

VII

The 1924 Immigration Act

Japanese immigrants interpreted the enactment of the 1924 Immigration Act as the culminating act of rejection by the United States. Enacted in the spring of 1924, this restrictive legislation was designed to control the racial composition of the American population. It regulated all immigration to the United States by setting an annual ceiling on immigration and by establishing a quota system based upon national origins. To ensure the predominance of the so-called Nordic race, the quota system heavily favored the countries of western and northern Europe. It allotted to them large annual quotas, while giving eastern and southern European countries much smaller quotas. In terms of immigration from Asia, the 1924 Immigration Act stopped it entirely by an exclusionary clause that prohibited the admission of any alien ineligible to citizenship as an immigrant. Inasmuch as the Supreme Court had ruled the Japanese ineligible in the Ozawa case, this exclusionary clause automatically applied to the Japanese. In this way, the 1924 Immigration Act nullified the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907-8 and abruptly terminated all Japanese immigration.

As Congress was enacting the 1924 Immigration Act, some uncertainty surrounded the exclusionary clause. Japanese Ambassador Hanihara Masanao protested the clause as being discriminatory against Japan. In an April 10 letter to Secretary of State Charles E. Hughes, Hanihara said that the clause singled out the Japanese people as "unworthy and undesirable." He pointed out that Congress had extended

the Chinese Exclusion Act indefinitely in 1902 and had designated most of Asia in 1917 as barred zones from which no immigration was allowed. In view of this fact, and the public statements made by anti-Japanese exclusionists, Hanihara could not help but believe that those who supported the clause, notwithstanding their frequent denials, had only the Japanese in mind. In his opinion, there was no need for its inclusion because the Gentlemen's Agreement, faithfully honored by the Japanese government, had effectively limited Japanese immigration. The inclusion of the exclusionary clause by Congress would have "grave consequences," Hanihara warned, "upon the otherwise happy and mutually advantageous relations between" Japan and the United States.¹

Out of deference to Japanese national sensibilities, Secretary of State Hughes tried to persuade Congress to drop the exclusionary clause altogether. When he was unsuccessful, he tried to secure a period of grace during which it would not be in effect, giving him time to negotiate a new immigration treaty which would be satisfactory to both Japan and the United States. With this in mind, Hughes sought March 1, 1925 as the effective date of the clause. To Hanihara's great shock, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge interpreted his usage of the phrase "grave consequences" as a "veiled threat" against the American government, and in mid-April Congress swiftly enacted the 1924 Immigration Act with the exclusionary clause included. President Calvin Coolidge signed the act on May 26 and it became effective on July 1, 1924. From this date, no alien ineligible to citizenship was to be admitted as an immigrant.

Japanese immigrants reacted to the 1924 Immigration Act in a number of ways. During the spring months, a number of immigrants endeavored to beat the deadline. The Gentlemen's Agreement remained in force until June 30. Under its terms, Japanese immigrants still were able to send for their wives, children, and parents, and still could return to Japan themselves and reenter the United States as long as they did so before July 1. But immigrant bachelors did not have the option of summoning picture-brides because the Japanese government had ceased issuing passports to such brides back in 1920. In April the *Nichibei Shimbun* urged single men to return to Japan to get married.² Some bachelors who had the economic means scurried back to find brides at this time. In order to expedite their return to the United States, the Foreign Ministry waived its regulation requiring wives to be entered in their husbands' family registry for six months to qualify for passports. This increased the possibility of such men being able to

reenter the United States with their spouses before July 1. The number of immigrant men who actually married in Japan at this time was small. The San Francisco consul estimated that only about 442 brides entered the United States through the San Francisco immigration station during the months of May and June.³

Other Japanese immigrants sent for their children and/or parents at this time, too. Many had intended to summon them before the spring of 1924, but had procrastinated for one reason or another. Faced with a now or never situation, they finally acted decisively and sent for them. Still other Japanese immigrants who happened to be visiting Japan applied for immediate return passage to the United States. Under normal circumstances, returnees did not have to worry about rushing back because Foreign Ministry regulations permitted them to stay in Japan up to three years without forfeiting the right to return. With the June 30 deadline looming, however, all returnees were forced to make a sudden choice. They either had to cut short their visit, or face being barred from American shores permanently.

