

Immigration from Japan to the U.S.A., Historical Trends and Background

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This paper is the first part of my study on the experience of Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans in the U.S. The emphasis in this chapter is on historical trends and background of their migration patterns from the initial period of their movement, until the decade of nineteen seventies during which many ethnic groups in the U.S. have been observed as being transformed their ideology of cultural assimilation to cultural separatism. Japanese community in the Mainland will be primarily focused with partial reference to those in Hawaii, since there are major social differences between the mainland U.S. and Hawaii, which was annexed by the U.S. in 1897. The differences are namely the motivation of the migrants and the reaction by the receiving societies, immigration policies, social conditions, and attitudes of the native people etc.

The trends of the Japanese immigration to the United States in the prewar period is shown in Chart 1, the subsequent growth in the population of the Japanese community in the U.S. can be seen in Table 1. These migrants, the vast majority of whom came to the U.S. in the period from 1890 to 1924, shared many of the following special characteristics:

1. Most of them first came to the U.S. as temporary migrants in order to be manual laborers. Only under the strong pressure of the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1908, the Migration Quota Law of 1924, and the Japanese Evacuation and Incarceration of 1942-1945, did their orientation change and did they begin to make broad efforts to assimilate with the rest of American society.
2. When they first came to the U.S., they were roughly homogeneous in age — 14-35 years old, sex — most were male, social status within the Japanese kinship system — most were not first sons and therefore had no rights of inheritance, occupational background — most were peasants, area of origin — 89 % were from the eighteen southern prefectures, and education — a large proportion had at least eight years of compulsory education in Japan¹⁾.
3. Most of them were distributed in the West Coast and on Hawaii, and, prior to World War II, only a few of them had settled in other parts of the United States.
4. The majority of them were recruited as unskilled laborers at low pay, even lower than that received by comparable Chinese or Mexican laborers, in such fields as farming, logging, rail-road construction, factory work in canneries and so on. Because of the strong anti-Asian feelings on the West Coast, which persisted after the rapid anti-Chinese movement of the mid nineteenth century, they had scarce access to the jobs in urban areas. They composed labor gangs totally segregated

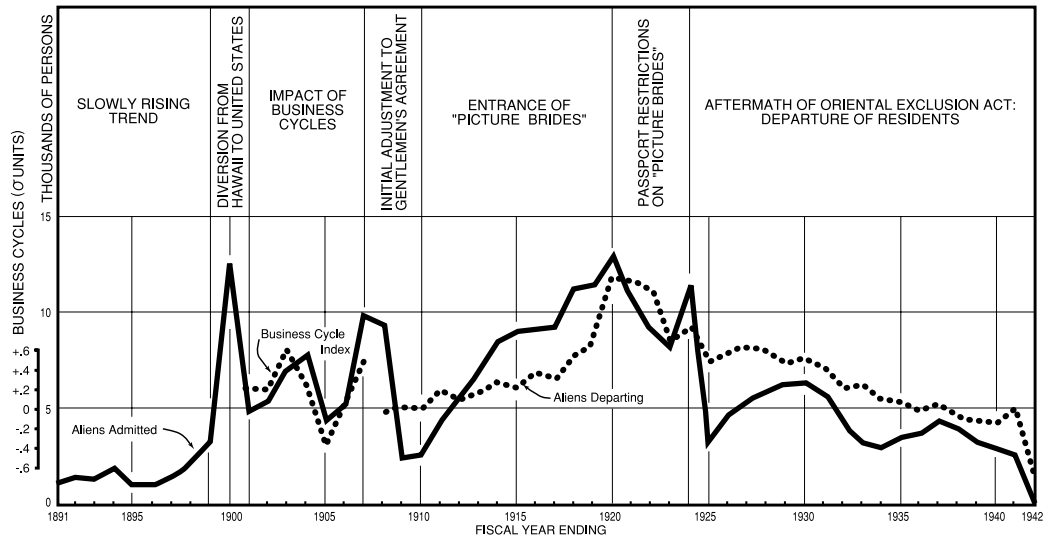


Chart 1 Japanese immigration to and emigration from continent United States, by fiscal years, 1891 -1942, and index of United States business cycles, by calendar years, 1900- 1906; Source: Thomas 1964, Chart 1 p. 4

