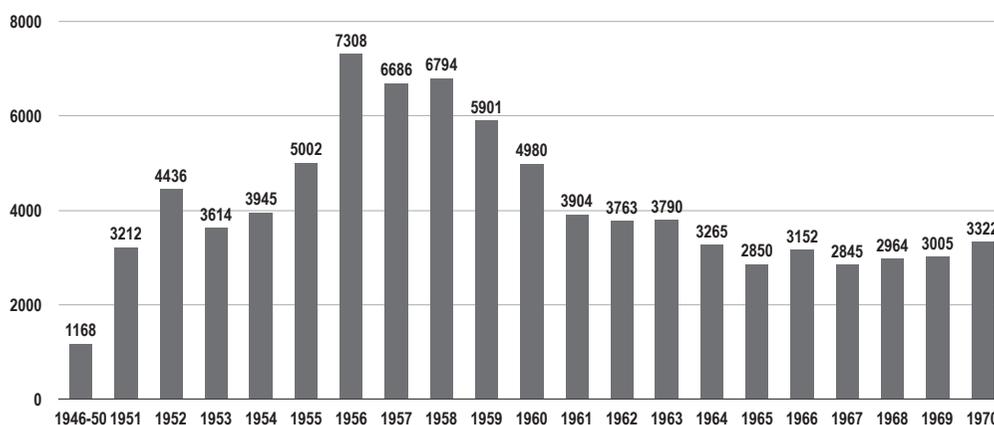


Figure 1 The Number of Japanese Immigrants to the United States: 1946-1970

(Based on the number by Issuance of Immigration-related Visa*)

*The number does not include visas for re-entry for permanent settlement and temporary agricultural workers to the United States

[Source] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Waga Gaiko no Kinkyō* [Current Status of Our Foreign Affairs] (Tokyo: Gaimusho, 1969, 1980).

While the McCarran and Walter Act of 1952 opened a door to Japanese, the national origin quota system still prevented the influx of a large volume of immigrants from Japan. The quota system allowed only 185 Japanese per year to immigrate to the U.S. In fact, Japanese immigrants who entered under the quota system comprised only 1.4 percent (92) among all Japanese immigrants (6,563) from July 1956 to June 1957.¹⁰ The new mobility in the 1950s, on the other hand, depended on other arrangements and operation in the gatekeeping policies.

The largest source of the new Japanese immigration was the so-called “war brides” or “soldier brides,” who married American soldiers stationed in Japan during the occupation. The amended War Bride Act in 1947 allowed Japanese women to immigrate to the United States. Japanese American leaders from the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) played very active roles in enacting this law. The JACL had been a prominent political and social organization for second generation Japanese Americans since the 1930s.¹¹ Mike Masaoka, a Japanese American lobbyist who was a representative of the JACL, devoted himself to establishing the new immigration of “war brides” from Japan. The JACL supported Japanese American soldiers who married Japanese women during their service in Japan and brought them to the United States. More than that, JACL members considered that the War Brides Act as the “first success” in their fight to abolish racial barriers and restrictions on Japanese in the U.S. immigration policy.¹² The number of married couples among American servicemen and Japanese women in Japan reached more than 25,000 in 1956 and they would then be a possible source for new female immigration.¹³ Approximately 5,700 Japanese spouses of American citizens, mostly women, moved to the United States in 1956 and made up 78 percent of all new Japanese immigrants.¹⁴ The women were the majority among the

Japanese “out of quota” immigrants in the 1950s.

Following the enactment of the McCarran and Walter Act of 1952, the JACL leaders took their efforts to extend the opportunities for the new Japanese immigration. They eyed the new Refugee Relief Act of 1953. Two different groups utilized the law to immigrate to the United States. One was a group of multiracial orphans, also known as “GI babies.” They were born to Japanese women and American soldiers. Since the late 1940s, some Japanese mothers had had difficulties in raising their “multiracial” children without support from their fathers. Some children were abandoned because of racial discrimination to multiracial infants, antagonism to Americans, and socio-economic instability of single-mothers in Japan. Due to the occupation of Japan and the Korean War, the U.S. government treated the orphans who had American fathers as a target of the new refugee policy. In 1955, the U.S. government allowed the issuance of non-quota visa to 4,000 adoptive children under 10 years old.¹⁵⁾ Until the law expired in 1956, the U.S. authority issued more than 2,500 visas to the orphans from Japan.¹⁶⁾