The June 30 deadline created a problem at ports of embarkation in Japan. Shipping lines were suddenly flooded with reservation requests. The demand for tickets exceeded the limited passenger space on ships making the trans-Pacific run. Prospective passengers converged upon Kobe and Yokohama in the hope of assuring themselves passage tickets or at least a spot on waiting lists. At the beginning of June, the Foreign Ministry estimated upwards of 1,500 to 2,500 people might be unable to obtain passage due to the limited number of ships scheduled to sail for the Hawaiian Islands and the continental United States.⁴ Given the real possibility of missing the deadline, many people petitioned the Japanese government for assistance and requested that additional ships be made available promptly.⁵ The Foreign Ministry solicited the cooperation of Japanese shipping lines to alleviate the problem. As a result, the Nihon Yūsen Kaisha, the Ōsaka Shōsen Kaisha, and the Tōyō Kisen Kaisha each agreed to place one additional ship in service on the trans-Pacific crossing during the month of June. In return, they were allowed to raise their passage rates by 50 percent.

The exact number of persons stranded at ports of embarkation is unknown. The Governor of Hyōgo Prefecture reported that sixteen ships bound for Hawaii and the United States sailed from Kobe in May and June, carrying a total of 2,694 passengers.⁶ However, 679 people were left behind, among them a few who had failed to pass the required physical examination.⁷ The Governor of Kanagawa Prefecture reported that 2,308 passengers sailed from Yokohama in June. The

last ship bound for the United States from Yokohama was the *President Jackson* which departed on June 17. Unable to obtain accommodations on this ship, 22 persons were left stranded in Yokohama.⁸ Whatever the actual total was, those who had the misfortune of being stranded at ports of embarkation became the victims of the 1924 Immigration Act. They were separated permanently from their families, with reunion only possible if their relatives decided to abandon the United States and return to Japan.

Emotional reaction to the 1924 Immigration Act was very widespread and intense in Japan. Nationalistic mass rallies were held throughout the country to protest its enactment. Japanese protesters designated July 1 as a so-called *Kokujokubi* or "National Humiliation Day" because, in their opinion, the Japanese people had been insulted by being singled out for exclusion. American-educated intellectuals reacted very strongly. Nitobe Inazō, a John Hopkins University graduate, vowed never to set foot on American soil again until after the 1924 Immigration Act was revised to remove its exclusionary clause. As an Amherst graduate and leading Christian intellectual, Uchimura Kanzō went much further. He appealed to his countrymen, not only not to visit the United States, but also to refrain from using American products, receiving American aid, reading material written by Americans, and attending American churches. Harvard-educated Kaneko Kentarō, president of the America-Japan Society, resigned his post in protest.⁹

Japanese immigrants protested the 1924 Immigration Act in a more subdued manner. No mass protest rallies were held in the United States, but Japanese immigrant newspapers uniformly interpreted its enactment as a manifestation of white supremacy. In Los Angeles, the *Rafu Shimpō* advised all Japanese immigrants "to remain calm" and "avoid unnecessary indignation." Arousing more "ill-feeling" would serve no useful purpose. According to this newspaper, Japan had not suffered humiliation alone—the United States had humiliated herself in the eyes of the world. By excluding the Japanese people, she had betrayed her own ideals, dishonored her best tradition, and revealed her own weakness to all. If a future "cataclysmic racial strife" should erupt, the United States had to assume responsibility for it. For she herself had "planted the seeds" by "branding" the Japanese people with "a stamp of inferiority."¹⁰

Other immigrant newspapers voiced stronger opinions. The *Tai-hoku Nippō* interpreted the 1924 Immigration Act in racial terms, too. By enacting it, the United States had "planted the seeds of a racial

war" in which the white race would be pitted against the colored races.¹¹ To describe its own reaction, the Seattle newspaper used the term *gashin shōtan*.¹² Of Chinese classical origin, this term harked back in modern Japan to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. Japanese newspapers first used it after the war when Japan was forced by Germany, France, and Russia to return the Liaotung Peninsula to China. Known as the Triple Intervention, this event provoked an outpouring of Japanese national indignation because Japan had been denied the fruits of her victory. *Gashin shōtan* counseled patience to the Japanese people. They had to strengthen themselves in order to seek ultimate revenge against Germany, France, and Russia in the future. By the same token, Japanese immigrants had to cultivate their own strength in the face of the 1924 Immigration Act in order to compel Americans to acknowledge the true worth of the Japanese people and to make them pay the respect they owed to Japan.