Table 1 Population of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino, based on 1960 and 1970 reports of the Bureau of the Census; Source: Kitano and Sue 1973, Table 1 p. 2

Census Year	Chinese			Japanese			Filipino		
	Mainland	Hawaii	Total	Mainland	Hawaii	Total	Mainland	Hawaii	Total
1860	34,933								
1870	63,199								
1880	105,465								
1890	107,488	16,752	124,240	2039					
1900	89,863	25,767	115,630	24326	61,111	85,437			
1910	71,531	21,674	93,205	72157	79,675	151,832			
1920	61,639	23,507	85,146	111010	109,274	220,284	160	2,361	2,521
1930	74,954	27,179	102,133	138834	139,631	278,465	45,208	63,052	108,260
1940	77,504	28,774	106,278	126947	157,905	284,852	45,563	52,569	98,132
1950	117,629	32,376	150,005	141768	184,598	326,366	61,636	61,062	122,698
1960	199,095	38,197	237,292	260877	203,455	464,332	106,424	69,070	175,494
1970	383,023	52,039	435,062	373983	217,307	591,290	249,145	93,915	343,060

Note.—Based on 1960 and 1970 reports of the Bureau of the Census and on Lind (1967). No entry indicates that data were unavailable.

from the native laborers both in social aspect and space.

Situation in the Host Society

With the above-mentioned shared features, it was found that Japanese migrants were introduced into the U.S. under a social phenomenon and circumstances in the U.S. That was since the great Gold Rush of 1849, the West Coast rapidly developed. It caused a huge demand for laborers for many industries i.e. mining, light manufacturing, general construction, the construction of the transcontinental

railways etc., and particularly agriculture. With the completion of transcontinental railways and advances in transportation and food processing technology, the West Coast especially southern California, became a major national agricultural center, which grew to support much of the rest of the U.S. To meet the increasing demand for laborers, the industrialists and farm owners tried to introduce Chinese workers, since they could be employed very inexpensively and were hard working and docile. However, the rapid increase in the number of Chinese laborers (shown by Table 1) triggered the violent anti-Chinese movement on the West Coast. This was caused by two reasons.

The first, an economic reason, stemmed from the fact that the supply of inexpensive Chinese labor lowered the general wage level. In addition, Chinese were frequently used to break strikes. Hence, the exclusion of Chinese laborers became one of the main goals of the emerging labor movement on the West Coast.

The second, a social reason, stemmed from the fact that the perceptions of the Chinese lifestyle, the spreading of Chinese slums with their poor sanitary conditions, factional battles, gambling, prostitution, opium-smoking etc., irritated the general feelings and went against the moral standards of the white people. In China, the Ch'ing dynasty was in the last stages of decline that the Ch'ing government could not even control the emigration of its people; much less was it in a position to protect its overseas citizens. Even when hundreds of Chinese laborers were murdered and the U.S. government did not punish the murderers, the Chinese government did not dare to protest (tenBroek 1954, p. 15). As a result of the strong anti-Chinese movement, Chinese immigration to the U.S. was stopped by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Situation in Japan

Since the early Tokugawa period until the middle of the Meiji period (1638-1885), the Japanese government did not allow its citizens to emigrate. Actually, there were dispatches to the West special educational missions in which students studied for long periods, and there were a few political refugees and stowaways who escaped from Japan, but their numbers were negligible compared with later emigration, in Table 1. But after solving its domestic security problems and preparing the necessary legal procedures, the Japanese government, starting in 1885, shifted its migration policy to encourage unemployed people or poor peasants to emigrate. This change resulted from the strong population pressure that had become noticeable since the late Tokugawa period. The nationalistic Meiji government, which carried out its modernization policy under the slogan of "*Fukoku kyōhei*" ("Enrich the nation and strengthen the military"), encouraged its people to be fecund. Consequently, the Japanese population density increased from 1,335 people per square *ri* (which is about 5,952 square miles) in 1872 to 1,885 per square *ri* in 1903 (Iwata 1962, p. 26). But throughout the Meiji period jobs were not sufficiently provided to people. In the process of rapid modernization and commercialization of the late nineteenth century, the traditional solidity of the peasant community was fractured. Poor and landless peasants, especially those who were deprived of the right of inheritance due to the primogeniture kinship system, flowed into urban areas; there squatter slums developed and filled with the unemployed, including potentially dangerous ex-soldiers. Since the early Meiji, the Japanese government eagerly