The second group under the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 was mostly composed of young male workers. After a new batch of 3,000 refugees was allowed from Far East Asia, the JACL approached to the government and local officials in their homeland. They thought that those Japanese suffering from overpopulation, wartime devastation, and natural disasters had a legitimate cause to be classified as “refugees.” In 1955, the U.S. agency accepted a group application for refugees and issued permits to refugees from Japan. The first group of refugees came from the prefectures with emigration history, including Wakayama, Hiroshima, and Kagoshima. In these prefectures, there were still connections between local officials and Japanese American leaders.¹⁷⁾ The sponsors for these refugees were Japanese American farmers in California, who needed young agricultural labor to rebuild farming camps after the wartime internment.¹⁸⁾ Until 1956, the number of Japanese refugee workers reached 1,005 out of the total 2,200 Japanese refugees who came under the 1953 Act.¹⁹⁾ Following Japanese refugee workers by the Refugee Relief Act expired in 1956, the U.S. government and Japanese government agreed to launch a “supplementary agricultural worker program,” referred to “*tanno*” to fill the demands of labor from farms in California. The *tanno* program sent a maximum of 1,000 workers per year to fill the agricultural labor demands in the West Coast. The entry of young male refugees was a result of Japanese American leaders taking advantage of the opportunities made by the gatekeeping policies and its implementation during the Cold War politics. The geopolitics activated the people’s movement during the period between two major immigration acts: the 1952 McCarran and Walter Act that allowed a limited number of new Japanese immigration, and the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that abolished the national quota system.

Therefore, the 1950s was a period of promoting mobility and fluidity among Japanese Americans. The movement included people with very different backgrounds: legal immigrants under the national quota system, soldier brides, adoptees, refugees, temporary agricultural workers, and Nisei who returned to the United States. It provided unprecedented diversity in the Japanese American community.

3. Two Kinds of Refugees: Multiracial Orphans and Young Male Refugees

The Refugee Relief Act brought two very different groups of Japanese refugees into the Japanese American communities. Different interests and actors were behind the two patterns of Japanese refugees.

Multiracial orphans from Japan were among America's political projects under the 1953 Refugee Act. Due to the presence of the U.S. military in post-Second World War Korea and Japan, the children of U.S. servicemen and native women became a social issue as per the new American imperialism policy in East Asia. In many cases, "international" couples did not last, partly because the servicemen abandoned those "wives" when they left for their homeland or for other bases around the world. The single mothers themselves and their children usually suffered from discrimination and spent insecure lives. Social and economic insecurity forced the mothers to abandon their children.²⁰⁾ The "GI babies" were a symbol of a "tragedy" of the war and of the U.S. occupation. The U.S. government and military recognized their obligation to deal with the orphans. Civil organizations such as the International Social Service also engaged in international adoption for those multiracial orphans in East Asia.²¹⁾

As the American media and the public became concerned about the "GI babies" issue, Japanese Americans focused on an incident involving the denial of entry of a three-year-old boy, Pascal Yutaka Nemoto. In 1951 a former American GI family in Southern California adopted him and applied for his entry permit. However, the U.S. Congress rejected a special bill for issuing the visa to him because a Congressman John Rankin voted against it. Japanese American leaders interpreted this as a symptom of racism in Congress. Rankin insisted that the bill brought a flood of "unAmerican elements" and destroyed immigration laws. Mike Masaoka from JACL accused Rankin's view as "racial prejudice" against the Japanese and Japanese Americans. Japanese Americans in Southern California also joined the local campaign to allow the boy to enter and live together with his family. At last, Rankin withdrew his objection and the special bill was passed in the U.S. Congress.²²⁾ The incident advanced the effort to build a solid legal framework to accept the orphans and adoptees. Then, the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 extended to 4,000 applicants under 10 years old.

The other strong advocate for allowing multiracial orphans to apply for the refugee program was Miki Sawada, the founder of the Elizabeth Sanders Home orphanage for multiracial kids in Kanagawa prefecture. Sawada was also known for helping Nisei stranded in Tokyo and Japanese Americans honored her as the "mother of Nisei in Japan." During the early 1950s, she made several campaign tours around the United States to appeal for the adoption of multiracial children in her orphanage. As part of her campaign, she visited Washington D.C. to appeal to Eleanor Roosevelt and also moved to Los Angeles to urge Japanese Americans and African Americans to promote international adoption.²³⁾ Sawada insisted that the United States should take responsibility in "multiracial orphan issue" and U.S. immigration law should be reformed to grant immigrant visas to

children whose American fathers did not register.²⁴⁾ Some Japanese Americans also supported multiracial orphans in Japan. Two Nisei, Frank Momii and Masaru Akahori, established the East-West Children's Aid to support the orphans in East Asia.²⁵⁾ The cities of San Francisco and Los Angeles also had many organizations promoting international adoption and the immigration of these adopted children from Asia.²⁶⁾

The humanitarian-oriented efforts by Miki Sawada and by the Japanese American leaders coincided with America's strategic shift in Cold War geopolitics in East Asia. The U.S. government was very cautious about the spread of anti-Americanism in East Asia. The U.S. media emphasized that the United States had a "moral responsibility" toward Asian children fathered by U.S. military men.²⁷⁾ Thus, the extension of the Refugee Relief Act was an urgent measure to deal with the multiracial orphan issue in East Asia in the context of the Cold War.

