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A New Look at Issei Women

ISSEI WOMEN: AN OVERVIEW

This overview introduces a series of portraits from a whole class of “unknown greats”: Issei women. Of all the ethnic Japanese in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century, the lives and experiences of immigrant women have been arguably the least studied by family and community historians, despite notable efforts by such scholars as Akemi Kikumura-Yano and Evelyn Nakano Glenn. The reasons for this, even leaving aside simple sexism or denigration of women, are not hard to find. Most Issei women generally spoke and wrote English badly, if at all, and thus left few readily accessible primary sources behind. In keeping with popular ideas of the female role in both the American and Japanese societies of the day, they were largely relegated to the care of families and as unpaid labor on farms or in shops. Although I will focus on some outstanding individuals, comparatively few were able to establish themselves in careers. Yet it would be a great mistake to dismiss these women or to minimize their contributions. For Issei women, as a whole, were extraordinary.

First, they were a uniquely educated set of women. As a result of the establishment of universal education in late Meiji- and Taisho-era Japan, they were almost entirely literate—far more so than the average white American of that period. Further, a large fraction of these women continued their education in Japan beyond primary school into high school and normal school, where they studied to become schoolteachers, the only independent career open to Japanese women at that time. (Moreover, because the national universities were closed to women, they studied, in many cases, at Christian schools or with help from Christian missionaries, which facilitated their subsequent familiarity with and embrace of Christianity once in the United States.)

It was precisely these patterns that led them to marry overseas Japanese. That is, because of their extended studies, masses of Japanese women remained single into their early to mid-twenties, which was considered too old for a respectable bride in Japan. Thus, their only remaining option, if they wished to marry, was to look abroad and unite with Japanese immigrant men. Their prospective husbands, themselves generally much older, could not afford to be so choosy about the age of the women who would agree to leave Japan and join them in North America. They gladly tapped into this available pool of potential partners, even though it meant arranging marriages with women they had never seen—women whose educational background, and sometimes class origins, were generally superior to their own. The mass of Issei women wed by proxy came to North America as “picture brides,” to be greeted upon entry by their new husbands. (Many are the stories of shock and disappointment experienced by women who discovered that their spouses were not so young or prosperous as they had made out, and had sent faked, misleading, or outdated photos.)

We can only begin to imagine the difficulties that these women experienced, suddenly stuck in a new country with an unfamiliar language and customs, trying to build new lives among foreign (and sometimes hostile) natives. Locked into wedlock with strangers, their adjustment to married life was difficult—as in other immigrant subcultures, wife beating and abandonment were legion in Japanese communities—and they had little recourse besides giving up everything and making the long trip back to Japan. Such drastic action became exceedingly more complicated once these wives became mothers; the immigrant women were at the height of their age of fertility, and so the average birthrate in Japanese communities was considerably

higher than that among native-born whites. As Issei men, in most cases, did not participate in child care, the women had to shoulder alone the double burden of working and raising a family.

Still, whatever the rigors and trials of their existence, these women not only adjusted with fortitude to their new circumstances, but they pursued social and intellectual interests. Unlike their husbands, who generally had much less education, Issei women remained devoted readers and writers in their native tongue. They faithfully wrote diaries, a number of which survive. (For example, Susan L. Smith's *Japanese American Midwives: Culture, Community, and Health Politics, 1880–1950* (2005), features the diaries of Toku Shimomura, a midwife in Seattle, which furnish considerable information on birthing practices.) They also wrote letters, especially to friends and family members in Japan. They composed a large proportion of the audience for Japanese-language newspapers and magazines, and they long remained impassioned contributors to the haiku and tanka poetry contests run by these newspapers, one of which is poignantly dramatized in Hisaye Yamamoto's famous story "Seventeen Syllables." In response to such demand, the West Coast Japanese press not only expanded its coverage of sections deemed "women's interests," but newspapers engaged feminists such as Mei Tanaka (Ayako Ishigaki) of *Rafu Shimpo* and Misatoshi Saijo (Miyatsa Asano Saijo) of *Sangyo Nippo* as regular columnists. Indeed, after the death in 1936 of founding editor Kyutaro Abiko, San Francisco's *Nichi Bei Shimbun*, the leading organ of the West Coast Nikkei press, was edited by his widow, Yonako Abiko (who was the sister of the notable feminist educator Umeko Tsuda, founder of Japan's Tsuda College), until its forced dissolution in spring 1942. Issei "aunts" also published in the English-language press.