pursued development of uncultivated land in order to resettle unemployed people in the up country areas, especially in Hokkaido, the Kuril Islands, and Sakhalin. But strong population pressure also forced the Japanese government to encourage the people to emigrate; the first main flow concentrated on Hawaii and in North America (the U.S. and Canada), the later flow in Asia and South America, especially in Brazil. Under the aggressive expansionistic policy of Japan since the Sino-Japanese War (with the annexation of Taiwan in 1895, Korea in 1910, establishment of Manchukoku in 1910 etc.), one can see attempts to respond to problems stemming from population growth pressure (though of course this was by no means the only factor in Japanese expansionism).

Resulting from social and economic changes in both the U.S. and Japan, the Japanese migrants began to come to the U.S., which the migration to Hawaii was initiated in 1885, and to the West Coast in 1890. It thus helped meet the still strong demand for Asian laborers in America after the exclusion of the Chinese (see Table 1 and Chart 1).

Four Periods Divided by Historical Facts

In the history of Japanese immigration to the U.S., considering some facts and remarkable turning points, the period of nearly one hundred years can be divided into four periods as follows.

Period 1 1890- 1908 The influx of the first generation migrants born in Japan, or the Issei

Period 2 1908- 1941 The second generation born in the U.S. called Nisei are added to migrant population.

Period 3 1942- 1945 The period during which both generation shared common experience of War-time Evacuation and Incarceration.

Period 4 1945- 1970's About two decades after the war during which the third generation called Sansei were born and socialized as an unquestionable American citizen.

Period 1 (1890 - 1908)

When Japanese migrants first entered the U.S., there was already an atmosphere of strong discrimination against Asian laborers. This atmosphere can be better understood by considering Edna Bonacich's "theory of ethnic antagonism" (Bonacich 1972). According to her explanation in terms of economic conflict, there develops a "split labor market" when the labor market has two or more groups of laborers whose price of labor differs substantially. In that market there exists three classes which conflict with each other: employers, higher paid laborers, and lower paid laborers.

1) Employers:

"This class aims at having as cheap and docile a labor force as possible to compete effectively with other businesses. If labor cost are too high (owing to such determinants as unions), employers may turn to cheaper sources, importing overseas groups." (Bonacich 1972, p. 553). This description typifies the situation in the Western U.S. which resulted in the introduction of Chinese and Japanese migrants in the nineteenth century.

2) Higher paid laborers:

seek to protect themselves by two ways. One is by *exclusion* of less expensive labor; that is what

happened in the case of the Chinese and Japanese laborers in the U.S. Another way is by setting up a *caste system* in order to exclude cheap labor from desirable jobs. Keeping this theory in mind, the real causes of the following process can be verified:

As is seen in Chart 1, the inflow of Japanese migrants to the U.S. reached the level of more than 10,000 a year by 1900. The increasing presence of Japanese aroused a strong anti-Japanese movement on the West Coast. In 1905 there was formed the Anti-Asiatic Exclusion League. This organization launched a very strong anti-Japanese campaign, accusing the Japanese of being the cause of the low wage standard and proposing that there be laws prohibiting Japanese immigration, land holding in the U.S., and marriage with whites. Strongly influenced by this movement, the San Francisco Board of Education ordered that its Oriental pupils be segregated from others in the public schools. By these pressures, the steady increase of Japanese immigration was greatly slowed and the Japanese government expressed serious concern about the situation and put pressure on the U.S. government to revoke the segregation order. After a complicated series of negotiations between the U.S. and Japanese governments, the so-called Gentlemen's Agreement was reached in February 1908 (McLe-more 1980, pp. 161-162). This agreement prescribed that the Japanese government would not issue passports to those seeking to migrate to the U.S., other than those wives, children, and parents of Japanese already settled in the U.S. Since then, migration to the U.S. considerably declined and Japanese emigrants instead went primarily to Brazil, which about that time began to encourage the migration from Japan, and to Asian countries.

Period 2 (1908 - 1941)

In spite of the Gentlemen's Agreement, there still continued an inflow of Japanese immigrants, especially during World War I, when there was a high demand for labor. However, by examining this trend in detail in Chart 2, about half of the new migrants were female, most of whom came as brides (in many cases as *picture brides*) of the settled male migrants.

