Asian Women

Immigration and Citizenship in Oregon

THE HISTORY OF ASIAN WOMEN’S CITIZENSHIP in Oregon intersects with race, gender, class, national origin, immigration statutes, and legal cases. A complex legal and social backdrop dictated Asian women’s ability to immigrate to Oregon, marry, raise families, and become citizens. Federal laws and legal decisions, marriage rights and customs, prostitution, labor, and international relations all have played roles in the relationship between first-generation Asian American women and their citizenship. Second-generation, American-born Asian women faced barriers to the privileges of citizenship as well as legal battles and discrimination. Not just internal policies but also global politics and international relations influenced Asian women’s opportunities to immigrate and gain U.S. citizenship.

Much of the scholarship about Asian women immigrants details the history in California rather than in Oregon. I write this article to give voice to the experiences and challenges that first-generation Asian immigrant women and second-generation American-born Asian women faced in Oregon and to their strength and courage in claiming rights for themselves and their families in a country that often thought them foreign and inassimilable. Looking at citizenship through the eyes of Asian women is critical to understanding the full history of Asian Americans in the United States and the history of the nation as a whole. Asian women served “as historical agents actively engaged in determining their lives and those of their families, communities, and larger entities, albeit within multiple and complex constraints.” Often written about from the perspectives of race and national origin — rather than from the intersection of race, gender, class, and national origin — Asian women’s lives remain at the margins of history. Scholars have much to do in understanding the history of Asian women in Oregon, work that can be guided by the history reviewed here.

NATURALIZATION AND IMMIGRATION RESTRICTIONS FOR FIRST GENERATION IMMIGRANT WOMEN

The history of first-generation Asian women’s immigration to the United States begins with Asian men, sought for their cheap labor or seeking their own fortune. As early as the 1850s, Chinese laborers, mostly from the Guangdong province, settled in the southern and eastern parts of the Oregon territory to mine gold. Chinese men also built the railroads in Oregon. They held manufacturing jobs around Portland, cleared forests, cultivated farmland in Oregon’s rural areas, and composed the largest percentage of cannery workers in Astoria. By 1890, the Chinese population in Oregon had grown...
to 9,540, the second largest community of Chinese in the United States. Males constituted 95 percent of that total.4

The first generation of Japanese immigrants, called Issei, arrived in the United States during the mid 1880s, following the 1882 passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act and the resulting labor void. The mostly male immigrants hailed from Yamaguchi, Hiroshima, Okayama, and Wakayama prefectures; many were single and many thought of themselves as sojourners, here to make their fortune and return home. They had left their wives and families behind in search of riches, anticipating a glamorous life in America.1

South Asian men began arriving on the West Coast in 1907. Men between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five, with little education and few skills, were brought largely for their labor, so few women immigrated with them; between one-third and one-half worked to support their families in India.6

Many factors inhibited women’s immigration, including traditional Chinese values, which gave them little standing because of their gender. Some feared their “husbands might have concubines or other wives in the United States,” and they would have no legal recourse, since Chinese women could neither divorce nor remarry and were subject to their husband’s discipline. Chinese men, however, could commit adultery, divorce, remarry, or practice polygamy. Further discouragement came from missionaries who described the United States as dangerous and depraved. Others said the fees charged for passage on ships were exorbitant and the conditions on board ghastly, and they would have no legal recourse, since Chinese women could neither divorce nor remarry and were subject to their husband’s discipline. Chinese men, however, could commit adultery, divorce, remarry, or practice polygamy. Further discouragement came from missionaries who described the United States as dangerous and depraved. Others said the fees charged for passage on ships were exorbitant and the conditions on board ghastly, with hundreds of lewd men in the steerage class of the ships they would use for passage.7 Chinese women’s immigration experiences began and remained quite different than that of Chinese men.

Still, many single Chinese women immigrants, like men, came from impoverished backgrounds and sought economic security in the United States.4 There were no guarantees, and their work opportunities in the United States were genderized. Some had been promised jobs or husbands that never materialized, and the imbalance of Chinese men to women made them vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Some could only find work as prostitutes in Chinatown brothels.

By 1860, twelve Chinese brothels existed in Portland, run by Chinese merchants or by Tong associations. In an effort to drive them out, the City of Portland enacted an ordinance to suppress prostitution in 1871, then revised it in 1880. Victorian, white society viewed prostitution in Portland’s Chinatown as a scourge to be eliminated. Chinese women immigrants, historian Peggy Pascoe shows, did not necessarily feel the same way. They saw prostitution as a temporary situation, and they could marry and leave prostitution behind. They could make money as prostitutes and send it back to their impoverished families in China or use it as a means to make a new financial start in America. Prostitution, then, was viewed as a means to an end and a temporary necessity given the options, rather than a lifelong moral shame. For some, prostitution was their best choice. Choosing to become a prostitute was some women’s way of negotiating intricate hierarchies of power based in class, gender, and the division of labor in the United States.9

Chinese prostitution became a national concern, and Congress passed the Page Act in 1875, prohibiting “the immigration of any Chinese woman who was not a merchant’s wife and any ’Mongolian’ woman who entered the country for the purpose of prostitution.”10 Historian Erika Lee outlined the law’s causes:

Social reformers and anti-Chinese politicians alike led the campaign to eradicate the business and immigration of Chinese prostitutes. The 1875 Page Act was the first federal law to restrict immigration, illustrating the extent to which Chinese prostitution was considered a threat to the nation. It also paved the way for the eventual passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act seven years later.