The extraordinary creativity of the women of the Issei generation was most powerfully demonstrated, ironically, by their wartime confinement. Released from farm labor and shop duties and relieved of the need to cook by communal mess halls, these women were able to take advantage of a measure of leisure to cultivate activities they previously engaged in only in stolen moments. They both practiced and taught ikebana, Japanese dance, theater, and folk arts, all of which had been less present in communities during the prewar era.

Finally, the Issei women, to the extent that they could communicate with their Nisei children, were responsible for passing on their interest in education and its value. The stellar educational record of the Nisei generation,

especially women, very soon became evident; despite areas of discrimination and exclusion, such as quotas for ethnic Japanese in West Coast medical schools, Nisei attended institutions of higher education in disproportionate numbers well before Pearl Harbor. Researchers in American education have long agreed that the most important variable in determining the educational success of children is the educational level and interest of their parents. Because fathers were more often absent or emotionally distant in Japanese communities, mothers bore responsibility for their children's achievement and encouraged them to succeed.

SHIO SAKANISHI: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS OFFICIAL AND SCHOLAR

In his April 1939 *New York Times* column, Edward Larocque Tinker offered a laudatory account of a new book, *The Spirit of the Brush: Being the Outlook of Chinese Painters of Nature, from Eastern Chin to Five Dynasties, A.D. 371–960*, a collection of commentaries on art by Chinese classical painters. Tinker noted that the editor of the collection, Dr. Shio Sakanishi, was to be congratulated. He had not only edited and translated the pieces but had added a set of richly anecdotal biographical essays on each artist that explained their work and ideas on art and nature, thereby transforming the Chinese artists from foreign and exotic figures to accessible ones. Two weeks later, Tinker made a shamefaced apology after discovering that Sakanishi was a lady—and a scholar—and not a gentleman as reported! Tinker was not alone in his astonishment at Sakanishi's gender, for she ultimately spent a lifetime challenging conventional ideas of women's role and abilities.

Shio (Shiho) Sakanishi was born to a Christian farming family in Hokkaido, Japan, in 1896. She achieved distinction in her early twenties, when she became the first Japanese woman ever hired to teach at a boy's preparatory school. She came to the United States in 1922 and enrolled at Wheaton College, where she graduated in 1925 with a degree in aesthetics and literature. During her time at Wheaton, she attracted publicity because of a speech at Mount Holyoke College on the need to encourage women writers, and she announced that she had undertaken a Japanese translation of a biography of that school's founder, pioneering educator Mary Lyon. After leaving Wheaton, Sakanishi enrolled at the University of Michigan, where she received her doctorate in 1929.

In 1930, after a short stint as a professor of English at Hollins College in Virginia, Sakanishi was hired by the Library of Congress as a librarian in its Asian Reading Room, then called the Orientalia Division (as a noncitizen, her hiring by the federal government required a special act of Congress). Her first task was to sort through some 15,000 Japanese books collecting dust on back shelves. Her skilled and thorough organization of the collection led to her being named director of the division in 1935. In this job, Sakanishi mixed and grew friendly with government officials as well as writers and intellectuals such as Archibald MacLeish (who became her boss as librarian of Congress in 1939) and Ezra Pound. In addition to aiding researchers, she offered public programs on events such as Buddha's Birthday and gave outside lectures on Asian literature, especially women writers. For example, in 1935 she served as a lecturer at Yale University's Institute of Human Relations. While researching the origins of printing and papermaking, her passion turned to science. In 1941 she supervised a series of experiments designed to duplicate the process of the "million paper charms," a set of Buddhist prayer charms printed by order of the empress of Japan in AD 770 and thought to be the oldest extant examples of woodblock printing. The team discovered that the printing involved baking clay tablets carved with a stylus, then pouring metal over the tablet to create a crude form of type.