This fact reveals the strong influence of the Gentlemen's Agreement on how the immigrants viewed their future life and their self establishment. With further large scale immigration of Japanese prohibited, the remaining Japanese migrants must increasingly realize that they were isolated and that their futures would be, for the foreseeable future, in the U.S. Inevitably, a subtle shift in their self-perceptions from that of temporary sojourners to that of long-time, possibly life-time, settlers. This important change of their orientation is illustrated by the large numbers of females who migrated, as marriage partners, during the period from 1910 to 1924.

The anti-Japanese and anti-Asian movement did not cease after the Gentlemen's Agreement. Many bills to oppress the Japanese immigrants were introduced to the California and U.S. legislatures; some of them were enacted and put into practice. Among them the most important one was the Alien Land Law, which was passed in California in 1913. It eventually prohibited Japanese from making new land purchases²⁾. This movement, in alliance with other movements throughout the country that were against immigration that could serve as sources of cheap labor, succeeded in having the Immigration Quota Laws passed; there was a tentative one in 1921 and a permanent one in 1924, which was not repealed until 1965. By the legislation of the 1924 Immigration Quota Law, the Gentlemen's Agree-

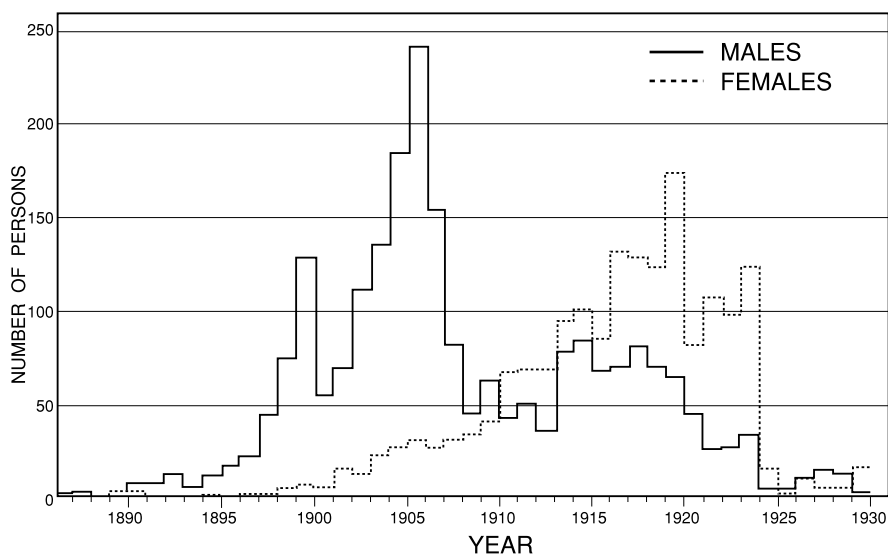


Chart 2 Numbers of Japanese arriving in continental United States, 1887- 1930. Based on interviews with 2,298 males and 1,781 females; Source: Strong 1934, page 87

ment was unilaterally abrogated: the new law allowed only 100 Japanese a year to immigrate. It became almost impossible even for the parents or wives of Japanese who were already in the U.S. to immigrate. In spite of the fact that the road to naturalization was closed³⁾, from this period of time, the Issei's aims and interest toward permanent settlement and socio-cultural assimilation became much stronger. Completely cut off from the regular circulation with Japan, the Japanese community began to evolve its own unique culture. The population of the closed Japanese community continued to increase, adding second and third generations (Nisei and Sansei), as shown in Table 1.

Reflecting the cessation of further immigration, the age structure of the Japanese population shows a two-peak curve, as seen in Chart 3a, represents the Japanese born and U.S. born generations. Apparently, after all of the official and social discrimination, the Issei's attitude towards Japanese society and American society can be called ambivalent. Even though their children, the Nisei generation automatically received U.S. citizenship by birth, yet the Issei parents usually tried to get Japanese citizenship for them in addition. Therefore, most of the Nisei generation had dual U.S.-Japanese citizenship. Moreover, the Issei's attachment to Japanese society was obvious that it was very popular for them to send at least one of their children to Japan for education. These Nisei formed a special group within the Japanese community in America known as *Kibei* (means "those who have returned to America").