Under the law, U.S. immigration officials had the power to institutionalize their personal biases regarding Chinese people. Many assumed that Chinese men who wanted to bring their wives actually just wanted to bring in prostitutes. Officials’ “combined a racialized characterization of Chinese immigrant men as a ‘cunning,’ dishonest group, willing to victimize their own women, with another stereotype that linked Chinese women immigrants directly (and only) to prostitution.”10

Saddled with such assumptions, officials created an immigration experience for women that was different from that of men. Author Jennifer Gee writes:

Unlike Asian immigrant men, women encountered assessments of their sexual morality, which profoundly influenced immigration officials’ decisions to admit or deport them. The requirement of sexual respectability reflected contemporary racial ideology that defined Asian women as particularly inclined to immorality. Sexuality had been embedded in white Americans’ conceptions of Asian women since the mid-to late nineteenth century. . . .

By the 1890s, definitions of sexual immorality became attached to Japanese immigrant women as well.11

That first devaluing of Chinese women immigrants, by viewing them as embodiments of immorality, gave way in 1882 to congressional passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

With the act’s passage, Chinese laborers were no longer allowed to re-enter the United States with their families. Merchants, however, were exempted.13 The law thereby targeted one particular economic class for exclu-
sion. It also made clear that Chinese immigrants could not become naturalized citizens, because, as one senator argued, “the Caucasian race has a right, considering its superiority of intellectual force and mental vigor, to look down upon every other branch of the human family.”

The number of first-generation Chinese women immigrating to Oregon decreased after its passage. Although wives of merchants could immigrate to the United States, the Chinese government did not issue documentation for wives, leaving it up to U.S. immigration officials to determine whether a Chinese immigrant woman was truly the exempted wife of a merchant. First-generation Chinese women could not enter on their own as teachers, students, or shopkeepers — members of the exempted class — only wives of merchants.

Seeking to weed out prostitutes, officials asked about particulars of home life. They questioned women about the layout of their husband’s village, the number of households, and other specific details. Wives often had not been raised in their husbands’ villages, and most had lived there for only a short period of time. The women therefore often did not know the answers, so immigration officials believed they were lying about their marital status. One merchant’s wife, Jee Shee, for example, had lived in her husband’s village for only two months before traveling to the United States in 1911, and she found such questions almost impossible to answer. Immigration officials asked other morality-based questions as well: where had the women lived; had they grown up in the city or the country; had they traveled to the United States with a group of women; and had they worked as a “dancing girl” or in a teahouse? Such questions were all aimed at determining their sexual respectability.

Well aware they would face such questions, wives of merchants changed themselves to conform to immigration officials’ biased expectations and notions of class, gender, and race. They saved money and bought first-class passage, wore fine clothing such as silk robes, highlighted their bound feet, and acted in a manner that suggested wealth. They played to their audience in the evidence they provided to support their request for admission: affidavits, witness testimony, photos, and even X-rays of their bound feet. They took such actions to demonstrate their economic status and to dispel any suspicion that they were prostitutes. The women thereby actively confronted exclusion, and their willingness to do so belies a common rendition of them as passive, subordinate victims.

Like those in other cities, Portland immigration officials often viewed Chinese women as prostitutes and sought to deny their entry, forcing women to hire legal counsel to defend their constitutional rights. Some found a sympathetic ear in the U.S. District Court of Oregon, which, in turn, sometimes resulted in complaints such as the following, by a customs officer:

[Johnston] indicated that while customs officers were denying entrance to more than half the Chinese on each ship, the immigrants were still managing to enter by way of the legal system. He also accused Judge Bellinger [Federal District Court for the District of Oregon], of making liberal rulings that allowed the admission of numerous wives for Portland’s Chinese. Johnston questioned whether these women were wives and admitted his fear that allowing entry to Chinese women would produce great harm, though he did not specify what that might be.

Officials also believed many first-generation Japanese female immigrants were prostitutes.

An 1891 federal law aimed to restrict Japanese women immigrants by prohibiting the entry of prostitutes, contract laborers, and paupers. That same year, Toshiro Fujita was sent by the Japanese consulate in San Francisco to investigate the conditions of Japanese immigrants in the Pacific Northwest. He learned that in Portland, there were about 130 Japanese, 60 of whom were employed by restaurants. He also talked with approximately 20 female emigrants, most of whom were prostitutes. By 1900, the Japanese population in Oregon totaled 2,501 with 2,405 males and 96 females. That year, the “Manuscript Census” in Portland listed the majority of Japanese women immigrants as prostitutes who lived in the downtown area.
Not all Japanese women immigrants were prostitutes, of course. The first permanent Japanese settlers in Oregon were two females: Miyo Iwakoshi, twenty-seven years old, and Tama Jewel Nitobe, her five-year old adopted daughter. Iwakoshi had met Capt. Andrew McKinnon when he was teaching animal husbandry in Japan. They married and sailed to Oregon in 1880 with Miyo’s younger brother, Rikichi, and with Tama. McKinnon sold his ship and built a sawmill near Gresham, naming it Orient steam sawmill in Miyo’s honor. The village of Orient still exists today. In 1891, Iwakoshi’s daughter, then sixteen years old, married Shintaro Takaki, who had opened the first Japanese business in Oregon, a restaurant. Theirs was the first Japanese wedding to take place in Oregon, and on the birth of their first child, they became the first Issei family in the state.