Meanwhile, Sakanishi continued translating and began selecting outstanding pieces of Japanese literature for rendering into English. Her first effort, a Japanese comedy called "The Ribs and the Cover," appeared in the *Golden Book Magazine* in 1932. (Soon after, she undertook a multiyear project with collaborators to produce an authoritative list of translations of Japanese drama into English, French, and German, which was released in 1935.) Meanwhile, she received a contract for a set of translations of modern Japanese poets. The first of her translations to appear was that of Meiji-era poet Ishikawa Takuboku's *A Handful of Sand*, in 1934. The next year, she completed a translation of Yasano Akiko's *Tangled Hair* and Sachio Ito's *Songs of a Cowherd* followed in 1936. A small volume of comic playlets, *Kyôgen*, appeared in 1938. Sakanishi served as a regular book reviewer of Chinese and Japanese literature for the *Washington Post* and in 1939 she was invited by the *New York Times* to report on contemporary literature in Japan in a set of articles, "The Japanese Literary Scene." Both her incisive criticism of literary movements and her polished English prose drew respectful attention.

In addition to her translations of Japanese works, Sakanishi turned to a compilation of Chinese art criticism—in the process, demonstrating an impressive command of classical Chinese. Her first effort in this field, which appeared in 1935, was an English edition of Kuo Hsi's *An Essay on Landscape Painting*, a short book in which the eleventh-century Chinese landscape painter conveyed his aesthetic doctrines. *The Spirit of the Brush*, Sakanishi's best-known work, followed four years later.

Although Sakanishi expressed approval of American democratic society, her exalted government position did not isolate her from suspicion due to her Japanese ancestry and Japanese embassy connections. As 1940 dawned, war broke out in Europe and relations between the United States and Japan grew increasingly strained. Sakanishi found ways to assist her adopted country and ease tensions. First, she engaged in historical research that underlined the ties between the United States and Japan. In 1940 she published an edition of the private journal of John Glendy Sproston, who accompanied Commodore Matthew Perry on his historic mission to “open” Japan. The following year, Sakanishi edited an edition of the unpublished letters of Townshend Harris, the first US consul in Japan.

She also engaged in more confidential intelligence work. In 1941 William J. “Wild Bill” Donovan, who had been selected as Coordinator of Information, started putting together a team (his agency would soon morph into the Office of Strategic Services, wartime ancestor of the Central Intelligence Agency). In desperate need of agents to collect information and offer advice on Japanese threats to French Indochina, Donovan recruited as his Southeast Asia regional expert Kenneth Landon, who had recently returned to the United States after he and his wife, Margaret, had served for several years as missionaries in Thailand. (Margaret would draw on her experience in Asia for her 1944 bestseller *Anna and the King of Siam*.) Sakanishi immediately offered Landon, a fellow Wheaton College alum, an office at the Library of Congress and assisted him in his intelligence work. Indeed, in his 1967 book *The Broken Seal*, historian and intelligence officer Ladislav Faragó asserted rather doubtfully that Sakanishi had been a double agent aiding the US Office of Naval Intelligence (Farago claimed that she fingered a Japanese courier carrying the keys to diplomatic codes, thereby enabling naval intelligence officials to copy the documents and break the code).