Another Japanese refugee group was the "*nanmin seinen*" or young male refugee. While the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 was a strategic and diplomatic action in Cold War politics, its application to Japan was based on different interests among politicians, officials, community leaders, and business leaders both in Japan and the United States. In 1953, citrus farm owners in California proposed to import Japanese agricultural workers to replace Mexican unskilled workers brought in by the *Bracero* program.²⁸⁾ The Japanese government, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, took advantage of their connections with Japanese American leaders including Mike Masaoka to carry out a new worker program.²⁹⁾ Masaoka insisted that Japanese who repatriated from former Japanese colonies in Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula and those who suffered from natural disasters such as flood and typhoon should be included under the category of refugees under the Refugee Act of 1953.³⁰⁾ As orphans adopted by American citizen utilized the Act's "refugee" category, American authorities expanded it to include broader prospective migrants whom the U.S. citizens and institutions sponsored. This shift enabled young Japanese agricultural workers to enter the United States as refugees.

Most young refugees came from the regions with large emigration history to the United States. Those refugees, as well as their predecessor in the early 20th century, were expected to be agricultural immigrants to fill the labor demands of farms in California. The Japanese national and local governments also adopted this refugee program to mitigate overpopulation. A Japanese government-based organization, *Kaigai Kyokai Rengo-Kai* [The Japan Federation of Oversea Associations], established in 1954, which started the financial support program for Japanese agricultural emigrants to Latin America, also applied this support for the refugees in North America in 1956. From their view, the young male refugee program and the subsequent *tanno* supplementary agricultural worker program were in the context of social policy, at the intersection of emigration and agriculture in postwar Japan.³¹⁾

Japanese American leaders sought their own economic as well as cultural interests in the refugee worker program. From their point of view, the refugee workers were reminiscent of the memory of first generation Japanese immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th century. Mike

Masaoka expressed the start of the new “refugee” migration as follows;

Old timers believe that this is the first large contingent of Japanese to arrive in California for employment at a single farming operation since the Gentlemen’s Agreement was signed in 1908....All the great and human progress made in agriculture in the past half century is now theirs. And opportunities for the future are far more promising than that which greeted by Eastbay Issei in the early 1900s. May they make an equally impressive contribution to the land of their adoption as did the earlier predecessors from Japan.³²⁾

He expected that the young male refugees would become the successor of Japanese ethnic industry, especially farming. In fact, many Japanese Americans enjoyed the occupational and educational opportunities which relatively opened to them after the Second World War and left farming which was once their common ways for upward mobility in the United States. As a result, Japanese large-scale farmers in California demanded young labor to maintain their industry. Thus, they actively sponsored the new “refugee” workers from Japan to provide them with accommodations and workplaces in their field.³³⁾ Tsunekusu Kawasaki in Delano was a Nisei farm owner who brokered between the Japanese government and farm owners in California for the new agricultural migrant worker program.³⁴⁾ When young male refugee migration started in 1956, Kawasaki and other farmers in Central California sponsored them. And Katsuma Mukaeda, an Issei leader in Los Angeles, also engaged in bridging young refugees from Kagoshima and Japanese American farmers in Southern California.³⁵⁾

Thus, two distinctive flows of Japanese refugees were structured in the different but entangled contexts of the Cold War politics in East Asia, the racialized and gendered political economy of U. S.-Japan migration, and socio-cultural and economic legacies of Japanese Americans in the West Coast. And how did such a new influx of people transform the community structure and the identity formation of the Japanese American community in California?

4. Gendered Inclusion/Exclusion in the Japanese American Community

There was a contrast in the acceptance of two types of refugees in Japanese American community. As described above, the young refugee workers were expected to be the successors of the Japanese agricultural industry and would become new members of the Japanese American community. Multiracial adoptees, however, were not a part of the Japanese American community after they moved to the United States. Most adoptees lived with non-Japanese American families far from the Japanese American communities. Their parents did not think that their children should have any connection with Japanese Americans. An American adoptive father told media not to ask about his adoptee’s experience in Japan because his adoptee’s new life started when he landed in the United States.³⁶⁾ As Americans believed that memories of “Japan” triggered a trauma for

adoptees, the parents brought them up as “Americans” and not as “Japanese Americans.” Pearl S. Buck, a well-known novelist and advocate for international adoption of multiracial children from Asia, also wrote as follows;

“[T]he decision must be made as to whether the children are to be American or Japanese. If they are to be American, then they should be brought to America and placed for adoption by special agencies... If they are to remain in Japan, then they must be made as Japanese as possible for their own safety.”³⁷⁾

This binary understanding of the multiracial orphan’s identity between that of being American and being Japanese made it difficult for the orphans to define themselves as “Japanese Americans.” American activists involved in the adoption program believed that these orphans should be American, otherwise they were “destined to form a minority group” different from those of Japanese Americans.³⁸⁾ Moreover, Miki Sawada also expected African American community, rather than Japanese Americans, to foster the orphans fathered by African American soldiers.³⁹⁾