Period 3 (1942 - 45)

Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor by Japanese Navy, the Japanese and Japanese Americans in the U.S. were widely suspected being loyal to Japan, an enemy country, and being potential support of possible Japanese attacks. Those who lived on the West Coast were considered to be a special threat

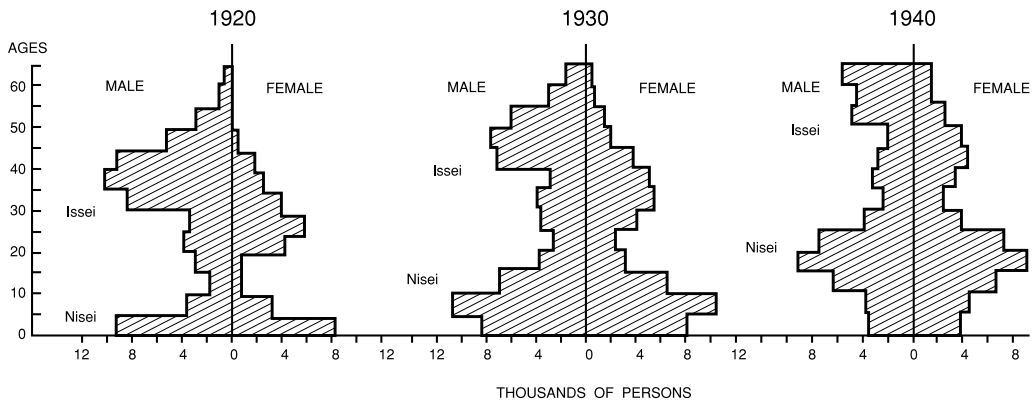


Chart 3a Age-Sex structure of the Japanese American Population in California, Washington, Oregon, and Arizona, by Decades, 1920- 1940; Source: Thomas 1952, Chart III p. 14

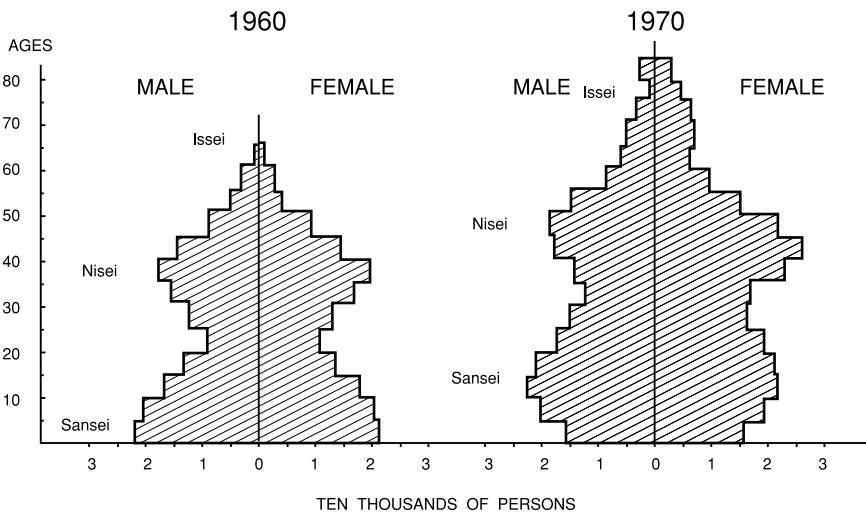


Chart 3b Age-Sex structure of the Japanese American Population in the West, by Decades, 1960 -1970; Source: U.S. Census 1960 & 1970

because of high concentrations of population and it was felt that there was a high possibility of Japanese attack there. Consequently, the U.S. government resorted to a comprehensive evacuation of more than 110,000 people on the West Coast to inland concentration camps.

This program was under the management of the War Relocation Authority (WRA). Socially unexpectedly, under this relocation program, Japanese and their off springs had been thoroughly indoctrinated in American culture. This incarceration experience, together with the complete oppression of the Issei's organizations and with the information received about the miserable conditions in postwar Japan, were enough to make the Issei give up their desire to return to Japan. While the Issei's influ-

ence in the Japanese community declined as they grew into retirement, the Nisei generation and their organizations, particularly the Japanese-American Citizens League (JACL), which was established in the 1930's, took over the leadership in Japanese American community. They cooperated with the War Relocation Authority (WRA) on the one hand, but on the other hand they fought and sued the U.S. government for its evacuation and incarceration policy, on the premise that such conduct was unconstitutional for its comprehensiveness which neglected to distinguish between U.S. citizens and conspirators, and its exclusive application to the Japanese ethnic group while exempting the German and Italian⁴). This period contributed to the orientation of Japanese and Japanese Americans towards assimilation with American society.

