



## “Where the Danger Lies”: Race, Gender, and Chinese and Japanese Exclusion in the United States, 1870–1924<sup>1</sup>

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*Race too often is used as the explanatory variable for understanding immigration exclusion, marginalizing the significance of race making, ethnic differentiation, and gender construction in particular. This article explores these processes by examining exclusionary policies implemented against Chinese and Japanese immigrants from the mid-1870s to 1924, the year the National Origins Act was passed. Politicians, intellectuals, and moral reformers used a gendered logic—the construction of idealized gender norms, roles, and sexual propriety and the attachment of these meanings to male and female bodies—to distinguish Japanese immigrants from the Chinese immigrants they followed, allowing for ethnic differentiation and dissimilar policies. The convergence toward exclusion rested on a racialized logic—the construction and attachment of inferior status and meanings to immigrant groups through discourse, formal and informal categorization, or social closure—which claimed that the Japanese were unassimilable and racially undesirable like the Chinese. Exclusionists focused on the immigrant women, decrying their sexual and gender impropriety as evidence of the groups’ threats to the sanctity of white families, which imperiled the nation. Gender and race both mattered in these logics and their meanings were constructed as their salience interconnected.*

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**KEY WORDS:** gender; gender construction; immigration control; national identity; race; racialization.

### INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1800s, the United States declared an end to its historically open immigration policy and directed a paradigmatic shift (Calavita, 1984; Tichenor, 2002). In 1875, the United States passed the Page Law, which prohibited the entry of Chinese women for “lewd and immoral purposes.”<sup>3</sup> The Chinese

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<sup>3</sup> Though the law denied entry to any subject coming from “China, Japan, or any oriental country,” the real target was Chinese women. See Peffer (1999), Chan (1991), and Page’s speech in introducing his bill, Appendix to the Congressional Record (1875:40–45).

Exclusion Act of 1882 denied entry to all Chinese laborers, making no explicit mention of Chinese women, which meant that the Page Law continued to regulate their coming.<sup>4</sup> The laws banned practically all Chinese women from entering for immigration officials assumed that most were prostitutes (Gee, 2003). Although the merchant class was exempt—in theory, if not always in practice (Stevens, 2002:289–297)—these laws prohibited Chinese male laborers (who made up the majority of Chinese immigrants) from bringing over their wives and family, limiting permanent settlement in the United States. Japanese immigrants who followed more than three decades after the Page Law faced less harsh policies.

In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt responded to efforts by the San Francisco School Board to send Japanese students to segregated Chinese schools (Daniels, 1977). Trying to sidestep local efforts to racialize Japanese students as the same as the Chinese, Roosevelt and his administration responded quickly to assure Japan that its subjects were being fairly treated and moved forward with a political resolution. He convinced the school board to revoke the segregation orders upon agreement that the federal government would do something to stop Japanese immigration, seeking a compromise that would appease both the Japanese government and growing anti-Japanese sentiment in California. Japan and the United States negotiated the terms of an immigration policy, outlined in the Gentlemen's Agreement, a series of six memos exchanged between late 1907 and early 1908. The Japanese government pledged not to issue passports to laborers, skilled or unskilled, for the continental United States in exchange for concessions regarding laborers already residing in the United States and their right to bring over families. Japan was permitted to continue issuing passports to parents, wives, and children of laborers already in the United States. The more favorable policy for Japanese laboring immigrants was short lived; Japanese immigrants were banned in the Immigration Act of 1924. Nevertheless, the varying treatment was hugely consequential, creating a viable U.S.-born second generation (Nisei) for the Japanese but not for the Chinese.

In most accounts of Chinese and Japanese exclusion, scholars have emphasized geopolitics and/or racism directed at an “Asiatic race”<sup>5</sup> (Daniels, 1988; Hing, 1993; Kim, 1994). They state that because China was a declining power and Japan was an increasingly more significant international player, the United States acted unilaterally against China while it entered into bilateral talks with Japan that led to more favorable outcomes (Cohen, 1990; Nester, 1996). By the time of the San Francisco school segregation efforts, Japan had positioned itself as a leading international power after its victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. However, while the geopolitical account is critical for helping to

<sup>4</sup> Congress made the Act permanent in 1902, repealing it in 1943 when China became the United States' ally in its war against Japan (Lee, 2003a; Riggs, 1950).

<sup>5</sup> I place period terms such as “Asiatic race” in quotes. Although I argue that terms such as “race” or “white” are socially constructed and their meanings are contested, for stylistic purposes I do not place these terms in quotes.

elucidate the shift in policy, it cannot explain why the laws and policies emphasized the regulation of women's immigration nor why the United States eventually excluded Japanese immigrants in 1924 since geopolitically Japan remained strong. This geopolitical assertion often goes hand in hand with a racially reductionist account that identifies the two groups as Asian. In latter accounts, anti-Chinese sentiments led to anti-Japanese agitation for exclusion (Daniels, 1988). Race is treated as the explanatory variable rather than the thing that needs to be explained (Loveman, 1999). Together, these arguments offer a supposedly fully accountable explanation, which unfortunately obscures opportunities to see moments of ethnic differentiation and variable immigration policies.

This article explores how race *making* and gender construction were constitutive of immigration control. Exploring the two cases and time periods in comparative framework, I argue that politicians, intellectuals, and moral reformers sought to construct a national identity, articulating immigrants as threats or affirmations of their vision of nationhood. These efforts hinged on two mechanisms or logics. The initial variation in treatment or divergence in policy, which made important ethnic differentiations, relied on a gendered logic—the construction of idealized gender norms, roles, and sexual propriety and the attachment of these meanings to male and female bodies. In the development and administration of dissimilar policies, intellectual and political leaders identified varying qualities in the two groups of women. Chinese immigrants were described as racially undesirable and unassimilable, which was supposedly illustrated by gender and sexual deviance—the women's participation in prostitution. However, three decades later, Japanese immigrants enjoyed a period of favorable characterization. Political and intellectual leaders did not typify the women as deviant, despite their links to prostitution, and highlighted the immigrants' willingness to come and settle as families.