A similar logic was seen in the exclusion of soldier brides. Even though they constituted the majority of post-1952 immigrants, Japanese American leaders did not really think that the social welfare of these women was a primary concern in their community. In 1956, the JACL’s National Council charged the American Federation of International Institute to take care of “legal and social work problems involving many nation-wide ‘soldier bride’ cases”. According to Masao Satow, the JACL’s National Director, JACL was “not a social case work agency” and its members were not “qualified to give the necessary counsel and assistance” to soldier brides.⁴⁰⁾ In fact, the International Institute of Los Angeles established Soldier’s Brides Club and held its first meeting in 1953.⁴¹⁾ More than 100 Japanese women gathered in the meeting. The club was a major group for Japanese wives in Los Angeles area. It engaged in networking the Japanese women and organized charitable enterprises, including the sending of relief supplies to war orphans in South Korea.⁴²⁾ The organizational supports for those women were based on religious and interracial cooperation in multiracial neighborhoods, rather than on Japanese American ethnic organizations.

The U.S. media also welcomed Japanese brides only when they could be an “American” wife and mother. The U.S. military established a “bride school” to teach the American way of life to prospective soldier bride immigrants.⁴³⁾ Both soldier brides and adoptees were forced to deny their “Japaneseness.” In addition, the Japanese American leaders expected non-Japanese organizations to provide those women and children with social services and supports. The International Institute, the YMCA and the YWCA, and the American Friends Service were the social service agencies designated for them. Under such circumstances, some soldier brides felt that they were excluded from the Japanese American community partly because of the prejudice against “*pan-pan girls* (the derogatory name for women who dated with American GIs)” and “*konketsuji* (mixed-blood children)” in Japanese America as well as in Japan.⁴⁴⁾

The contrast in discourses between the two refugee groups also reflected a gendered power structure in the Japanese American community. The representations of the new immigrants in Japanese-language newspapers in Los Angeles were framed differently in terms of gender in the Japanese American community. Some newspaper articles expressed “young male refugees” in analogy with Issei agricultural worker/farmer men in the early 20th century. They anticipated that the new men would revitalize the Japanese immigrant agriculture, which was an economic base of prewar Japanese communities in California.

On the other hand, the articles on the lives of soldier brides and multiracial adoptees were usually sensationalized and scandalized. Those articles were written as such since they would be consumed by readers to satisfy the latter’s curiosity. The headlines involving soldier brides were usually related to terms such as “tragedy,” including “domestic violence,” “divorce,” and other troubles.⁴⁵⁾ Multiracial orphans were often dramatized as “victims,” “kids in tragedy,” “unwanted kids” and “the abandoned”.⁴⁶⁾

Discourses on Japanese American women, on the other hand, were likely to be more conservative than those about the new immigrant women. The Women’s Association of Southern California honored a Nisei woman who took care of her old Issei father-in-law who was ill in bed for years. Another article admired a Nisei daughter who married a Japanese diplomat for her “filial devotions to parents and benevolent love to children.” The Japanese media often introduced such women’s devotions and sacrifices as a “role model” for Nisei girls in the communities.⁴⁷⁾ Thus, the community press maintained a stubborn image of a gendered division of labor, in which women took supporting roles for men. For soldier brides and multiracial orphans, on the other hand, it was difficult for them to find their own place and roles in the gendered discourses of the Japanese American community.

An underlying interpretative framework on the representations was a patriarchal ideology that saw women and children as subordinates to men. From this framework, a young male refugee and his family members were subjects who would be legitimate members of the Japanese American community. Soldier brides and multiracial orphans, on the other hand, belonged to non-Japanese men and families. The gendered formation was a basic condition for the inclusion and exclusion of these Japanese new comers in ethnic communities.

5. Retreat from Internationalism and Wartime Memories

The new Japanese refugees during the 1950s were a part of the trans-Pacific mobility in postwar U.S.-Japan relations. Japanese American leaders promoted “internationalism” to seek “racial equality” in the U.S. immigration policies and to maintain the ethnic agriculture profile. The gendered formation of the Japanese American community prepared different paths for the two groups of refugees. While multiracial orphans and soldier brides were excluded from the community, the young male refugee workers were welcomed to inherit the ethnic traditions.

The historical reality of the young male refugees, however, went against the high expectations placed on them. In the summer of 1956, Japanese refugee workers made a claim for the improvement of their working conditions and for the annulment of their three-year labor contract with a Nisei farm owner, Tsunekusu Kawasaki, in Delano. These young workers fled from the farm because of the distasteful meals, insufficient working hours, and “contract fee deduction” from their salary.⁴⁸⁾ They went to Los Angeles to consult with the JACL and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce. The Japanese Americans and the Consulate General were engaged to settle the incident. Kawasaki compromised with the “runaways” on the terms of contracts and its conditions and, in the end, the young workers returned to the camp.⁴⁹⁾

Rafu Shimpo expressed this incident as a “riot” by Japanese refugees in a Japanese-owned farm. The *doshi-kai* [comrades’ club] organized by Issei and Nisei citizens in Delano, failed to persuade the “runaways” to go back to the farm. The *doshi-kai* members referred to ethnic tradition when they talked about the incident and refugees.