Period 4 (1945 - 1970's)

Returning from the concentration camps, converted Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans naturally started making moves towards rapid assimilation and were generally successful in mobilizing themselves in order to attain higher social status, and despite the fact that at this new starting point they were able to recover only about 10 % of their wartime losses⁵).

As being shown in Chart 4, after 1952, especially after the Immigration Act of 1965, there has been a flow of about 4,000 to 5,000 immigrants from Japan to the U.S. yearly. These immigrants account for about one-third of the population growth of Japanese and Japanese Americans. They consist of people from various categories, such as students, visitors, and wives of American servicemen (Kitano 1969, pp. 131- 132). From the end of the nineteen seventies, there are steadily increasing numbers of various status of Japanese including university students, exchanged scholars, temporary officers and workers and who are assigned and transferred by companies in Japan or working for the business and industrial joint ventures. Many of them are committed to the existing Japanese communities, and others establish several new organizations in the later period.

Conclusions

The immigration influx from Japan to the U.S.A. and the process of their community establishment can be viewed in four periods and stages.

1. 1890 -1908, it was time of initial influx of (bachelor, male) workers. Their community was temporary and occupied by sojourners. Personal tie with original family in Japan was strong. Their identity and frame of reference were attached to the homeland.
2. 1908 -1941, time of immediate family building and realization that settlement in the U.S. may be of long duration. The second generations were born and raised up as American citizens. Their Diasporic community has been observed in suspicion by the authority and members of American core culture. Their psychological attachments were in ambivalent state in terms of dual affiliation and loyalty to both societies.
3. 1942 -1945, the period of Wartime Evacuation and Incarceration. It was the time of breaking tie with Japan and preparing to enter mainstream of U.S. society. Bitter experience in losing all property and deprivation of pride and identity as good American citizens had forced the survivors devi-