The convergence toward exclusion relied on the workings of a racialized logic—the construction and attachment of inferior status and meanings to immigrant groups through discourse, formal and informal categorization, or social closure. The convergence rested on racialized claims that the Japanese were also unassimilable and *racially* undesirable like the Chinese. The earlier racialization of Chinese immigrants provided an effective framework for meaning construction and eventual exclusion. Political and intellectual leaders denounced Japanese immigrants' growing presence and seeming permanence as evidenced by land ownership and the women's increased settlement and high fecundity in the decade that followed the Gentlemen's Agreement. Japanese immigrants now threatened the sanctity of *white* families and imperiled the nation in much the same way that the Chinese did four decades earlier. Gender and race both mattered in these logics, and their meanings were constructed as their salience interconnected (Glenn, 1999). In particular, race was not some objective truth for exclusionists to discover; rather, it was claims making that they had to express. It was through their discursive, symbolic, and administrative practices that they constructed an "Asiatic *race*" that had

to be excluded. Such efforts were gendered, and failure to see gendered processes of racialization can produce a view of immigration policy as an instrument of racialization alone. A comparative study helps address this possible misidentification for it is able to tease out these differences in not only shift and content of immigration policies but also in the meaning and significance of race and gender that enabled and resulted from such measures.

In addition to providing a corrective to the traditional account of Chinese and Japanese exclusion, this article can address a gap in most studies of immigrant control. Most historical accounts have focused mainly on racism and labor competition between European-American workers and immigrants, largely ignoring the importance of gender (with notable exceptions mentioned below) (Calavita, 1984; Gyory, 1998; Higham, 2002; Mink, 1986; Saxton, 1971) even as they have advanced our understanding of the construction of race and racialized hierarchies in immigration control (Ngai, 2004; Zolberg, 2006). Studies of contemporary immigration control also have emphasized economic competition or market relations in the state's abilities or failures to control immigration and the limiting or extension of rights to migrants (Calavita, 2005; Castles and Miller, 1993; Freeman, 1995; Hollifield, 1992). While migrant labor issues provide one set of conditions for determining and evaluating state policies to regulate immigration, immigrants' efforts to form families and settle permanently pose equally important challenges for the state. This speaks to the important analytic dimension that gender construction, along with race making, offers for better understanding dissimilar treatment.

Thankfully, scholarship focused on gender and migration has grown increasingly over the last two decades, showing how all aspects of migration is gendered, including emigration and immigration policies, networks of migration patterns and movement, and efforts to settle and acculturate (Gardner, 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Moch, 2005; Oishi, 2005; Portes et al., 2009; Sakamoto et al., 2010). Asian-American scholars have explored gendered, as well as racialized and class, biases of exclusionary laws and policies, although their investigations have focused largely on a single group—often, Chinese immigrants (Chan, 1991; Gee, 2003; Lee, 2003b; Zhao, 2002). Their works are part of a tradition of research that has understood the importance of gender and family dynamics in immigrants' efforts to enter and settle (Glenn, 1983, 1986; Hsu, 2000; Matsumoto, 1993; Nakano and Shibata, 1990; Park, 2007). So significant has the development of gender in migration studies been in recent years, that Donato et al. (2006) state that it is no longer sufficient to simply include gender in the analysis but, rather, one must specify and investigate *how* it matters. This article seeks to contribute to this advancement by recognizing that how and why men and women immigrate, for what purposes, in what familial and/or sexual relations, and under which regulatory control by the state have important consequences for how a perceived ethnoracial collective may settle and affirm or challenge the existing notion of the family writ large—the nation.

In considering how particular groups can be conceptualized to represent or threaten a national identity, we must examine how particular meanings get attached to different groups. In a comparative study of Chinese and Japanese immigrants, we must ask whether and how they were treated alike or differently and what helped to construct an “Asiatic race.” If Japanese immigrants enjoyed preferential treatment due to ethnic differentiation, how did they eventually become identified as “like the Chinese” in racialized terms? How did these meaning constructions shape and enable policy making and administration? These questions show the importance of meanings in policy making, helping to address the issue of how policies are formulated, leading to their success or failure. Historical institutionalists have demonstrated the role of institutions in shaping policy outcomes, focusing on configurations of power and interests, particularly in state structure, that affect policy outcomes at critical historical junctures (Evans, 1995; Skocpol, 1992). Without discounting the substance of this argument, scholars are increasingly calling for greater attention to how meaning is constructed and deployed in policy-making processes (Campbell, 2004; Skrentny, 2006; Steensland, 2006). It is a cultural emphasis in general and a cognitive approach more specifically (DiMaggio, 1997; Zerubavel, 1997). If policy change is about generating a particular vision of the world (Bourdieu, 1990), how do these visions shape the policy-making process? While an institutional perspective helps to map the constellation of actors and organizations, what enables political change and implementation is the meaning construction that occurs. A test of why such construction is or is not possible is beyond the scope of this article; instead, I offer a sketch of the mechanism by which meaning construction enables policy formation and administration, which furthers the meaning development. As Bourdieu explains, there are symbolic struggles over the conception of the social world. At the subjective level, one may act to try to alter categories of perception and evaluation—the names and words that “construct social reality as much as they express it” (1990:134). To varying degrees, these views can be filtered and shaped by the work of categorization and classification. More specifically, however, individuals—particularly policy-making state actors—can enact or direct these categorical or classificatory and other meaning-making efforts, exercising the symbolic powers of the state (Bourdieu, 1990:137; Loveman, 2005). Through the development and administration of immigration laws that identified unassimilable races for exclusion, political and intellectual leaders shaped not only the meanings of different immigrant groups but also that of the nation.