Japanese in California have worked with diligence for fifty years even if they did not have a valid contract with their boss. That was a source of trust to Japanese workers here.⁵⁰⁾

Despite the persuasion of the *doshi-kai*, the Japanese refugee workers refused to comply and insisted on their rights as workers. Older Japanese Americans thought that the refugees’ attitudes symbolized the differences between their ancestors in the early 1900s and these refugees in the 1950s. This incident dampened the Nisei’s assumptions that the young refugees would become successors of the Issei tradition in ethnic agriculture. Their “resistance” and “riot” changed the ordinary Nisei’s view toward the new generation. At the same time, the Japanese government questioned the legitimacy of the refugee agricultural worker program. Japanese politicians inspected the living and working conditions of the new refugee workers and proposed to suspend the subsequent farm labor project.⁵¹⁾ As the young male refugees resisted their boss in the camps, the Japanese agricultural workers in Santa Ana, Orange County, also launched a protest against the farm owners.⁵²⁾ These incidents underlined the difficulties of the new immigrants in sharing the ethnic interests of the local Japanese Americans in rural California.

The Japanese American community gradually embraced hesitancy toward the internationalism, which promoted to the new refugee immigration. The organizational involvement in immigration and in the U.S.-Japan relations became controversial among the members of JACL.⁵³⁾ In 1956, a Los Angeles Nisei, Kango Kunitsugu, wrote an essay to oppose the JACL’s stance on “international” issues in an LA-based English paper, *Crossroads*. According to Kunitsugu, “the JACL’s primary responsibility is...that of promoting the welfare of Americans of Japanese ancestry” and JACL’s commitment in the U.S.-Japan relations “would endanger the very foundation” as an “American organization.”⁵⁴⁾ Actually, an editorial in the *Saturday Evening Post* criticized the fact that the JACL spoke “for the interests of Japan,” “with which they are connected

by blood.” The article underlined the idea that “the United States is one nation, not a bundle of nationalities.”⁵⁵⁾

These criticisms triggered the disputes on the JACL’s internationalism. Roy Nishikawa, the National Director from 1956 to 1958, defended it by claiming that the JACL “must be flexible enough in its outlook as an organization” to “meet the demands of a changing world.”⁵⁶⁾ Some leaders in the Southern California chapters, on the other hand, claimed that the JACL should adopt a “hands-off” approach to the U.S.-Japan relations because it could not “afford to risk the chance of becoming identified with Japan in case the Japanese once again lose favor in the eyes of the American public.”⁵⁷⁾ Saburo Kido, a former JACL National President, also warned that the JACL’s commitment would “endanger the status of the individual members” by being “branded as a ‘front’ organization” of Japan. Those leaders shared a fear of being defined as an “outpost” of Japan. They defined the JACL as a “loyal group devoted to promoting better citizenship” (Kido) and underlined its mission as a welfare organization for Nisei.⁵⁸⁾

In the midst of all these argument, the JACL National Convention was held in Salt Lake City in 1958. As a result of discussions and negotiations, the JACL confirmed its role as a welfare organization and thus delegated the responsibility for U.S.-Japan issues to another new organization, the “National Committee on International Relations.”⁵⁹⁾ It was a compromise between two groups. Anti-internationalists succeeded in separating the international issues from the JACL’s agenda, while internationalist leaders sought their interests through the special organization. This decision symbolized a retreat from organizational internationalism among Japanese Americans. In fact, the National Committee on International Relations could not attract the attentions of the broader Japanese American community members and it was not activated in the end.⁶⁰⁾

Thus, the JACL local chapters in the West Coast did not share internationalism as a primary interest. Kunitsugu emphasized that the American public might label the JACL as “a propaganda machinery” for Japan and define the Japanese and Japanese Americans as “enemy aliens” as they did so immediately after the Pearl Harbor attack.⁶¹⁾ Moreover, the *Saturday Evening Post* article reinforced his fear. The refusal to adopt internationalism among local Japanese American leaders in the West Coast was founded on the experience of wartime suffering as a result of being labeled as “enemy aliens,” and from being imprisoned in camps despite their citizenship. Kunitsugu pointed out that this would “further widen the gap...between the national JACL and local chapters.”⁶²⁾