Other Japanese women married and immigrated to ease the economic burden on their families. Miyoshi Noyori, for example, who settled in Dee, Oregon, in 1919, said: “In my own mind, I had motives of making money in America. Since my older sister had hearing problems, it was up to me to make money to help my parents expand their grocery store. It appeared that America would provide me with financial success! So it was my wish to marry him” [her soon-to-be husband].

Many first-generation Japanese women also entered the United States as picture brides: women who wed strangers, through the exchange of pictures and letters. Most often facilitated by a go-between, participants viewed the system as an adaptation of arranged marriages, a socially accepted institution in Japan. From 1907 to 1920, thousands of picture brides arrived on U.S. shores. Many single first-generation Japanese men in Oregon wished to travel back to Japan and find wives but could not afford the cost and time involved. Picture brides filled the bill. An intermediary was often engaged to find suitable matches, and when the families agreed on the marriage, the wedding took place in Japan, without the groom in attendance. The picture brides would then travel to America on their own and meet their husbands. Again, they had to apply for entry based on their dependent immigration status.

The Japanese government imposed restrictions on picture-bride marriages: no more than a thirteen-year age difference between the spouses, and the bride’s name was to be registered in the husband’s family register (koseki) for six months prior to their passport application. Once the application was accepted, the Japanese government would issue a passport for the wife to join the husband. This process occurred many times over, as first-generation Japanese women immigrated to the United States already married to men they had never met.

Korean picture brides also came to Hawaii and the continental United States during the same period. From 1910 to 1924, an estimated one thousand Korean women arrived on both shores. The Korean picture-bride practice developed after the United States and Japan reached the Gentlemen’s Agreement in 1907, a policy wherein Japan—in an attempt to avoid total exclusion—promised to discontinue issuing passports to laborers who wanted to emigrate to the United States for the first time. The agreement included Koreans as well, because Korea had come under Japanese colonial rule in 1905 and Japan had annexed the nation in 1910. With that annexation, Koreans were considered identical to Japanese nationals (similar to the relationship between the United States and the Philippines) and had to abide by all U.S. immigration laws that applied to Japan. Under the agreement, laborers who had already lived in the United States could return, and passports would be issued to the “parents, wives and children of laborers already resident there.”

Like their Japanese counterparts, Korean picture brides were willing to risk marrying men they had never met in person to pursue their education or their religious freedom, but unlike first-generation Japanese women, Korean
picture brides had an additional motive: to escape Japanese colonialism and domination. Korean men in the United States were eager to start families, and to make themselves more attractive to their potential wives, they often sent pictures from their younger days, portrayed themselves as having more wealth than they might have had, or pursued other less-than-honest ways to win their mates.32

Korean picture brides changed the gender dynamic in traditional marriages by working outside the home and serving in the Korean churches as teachers, Bible study leaders, and committee members. They also played a strong role in the fight for Korean independence from Japan by forming women’s associations, teaching children the Korean language, and emphasizing unity and humanity. They contributed to the Korean provisional government in China, the Korean Commission in Washington, D.C., and the Korean Independence Army in China and Manchuria. The first Korean-American communities were established in Hawaii, where the vast majority of the Korean picture brides had emigrated. The Korean immigrant population was very small before World War II, first because of the Gentlemen’s Agreement and then the National Origins Act of 1924. By the 1950s and early 1960s, women increasingly dominated immigration to the United States, which allowed for a nearly balanced ratio between Korean men and women by 1965. In the early part of the twentieth century, Korean tenant laborers moved from Hawaii to Oregon, Washington, California, Idaho, and Montana. Only a handful came to the United States, even as late as after World War II. In the late 1940s, Korean students and their families and teachers made up the nucleus of the Korean community.33

A general rule put in place after July 1, 1915, allowed any Japanese or Korean male in the United States who could show a bank account or other liquid assets of $800 or more to send for his wife and other admissible relatives to join him. The sum of $800 was a sizable amount when the average annual earnings were less then $700, but the rule was also easy to circumvent, as groups of men could pool their assets with the same $800 being used many times over.33

In Oregon from 1910 to 1920, the number of Japanese women between the ages of twenty and forty-four years increased from 201 to 769. Picture brides composed more than half of all married Japanese women arriving during that decade.34

Itsuo Akiyama of Oak Grove, Oregon, immigrated to the United States as a picture bride in 1915, at the age of nineteen. She described her experience:

Japanese immigrant women played a significant role in maintaining Japanese cultural and religious beliefs from Japan. Portland’s first Nichiren Buddhist Church, where this photograph was taken, was established in 1930. These women are performing the traditional Japanese dance of Odori. Left to right are: Mrs. Nakata, Mrs. Moriyu, Mrs. Akiyama, Mrs. Sakamoto, and Mrs. Kobayashi.
Once again, immigration officials often held stereotypical views of proper household roles. If the picture brides said their duties were housekeeping or helping at home, "officials accepted [that answer] as the normative function of Japanese immigrant wives, granting entry to picture brides according to their own assumptions about married women’s roles in the household."\textsuperscript{38} Their assumptions also supported the class bias found in the Gentlemen’s Agreement, which had excluded Japanese laborers from entering the country. Higher-income males who could support their wives and therefore keep them out of the labor force were favored throughout early immigration from China and Japan. Like Chinese women, Japanese female immigrants’ entry required their husbands to show evidence of finances and employment to ensure that the brides would be financially secure and that neither husband nor wife would become public charges. Husbands also had to have proof of their own legal admission to the United States. Should the women not be legally admitted, they were deported.\textsuperscript{39}