They constructed these meanings by focusing on the symbolic role and physical work that families and women perform. Regulating family formation through the control of women’s immigration and reproduction, which is crucial to forging a national identity, proved to be invaluable for controlling Chinese and Japanese immigration. Chinese and Japanese immigrants provided necessary labor for economic development in the newly developing West, which encapsulated the extension of the supposed ideals of the new Republic—freedom, democratic values, and Anglo-Saxonism (Horsman, 1981; Merk,

1963; Milner, 1994). Settling families in this region was ideal since they provided the “best and cheapest insurance that the West would be tied to the national culture” (Conzen, 1994:319–320). However, these nation- and state-building efforts hinged on efforts to populate the land with the *right* kinds of families, and exactly what types of families were intended soon embroiled local and national politics. Exclusionists argued that Chinese and Japanese immigrants threatened the settlement of white families, and thereby challenged the notion of a white national identity, even as the meaning of whiteness was evolving (Jacobson, 1998; Roediger, 1991). This imagining of a national identity in racial terms required political and intellectual elites to conceptualize and articulate how a racialized group reproduced itself. The continuity or break in the formation of any given racial group relied on the reproductive actions of families in general and women in particular (Gal and Kligman, 2000; Mosse, 1985; Nagel, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1998). Thus, for many politicians and intellectuals, regulating sex and reproduction, especially women’s engagement in these, meant controlling races and racial formation in the United States. In their minds, controlling women’s bodies provided opportunities to control the lines of significant differences, be they ethnic, racial, or class. Through the control of women’s bodies, these actors regulated sexual relations, the formation of immigrant families, and a racialized national identity. The project of unifying the West Coast, economically, politically, socially, and culturally, and integrating it into the nation-state was thus bound up in the coming and regulation of these new immigrants.

These gendered and racialized forms of immigration control, which questioned women’s morality and immigrants’ assimilability, also constituted exclusionary efforts directed at southern and eastern European immigrants in the 1920s (Gardner, 2005) and at migrants in non-U.S. settings (Oishi, 2005; Peffer, 1999). The fact that Chinese and Japanese immigration and efforts to regulate them came earlier is one obvious reason for studying them. The passage and administration of the Page Law and the Chinese Exclusion Act provided the “legal architecture for 20<sup>th</sup> century immigration policy” (Lee, 2003a:24). Furthermore, examining immigration control in a larger comparative-historical framework that begins with Chinese and Japanese immigrants challenges the notion that the United States was an open immigration society prior to 1921 when Congress passed the first National Quota Law. How political and intellectual leaders conceptualized the Chinese and Japanese as ethnically different at first and then similarly “Asiatic” helped to lay down a path for linking race, reproduction, and nation in immigration control. Thus, this investigation is able to illustrate how gender construction and race-making processes that were fundamental to later exclusionary efforts took shape decades earlier.

To demonstrate this, I rely on a variety of primary and secondary sources and employ a narrative method, wherein the concern lies with understanding processes and events (Desai, 2002:626). I examined records of the Bureau of Immigration, including its communications with field offices, the White House, and the Department of State; presidential documents related to immigration



matters; congressional debates, hearings, and reports on immigration; private letters between key political and intellectual leaders; and newspaper accounts. I identified how leading policymakers, administrators, and intellectuals conceptualized Chinese and Japanese immigrants, attaching racialized and gendered meanings to them. I evaluated how these constructions enabled policy formation as well as how such developments shaped perceptions of the immigrants.

I begin with an examination of how Chinese immigration, with its particular gender arrangements and sexual relations, assisted in the settlement of the West Coast. Though the immigrant group's gender imbalance provided economic benefits for those employing the laboring men, it also constituted immorality. Exclusionists identified gender and sexual impropriety in the group and claimed that the Chinese were a threat to the proper settlement of the West by white families, relying on gender and sexuality to racialize Chinese immigrants in pushing for exclusion. I then investigate how Japanese immigrants enjoyed a more favorable treatment. While factors such as geopolitics, timing, and economic development mattered, political leaders and immigration officials relied on the meaning and role of Japanese women, which was not characterized as singularly deviant like the Chinese, to permit a period of entry and settlement. Thus, I show how gender mattered in the policy divergence as crucial ethnic differentiation between the two groups was made. Eventually, intellectuals and politicians argued that the seeming permanence of Japanese settlement was a threat to the nation and relied on a racialized logic to push for exclusion. In moving toward this convergence in policy of exclusion, they racialized the Japanese in part by claiming that Japanese women's fecundity would lead to a threatening presence in the United States. By identifying the shifting significance of race and gender, this comparative study of Chinese and Japanese immigration illustrates the importance of understanding the interconnectedness of race making, gender construction, and reproduction in immigration control.

## CHINESE IMMIGRATION AND EXCLUSION

When examined by itself, the story of Chinese immigration appears to be a story about a steady march toward exclusion, aided by China's poor geopolitical status, economic recession, opportunistic politicians, and labor unions—all guided by a racist rhetoric that helped to identify the Chinese immigrant as curiously strange at best and morally threatening to the American way of life at worst. In looking at Chinese immigration history this way, it is easy to recognize the role of racism in explaining their exclusion. However, while social closure and anti-Chinese sentiments helped to racialize Chinese immigrants, especially through medical and scientific doctrines, such a narrow view limits the important salience of gender in explaining *how* an immigrant group *becomes* racialized as an *other*, not worthy of entry,

settlement, and inclusion into the national fabric. As discussed earlier, other scholars have shown the importance of looking at gender and women's immigration in Chinese exclusion, demonstrating the ways a focus on gender and sexuality helped to racialize the Chinese (Chan, 1991; Lee, 2003b). Chinese immigration history has been extensively researched and well documented. What I offer here is an examination of this history as a way to understand the salience of a gendered logic in exclusionary actions that constitute nation-building efforts, which will be made clearer by comparing the Chinese case with the Japanese one.

### *Chinese Women's Value in Settling the West*

A poor and weakened China helped to push many emigrants to the United States, which also lured immigrants with tales of gold and other riches (Daniels, 1988; Lyman, 1974). There were more than 63,000 Chinese immigrants in the United States by 1870 and more than 105,000 by 1880. Most of the early Chinese immigrants were male sojourning laborers who came alone. Not surprisingly, Chinese men accounted for over 90% of the immigrant population. The ratio of male to female was nearly 13 to 1 in 1870, 21 to 1 in 1880, and never lower than 12 to 1 until 1920 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

The Page Law of 1875 and, eventually, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 exacerbated the initial imbalance (Chan, 1991; Yung, 1995). Unbalanced sex ratios were common among most immigrant groups in the early years of their immigration (Archdeacon, 1983:139). Particularly in places like the West, this meant that men dominated the labor force. Like other immigrants and migrants from the East Coast, Chinese immigrant men entered mining and railroad construction. The Central Pacific Railroad alone employed 12,000 to 14,000 in its effort to complete the transcontinental railroad (Sandmeyer, 1991; Saxton, 1971). As placer mining waned and the railroad was completed, these men moved into manufacturing. Manufacturers spoke positively of Chinese laborers, stating that their inexpensive, reliable character provided them the opportunity to compete against eastern state competitors and to finally make a profit (U.S. Congress, 1877:512–558). In just about every industry, Chinese immigrants provided the cheap labor that made production profitable and competitive with goods produced on the East Coast and abroad, making their labor crucial to the development of the West.