In general, the Issei and Nisei living in the West Coast had suffered from the forced migration and the loss of their properties. Compared to Nisei elites who were resettled to the East Coast, those in the West Coast were interned for longer periods. Moreover, the U.S.-Japan war had destroyed the foundations for their living as an “ethnic group” situated between the homeland and their country of residence. Before the war, Japanese immigrant communities adopted the American way of life while keeping transnational connections to their homelands.⁶³⁾ For them, the war denied the foundational conditions for such simultaneity of assimilation and transnationalism. Japanese immigrants and their descents in the West Coast lived in such transnational ethnic communities. To

be branded as “enemy aliens” was a traumatic experience for such ordinary Japanese Americans. Fear and anxiety led them to keep a distance from “national” JACL elites and their commitment to new Japanese immigration. The fear overpowered the elite’s ambition to be a player in postwar U.S.-Japan relations. In other words, local leaders in the West Coast were struck in their memories of catastrophes—meaning their incarceration and the denial of their ethnic identity—during the wartime, while the JACL national leaders tried to go far to “look forward” as regards the new U.S.-Japan relations.⁶⁴⁾

Thus, the traumatic wartime experiences and memories of Japanese Americans caught in-between the homeland and the country of residence was the primary motivation for anti-internationalism. Even a decade was not enough for them to heal from the trauma. It was difficult to trust in the American public at moment when the interests of both countries collided against each other again.

6. Reclaiming the History of Migration/Refugees from Postwar Japan

Since the end of the Second World War, the U.S. “refugee” policy has been a political product that sought its “national interest” despite the humanitarian ideals introduced by the United Nations. A volatile political situation in postwar East Asia turned Japan into a possible source of refugees. Japanese Americans intervened in the “opportunity” to extend new immigration from Japan and to seek its ideals of racial equality in the United States.

However, the story of Japanese refugees in the United States has not been a part of the “master narrative” of Japanese American history. Besides the small size of the refugees, socio-cultural factors also suppressed their stories. The gendered formation of the community made it difficult for the orphans to find their own place in Japanese America. The young refugee workers also did not fulfill the expectations of following the ethnic tradition. Moreover, the Japanese Americans’ wartime experiences kept themselves away from the new internationalism. The refusal against internationalism was a symbolic turning point toward Japanese American “assimilationism” which has usually characterized the 1950s in their master narrative.

From the point of view of the 2010s, it is ironic that Japan is now one of the most exclusionary countries for refugees. The Japanese government justified the low recognition rate by claiming that most applicants were *de facto* immigrants, not *real* refugees as defined by the Refugee Convention. Throughout the history of Japanese refugees during the 1950s, this paper shows that Japan, the United States, and the Japanese Americans exploited the refugee policy to tackle the postwar social issues, wartime orphans, and overpopulation. In a broader sense, Japanese refugees were among the people displaced after the catastrophic world war. At the same time, the refugee worker program emphasized the economic potentials of Japanese worker who could replace Mexican agricultural workers. The refugee program was operated as *de facto* economic immigration to the United States. Thus, this episode indicates the blurring of boundaries between migration and

refugee status in the years when refugee policies were introduced in the Pacific. Similar complexities can be seen in the American refugee policies after the Vietnam War, the Cuban Revolution, and the Middle East wars. Humanitarian relief and economic rationality were intertwined in the refugee policies. This complexity of the migration/refugee nexus is inevitable among displaced people in modern world.

A lesson to be learned from Japanese refugees during the 1950s is that ethnic minority groups are important players for the refugees' migration and incorporation into a receiving country. The Japanese American ethnic organizations, in the end however, marginalized the new Japanese postwar immigrants and built the "master narrative" to cherish assimilation and integration in the United States. The story of Japanese refugees is still hidden in the shadow of two glorious success stories. The Japanese American success story consolidated the linear generational development from Issei to Nisei, and to Sansei and overlooked the existence of postwar Japanese immigrants.⁶⁵⁾ The rapid economic growth of postwar Japan also ignored the emigrants to the Americas as being part of its success story. The marginalization of the Japanese refugee story demonstrates the discontinuity between the historical memory of Japan as a nation of emigration, and the present understandings of Japan as a nation of non-immigration.

Notes

- 1) Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-Open Door 1945-Present* (New York: Free Press, 1986), pp. 45-46.
- 2) Victor G. Nee and Brett de Bary Nee, *Longtime Californ': A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), p. 410.
- 3) Lori Watt, *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).
- 4) Akira Ishikawa, "Waga Kuni no Kokusai Jinkou Ido Tokei ni-tsuite [On Statistics of International Migration in Japan]" *Jinko Mondai Kenkyu* 180 (1986), pp. 57-65.
- 5) Yukiko Koshiro, *Trans-Pacific Racisms And the U.S. Occupation of Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
- 6) Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, Akemi Kikumura-Yano and James A. Hirabayashi ed. *New Worlds, New Lives: Globalization and People of Japanese Descent in the Americas and from Latin America in Japan* (Stanford University Press, 2002); Nobuko Adachi ed. *Japanese Diaspora: Unsung Pasts, Conflicting Presents and Uncertain Futures*. (New York: Routledge, 2006).
- 7) Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- 8) Fuminori Minamikawa, "Posuto Senryoki-ni-okeru Nichibei-kan-no Imin-to Sono Kanri [U.S.-Japan Migration and Control in the Post-occupation Era: The Japanese American Community under the 1952 Regime of Human Migration]," *Ritsumeikan Kokusai Kenkyu* 28:1 (2015), pp.145-161. The early 1950s was also the time of making foundational political framework of immigration to Japan. See, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Borderline Japan: Foreigners and Frontier Controls in the Postwar Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 9) Erika Lee conceptualizes "gatekeeping" as a comprehensive process in which a law was enacted in