Japanese female immigrants did not always accept the decision when they were barred entrance. In 1891, for example, an inspector of immigration denied entry to Nishimura Ekiu, age twenty-five. With only twenty-two dollars in her possession, Ekiu first said that her husband was on board the ship, which he was not, and then said her husband was to meet her at the ship but that she did not know his address. She was found to have no means of support and was without relatives or friends in the United States, and therefore, as "a person likely to become a public charge," was held for deportation.\textsuperscript{40} Ekiu filed a writ of habeas corpus, which was denied by the commissioner of the circuit court. She then appealed her case to the U.S. Supreme Court, arguing that complete judicial deference to immigration decisions made by executive branch immigration officers amounted to a denial of due process. The Supreme Court disagreed with Ekiu, holding "that the judicial branch was not to second-guess the political questions inherent in any immigration decision [of the executive branch]."\textsuperscript{41}

That court decision meant immigration officials had almost absolute power over the lives of female immigrants from Japan and other Asian countries. To enter the United States, their papers, appearance, and answers therefore had to conform to the subjective opinions and beliefs held by officials. Not only were Asian female immigrants expected to prove their identities as exempted wives of men with financial resources, they also had to pass the inspectors’ test of their sexuality and morality. In effect, they had to prove they were not prostitutes. This reinforced a class bias, as Jennifer Gee concludes: "Because prostitutes were assumed to belong to nonelite social and economic classes, immorality served as an indicator of lower-class status."\textsuperscript{42} Despite the barriers, first-generation Japanese women passed the entrance tests. Between 1912 and 1920, almost 7,000 picture brides entered the United States.\textsuperscript{43} In 1910, the ratio of Japanese immigrant men to women was seven to one, but by 1920, the ratio shifted to two to one.\textsuperscript{44}

By February 1921, however, there was growing animosity against Japanese immigrants and cries for their exclusion. In response, the Japanese government voluntarily stopped issuing passports to picture brides, but "established a new policy that permitted marriages between Japanese women and émigrés who returned to Japan for as few as thirty days."\textsuperscript{45} Those women were called Kandodan brides (the Japanese word for excursion) and were issued passports. When they entered the United States, however, they were met with the same level of animosity from immigration officials as the picture brides before them. Only a small number of Japanese women continued to enter the United States until 1924, when the Immigration Act of 1924 banned any further immigration.\textsuperscript{46}

The Immigration Act of 1924 denied all immigrants “ineligible for citizenship” admission to the United States.\textsuperscript{47} In 1922, the Supreme Court case of Takao Ozawa v. United States had confirmed that first-generation
Asian women immigrants in Oregon could not become naturalized citizens because they were clearly not Caucasian.\textsuperscript{48} The act stopped all immigration from Japan, barred Korean immigrants, ceased the arrival of picture brides, and denied entrance to Chinese immigrant wives of Chinese men who were American-born U.S. citizens.\textsuperscript{49} The law changed in 1930, allowing entry for wives who had been married prior to May 26, 1924, but the gender imbalance within the Chinese American communities in Oregon remained high until 1940, when it evened to about two men for each woman.\textsuperscript{50} The United States repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act after it entered World War II, allowing both immigration and naturalized citizenship for first-generation Chinese men and women already in the United States.

First-generation women immigrants from Japan and Korea could not become naturalized U.S. citizens until 1952, with passage of the McCarran-Walter Act.\textsuperscript{51} Many women then acted on their new rights. Hama Yamaki of Hood River, for example, described her work to become a citizen:

> We had a citizenship class in the Hood River heights, and Mr. Tamura and Mr. Hasegawa helped. Our books were in \textit{Eigo} [English] so we had to study with dictionaries. Most of the book was concerned with the history of the United States. Rev. [Arthur] Collins would praise us for our answers and say, ‘You must have studied hard.’ . . . I even learned the ‘Pledge of Allegiance’ in case they asked me to recite it. I studied so hard I felt that I just had to pass! The test was given on the second floor of the Hood River bank, and there were many questions.

At the completion of the examination, Yamaki said:

> When it was over, I was very relieved; and I wrote a haiku about my feelings:

> After I was older
> I achieved American citizenship
> And greeted a new year

> Yamaki took great pride in being able to vote. Other female \textit{Issei} in Oregon felt the same way. Tei Endow said: “I was most happy to receive this honor. I was able to vote. . . . Before we voted, we studied sample ballots; and we asked our friends to make suggestions. I felt privileged to be able to cast my vote. I finally felt that my one vote may have mattered.”\textsuperscript{52}

For Korean female immigrants, 1952 proved not as significant. While eligible to become U.S. citizens, the Korean War still raged, impacting the U.S. Korean community. Koreans did not immigrate in large numbers until after passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which increased immigration quotas. Even then, Korean “war brides” — Korean nationals who had married American soldiers — constituted the largest segment of Korean immigrants from the end of World War II until 1975. The War Brides Act of 1947 also allowed Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino brides and children of U.S. servicemen to immigrate without being subjected to quota restrictions.\textsuperscript{53}