Whatever the extent of Sakanishi's efforts to assist the federal government, she was targeted once war broke out between the United States and Japan in December 1941. Arrested by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, she was detained indefinitely without charge. Archibald MacLeish protested unavailingly on her behalf while First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt wrote Attorney General Francis Biddle to ask if anything could be done to help her and whether naval intelligence files revealed any suspect conduct. Her political opinions and the reasons for her custody are unknown, though it is likely that her name figured on a list of Japanese immigrants (plus a few Nisei) whom Tokyo demanded be repatriated. What is certain is that, realizing that the war would be protracted, she accepted repatriation, and in August 1942, sailed on an exchange ship to Japan, where she had not lived for two decades. Sakanishi maintained a low profile during the war, though according to one source, she was conscripted into service for Japan's war effort as a translator and propagandist.

Following Japan's defeat, Sakanishi emerged as a liberal and pro-American voice. The occupation government selected her as an advisor, and she was appointed to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Councilors of the Japanese Diet as a specialist on women's issues and international relations. Drawing on her familiarity with American society (a rare commodity in occupation-era Japan), she published a trilogy of studies on American women and popular history: *America no josei* (1946), *Jugonin no Americajin* (1946), and *America shi* (1947). In the years that followed, she produced some two dozen books on social reform issues such as child-rearing, young people, and women's rights, plus translations of numerous American books (as well as the daily *Blondie* comic strip). Sakanishi became best known as a broadcaster and television interviewer. She would question foreign visitors in English, then interpret both questions and answers for her viewers.

In 1963 Sakanishi made a triumphal return visit to the United States. She died in Japan in 1976. Her unique career and success provoked admiration and challenged easy assumptions about gender roles among Japanese.

FUKI ENDOW KAWAGUCHI'S DIARY¹

As I mentioned in the overview of Issei women, one field of creative work common among immigrants was keeping a diary. We are fortunate to have various surviving journals. Beyond their value as literature, they help fill a



FIGURE I.I. Fuki Endow Kawaguchi, California farm wife and diarist, with her husband.

significant gap in our historical understanding of the removal of West Coast Japanese Americans during World War II: how ordinary people perceived events as they occurred.

In the decades since the war, former camp inmates have produced an enormous corpus of literature dealing with their wartime experiences, including oral histories, memoirs, essays, plays, poetry, and fiction. These have provided valuable insight as to how the government's policy played out in the lives of its victims and included a store of information useful in reconstructing the overall camp experience. Still, memoirs are, by nature, products of hindsight and recollection, formed of material drawn from the untidy storehouse of human memory. They inevitably give an incomplete and less than trustworthy accounting of past sensations, especially the traumatic emotions and painful human relations that characterized the camp experience. In contrast, the contemporary written record of wartime Japanese Americans is both relatively sparse and uneven. Surviving letters, essays, and journals stress the experience of the Nisei, who comprised the majority of camp inmates. Members of the Issei generation, less long-lived and fluent in English than their children, have produced much less accessible material despite various oral history collections and a few published memoirs.

Nowhere is the documentary record, for both groups, barer than that for the period before mass confinement took place. Although government documents and newspaper accounts provide a certain amount of data regarding developments within Japanese communities during this turbulent time, it is very difficult to determine what was happening "on the ground," in ordinary people's lives.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and the outbreak of war transformed the lives of West Coast Japanese Americans—especially the Issei, who bore the brunt of official repression. Barred on racial grounds from becoming American citizens despite their long residence in the United States, they suddenly were designated *enemy aliens* once war began. Their bank accounts were frozen; many of their newspapers and business establishments were closed; they were subjected to a strict curfew; and their homes were opened to random searches. A total of 1,370 West Coast Issei were rounded up and interned by the FBI in the period after Pearl Harbor, an action that created individual hardship as well as deprived the community of much of its leadership and cohesion in the weeks that followed.

Some time ago I came across a wonderful bit of historical material: the diary of Fuki Endow Kawaguchi (in a translation by her daughter, Sanae

Kawaguchi Moorehead). With the family's permission, I proceeded to edit a section of it. The text offers a rare contemporary portrait of a family of Japanese American farmers in Southern California during the period following Pearl Harbor.