- politics and enforced by bureaucrats and officers in both home and destination. Erika Lee, *At America's Gate: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp.19-22.
- 10) *Rafu Shimpo*, September 10, 1957.
 - 11) Bill Hosokawa, *JACL in Quest of Justice* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1982); Lon Kurashige, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival in Los Angeles, 1934-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
 - 12) Bill Hosokawa, *JACL in Quest of Justice*, p.288.
 - 13) *Pacific Citizen*, September 21, 1956. The article also pointed out that over half of the women were pregnant. Thus, they also could bring children immigrants to the United States.
 - 14) Yasuo Wakatsuki and Joji Suzuki, *Kaigai Iju Seisaku Shiron [History of Oversea Emigration Policy in Japan]* (Tokyo: Fukumura Shuppan, 1975), p.261.
 - 15) *Pacific Citizen*, March 26, 1954; March 4, 1955.
 - 16) *Pacific Citizen*, January 18, 1957.
 - 17) Some politicians elected in those prefectures were involved in establishment and enforcement of refugee and supplementary agricultural worker program. For example, Takizo Matsumoto, a member of House of Representatives from Hiroshima, was mediated between Mike Masaoka and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan in the making of supplementary agricultural worker program. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Records, J-1-1-0-5-1-1, Diplomatic Archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. [Hereafter, MOFA Records]
 - 18) *Rafu Shimpo*, December 14, 1953; June 16, 1954; July 14, 1954; *Kashu Mainichi*, January 29, 1954.
 - 19) *Pacific Citizen*, January 18, 1957; A half of all refugees were Japanese orphans. *Kashu Mainichi*, August 2, 1956.
 - 20) Koshiro, *Trans-Pacific Racisms And the U.S. Occupation of Japan*.
 - 21) Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Global Families: A History of Asian International Adoption in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), Chap.1.
 - 22) *Rafu Shimpo*, September 29, 1951; September 30, 1951; November 5, 1951.
 - 23) *Rafu Shimpo*, November 11, 1952; *Kashu Mainichi*, November 17, 1952.
 - 24) *Rafu Shimpo*, November 14, 1952.
 - 25) "Articles of Incorporation of East-West Children's Aid," (Box 36, Akahori Family Papers, Japanese American Research Project Collection, Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles).
 - 26) Mike Masaoka, *They Call Me Moses Masaoka: An American Saga* (New York: William and Morrow, 1987), p.286.
 - 27) Choy, *Global Families*, p.26.
 - 28) "*Kashu Kankitsuen no Nihonjin Roudosha Koyou ni kansuru Ken* [The issue concerning employment of Japanese worker in citrus farms in California]," January 13, 1953. MOFA Records, J-1-1-0-5-1-1.
 - 29) Go Oyagi describes the details of the negotiation between Masaoka and both governments. Go Oyagi, "Over the Pacific: Post-World War II Asian American Internationalism" (Ph.D diss., University of Southern California, 2013), Chap. 2.
 - 30) *Pacific Citizen*, August 7, 1953; August 14, 1953.
 - 31) Atsushi Ito, *Nihon Nomin Seisaku Shiron [Japan's Peasant Policy in the Wartime and Postwar Periods]* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2013), Chap.3.
 - 32) *Pacific Citizen*, June 17, 1955.
 - 33) *Pacific Citizen*, September 24, 1954; *Rafu Shimpo*, July 8, 1955.
 - 34) "*Kashu Kankitsuen no Nihonjin Roudosha Koyou ni kansuru ken* [The issue concerning employment of