The inexpensive character of Chinese labor was not some inherent nature of Chinese immigrants but was, instead, created and retained by a gender imbalance, which negatively characterized the immigrant group as a whole. Chinese women and the roles they fulfilled as wives and prostitutes helped maintain men's cheapened status. On the frontier, a bachelor society—to the extent that wives were not around—attracted prostitutes (Courtwright, 1996;



Pascoe, 1990).<sup>6</sup> As prostitutes, early Chinese female immigrants performed economic and sexual roles that helped maintain the family structure in China and the Chinese community in the United States. They maintained the young single male labor force while providing sex work that is often of great profit to those who control their labor (Hirata, 1979; Ling, 1998; Yung, 1995). Chinese women's prostitution and the economic and family structures they supported further reduced the cost of Chinese immigrant men's labor (Espiritu, 1997). Patriarchal demands placed on both men and women help to explain this phenomenon. Emigrant males often married before leaving, and newly married wives served their filial duties by staying in their husband's home (Hsu, 2000; McKeown, 1999; Peffer, 1999). Women were kept under the watchful eyes of their families, and sojourning men were obliged to send their earnings home to support their families. The Chinese family was preserved at home while Chinese itinerant laborers continued to work in the United States, having their sexual needs satisfied by prostitutes. The emigrants returned home when they could afford it, sired a child, and if that child was a boy, he later joined his father to work in the United States. This ensured that the cost of producing and reproducing Chinese labor was lowered, and Chinese immigrant men were cheaper to hire.

### *Chinese Sexual Deviance and Threat to the Nation*

A small number of Chinese women may have helped support a largely bachelor Chinese community in the United States, but their increasing numbers suggested permanent settlement and coincided with an economic recession—both seen as dire problems by political and labor leaders and intellectuals. Whereas some moral reformers and intellectuals concluded that a limited number of Japanese women who arrived three decades later could be appropriate for “protecting” native-born European-American women from Japanese men, as discussed further below, Chinese women did not benefit from such reasoning. This resulted in part from the fact that the country fell into a recession beginning in the early 1870s, from which it did not recover until well into the next decade, making all Chinese immigrants' continued presence a threat to the nation. While earlier accounts emphasized economic competition and social closure as the base root of racist exclusion (Gyory, 1998; Mink, 1986; Saxton, 1971), I explain how politicians, intellectuals, and moral reformers seized the moment of economic upheaval and political uncertainty to rally for exclusion by decrying their settlement as a threat to white

<sup>6</sup> Without discounting the important roles that Chinese prostitutes played, it is also necessary to recognize that they probably accounted for just 6% of the Chinese population in the United States at the time of the exclusion laws. No clear and exact figures of Chinese prostitutes exist. Their numbers were highly dependent on who did the counting (Peffer, 1999:87–100). San Francisco's Chinatown, the largest Chinese immigrant settlement, probably had around 1,400 Chinese prostitutes out of about 2,000 Chinese women in 1870 (Chan, 1991:107; Hirata, 1979:22; Peffer, 1999:124).

families and the nation and focusing on the problems associated with Chinese women's immigration. Doing so helps to explain how race making and immigration control operated along gendered lines.

Identifying sources of contagious disease in the activities and bodies of Chinese immigrants, particularly the prostitute women, provided justification for efforts to limit their coming and to quarantine their places of work and residence. Unfortunately for many Chinese women, being identified as a prostitute was difficult to avoid (McClain, 1994; Pascoe, 1990). In his introduction of the bill that became the Page Law, Representative Horace Page from California declared 90% of Chinese women in the United States to be prostitutes (Peffer, 1999:76). Such rhetoric was repeated again in 1882 in debates over Chinese exclusion, when Chinese women were pronounced to be "all prostitutes or concubines" (*Congressional Record*, 1882:1903). Many moral reformers and health officials then decried these Chinese women as the biggest source of disease and the greatest threat to the health of families and the nation. The growing popularity and acceptance of the science of race, along with a newly developing germ theory that explained disease and health, lent credibility and serious weight to generalizations of the Chinese as an undesirable and unassimilable race (Shah, 2001). Scientists and other leading intellectuals, moral reformers, and politicians could more easily connect race, gender, and nation to one another—both figuratively and literally—with the prudence and strength of science backing up meaningful claims about Chinese degeneracy. For example, in his official address as president of the American Medical Association, the world-famous gynecologist J. Marion Sims claimed that syphilis had reached epidemic proportions and sounded the alarm about the particularities of the "Chinese syphilis tocsin" at the centennial jubilee of the AMA in 1876. He stated that Chinese prostitutes on the West Coast had already spread syphilis not only to men, but to boys as young as eight and ten (Miller, 1969:165). Young boys were supposedly going to Chinatown where the price for sexual favors was "so cheap" but led to venereal diseases (California Legislature, 1877:153). Frequenting Chinese brothels would not only bring shame upon the men and their families, but it could kill them. Chinese prostitutes presented both moral and physical threats to families.

Besides criticizing the Chinese for their sexual depravity, politicians and labor leaders also claimed that Chinese immigration and settlement depressed wages and furthered unemployment. Chinese frugality drove down living conditions, prohibiting settlement by the *right* kind of families. Dennis Kearney, head of the Workingmen's Party, a viable third party in California in the 1870s whose prominence forced both the Democratic and Republican parties to adopt anti-Chinese platforms by 1876 (Gyory, 1998), claimed the following in his "Manifesto."