Under the Filipino and Indian Naturalization Act of July 2, 1946, Congress allowed naturalized citizenship for South Asians and Filipinos.\textsuperscript{54} Prior to that time, Filipina women, as U.S. nationals but not citizens, had no home-country consulate to protect them. The United States refused to grant either Philippine independence or U.S. citizenship to Filipino residents. In 1934, they were reclassified as aliens for the purpose of immigration to the United States and had an annual quota of only fifty visas.\textsuperscript{55} As well, the Supreme Court in 1925 held that Filipinos, like Japanese and South Asians, were not “free white persons” eligible for naturalization.\textsuperscript{56}

Filipina women who immigrated to Oregon found life in the United States quite different from what they had known. Concordia G. Hortalaza, the wife of a naturalized Filipino U.S. citizen, arrived in Portland in 1952. She described her experience:

> When I first arrived here in U.S., I thought everything was beautiful, because it was springtime, but when I first tasted the food like corn on the cob, fish, etc., they tasted different from what we use to eat in P.I. [Philippine Islands]. Our food over there is always fresh. Here it was different. I feel cold all the time and I wanted to go home, ‘cause you don’t have anybody to talk to except your husband. We live in an apartment. The food I enjoyed so much was ice cream. I was so happy when I met several Filipinos. One was my cababayanan — Jonny Soy.

> As we are starting a new life here, no money, my husband don’t make much, I did my washing by hand. I have two sisters who live with me in the P.I. so I depend on them to do all the work as I am always in school. Now I do all the work and I’m very good at it. All the conveniences are here, so I’m so glad about it. Now I love the life here.\textsuperscript{57}

As expressed by Concordia, meeting other Filipinos significantly added to her happiness. Developing communities is key to most immigrants’ happiness. Estela B. Feliciano recalled that at a birthday party, the idea of forming a Filipino American Association (FAA) was birthed. So in January 1959, having called every Filipino within a thirty-mile radius, they started the FAA in Mr. and Mrs. Julian Llanis’s basement with thirty participants. The organization’s goals included helping one another in times of need — such as when looking for jobs, needing emergency shelter or food, or facing calamities such as death — as well as fostering better understanding among Filipinos and with others outside of the Filipino culture.\textsuperscript{58}

In Oregon and elsewhere in the United States, the number of Filipinos was relatively small compared with other Asian immigrant communities until 1965. With that year’s Immigration and Nationality Act, 20,000 immi-
grants per nation as well as family members could enter on a non-quota basis. First-generation Asian women immigrants’ reasons for immigrating to Oregon, their harrowing experiences on entry, and the ways they responded to those challenges reveal their tenacity, courage, and wit. First-generation Asian women were not just sidebars to this history, but in the mix. To gain true knowledge and a whole perspective of Asian America’s challenges and triumphs to gain U.S. citizenship, women’s experiences and voices must be included. Their stories matter; their history matters.

BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP
AND SECOND-GENERATION ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN

The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1868, states in part:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.

This guaranteed citizenship for the American-born, second generation of Asian women living in Oregon, but it was no guarantee for their widespread acceptance and recognition as Americans.

The first-generation immigrants from China and Japan had different immigration patterns, settled in different geographic locations, and built communities differently, affecting the second generations of each group. Historian Marie Rose Wong describes the Chinese immigrant community in Oregon: “The discrepancy in age between the dominant groups of both genders and the continued imbalance in the male-to-female ratio, exacerbated by added restrictions on female immigration, discouraged couple formation in Chinatown, a harbinger of slow death for a community incapable of regenerating itself.” In 1880, the ratio of Chinese men to Chinese women in Oregon was 57:1. That ratio would decrease with ensuing decades, but did not normalize (about 2:1) until 1950, some seventy years later. In 1886, the Oregon legislature made family-building more difficult by prohibiting marriage between white persons and persons with a quarter or more of “negro blood,” including Chinese and “Kanaka,” or native Hawaiian. Due to that law and restrictive federal immigration laws, the second generation of Chinese Americans did not come of age until the 1920s.

Chinese families established themselves throughout the state of Oregon. Wah Sing (seated on left) settled in Astoria. He is pictured here in about 1900 with his second wife, Auan Tai Wah Sing, seated, and their children. Standing in back, left to right, are: Lilian, Tong, Quan (Joe, son of first wife), Quong, and Helen. The smallest child is Rose, with Hattie behind her. Edith stands at the right. Sing was a clothing merchant, and Tong and Quong were the first Chinese to graduate from Astoria High School (both in 1913).

The 1888 case of Ex Parte Chin King and Ex Parte Chan San Hee demonstrates the barriers to full citizenship faced by U.S.-born, second-generation Chinese women. Chin King and Chan San Hee were sisters, born of Chinese immigrant parents in Portland and San Francisco. When they returned from a trip to China in 1888, they were forced to remain on their ship. The Portland collector of customs insisted they present certain certificates required under the Chinese Exclusion Act. They had no such documents, and instead filed a petition for a writ of habeas corpus in the federal district court of Oregon. The sisters argued that as U.S. citizens, the exclusion act did not apply to
them, and they did not need any certificates for re-entry. Matthew Deady, then presiding judge for the U.S. District Court of Oregon, agreed, finding that the collector had unlawfully detained them in violation of their constitutional rights. King and Hee had all the privileges and immunities of citizenship, including the right to come into, pass through, or reside within the state. Deady called for their immediate discharge.