The *Shin Sekai* also interpreted the 1924 Immigration Act in strict racial terms. By treating the Japanese as "an inferior people," it had thrown down the gauntlet of "a racial struggle" between "the yellow and white races." In order to rise to the challenge, Japanese immigrants had to demonstrate the true character of the Japanese people by competing successfully with the white race, intellectually, physically, and morally.¹³ The *Shin Sekai* ridiculed any Japanese person who scoffed at the designation of July 1 as a National Humiliation Day. "Anyone who remains in a toilet long enough will not be able to smell the foul odor," it said. "Anyone who works as a menial servant long enough will develop a servile mentality." And "anyone who does not consider a national humiliation a national humiliation has lost all of his sensibility."¹⁴ In point of fact, Japanese immigrants in the United States were "treated just like *burakumin* in a humiliating way."¹⁵

This analogy to the despised outcaste group in Japan was not by happenstance. In 1922 leaders of this group established the *Suiheisha* and launched a national campaign to fight discrimination. The *Suihei* movement, as it came to be called, received wide press coverage which brought Japanese national attention to the plight of the *burakumin* or members of this outcaste group. The *Taihoku Nippō* likewise equated the treatment of Japanese immigrants in the United States to that of the *burakumin* in Japan. Ironically, however, this newspaper perceived no connection between the *burakumin*'s struggle for equality in Japan with that of the Japanese immigrants in America. Some *burakumin* felt that no Japanese had a right to protest the treatment of Japanese

immigrants abroad because the Japanese themselves discriminated against *burakumin*, Koreans, and Chinese in Japan. Only if the Japanese treated all minority groups equally would they ever be justified in criticizing the United States. The *Taihoku Nippō* repudiated this line of reasoning. Japan had been insulted by the United States, plain and simple. Consequently, regardless of how minority groups were treated in Japan, all Japanese had the right to protest the American treatment of Japanese immigrants.¹⁶

Japanese immigrants themselves of course were not free of prejudice. Aware of what had happened to Chinese immigrants in the nineteenth century, Japanese immigrant leaders had always dreaded the thought of Japanese exclusion. During the course of the Japanese exclusion movement, the leaders repeatedly said, "We are afraid that we will be excluded as the Chinese have been." Since they themselves had a low opinion of the Chinese people, this was not a pleasant thought to entertain. For their part, anti-Japanese exclusionists always linked Japanese immigration to the past "evils" of Chinese immigration. To counteract this negative association, Japanese immigrant leaders did everything possible to disassociate Japanese immigrants from their Chinese counterparts. In the end, however, all of their attempts at disassociation went for naught. For the Japanese people, stigmatized as an equally inferior and undesirable race, were excluded in an identical manner. Japanese immigrant leaders, then, reached the inevitable conclusion that, "We have been excluded just like the Chinese," which expressed a realization that what they had dreaded for so long had become a horrible reality.

Japanese immigrant leaders believed in the superiority of the Japanese people. In 1913 five prominent leaders—Ushijima Kinji, Fujihira Junzō, Abiko Kyūtarō, Ikeda Goroku, and Kawakami Kiyoshi—addressed a revealing letter to Ambassador Chinda Sutemi. Fujihira headed the San Francisco branch of the Yokohama Specie Bank, while Ikeda was the publisher of the *Shin Sekai*. In discussing two immigration bills before Congress, these five men presented their opinion regarding a provision prohibiting the admission of any alien ineligible to citizenship. They wrote:

Of the ten or more immigration bills which have been introduced into Congress, the two most important ones are the Dillingham Bill in the Senate and the Burnett Bill in the House. Both bills contain a provision prohibiting the admission of aliens ineligible to citizenship under existing naturalization statutes. This provision has the objective of excluding Japanese and other Orientals. Among the countries of the Orient, there

are those which still cannot claim to rank among the advanced, civilized world powers. That these lesser nations will be treated differentially by American immigration laws is understandable. But since Japan already ranks among the advanced, civilized nations, it is unfair for her to be treated as an inferior country.¹⁷

This letter expressed the ingrained prejudice of Japanese immigrant leaders. Countries like China and Korea were "inferior nations," in their opinion, whose subjects were unworthy of equal treatment. If the United States elected to discriminate against the people of such nations, that was understandable as well as acceptable. But Japan and her subjects were different. Japan was the equal of the western powers, and therefore her subjects deserved to be, indeed demanded to be, treated equally. Above all else, Japanese immigrant leaders wanted Japanese immigrants to be treated as European immigrants were. They conceded that the American government had the right to regulate immigration. They only wanted Japanese immigration to be placed on the same footing as European immigration. In terms of the 1924 Immigration Act, they wanted Japan placed under the quota system as European nations were. Thus Japanese immigrant leaders felt doubly affronted by the 1924 Immigration Act because it ranked the Japanese, not as the equal of Europeans, but on the same low level as previously excluded Asian people, the very people whom they themselves judged to be inferior.