We declare that white men, and women, and boys, and girls, cannot live as the people of the great republic should and compete with the single Chinese coolie in the labor market. We declare that we cannot hope to drive the Chinaman away by working cheaper than he does. (Sandmeyer, 1991:65)

Likewise, speaking on the U.S. Senate floor in 1876, California Senator Aaron Sargent stated that the Chinese living conditions were so despicable that they were driving out white residents in places like San Francisco (Shah, 2001:74). Local and state political leaders also directly lobbied Congress for action. In a letter sent to the U.S. Senate in December 1881, the Board of Trade of San Francisco wrote:

It is evident that a continuance of an unrestricted Chinese immigration is prejudicial to the interests of the Pacific Coast, tending to prevent a desirable immigration from Europe and our Eastern States and causing a prejudice which operates against the settlement of our unoccupied lands by permanent settlers.<sup>7</sup>

Convinced by such arguments and motivated to appeal to the labor vote and to western congressional delegates, national political leaders sounded the alarm. Senator James Blaine of Maine spoke on the Senate floor in 1879 in debates over whether the United States ought to abrogate the Burlingame Treaty, which had enabled Chinese immigration thus far, in a step toward making Chinese exclusion possible. He argued: “The Asiatic cannot go on with our population and make a homogenous element.” He further claimed that the Chinese had “no regard to family,” did not “recognize the relation of husband and wife,” and did “not have in the slightest degree the ennobling and civilizing influences of the hearthstone and the fireside” (*Congressional Record*, 1879:1301). In the explicit message that Chinese immigrants did not care about the family was an implicit message that *their* kinds of families were unwanted and could also threaten *our* kinds of families. The racialized and gendered assumptions that underpinned such claims making were especially apparent in the handling of Chinese merchant class efforts to bring over wives. As Stevens explains, Chinese merchant men who were exempted from the Chinese exclusion laws and, thus, theoretically entitled to the rights and privileges of coverture, seemingly ensconced and protected in nineteenth-century laws related to marriage, property, and even citizenship (Bredbenner, 1998; Cott, 1998; Sapiro, 1984), were in practice denied the right to unify with their wives. In particular, the slightest hint or suggestion that the woman was a prostitute or simply “connected” to a brothel was offered as proof that the woman was not a proper wife and the man not a proper husband (Stevens, 2002:289). Stevens suggests that Chinese merchant men’s limited success in bringing over their wives following the Chinese Exclusion Act in the 1890s and early 1900s reflects to some degree an initial ability for a Chinese woman’s marital status to “trump” her racial classification (2002:297). While these women’s “success” should not be overstated, Stevens’s account illustrates the complexities associated with the attachment of racialized meanings to immigrants. Gendered notions of the family and sexual propriety were critical to race-making claims.

Overall, Chinese immigrants did not constitute the desired family type in the making of the nation and in settling the West. In debates leading up to passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, Chinese immigrants were declared

<sup>7</sup> Senate Documents, RG 47A-H10.1, Box 110, National Archives, Washington, DC.

“a distinct race of people ... wholly incapable of assimilation” (*Congressional Record*, 1882:1584). The incapacity to assimilate—constituted by disease, ability to live under depressed wage conditions, debauched sexuality, and illegitimate family formation—all undermined permanent white family settlement. These claims were made meaningful by the symbolic linking between race and gender with specific references to the immigrant women’s sexuality. Thus, gender construction, with an emphasis on gender and sexual propriety, helped to racialize the Chinese, who were seen as a threat to the purity and sanctity of white families and the nation. Invoking such meaning constructions of the Chinese as an undesirable race, which imperiled the nation, anti-Chinese politicians in Congress, supported by moral reformers, intellectuals, and labor leaders, successfully passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882.

In many ways, exploiting Chinese immigrants’ labor and preventing them from permanently settling were part of many political and intellectual leaders’ grand plans for national expansion. In a letter to historian, writer, and publisher Henry Bancroft, Judge Lorenzo Sawyer, a federal district judge in California, outlined a pattern of immigration that would be most beneficial to business, capitalist development in the West, and the nation. Writing about Chinese men, Sawyer stated:

If they would never bring their women here and never multiply and we would never have more than we could make useful, their presence would always be an advantage to the State ... so long as the Chinese don’t come here to stay ... their labor is highly beneficial to the whole community ... the difficulty is that they are beginning to get over the idea that they must go back. Then they will begin to multiply here and that is where the danger lies in my opinion. When the Chinaman comes here and don’t bring his wife here, sooner or later he dies like a worn out steam engine; he is simply a machine, and don’t leave two or three or half dozen children to fill his place.<sup>8</sup>

Though written in 1886, after passage of the exclusion laws, Sawyer’s sentiments were representative of many economic, political, and intellectual leaders’ plan in which Chinese immigrants played an important role in developing the West but not in constituting the national fabric. They were quite successful in making Judge Sawyer’s vision come true.

## JAPANESE IMMIGRATION AND LIMITED SETTLEMENT

With an understanding of how and when gender construction and racialized discourse and practices led to Chinese exclusion, it will be clear to see how divergence occurred and a more favorable policy permitted limited Japanese immigration and settlement. Because of important geopolitical and economic factors and early settlement patterns, Japanese immigrant women were not characterized as singularly deviant as were Chinese immigrant women. A

<sup>8</sup> Lorenzo Sawyer. Letter to H. H. Bancroft, dated September 22, 1886, Bancroft Manuscript, Letters, Bancroft Library (University of California, Berkeley), 4–5. As a federal district judge, Sawyer actually ruled many times in favor of Chinese immigrants and was lambasted for being a *friend* of the Chinese (Salyer, 1995).

gendered analysis helps explain this original divergence. Politicians and intellectuals differentiated the Japanese from Chinese immigrants by identifying gender and sexual propriety among the former. When Japanese women's immigration grew enough to indicate permanent settlement, nationalizing elites then decried the women's sexuality, arguing that their high fecundity threatened the sanctity of the nation. These latter pronouncements constituted convergence toward exclusion and rested on the racialization of the Japanese as being as equally menacing as the Chinese. Thus, earlier forms of race making provided an important framework and legacy of meaning construction for eventual exclusion of the Japanese.