In another Oregon case, Yee Woon, a single mother of ten children, took legal action to establish her children’s U.S. citizenship before they left the country, seeking to avoid any problems with immigration officials on their return. Woon filed a petition in the federal court of Oregon against J.H. Barbour, the inspector in charge of the U.S. Immigration office in Portland, asserting that her children were born in Oregon and California. She had birth certificates for some and witnesses for the others. Woon prevailed in the 1905 case of Yee Woon et al. v. J.H. Barbour, but it took resources and time. She had to go to great lengths to avoid the heavy hand of racism faced by U.S. citizens of Chinese descent.

Like all children of immigrants, the lifestyles of second-generation Asian women differed from that of the first generation. Nevertheless, Chinese and Japanese daughters were similar to their mothers in that they both had to deal with the twin evils of racism and sexism. In 1922, Congress passed the Cable Act, which stated that if any female U.S. citizen married a man who was ineligible to become a citizen, she would lose her citizenship. Her status followed that of her husband. She could not regain her citizenship and “could no longer confer derivative citizenship to any of her children who might be born outside the United States.” Prior to the Cable Act, from legislation dating to 1907, women who were U.S. citizens would lose citizenship if they married any non-citizen, regardless of whether he was eligible for citizenship. The Cable Act was titled the “Married Women’s Independent Nationality Act.” In general, it protected independent nationality for white women only, as anti-miscegenation laws in Oregon and other states barred marriage between Asians and whites, and first-generation Asians were ineligible for citizenship.

The Cable Act directly affected Portland native Chiyoko Makino. Born in 1908, she attended Jefferson High School and became a violinist for the Portland Junior Symphony Orchestra. Yoshimasa Tatteeishi, her husband-to-be, was born in Fukuoka, Japan, in 1899 and immigrated to the United States in 1918. They married in 1928, and Chiyoko, now “ineligible to become a citizen,” had to register as an alien each year and carry an identification card. She became a person without a nation, because she was neither a Japanese nor an American citizen. She did not regain her American citizenship until after the 1952 passage of the Walter-McCarran Act.

Much less is written about the Filipino second generation. Often called the Bridge Generation, they were born to the first wave of Filipinos and are today in their sixties, seventies, and eighties. The second wave of Filipino immigration did not occur until after 1952. In 1961, 65 percent of the immigrants were women (2,738 admitted), and almost fifty percent of them were wives of U.S. citizens, including many servicemen. More arrived after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, and by 1980, the U.S. Census listed 775,000 Filipinos living in the United States, the second largest Asian group after people of Chinese ancestry. Today, Filipino Americans are the largest Asian ethnic group with four million strong (Chinese are at 3.5 million), and 15,861 Filipinos are estimated to be residing in Oregon, with 10,928 living in the
First-generation Asian women in Oregon gained rights to immigration and naturalized citizenship more because of changing relationships between the United States and Asian countries than because the United States addressed national and local discriminatory policies and statutes.

With Japan’s victory over China (1894–1895) and its defeat of the Russian fleet in 1905, the United States began to see Japan as a military threat of significant magnitude. That view directly influenced the 1921 Immigration Act, and the “federal government delayed a legislative response to West Coast proposals for Japanese exclusion until 1924” in an effort to not inflame relations between the two nations.

The anti-Japanese movement came from states, labor unions, politicians, and the like. In Oregon, the legislature stated its opposition to Japanese immigration in a memorandum directed to all Congressional senators and representatives. It stated, in part:

The legislature of the state of Oregon is unalterably opposed to further immigration into the United States in excess of the present quota, and further recommends that our laws be so amended as to restrict the entrance into the United States of all Asians and Southern European internationals [sic] . . . [Oregon also called for a] rigid exclusion of all further immigration until such time as we may fully assimilate those within our borders and give to American labor and American laws the right which is their due.

Other international factors influenced passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, which cut off all immigration from Asia, as described by Bill Ong Hing: “The reactionary, isolationist political climate that followed World War I, manifested in the Red Scare of 1919–20, led to even greater exclusionist demands.” Thus, national and international factors mixed to affect Asian women’s immigration to the United States.

Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and other parts of China in 1937, embroiling the two countries in numerous skirmishes. China finally declared war on Japan, and the United States did as well in late 1941. With Japan as the common enemy, China became a strategic ally of the United States. Japan criticized the United States’ exclusion of Chinese immigrants and characterized it as America’s disdain for all Chinese people. United States officials believed they needed to counter such claims now that China was an ally. Only then did Congress pass the Magnuson Bill, which repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Under the new legislation, first-generation Chinese women already in the United States could then become naturalized citizens, marking the first time since the Naturalization Act of 1790 that members of any Asian immigrant group could become naturalized citizens.

During World War II, second-generation Chinese women experienced much different treatment than their Japanese American counterparts.

The immediate changes that the war brought to the largest Asian American communitiees seem contradictory: Japanese America was debased while Chinese America was promoted. The long term changes for each community, however, were similar: in each instance, the center of gravity changed decisively from the Old World to the New.

Along with their mothers, who could now become naturalized U.S. citizens, Chinese American women in Portland started wearing buttons that stated “I am Chinese,” so they would not be mistaken as Japanese Americans and treated accordingly.