Fuki Endow was born February 6, 1905, in Miho, a peninsula jutting into Suruga Bay on the island of Honshu, about one hundred miles south of Tokyo. Her parents were small shopkeepers. Sickly as a child, she was indulged and received an unusually extensive education for a woman of her time and background. In 1923 she met Sakujiro Kawaguchi, a native of Miho who had immigrated some years before to the United States and had returned to Japan to find a bride. Fuki thought going to America was a very exciting idea and agreed to marry him despite their brief acquaintance. Soon after, she gave birth to a daughter, Kazuko, who died within a month. Daughter Toshiye came a year later, followed by Haruko, Sanae, and Michiko. Fuki found relations with her husband difficult and the strains of constant pregnancy and childbirth were hard on her health. In 1933 she returned to Japan, taking her four daughters with her, a common practice among immigrants who felt a Japanese education would be better for their children. However, life in Japan proved even more difficult. The children were almost constantly ill, and one-year-old Michiko died. In 1935 Fuki agreed to return to her husband. Two years later, they acquired a farm in Dominguez Hills, now part of Los Angeles, where they grew flowers. Life on the farm was hard on Fuki, who was often ill.

She maintained a daily journal, with some interruptions, for forty years, although only the volumes from the 1940s survive. What struck me most powerfully in the existing diary was the section dealing with the period between the onset of the war in the Pacific and the mass removal of West Coast Japanese Americans. The journal's entries trace the author's growing awareness that she and her family might be taken away from their land and her uncertainty over what action to take, as the shadow of expulsion loomed ever nearer. Kawaguchi's text offers a vivid picture of the confusion and anxiety felt by Issei in Southern California as they faced business closings, alien registration forms, and evacuation from defense areas; but it shows the resilience and vitality of their community life. It also refutes popular images of the Issei as passive in the face of mass expulsion. In particular, the text reveals that many families did seriously consider and plan for "voluntary

evacuation” from the West Coast, regardless of the considerable difficulties entailed in such an operation, during the short window of time in early 1942 that it was possible. The Kawaguchi family did just that: organizing a caravan and migrating to Utah, where Mr. Kawaguchi had old friends from his days working on the railroad.

I find a thrilling tension in the author’s description of the unfolding events, lending her narrative the character of a detective story. Yet the journal’s force does not result simply from its immediacy. While the entries stand as they were written at the time, without subsequent correction, the diary is by no means an unconscious or unskilled text. Fuki came from an educated background and was an avid reader and letter writer as well as an accomplished poet of haiku. (On at least one occasion, local Japanese American newspapers offered to publish her work, but her husband forced her to decline such offers because he thought them unseemly for a woman.) Her journal weaves together daily weather reports and a precise accounting of each day’s planting with details of the larger world, firmly grounding the historical events leading up to the expulsion of Japanese Americans in the day-to-day experience of ordinary people. Her prose, couched in the Japanese idiom of her youth—one already growing old-fashioned by 1941—features colorful and evocative language. Thus, in addition to its value as a historical resource, Fuki Endow Kawaguchi’s diary represents a precious example of *women’s literature*, giving voice to the unique perspective of Issei women.

TEL SONO: ISSEI WOMAN LAWYER AND MISSIONARY

One area of professional life in the United States in which women have become most visible is law. Within recent generations, women attorneys have passed from being a rarity, greeted with condescension and often unemployable, to forming the majority of new law school graduates. Nisei women formed part of this wave of courageous pioneers.