### *Settling of the West and the Dual Image of Japanese Women*

A number of factors explain why policies toward Japanese immigration began with partial restriction and acceptance yet resulted in exclusion (Ichioka, 1988; O'Brien and Fugita, 1991). During the height of Chinese immigration, Japan and its subjects were characterized as superior to China and its people. Ethnic differentiation from the Chinese was part of the early history of Japanese immigration. Though politicians, labor union leaders, medical experts, and newspaper editors regularly derided China and Chinese immigrants, many of them initially spoke and wrote glowingly of the Japanese. For example, in 1869, when there were just a handful of Japanese in the city, the *San Francisco Chronicle* noted the difference between the two groups, stating, "the objections raised against the Chinese ... cannot be alleged against the Japanese ... They have brought their wives, children and ... new industries among us" (Daniels, 1977:3). Gender relations and notions of proper family arrangements highlighted the differences between the two groups.

The United States conceded a more favorable immigration policy to Japan, partly because it was a stronger power than China, having defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. Other important factors included the timing of Japanese immigrants' arrival. They followed Chinese immigrants just as the country began to recover from a national economic recession, beginning in the 1890s and in increasingly significant numbers after 1900. Due in part to Chinese exclusion, availability of cheap labor declined. Also, Japanese immigrants engaged in agricultural work, and demand for agricultural laborers ran high along the West Coast. While Chinese agriculturists had been rather plentiful through the end of the nineteenth century, they became scarcer as a more intensive form of agricultural production boomed that required a greater number of farm-laboring hands (Chan, 1986). This meant that the Japanese settled in more rural areas as they sought agricultural work, drawing less attention from white labor organizations whose main focus was largely urban and concentrated on making Chinese exclusion permanent.

There were some important similarities as well. Like Chinese immigrant women, Japanese women followed the men. The Census counted more than

24,000 Japanese by 1900 and more than 72,000 by 1910, mainly in the West Coast states of California, Washington, and Oregon. Of these figures, Japanese women accounted for more than 9,000 in 1910 and more than 38,000 in 1920 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). This meant that the ratio of men to women was much more even for the Japanese than it was in the Chinese case. While the ratio of men to women was high at 24.3 to 1 in 1900, it was 6.9 to 1 in 1910 and 1.9 to 1 by 1920. Japanese women also entered prostitution. Prostitutes probably made up a fair number of the Japanese women who settled in the United States prior to 1900. By 1890, the Japanese consulate in San Francisco reported that there were 30 prostitutes working in the city. By 1898, there were at least 161 Japanese prostitutes in California, practically in every major Japanese settlement (Daniels, 1988:105). However, unlike Chinese women, Japanese women did not face singular typification—one of debauched sexuality and inherently diseased inferiority. They were afforded some “protection” in their immigration status following the Gentlemen’s Agreement. While the agreement denied entry for Japanese laboring men, it did permit those already here to summon wives they had left behind. Japanese men also called for women they married by proxy with photographs in Japan. These brides were euphemistically called “picture brides” or “photograph brides” by U.S. immigration officials and politicians, though the terminology elicited a negative response from the Japanese government (Glenn, 1986).

Immigration and other government officials recognized Japanese women’s efforts to land as wives and did not initially prevent it. Japanese immigrant leaders, especially, encouraged immigrants to settle their roots in the United States. One of the most influential immigrant leaders was Abiko Kyutaro, a publisher whose newspaper was the leading paper by 1910. In his paper, he encouraged Japanese laborers to buy land, become agricultural producers, and to permanently settle. He urged men to summon their wives, believing that this was a way Japanese immigrants could contribute to U.S. society and let go of their sojourning mentality. Settlement of family life, he wrote, would help to discourage gambling, prostitution, and other activities that Americans might cite as the basis for anti-Japanese sentiments (Ichioka, 1988:28).

A group of rice farmers in Texas who called for their wives illustrates the move toward settlement. In 1903, Rihei Onishi began a rice farm in Pierce, Texas. By 1906, several dozen men from Japan joined him in Texas, leasing land from him. In 1909, when Onishi went to Japan for a visit, six of his tenant farmers asked Onishi to bring their fiancées and wives to the United States. As “settled agriculturists” summoning their wives, Onishi’s tenant farmers were allowed to bring over these women.<sup>9</sup> This early form of migration and rural settlement shielded Japanese immigrants from anti-immigrant agitators who focused so vehemently on Chinese immigrants in places such as San Francisco. The Japanese family served the economic

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Bureau of Immigration, RG 85, Entry 9, File 51835/6, Box 13, “Japanese Rice Growers in Texas,” National Archives, Washington, DC.



development needs of the growing nation. Furthermore, initial depictions of the Japanese woman as wife ensured two useful qualities. One, Japanese women as wives provided beneficial labor on the farms on which their husbands worked, something understood by Onishi's men on his rice farm.<sup>10</sup> These wives fulfilled a second important role. Japanese women who entered as wives could potentially protect European-American women from menacing Japanese men.

Though the pairings of Japanese men and white women were rare, politicians and immigration officials identified them as one of the worst features of Japanese immigration. Immigration officials' handling of a case involving a Japanese man and a European-American woman exemplified the stereotypical assumptions about Japanese men and their sexuality. A European-American woman named Louise McElwain and her Japanese husband, Manzo Goto, were arrested and investigated by the Bureau of Immigration in 1914 when it was suspected that Mr. Goto had led Ms. McElwain into prostitution.<sup>11</sup> In interviews, she confessed that she earned money by having sex with Japanese men, although she contradicted this statement on several occasions. During one of these interviews, the investigators asked if Mr. Goto ever slapped her, suggesting violence was used to keep Ms. McElwain into prostitution. When Mr. Goto was ordered deported for having committed the crime of prostitution, the Bureau of Immigration sought to send Ms. McElwain to her parents with the hope that she could be "reformed."<sup>12</sup>

Many Americans feared foreign men were leading native white women into lives of prostitution (Bederman, 1995; Donovan, 2006). Ms. McElwain's entrance into some prostitution work was not unusual. Many women with limited opportunities for financial independence moved in and out of prostitution during their life course (Rosen, 1982). Japanese men or other foreign men were not necessarily to blame for these women's entrée into prostitution. However, to the immigration officials, McElwain represented the fallen woman who fell victim to the predatory Japanese man. She, like other white women, had to be protected from the likes of Manzo Goto. Like the Chinese men, the Japanese men were often brandished as hypersexual and menacing. The immigration officials who interrogated Mr. Goto and Ms. McElwain sought to identify him as lecherous and their relationship as deviant. In doing so, they were able to make chivalrous claims to protecting white womanhood while racializing Japanese men as deviant. The imputed purity of white womanhood symbolically represented the purity of the nation, whose sanctity had to be protected against contaminating immigrants.