They also got involved in the war. Hazel Ying Lee, a Portland native born in 1912, became the first Chinese American woman to fly for the U.S. military. Earning a pilot’s license in Oregon, she wanted to serve China as a pilot but was rejected because she was female. She returned to the United States, where she flew fighter planes with an elite group of women pilots in the Women Airforce Service Pilots program. Lee was one of only two Chinese American women in that program.

Japanese American women had an almost-opposite experience. Seen as the enemy and herded into internment camps without due process, Nisei women were forced to leave their American lives. Citizenship did not matter; they were stripped of their rights. Even while mistreated, many Nisei wanted some way to prove their loyalty. Approximately one hundred Nisei women served in various capacities in the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). They also demonstrated loyalty by joining the military as nurses, as Frances Setsuko Kumazawa did. Born in Wilsonville, Oregon, Kumazawa attended Gresham High School until May 1942, when orders from the Western Defense Command forced her to leave and enter the Portland Assembly Center (previously the Pacific International Livestock Exposition building in North Portland). As soon as possible, she left the Assembly Center to work on a farm in Nyssa, Oregon (outside the Western Defense Command’s boundaries). She also continued her education and graduated from Nyssa Union High School in 1943. In September of that year, she entered the Cadet Nurses Corps at Eastern Oregon College of Education in La Grande. As part of the course, her class continued to train at The Dalles Hospital, which was located within the Western Defense Command; Kumazawa, however, was barred from that area. Instead of giving up, she wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt, asking for an exemption to that order, which she received. After taking a slight detour in her career training to be a
WAC linguist, Kumazawa transferred to a medical unit at Regional Hospital, Camp Crowder, Missouri, where she stayed for the duration of the war.85

Other Nisei women found different avenues for service. Lois and Helen Nanbara served as interpreters and translators for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in Portland. Working at an office located on Sandy Boulevard, their presence in the restricted zone was kept secret, and most Portlanders had no idea the work was being done by these two Japanese American women.86

During the war, the majority of the mass media portrayed second-generation Japanese Americans as traitorous while promoting Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, and South Asian Americans as loyal sons and daughters. Thus, World War II became a defining moment for second-generation Asian women in Oregon. Their status and treatment as U.S. citizens was not determined by their constitutional rights, but by international forces, the national politics and economics of war, and selective racism.87

In Oregon, deportation cases for Chinese waiting to be heard by the Portland immigration station were dismissed. The number of Chinese in Oregon, however, actually decreased. According to U.S. Census data, in 1950, 108 fewer Chinese men resided in Oregon than in 1940. The U.S. Census also indicated only 751 Chinese women living in Oregon.88

After the war, a few changes were made for Asian women to immigrate to the U.S. The 1945 War Brides Act provided that first-generation Chinese women who were wives of U.S. military men could enter the country.89 The United States realized that India had been militarily strategic in the war against Japan. In 1944, there was a push from the South Asian community to allow for Indian immigrants on a quota basis and to extend naturalization rights to South Asians. Thus, the Luce-Celler Act, or the Filipino and Indian Naturalization Act, established by Congress in July 1946, “rewarded other Asian allies by extending quotas and the right of naturalization to ‘persons of races indigenous to India, and . . . the Philippine Islands’ on the model of the 1943 act repealing Chinese exclusion.”90

After World War II, as Hing argues:

Anti-Asian sentiment lingered because the impetus for positive changes affecting Chinese, Filipinos, and Asian Indians had been largely political. The nativist ideology of the 1924 law [Immigration Act] gave little ground in the 1940’s. Exceptions were made only for unique, war-related legislation such as the War Brides Act and the Fiancées Act.

The United States, however, came under harsh criticism for its immigration policies when it took the reins of leadership at the United Nations and with other international organizations, as Hing explains: “The ideological Cold War between capitalism and communism made the United States acutely conscious of how its domestic policies, including immigration, were perceived abroad.”91

In 1952, Congress passed the McCarran-Walter Act, which not only eliminated the “ineligible for citizenship” barrier for first-generation Asian women in Oregon but also “allowed Congress to have a positive impact on international relations in the Far East (including Japan).”92 Even then, immigration quotas remained. The United States retained tight control over how many first-generation Asian immigrants would be allowed to enter the country, and the act in no way addressed the decades of exclusion Asians had suffered. Congress passed another Immigration Act in 1965, which loosened numerical quotas, helped professionals and other aliens who could fill jobs for which qualified U.S. workers were not available, and prioritized family reunification and refuge for persons fleeing a Communist or Communist-dominated country.93 It ushered in a new era for Asian immigration.
FOCUSING ON THE FIRST- AND SECOND-GENERATION ASIAN WOMEN AND CITIZENSHIP IN OREGON

The study of first- and second-generation Asian women in Oregon played vital roles in the development of their communities. More research on these women would greatly benefit us all. Their stories underscore the hardships they faced due to the intersection of their race, gender, class, national origin, immigration statutes, and the relationships between the United States and their countries of origin. It would also highlight the differences and similarities between white women’s and Asian women’s experiences in Oregon. Finally, the perseverance, tenacity, and sheer hard work of Asian women in Oregon would dispel stereotypes of them as passive, subservient or victims, or completely reliant on Asian men. Much more needs to be written about them to hear their voices and learn from their experiences.