An anti-Japanese incident which occurred shortly after July 1 reinforced the Japanese immigrant reaction to the 1924 Immigration Act. This took place on the night of July 22 in the town of Hopland in Mendocino County. On that night at 10:00 P.M., approximately 30 white youths armed with rifles, shotguns, and pistols surrounded a bunkhouse where eight Japanese laborers were lodged. These laborers had arrived in Hopland to work at a fruit packinghouse. The bunkhouse was situated behind the home of Wada Kume-kusu, a local Japanese labor contractor. The white youths randomly fired their weapons and hit both the bunkhouse and Wada's home. Fortunately, no one was injured. Wada himself was not at home. He was at another packinghouse where he had other laborers employed. The white youths never tried to break into the bunkhouse or home. Apparently, they simply wanted to drive away the eight laborers by intimidation. They posted a "Get Rid of Japs" sign with a Klu Klux Klan emblem before they left, and the Japanese laborers fled from Hopland as soon as the

white youths disappeared. The immigrant press interpreted this incident as another manifestation of white supremacy.¹⁸

Other acts of physical threat and violence had preceded this Hopland incident. Similar expulsions occurred in Delano, Los Angeles, and Porterville in 1922. The most publicized one occurred in Turlock in Stanislaus County. On the night of July 19, 1921, shortly after midnight, approximately 50-60 white men, armed with clubs, some with firearms, surrounded the Iwata Store where 18 Japanese workers had bunked down for the night. The white men first knocked on the door. When the Japanese refused to open it, they forced themselves in and then woke up all 18 Japanese workers. Ordering the workers outside, they placed eight on a Japanese-operated truck and commanded the Japanese driver to take them to Stockton. The remaining ten workers were loaded on another waiting truck and driven to Keyes, an adjacent town five miles north of Turlock. There the white men transferred them to a railroad freight car and warned them never to come back to Turlock at the risk of being lynched. This event was repeated twice in the course of the night. Returning to Turlock, the same white men raided another Japanese bunkhouse. They rounded up an additional 20 laborers in like manner and again dumped them off at Keyes. Meanwhile, another group of 50-60 white men went to three Japanese farms on the outskirts of Turlock. There they dragged out 20 laborers who had been hired by local Japanese farmers. These laborers were also taken to Keyes and warned never to return.¹⁹ Taken together, the Hopland, Turlock, and other incidents reinforced the Japanese immigrants' reading of the 1924 Immigration Act. To them, the act came to symbolize not only their legal rejection by the United States, but also their persecution by lawless white elements.

All local Japanese consuls agreed that the 1924 Immigration Act had a pronounced psychological impact on Japanese immigrants. San Francisco Consul Oyama Ujirō observed "a deep sense of dejection among ordinary Japanese residents."²⁰ Practically-speaking, Japanese immigrant bachelors, numbering well over 20,000, lost the most since they were now deprived of the opportunity of getting married in Japan and returning with their wives. A Portland consulate staff member reported that the negative psychological effect was great precisely because the 1924 Immigration Act "placed the Japanese into the same category as the Chinese had been."²¹ Seattle Consul Ōhashi Tadaichi reported that the immigrants within his jurisdiction "felt bitter and increasingly resentful of the United States."²² Los Angeles Consul Wa-

kasugi Kaname noted that many immigrants no longer perceived a future for themselves in the United States, and so he predicted that the number of Japanese residents would decrease in the coming years.²³ Consul Wakasugi also reported that two oldtime Issei, Kino Tamino-suke and Suda Kōgorō, formed an Awareness Group (*Kakuseidan*) in Los Angeles. The purpose of this group was to commemorate July 1, 1924, as a National Humiliation Day. In keeping with the meaning of *gashin shōtan*, both men favored developing the strengths and abilities of the Japanese people, so that one day Japan would be able to erase the stigma of inferiority with which Americans had branded the Japanese. The Awareness Group sold commemorative badges, with the proceeds earmarked for the erection of a July 1 memorial tower in Japan.²⁴

The 1924 Immigration Act also affected the Japanese immigrants' view of their children, the Nisei. Immigrant leaders had begun to shift their attention from the Issei to the Nisei before its enactment. Under an editorial policy established by Abiko Kyūtarō, the *Nichibei Shimbun* changed its own emphasis from January 1924.²⁵ Attaching much greater importance to the Nisei generation, this newspaper began to declare repeatedly that the future of the Japanese in the United States lay with the Nisei. The Issei were already entering old age; the Nisei were about to come of age. Denied the right of naturalization, the Issei were aliens ineligible to citizenship without a real future in this country; the Nisei were American citizens with a potential bright future. The Issei now had to adopt the Nisei's future as their own. To enable the Nisei to realize their full potential as American citizens, the *Nichibei Shimbun* upheld the view that the Issei had a moral obligation and duty to support the Nisei in every way possible. Abiko envisioned the Nisei playing a pivotal role in future Japanese-American relations. Being Japanese by descent but American by birth and education, the Nisei were ideally suited to become a future bridge of understanding between the two nations to dispel the ignorance which had been, in Abiko's opinion, the fundamental cause of the exclusion movement.