<sup>10</sup> Some exclusionists decried these farming wives' entry as a loophole in the Gentlemen's Agreement, allowing for additional laborers to enter.

<sup>11</sup> Some couples found creative ways to skirt antimiscegenation laws. Mr. Goto and Ms. McElwain married aboard a ship off the coast of California.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Bureau of Immigration, RG 85, Entry 9, File 53770/113, Box 66, "Manzo Goto," National Archives, Washington, DC.

*Japanese Fecundity and the "Growing Menace"*

Ethnic differentiation and divergence from the Chinese exclusion experience secured initial gains in entry for the Japanese; however, increasing settlement drew suspicious attention. The early benefit of limited Japanese female immigration and family settlement had produced two growing problems: U.S.-born Japanese children and the buying of precious land by Japanese immigrants. Various alien land laws prohibited noncitizens from buying land in states such as California, Oregon, and Washington—an attempt at social closure (Aoki, 1998). Initially, first-generation Japanese immigrants, the Issei, were able to buy land through their native-born citizen children, the Nisei. Taking land symbolically and physically challenged the imputed racial purity of the nation. Increasingly, Japanese foes included farmers who saw the settlement of Japanese immigrants and the taking of land by them as a direct assault on the nation, not to mention the white race. Articulating such sentiments before the California Assembly during debates surrounding a proposed alien land law that sought to limit Japanese land ownership was a former Congregational minister named Ralph Newman, who clamored: "Near my home is an eighty-acre tract of as fine land as there is in California. On that tract lives a Japanese. With the Japanese lives a white woman. In that woman's arms is a baby. What is that baby? It isn't Japanese. It isn't white. It is a germ of the mightiest problem that ever faced this state, a problem that will make the black problem of the South look white" (Daniels, 1977:59). This Japanese transgressed twice, taking land and cohabiting with a white woman, thereby sullyng the purity of the nation. The woman herself was a traitor to her race and the nation. For Newman, the actions of this Japanese man and his wife represented the precipice of racial and national ruin. He made his argument, relying on the imagery of women and their bodies as boundaries of the nation, both physically and symbolically. Women, land, and nation became interchangeable in nationalist and nation-building discourse.

The growing Japanese immigrant population and its settlement raised grave concerns. By 1919, major newspapers in California, Oregon, and Washington were regularly running front-page stories calling attention to the frightening advance of the Japanese people. The *Seattle Star* had headlines that read: "Japanese Picture Brides Are Swarming Here." The newspaper printed numerous articles "educating" the public about a practice it found fraudulent. The newspaper also warned that the landing of these brides threatened the racial purity of their state and the rest of the Pacific Coast. In bold letters, the newspaper wrote: "WHITE OR JAP—WHICH? Shall the Pacific Coast be Japanized?" The author Miller Freeman continued:

Let the Japanese multiply as rapidly as nature will permit them in Japan. It is their right. It is their privilege. But it is also the right of the Americans to have and to hold their own country against Japanese invasion and ownership. It is because Japanese

women are prolific that they present a menace to the Pacific coast ... We do not want on this coast the strife and the agony which the South has had to endure over the negro question ... If we check the ever-growing racial irritation NOW, we can avoid war. As we delay, the remedy will have to be more drastic.<sup>13</sup>

Politicians joined in denouncing Japanese settlement and potential threats associated with their reproduction. Senator James D. Phelan of California began to attack the picture-bride practice in 1919 in anticipation of his 1920 reelection campaign. He warned of the increasing threat of Japanese fecundity, which he claimed outpaced all other groups, including native-born European Americans. In a letter to the Secretary of State, he wrote:

The Chinese Exclusion Law has operated to reduce the number of Chinese from year to year, but so long as women are admitted from Japan, so prolific are they, that even with an exclusion law, we shall have the economic evil of their presence for a great many generations. The Japanese are, as you are aware, non-assimilable, and we are inviting, unless checked, a race problem more serious than that in the south. Every day is a day lost, and therefore action is earnestly demanded.<sup>14</sup>

Recalling earlier racialization of the Chinese, Senator Phelan identified the Japanese as being similarly unassimilable. In addition, the imagery he suggested with reference to African Americans in the South was a tactic used by politicians four decades earlier when they made repeated references to the experience of slavery during efforts to exclude the Chinese, helping to identify their immigration as a race problem (Calavita, 2007:121).

Referring to Phelan's letter, the Commissioner General of Immigration made similar analogies in a memorandum addressed to the Secretary of Labor and Commerce. He wrote:

[T]his particular Japanese immigration has differed from the old Chinese immigration. The Chinese brought very few of their women to this country. The consequence is that American born Japanese are increasing in numbers by leaps and bounds, while the problem arising from American birth with respect to Chinese has always been of comparatively little consequence.<sup>15</sup>

Whereas a more balanced gender ratio and the role of Japanese immigrant women as wives had earlier helped to ethnically differentiate them from the Chinese, these characteristics were now identified as threatening. The seeming permanence and expansion of Japanese settlement jeopardized the nation.

Sensing rising anti-Japanese sentiments and fearing the United States would abrogate the terms of the Gentlemen's Agreement, the Japanese government sought to self-regulate and ended its practice of issuing passports to picture brides beginning March 1, 1920 (Daniels, 1988:173). Rising nativism and anti-immigration measures, begun with the Chinese exclusion, reached their peak in 1924. By then, the question was not whether Japanese immigration would be restricted but, instead, to what extent.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Bureau of Immigration, RG 85, Entry 9, File 52424/13C.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Bureau of Immigration, RG 85, Entry 9, File 52424/13B, Folder 1, Letter from James Phelan to the Secretary of State, July 24, 1919, 2, National Archives, Washington, DC.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Bureau of Immigration, RG 85, Entry 9, File 52424/13B, Folder 1, Letter to Secretary of Labor and Commerce, July 30, 1919, 1–2, National Archives, Washington, DC.