- Japanese worker in citrus farms in California],” January 13, 1953. MOFA Records, J-1-1-0-5-1-1.
- 35) *Kashu Mainichi*, April 6, 1956. Mike Masaoka and other Nisei leaders also visited Japan to inquire about the possibility of new immigration. *Rafu Shimpo*, December 7, 1954; May 23, 1955.
 - 36) *Rafu Shimpo*, June 27, 1956.
 - 37) *Los Angeles Times*, May 31, 1953.
 - 38) *Los Angeles Times*, May 31, 1953.
 - 39) *Rafu Shimpo*, November 7, 1952.
 - 40) “Mike Masaoka to William S. Bernard,” September 11, 1956, “Masao W. Satow to Jackson Chence,” February 18, 1960, In Box 5, History of Japanese American Citizens League Collection, Japanese American National Museum, San Francisco (hereafter, JACL-JANL).
 - 41) *Rafu Shimpo*, November 3, 1953.
 - 42) *Rafu Shimpo*, February 24, 1954.
 - 43) Tomoko Tsuchiya, “Cold War Love: Producing American Liberalism in Interracial Marriage between American Soldiers and Japanese Women” (Ph.D diss., University of California San Diego, 2011), pp.128-131.
 - 44) Shigeyoshi Yasutomi, “Amerika Senso Hanayome heno Manazashi [Eyes on War Brides to the United States],” in Noriko Shimada ed. *Shashin Hanayome, Senso Hanayome no Tadotta Michi [Crossing the Ocean: A New Look at the History of Japanese Picture Brides and War Brides]* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2009), pp. 151-183. On discourse of miscegenation between Japanese women and American soldiers, See, Tomoko Tsuchiya, “Interracial Marriages between American Soldiers and Japanese Women at the Beginning of the Cold War,” *The Journal of American and Canadian Studies* 29 (2011), pp. 59-84.
 - 45) *Rafu Shimpo*, February 27, 1950; March 8, 1952; September 24, 1952; January 1, 1953; October 17, 1956; *Kashu Mainichi*, November 4, 1952; October 17, 1953.
 - 46) *Rafu Shimpo*, November 7, 1952; January 15, 1953; September 14, 1955; June 27, 1956; *Kashu Mainichi*, September 11, 1952. Multiracials in Japanese American community were also represented as “troublemakers” who committed to criminal activities in Japanese American community. *Rafu Shimpo*, July 31, 1951; November 13, 1952.
 - 47) *Kashu Mainichi*, August 5, 1953; March 17, 1958.
 - 48) *Rafu Shimpo*, August 27, 1956.
 - 49) *Rafu Shimpo*, August 28, 1956; September 11, 1956.
 - 50) *Kashu Mainichi*, August 28, 1956.
 - 51) *Rafu Shimpo*, October 11, 1956. October 12, 1956. Susumu Nikaido, a politician elected from Kagoshima, was an inspector for the Kawasaki Farm incident. He also had a connection with Japanese American community in Los Angeles. He studied in University of Southern California in the 1930s.
 - 52) *Rafu Shimpo*, September 19, 1958.
 - 53) On detail on the controversy between Mike Masaoka and other Japanese American leaders, see Oyagi, “Over the Pacific,” pp. 55-70. Ellen D. Wu sees the controversy as the JACL’s trouble with the tension “between assimilation and ethnic identity that endangered its lock on community leadership” in their path to be “the model minority.” Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 107.
 - 54) Kango Kunitsugu, “The Benchwarmer,” *Crossroads*, September 14, 1956.
 - 55) Editorial, “The U.S.A. is a Nation, Not Assorted “Cultural” Groups!” *Saturday Evening Post*, December 1, 1956.
 - 56) *Pacific Citizen*, February 28, 1958.
 - 57) Japanese American Citizens League, “Official Minutes of the 13th Biennial National JACL Convention,

- Los Angeles, September 2-6, 1954" (Box 35, JACL-JANL): 70. In the JACL Pacific Southwest District Council, Frank Chuman moved that the district announced national JACL's retreat from "political or economic intervention in international relations." *Pacific Citizen*, June 13, 1958; July 11, 1958.
- 58) Saburo Kido, "Why I am against JACL involvement in U.S.-Japan relations," *Pacific Citizen*, July 11, 1958.
- 59) "JACL Policy on United States-Japan Affairs adopted at 15th Biennial National Convention 1958." (Box 7, JACL-JANL); *Rafu Shimpō*, August 22, 1958.
- 60) "The Official Minutes of the National Council Meetings, Twentieth Biennial National Convention of the Japanese American Citizens League, San Jose, California, August 21-24, 1968" (Box 35, JACL-JANL), p.67.
- 61) Roy Nishikawa to *Crossroads*, *Rafu Shimpō*, and *Shin-Nichibei* on October 5, 1956 (Box 6, JACL, JANL).
- 62) *Pacific Citizen Holiday Issue*, December 20, 1957, A-7.
- 63) Azuma, *Between Two Empires*; Fuminori Minamikawa, '*Nikkei Amerika-jin' no Rekishi-Shakaigaku [Historical Sociology of 'Japanese American']*' (Tokyo: Sairyusha, 2007)
- 64) "Looking Forward" was a slogan of International Nisei Convention in Tokyo in 1957. *Japan Times*, October 25, 1957.
- 65) Eiichro Azuma, The Making of a Japanese American Race, and Why Are There No "Immigrants" in Postwar Nikkei History and Community?: The Problems of Generation, Region, and Citizenship in Japanese America. Yasuko Takezawa and Gary Y. Okihiro ed. *Trans-Pacific Japanese American Studies: Conversation on Race and Racializations* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), pp. 257-287