The future of the Nisei in the United States, however, was not at all assured. Japanese immigrants could not rule out the possibility of their children being stripped of their American citizenship. In 1920 Senator James D. Phelan had first proposed a constitutional amendment denying American citizenship to any American-born person whose parents were ineligible to citizenship. In 1922 Congress enacted

the Cable Act which directly affected Nisei women. Any Nisei woman who married an alien ineligible to citizenship lost her American citizenship by virtue of her marriage. In December 1923 Congress considered resolutions which reformulated Phelan's original constitutional amendment making the denial of American citizenship also retroactive to any person whose parents were both ineligible to citizenship. Next to the termination of all Japanese immigration, anti-Japanese exclusionists had had the goal of stripping the Nisei of their American citizenship. Any constitutional amendment of course required the approval of two-thirds of Congress and three-fourths of all state legislatures. For Japanese immigrants, although it was bad enough to be aliens ineligible to citizenship, it was something they could somehow live with. But the thought of their own children becoming aliens ineligible to citizenship was another matter. That would have been outrageous! Fortunately, the exclusionists were unable to marshal sufficient political support to deprive the Nisei of their American citizenship, but Japanese immigrant leaders were always alert to the possibility.

In the final analysis, the 1924 Immigration Act signified the complete failure of the Japanese immigrants' struggle against exclusion. The Supreme Court had upheld their ineligibility to citizenship as well as the constitutionality of the alien land laws. In retrospect, Japanese immigrants realized that all of their efforts to adapt themselves to American society and to demonstrate their assimilability had been in vain. The *Taihoku Nippō* described the sense of impasse reached by the immigrants. As the coordinating organ of all Japanese associations, the Pacific Coast Japanese Association Deliberative Council had been at the forefront of the anti-exclusion struggle. Now the situation of the council was tantamount to "picking up nails out of burnt ruins." Being too brittle, burnt nails are useless. This reference to picking up such nails was a metaphor for the psychological state of hopelessness and dejection into which Japanese immigrants had fallen. Japanese immigrants "have only one hope left," the *Taihoku Nippō* said, "and that is the maturation of our American-born children."²⁶

Thus Japanese immigrants came to attach extra significance to the American-born generation. They transferred their hopes and aspirations onto the Nisei generation. The Issei could not escape the liability of being aliens ineligible to citizenship; the Nisei were American citizens who, in theory, had all the rights and privileges that came with their American citizenship. Since the Issei no longer perceived any real fu-

ture for themselves, the Nisei's future, however precarious it appeared in 1924, suddenly loomed all-important to them. The future of the Japanese in the United States now depended on how their children would grow up and fare in their own native land. The anti-Japanese exclusion movement left an enduring legacy of bitterness and resentment in the hearts of Japanese immigrants. That legacy was mitigated partially by the hope that the Nisei would eventually vindicate the Japanese people in a brighter future.

Notes

- Note: JARP = Japanese American Research Project Collection
 JFMAD = Japanese Foreign Ministry Archival Documents
 SBZSME = Shakai Bunko, *Zaibei Shakaishugisha Museifushugisha Enkaku*
 UMWJ = *United Mine Workers' Journal*

Chapter II

1. Compiled from *Nihon Teikoku Tōkei Nenkan* (Tokyo, 1882-91).
2. Ibid.
3. Tomita Gentarō and Ōwada Yakichi, *Beikoku-yukei Hitori Annai: Ichimei Sōkō Jijō* (Yokohama, 1886), p. 36.
4. Akamine Seichirō, *Beikoku Ima Fushingi* (Tokyo, 1886), p. 21.
5. Ishida Kumatarō and Shūyū Sanjin, pseud., *Kitare, Nihonjin* (Tokyo, 1887), pp. 32-33.
6. "Nihon to Beikoku: Sōkō Dekaseginin no Mondai," *Kokumin no Tomo*, 23 (June 1, 1888), pp. 10-14, and "Tokubetsu Kisho," ibid., 24 (June 15, 1888), pp. 14-17. See also Ozaki Gakudō *Zenshū* (Tokyo, 1955), III, pp. 343-56.
7. *Japan Weekly Mail*, March 8, 1890.
8. Compiled from *Nihon Teikoku Tōkei Nenkan* (Tokyo, 1892-1901).