Interestingly, the first Nisei woman in the law was not an American but rather Maria Arai of Mexico. She was born circa 1915, the daughter of Kinta Arai, a Japanese foreign ministry diplomat who ended his career as an embassy counselor in Madrid. During those years, Maria received a degree in literature from University of Madrid. In 1933, after her father accepted a new chair in Oriental studies at the National Autonomous University of Mexico,



FIGURE 1.2. Tel Sono, the first Japanese American woman lawyer.

she enrolled at the university and earned a degree in international law. In 1935 the Mexican government hired her as a counselor in the Department of Agriculture and the director of the marine industry bureau. In 1936 she

was named chief prosecutor in the Mexican government's crime bureau. She subsequently went by the name Hisa Arai, spending a long career as an advisor on Mexico's international trade for the Instituto Mexicano de Ejecutivos en Comercio Exterior; her fluent Japanese helped her with negotiations on trade missions to Japan. She died in 2007.

Chiyoko Sakamoto (Takahashi) (1912–1994), a Los Angeles native, was the first Japanese American woman to practice law (although Elizabeth Ohi of Chicago, discussed in chapter 2, was admitted to the bar a few months before her). Sakamoto graduated from American University and passed the California bar exam in October 1938. Unable to find a job with a law firm, she worked as a legal assistant to a Japanese American community leader who provided translation services. After being incarcerated during the war at the Santa Anita and Granada camps, she returned to Los Angeles and was hired by African American attorney Hugh E. Macbeth as his associate. She later opened her own law office in Little Tokyo and was one of the founders of the Japanese American Bar Association and the California Women's Bar Association.

Other women followed Sakamoto. Rei Kihara Osaki obtained her law degree and was admitted to the bar in Idaho in 1943, in the teeth of wartime anti-Japanese prejudice. She worked for the Office of Price Administration before retiring to raise a family. Patsy Takemoto Mink, who received her JD from the University of Chicago in 1951, became the first Japanese American woman lawyer in Hawai'i—although she had to go to court to win the right to practice there. In 1964 she became the first woman of color elected to Congress. Nikkei women of subsequent generations also made important contributions. Peggy Nagae served as lead counsel in Minoru Yasui's *coram nobis* case in the early 1980s to overturn the wartime Supreme Court ruling against him. In the mid-1990s, Susan Oki Mollway, director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Hawai'i, became the first Japanese American woman on the federal bench.

But the first women lawyer of Japanese ancestry in America, Cassie Tel (aka Teru) Sono, lived long before the 1930s. By her own account, Tel Sono was born in Tokyo (then called Edo), Japan, in 1846 and grew up in Ebalaki. Her father, Tesai Sono, was a doctor and philosopher. When she was nineteen, her parents arranged for her marriage to an imperial court officer, with whom she had a daughter. Her husband proved to be an alcoholic, and in 1871

Sono took her daughter and moved back into her family compound. In order to support herself and her daughter, she undertook the study of law with her father. Japan at the dawn of the Meiji restoration had no law schools, and (as in America) most lawyers learned their trade by reading law.

In 1873 Sono moved to Tokyo, and after spending three months clerking as a “Secretary of Judgment,” she began her practice. As the first and only woman lawyer in Japan, she later recalled, she made such a startling spectacle in the court of assizes that two poets wrote about her in a volume about novelties in Tokyo, thus bringing her nationwide fame. She also attracted attention for her charitable work and received a letter of commendation from the emperor. Sono practiced law in Japan for twelve years, frequently defending women. She became increasingly frustrated with sex discrimination and the lack of educational opportunity for women. She determined to travel to the United States and study so that she could educate Japanese women.

Sono arrived in San Francisco in 1886. Three months later, the Bank of Japan, in which she had put her savings, failed. Impoverished and speaking no English, she was forced to hire herself out as a domestic to earn a living. She rented a room with an African American family and went to the city’s Japanese (Christian) mission to look for work. After her bad experience working for an abusive farm family, the pastor of the Japanese mission found her a free room in the cellar of the Chinese (Christian) mission. She remained there for several months, working during the day and studying English with a white woman at night. After enrolling in public school and being expelled as too old, Sono entered a private women’s classical school, supporting herself by domestic work.