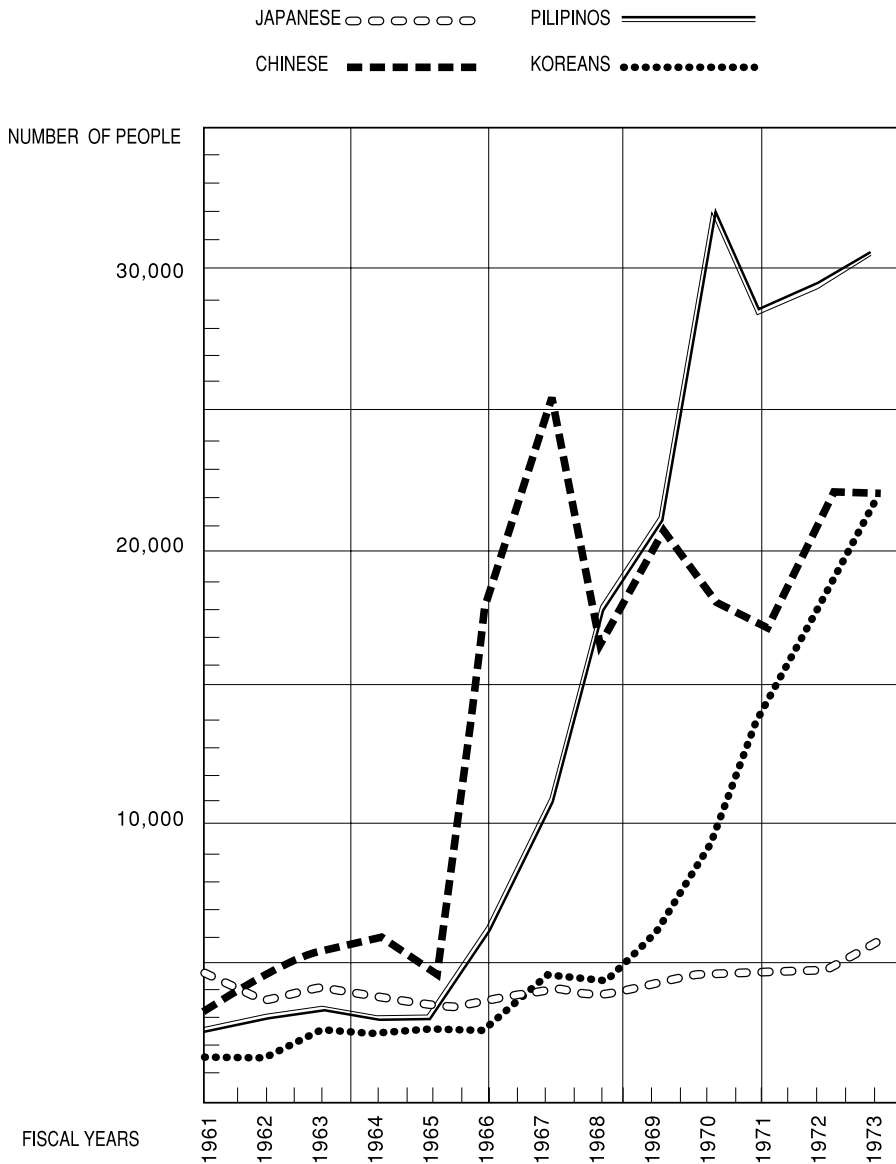


Chart 4 Asian Immigration to the United States, 1961 - 1973; Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Annual Reports 1961 - 1973

ate their dream and behaviors from Japanese to American orientation.

4. 1945 - 1970's was the period of upward social mobility. This period signifies the higher degrees of cultural assimilation into American society of the Americans of Japanese ancestry. Many aspects of their living — language, beliefs, ideology, education, jobs, marriage, style of life, recreation and so on, indicate the shifting of their social identity from Japanese towards American. Among the American ethnic groups, generally their position in the multi-ethnic structure is ranked above average.

Notes

- 1) This statement is firmly supported by research results. For example, J.W Connor reports his findings as follows: “*Our interview with 90 Issei (59 males, 31 females) in the Sacramento area support the idea of homogeneity since the over-whelming majority of our respondents (73 per cent) came from southwestern Japan, they were of a rural, agricultural back-ground, and the level of education was about eight years, while the average age at the time of emigration was about nineteen years.*”
- 2) As Iwata states, “*The Japanese circumvented the ownership provisions of the law by purchasing agricultural land in the names of their minor children born in the United States or by paying American citizens to buy land and hold it for them or their children.*” (Iwata 1962, p. 29) But the amendment of this land law in 1920 “... *deprived the Japanese of the right to lease agricultural land and to act as guardian for a native-born minor if his estate consisted of property which the Japanese could not hold under law.*” (Iwata 1962, p. 31)
- 3) Sec. 2169 of the Revised Statutes (1873) prescribed that: “*The provision of this title [i. e., U.S. citizenship] shall apply to aliens being free white persons, and to aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent.*” (Van Dyne 1907, p. 412), which thus effectively excluded most Asian from naturalization. Item No. 21 of The Naturalization Regulations, Office of the Secretary, Department of Commerce and Labor (1906) confirms this by stating, “*Clerks of courts shall not receive declaration of intention to become citizens from other aliens than white persons and persons of African nativity or of African descent.*” (Van Dyne 1907, p. 490) Some court cases show that Japanese claims for U.S. citizenship were rejected with the explanation that “*A native of Japan (of the Mongolian race) is not included within the term ‘white persons.’*” (Van Dyne 1907, p. 43-44) Because of these strict regulations, naturalization of Issei was impossible until the 1950’s. Therefore Issei and Nisei completely differed in their citizenship status: All the Issei generation had only Japanese citizenship throughout the prewar period, while most of the Nisei generation held both American (because of birth on American soil) and Japanese (because of their descent) citizenship. Therefore, although some overlapping and ambiguities are inevitable, in general I use the term Japanese or Japanese migrant to refer to the Issei generation, and the term Japanese Americans to refer to the Nisei and subsequent generations.
- 4) Refer, for example, to the case of Gordon K. Hirabayashi, who was arrested, jailed for violating the evacuation orders, and whose struggle in the courts was strongly supported by the JAACL (Japanese American Citizens League, 1942).
- 5) Properties namely lands, houses, money, saving in bank accounts, businesses, jobs and social networks

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