Speaking before the Senate during hearings on Japanese immigration, the anti-Japanese forces, including V. S. McClatchy (former publisher of the influential *Sacramento Bee* and director of the Associated Press), Senator Phelan, and others testified against continued Japanese immigration, decrying their inability to assimilate and danger they posed to Americans. McClatchy argued:

They do not come here with any desire or any intent to lose their racial or national identity. They come here specifically and professedly for the purpose of colonizing and establishing here permanently the proud Yamato race. They never cease being Japanese ... In pursuit of their intent to colonize this country with that race they seek to secure land and to found large families. (U.S. Congress, 1924:5-6)

McClatchy identified Japanese women's reproductive abilities, which enabled Japanese immigrants to make their settlement increasingly more permanent through family formation and land ownership, as the root of their growing threat to the nation. West Coast congressmen echoed McClatchy's words, and House and Senate leaders heeded their caution. In the Immigration Act of 1924, Congress instituted a quota system that essentially favored the "older stock" of English and German immigrants and greatly limited the "new immigrants" from southern and eastern Europe (Ngai, 1999). Congress could have extended the quota system to Japanese immigrants or let the Gentlemen's Agreement continue to regulate Japanese immigration, albeit in modified form. It did neither, voting instead to exclude all who were "ineligible to citizenship."<sup>16</sup> Such language barred entry to all Japanese.

Gender differences supported important ethnic differentiation and fairer treatment earlier, but exclusionists racialized Japanese immigrants as undesirable, relying in part on earlier meaning constructions that rendered Chinese immigrants as unassimilable. The preceding racialization of the Chinese provided a useful framework for politicians and intellectuals wishing to exclude the Japanese. Thus, the convergence in policy came to rest on a racialized logic.

The act devastated the Japanese-American community. First-generation Japanese in the United States (Issei) were unable to call for their families, and many left. Though the exclusionists feared and dreaded the possibility of a permanent Japanese-American community and had agitated to prevent such a development, they only succeeded partially. In 1920, there were more than 111,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans in the continental United States. The second-generation Nisei numbered 30,000. The sex ratio was much more balanced than it was for the Chinese following the exclusion laws. Because of the more permanent features of Japanese settlement, by 1920 over one-quarter of the Japanese-American population was native born. And because Congress never made the "aliens ineligible to citizenship" status hereditary, the

<sup>16</sup> The Supreme Court in *Ozawa v. United States* (1922) determined that the Japanese may be "white" in color but not "Caucasian," declaring them ineligible for citizenship since the Naturalization Act of 1870 limited naturalization to whites and persons of "African descent" (Haney-López, 1996).

development and growth of a native-born population was critical in ensuring the economic, political, and social development of a permanent Japanese-American community.

## CONCLUSION

Beginning with the Page Law, the United States reversed its longstanding tradition of an open immigration policy and instituted over the next half-century a series of exclusionary policies that limited people by ethnicity, national origin, class, occupational status, likelihood to “become a public charge,” literacy, political affiliation, moral turpitude, and health status. For a short but significant time, it permitted Japanese immigrant men to bring over their wives and children and to form families, giving them a chance to settle permanently. Both the Chinese and Japanese were eventually excluded, and the United States did not end Asian exclusion until 1952 or national origins quotas until 1965 (Reimers, 1985; Riggs, 1950).

I have argued that research on efforts to control and eventually exclude Chinese and Japanese immigration must be broadened beyond traditional accounts, which rely on geopolitics and racial reductionism for explanation. Geopolitics does not fully account for the content of the immigration policies, only partly explaining the shift in policy. In comparing the response to Chinese and Japanese immigrants, I have empirically demonstrated that intellectuals, politicians, moral reformers, and labor leaders focused on the immigrant women, identifying them as the symbolic and physical boundaries of the immigrant groups. Through these women, with an emphasis on gender and sexual propriety, these actors were able to make crucial ethnic differentiations. This gendered logic—the construction of idealized gender norms, roles, and sexual propriety and the attachment of these meanings to male and female bodies—helps explain why there was a period of divergence in policy that permitted Japanese immigrant men to bring wives and to settle families.

This argument runs counter to some immigration scholars’ claims that race explains both the Chinese and Japanese exclusionary history because they were both of the *same* “Asiatic race.” This is not to say that race did not matter. Race—or, rather, race making—intersected with gender. Racialization of the Chinese as unassimilable and undesirable was made meaningful through discourse, policy making, and legal administration that stressed Chinese women’s gender impropriety and lewd sexuality. In the convergence toward exclusion, a racialized logic—the construction and attachment of inferior status and meanings to immigrant groups through discourse, formal and informal categorization, or social closure—fueled race-making processes that rendered Japanese immigrants as equally unassimilable as the Chinese. However, these efforts also relied on the significance of gender. As Japanese immigrants’ efforts to settle and reproduce a viable U.S.-born community succeeded, politicians and intellectuals argued that the immigrant women’s sexual

fecundity was racially deviant, similar to the Chinese women's proclivity toward prostitution.

In addition, I have shown how political and intellectual leaders sought to construct a meaning of national identity worth defending and identified immigrant groups as possible threats or affirmations of such notions of nationhood. These meaning constructions—discursive acts, policy making, and administration of policies—often relied on the significance of women and the physical and symbolic work they do in reproducing the family and nation. The maintenance of the nation assumes traditional and biological (albeit often mythical) continuation of some group through the passing of generations via the family and the work that women do. Politicians, intellectuals, and other nation-building elites determine a national identity partly by shaping and dictating sexual practices of its subjects, in particular, women's reproductive capabilities since it is through their physical and symbolic work that the family, the ethnic or racial collective, and the nation are maintained. Political and intellectual leaders recognized differences in Chinese and Japanese women's sexuality as a way to define the categories of difference and of what constitutes an appropriate family and the nation.

The empirical and theoretical contributions of this study suggest the need to reconsider Chinese and Japanese immigration history and immigration exclusion research and to rely not on reductionist, especially racial, thinking. Instead, by focusing on the *processes* by which policy making or intellectual leaders envision and create meaningful categories of difference, we can better understand how constructs such as race, gender, and the nation are linked to immigration control.

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