Sono’s experience with a Japanese missionary led to her conversion to Christianity and her entry into the Japanese Methodist Church in October 1887. She then joined the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). According to one source, she studied for a time at a deaconesses’ training school in Chicago. In 1889 Sono began raising money to create a Japanese benevolent society in San Francisco and opened a school and daycare center to pursue missionary work among Issei “fallen women.” She soon moved to Brooklyn, New York (then an independent city), and began teaching Japanese language at Mrs. Osborn’s Missionary Training Institute. At that time she began the Tel Sono Association, with the goal of establishing a Christian missionary training school for high-caste women in Japan. In order

to support herself, she produced a 66-page autobiography, *Tel Sono: The Japanese Reformer*, which appeared in 1890 and is almost certainly the first published work by an Asian woman in the United States. It serves as the major biographical source on her life.

Sono attracted widespread attention after she spoke at an international convention of the WCTU in Boston in 1891. Soon after, she embarked on a fundraising tour under WCTU auspices. In her speeches, she wore Japanese dress and spoke of her experiences. Newspapers reported on her speeches in cities such as New York; Washington, DC; and Los Angeles and praised the opportunity she presented for Christianizing the natives of Japan, especially her access to elite women. In January 1893, she set sail for England, where she addressed the famed Mildmay Conference of evangelical missionaries. She then went on to Japan. In September 1893, her girl's boarding school, the Eshowin Geogaku, opened in Tokyo, with two "lady teachers" and a male minister. However, the Women's Board of Foreign Missions complained the following year that Sono was living comfortably on the money she had raised, without pursuing further efforts at fund-raising. Sono's later life lies unrecorded, and she remains largely forgotten—modern Japanese histories of women lawyers list the first women as beginning in 1940.

AYAKO ISHIGAKI: FEMINIST AND PEACE ACTIVIST

In the decade surrounding World War II, the Japanese-born feminist and activist Ayako Ishigaki lived in the United States, where she distinguished herself as a radical intellectual and an outspoken opponent of Japan's military occupation of Manchuria and China. She joined dockside protests aimed at preventing Japanese ships from landing and transporting cargoes and barnstormed the country on lecture tours to raise public awareness and earn money for Chinese war relief. She was equally forceful as an author, both in English and Japanese. She attracted attention within the community—not always favorable—for the columns she contributed to the Los Angeles newspaper *Rafu Shimpō* and became known for her semi-fictionalized 1940 memoir, *Restless Wave: My Life in Two Worlds*.

Ayako Ishigaki was born Ayako Tanaka on September 21, 1903, in Tokyo, Japan. Her mother died when she was young. Although her father, a university professor, did allow her to attend school, he made sure she absorbed



FIGURE 1.3. Ayako Ishigaki, *far left*, circa 1964, at a party in Japan.

conventional wisdom about women's social role. The key event in Ayako's life came when she was around sixteen. Her adored older sister gave into family pressure for an arranged marriage and wed a man in the diplomatic corps. Ayako declared that she would not accept any such union. Instead, she enrolled at Jiyu Gakuen, a new progressive girl's school founded by educational reformer Motoko Hani (artist and musician Yoko Ono would later study there). She also insisted on choosing her own spouse and became enamored of a local doctor's son despite his family's opposition. Meanwhile, she took paid jobs outside the home and was attracted by Japan's radical Farmer-Labor Party. In 1926, after spending a night in jail because of her activities, she agreed to move to the United States with her sister. Her brother-in-law secured a diplomatic passport for her, thereby enabling her to enter the country despite Japanese exclusion. Although Ayako's fiancé thereafter secured his family's consent to their marriage, she refused to return to Japan.