NOTES

1. The term generally used today is Asian American and Pacific Islander, but Asian is used here because the article is limited to women immigrants from China, Japan, Korea, South Asia, and the Philippines.
16. Wong, Sweet Cakes, Long Journey, 175. Wong also speculates that it may have been difficult for women to gain entry as a Section 6 exemption: teachers, students, merchants, and travelers qualified for the certificate.
25. Nakata, The Gift, 6. Issei means first generation and is used to refer to the immigrant generation to the U.S.
27. Tamura, Hood River Issei, 28; Gee, Housewives, Men’s Villages, and Sexual Respectability, 91–94.
Asian America; the Filipinos were American nation-

zone, described by degrees of latitude and

same could be said about second-generation

American women, even though many grew up
decades later than second-
generation Chinese and Japanese American

dwomen.

47. Gail M. Nomura, "Filipina Ameri-

an Journal Writing: Recovering Women's History," in Asian/Pacific Islander American Women.

60. The Fourteenth Amendment to the

U.S. Constitution was adopted on July 9, 1868, as

of the Reconstruction amendments.

63. Sara Paulson, "Act to Prohibit the

Intermarriage of Races, 1866," at The Oregon

History Project (Oregon Historical Society, 2006),

http://www.ohs.edu/education/oregonhistory/historical_records/dpDocu-

ment.cfm?doc_ID=16799FAD-AADF-7E49-

C09B8B755DF6 (accessed August 1, 2012).

The Oregon Legislature did not repeal the

law until 1951.

64. See Judy Yung, Unbound Feet: A Social

History of Chinese Women in San Francisco

(Berkeley: University of California Press,


65. 35 Federal Reporter, 354 (June 25, 1888).

Deadly was the 1857 president of the

Oregon constitution convention, where he

argued that Oregon ought to allow slavery

and that the Chinese should be excluded

from Oregon. See Wong, Sweet Cakes, Long

Journey, 141.


67. See Mei Nakano, Japanese American

Women: Three Generations 1890–1990 (Se-

bastopol, Calif.: Mina Press, 1990), 103.

The

same could be said about second-generation

Korean American women, even though

many grew up decades later than second-
generation Chinese and Japanese American

dwomen.

68. The Cable Act of 1922, 42 Stat. 1021

(September 22, 1922).

69. Yung, Unbound Feet, 168.

70. Ibid.

71. Chiyoko Tateishi regained her Ameri-
can citizenship in 1936, but between the time

she was married and then, she had to register

as an alien each year and carry an identifi-
cation card. 7/1/99, Oregon Nikkei Legacy

Center, exhibit text, draft, "Oregon Nikkei


72. Peter Jamero, "Vanishing Filipino

Americans: The Bridge Generation," http://

www.peterjamero.net/Pages/VanishingFilipi-


73. Hing, Making and Remaking Asian

America, 23. See also Chan, Asian Ameri-
cans, 140.

74. Knoll, Becoming American, 113.

75. Filipino American National History

Society, Oregon Chapter, http://lankeore-

gon.org/2012/03/23/fun-facts-filipinos-in-

oregon/, posted March 23, 2012 (accessed

August 8, 2012). The 2010 Census shows


census2010data.com/41-oregon-census-


76. Allerfeldt, Race, Radicalism, Religion,

and Restriction, 176.

77. Ibid., 188–89; see also 192.

78. Hing, Making and Remaking Asian

America, 32–33, 35. Filipinos remained

exempt from the Act because they were

nationals. They could not be excluded un-
til Congress granted independence to the

Philippines in 1934 with the passage of the

Tydings-McDuffie Act (March 24, 1934),

which granted independence on July 4, 1946,

but also stated that between 1934 and 1946

any Filipino who wished to immigrate to the

United States was subject to immigration acts

of 1907 and 1924. For purposes of immigra-

tion, the Philippines would be considered a

separate country with an annual quota of

50 visas.

79. Hing, Making and Remaking Asian

America, 36. See also Takaki, Strangers from

a Different Shore, 277. On Chinese in Portland

who wanted to show their loyalty, see Knoll,

Becoming Americans, 34; and Wong, Sweet

Cakes, Long Journey, 185.

80. Daniels, Asian America, 187.

81. Knoll, Becoming Americans, 35.

82. Yung, Unbound Feet, 257. Maggie Gee

from San Francisco was the other Chinese

American woman pilot. Lee was killed in a

mid-air collision while flying in Montana

on November 23, 1944. Her portrait is in

the Evergreen Aviation Museum in McMinnville,

Oregon, see "Dreams of the West: A History

of the Chinese in Oregon, 1850–1950 (Portland,

Ore.: Ooligan Press and Chinese Consoli-
dated Benevolent Association, 2007), 96.

83. Nakano, Japanese American Women,

170.

84. 7/1/99, Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center,

exhibit text, draft, "Oregon Nikkei Women:


85. Ibid., 32.

86. Ibid., 1999, 31–32.

87. Yung, Unbound Feet, 25. Yung also

recommends, on the "impact of World War

II on the various Asian ethnic groups owing
to politics and foreign relations," Takaki,

Strangers from a Different Shore, 10, 35/41/84.

88. Wong, Sweet Cakes, Long Journey,

166–66.

89. War Brides Act of December 28, 1945,

Statutes at large 60: 339. Knoll, Becoming

Americans, 35.

90. Hing, Making and Remaking Asian

America, 37. Daniels, Asian America, 198. See

also Knoll, Becoming Americans, 300.

91. Ibid., 37.

92. Hing, Making and Remaking Asian

America, 37, see also 247/4176.

93. Ibid., 40–41.