Soon after arriving in America, Ayako abandoned her sister's family and moved to New York, where she met and rapidly married a radical Issei artist, Eitaro Ishigaki. Ayako learned to do household chores and took various shop

and factory jobs to support the couple while Eitaro painted. In the summers they worked as concessionaires at Coney Island. The Great Depression hit the Ishigakis hard, and Ayako later claimed that at one point they survived entirely on extra food that their waiter friend Jack Shirai brought home from work (Shirai subsequently volunteered for service on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War and died in Spain).

Following Japan's 1931 invasion of Manchuria, Ayako began reporting for the radical publications the *New Masses* and *China Today*. In 1937 the American League for Peace and Democracy recruited her to organize against Japanese aggression. She moved to Los Angeles, where she began a column for the *Rafu Shimpo's* Japanese section. In her column, *Jinsei Shokan* (Women's Thoughts), written under the pen name May Tanaka, Ayako spoke as a housewife to other housewives. She used informal language and homey metaphors to advocate birth control and women's equality and to oppose militarism. Her column soon became popular—the common discrimination faced by Issei women erased the class barriers that might otherwise have separated them. Despite the column's popularity, the Japanese community's overwhelming support for Tokyo's invasion of China in July 1937 led her to give up in despair, and she returned to New York. In the following years, she undertook fund-raising tours in support of China alongside dancer Si-Lan Chen and writer Helena Kuo and began the work that emerged as *Restless Wave*.

Restless Wave, published in 1940 under the pen name Haru Matsui, ranks among the earliest books by an Asian American woman. Mixing autobiography, fiction, and reportage, it recounts the author's coming of age as a feminist and activist in Japan and the United States. The work remains notable for the ways the author associates Japanese military aggression abroad with "feudal" restrictions on women and the poor at home. The work also painted a sympathetic and poignant picture of Little Tokyo in the 1930s. While Ayako criticized the Issei for supporting Japanese militarism, she made clear that their pro-Japanese attitude stemmed from their race-based isolation—and their children's—within American society.

In 1942, following the outbreak of war between the United States and Japan, painter Yasuo Kuniyoshi recruited Ayako to make anti-Axis broadcasts. She thereafter joined the Office of War Information (OWI) as a translator and writer. She worked for the OWI and the War Department for the following five years. During this time, she evidently started a novel about Japanese

Americans, but the project was never realized. In the years following the war, Ayako revived her *Jinsei Shokan* column for New York's *Hokubei Shimpo*. She and Eitaro faced increasing harassment by the US government due to their political views, including their friendship with radical writer Agnes Smedley. They had already planned to leave the United States when Eitaro was summarily expelled in 1951. Ayako joined him in Japan.

Once in Japan, Ayako became renowned as an informed interpreter of American life as well as for her writings in the women's magazine *Fujin Koron*. In a controversial 1955 article, "*Shufu to iu dai-in shokugyō-ron*" ("Housewife: The Second Profession"), she complained that Japanese women's minds had "turned to mush" from staying at home, and she urged women to take up outside work, whether paid or unpaid.

In later decades, Ayako became a familiar Japanese television personality and women's advisor and authored over twenty Japanese-language books, including diaries, memoirs, essays, and biographies. Following Eitaro's death in 1958, she also dedicated her efforts to building a museum of his artwork, which opened in Wakayama in the 1980s. Ayako revisited the United States on a few occasions and contributed to the Japanese American literary anthology *Ayumi*. She died in a nursing home in 1996. In 2004 the Feminist Press of the City University of New York published a new edition of *Restless Wave*, by then long out of print. Two years later, it won a special citation as a "lost Asian American treasure" from the Association for Asian American Studies. (Full disclosure: I collaborated on the afterword to the new edition.)

NOTE

1. This piece is adapted from Greg Robinson, introduction to "On the Brink of Evacuation: The Diary of an Issei Woman, by Fuki Endow Kawaguchi," with Sanae Kawaguchi Moorehead, in *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 28 (October 2004): 359–82, which includes the text of the diary entries.