

# GOOD WIVES AND WISE MOTHERS

## *Japanese Picture Brides in*

## *Early Twentieth-Century British Columbia\**

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MIDGE AYUKAWA

“HOW EMBARRASSING AND AWKWARD IT WAS. There was no one to even introduce the new husband and wife to each other.”<sup>1</sup>

“When I saw him, I thought — he’s cuter than his photo. I giggled.”<sup>2</sup>

“When I saw Victoria, I thought it was a beautiful nice place. Then I became anxious when I wondered what kind of a person would be here to greet me. — He had a good physique like I had seen in his photo, but he was simple-minded. I was so sad. — I despaired.”<sup>3</sup>

These pioneer Japanese women who immigrated to British Columbia as picture brides in the early twentieth century each reacted rather differently when they first arrived and met their husbands. The majority have now quietly passed away, their lives unchronicled, even

\* This paper is about real people — the Japanese women who pioneered in Canada in the early years of Japanese immigration. Although the majority of those mentioned in this paper have passed away, their descendants are living. To preserve the privacy of the families concerned, the women are identified only by their initials. Full names, which may be fictional, are given only if their stories have already been previously published.

Following Japanese custom, all names are given with the surnames first, except in one case, Mrs. Kiyoko Tanaka-Goto.

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<sup>1</sup> Michiko Midge Ayukawa, “The Memoirs of Imada Ito, A Japanese Pioneer Woman” (B.A. thesis, University of Victoria, 1988), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Nakamura Tami, in Makabe Tomoko, *Sbashinkon no Tsumatachi* [Wives Who Were Picture Brides] (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1983), 136.

<sup>3</sup> Ishikawa Yasu, in *ibid.*, 109.

their descendants unaware of their sacrifices and their extraordinary lives. A sense of modesty, a genuine belief that their life experiences were insignificant, a reticence in revealing their private lives, compounded by the disinterest and reluctance of the children to probe into the pre-World War II society have all contributed to this underexamined aspect of Japanese Canadian history. While some stories have been recorded, the two major works, chronicling the lives of some of the picture brides, were written in Japanese by women who were born in Japan.

Kudo Miyoko, in her 1983 book, *Shakonsai*, deals at length with the difficulty of obtaining face-to-face interviews as well as the extreme reluctance of Japanese picture brides to talk about their past.<sup>4</sup> She did manage to write short accounts about thirteen women that she met; however, her work pales in comparison to Makabe Tomoko's thoroughly researched exploration of the picture brides.<sup>5</sup> Makabe befriended and developed empathy with a number of women and then wrote about five of them. She also reproduced the speech of the interviewees so that the unique Canadian-Japanese language of the pioneer society has been preserved.

Other oral history interviews have also been conducted with Japanese immigrant women. Through the Aural History Program of the British Columbia government, a number of interviews were conducted in both Japanese and English in the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> I have also conducted a number of interviews, but found the process rather daunting. In almost every case, it was necessary to have a mutual friend arrange the meeting, and often the interviewee disallowed the use of a tape-recorder. My own relatives and good family friends were willing to be interviewed, but some requested anonymity. Part of this reluctance stems from the fact that the Japanese are a proud and complicated people. The extreme hardships and the racial discrimination that they experienced are, I sense, looked upon as a disgrace, something to be ashamed of and not to be revealed. It is also possible that it is too painful to do so.

Despite these various difficulties, it is possible to use oral history and the rare essays and memoirs which are available to provide some

<sup>4</sup> Kudo Miyoko, *Shakonsai* [Picture Brides] (Tokyo: Domesu Shuppan, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> Makabe, *Shashinkon*.

<sup>6</sup> These are held in the British Columbia Archives, but the language of the pre-World War II Japanese Canadian community can be a problem. A few of the interviews have been translated and partly written up in two publications. They are *Steveston Recollected* by Daphne Marlatt (Victoria: Aural History, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1975) and *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End* by Daphne Marlatt and Carole Itter (Victoria: Aural History, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1979).

insights into the lives of the early Japanese women immigrants who came to Canada as picture brides.<sup>7</sup> The lives of these women tend to reflect the constraints of the Meiji gender ideology that they were taught as girls in Japan. These gendered expectations influenced their immigration to Canada, and shaped their lives once they arrived. Gender ideology was not, however, the only force defining Japanese immigrant women's lives. Both their immigration experiences and their lives in Canada were also shaped by the forces of Canadian racism and by the economic hardship they confronted in both Japan and Canada. At the same time, these women cannot be seen simply as victims of economic inequalities and of gender and racial discrimination. Many challenged accepted gender roles by making active decisions to emigrate, while others struggled, overtly and covertly, against the various constraints of their lives in Canada.

#### BACKGROUND

Japan existed in virtual isolation from the rest of the world until the second half of the nineteenth century when Western nations forced the country to open its doors. A revolution by young *samurai* [warriors] and the establishment of a new Meiji government resulted in the introduction of dramatic socio-economic changes to Japan, particularly through the process of industrialization.<sup>8</sup> The Meiji Constitution of 1889, the Imperial Rescript of Education issued in 1890, and the Civil Code of 1898 all contributed to defining the gender ideology which the Meiji government attempted to impose on all Japanese. "The values of the old *samurai* . . . were fostered by the government for the nation as a whole."<sup>9</sup> Feudal *samurai* customs and norms were disseminated among all other classes, including farmers, merchants and craftsmen, for "modernization [entailed] samuraization of all the people of Japan."<sup>10</sup> Through this process, primogeniture was codified, and the needs of the "house [were to be placed] before individual needs."<sup>11</sup> Rather than love and affection, filial piety and duty were to bind children to parents and wives to husbands. While marriage was

<sup>7</sup> For instance, Mrs. Imada Ito's memoir and an essay by Mrs. Kawamoto Koto are held in the University of British Columbia Library, Special Collections.

<sup>8</sup> Meiji was the era name for the period between 1868 and 1912, when Emperor Mutsuhito, a figurehead, was installed as the symbol of authority.

<sup>9</sup> George De Vos and Hiroshi Wagatsuma, "Value Attitudes toward Role Behaviour of Women in Two Japanese Villages," *American Anthropologist* 63 (1961), 1205.

<sup>10</sup> Tsurumi Kazuko, "Women in Japan: A Paradox of Modernization," *The Japan Foundation Newsletter* (April 1977), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Joy Hendry, *Understanding Japanese Society* (London: Routledge, 1991), 35.

increasingly viewed as an alliance between houses, men were considered to be superior to women, which meant that a Japanese woman was expected to obey first her father, then her husband, and later her son.<sup>12</sup> These gender roles were also firmly inculcated through the educational system. By the late Meiji era, the educational system became universal and centralized, with the introduction of six years of compulsory education and a school attendance rate of over 98 per cent by 1908.<sup>13</sup> This educational system sought to train all young women to be "good Meiji women."

#### JAPANESE IMMIGRATION TO CANADA

Emigration of *dekasegi rodo* [temporary migrant labourers] began in 1885, when government-sponsored workers were sent to Hawaii under three-year contracts.<sup>14</sup> Migration to the mainland of the United States and Canada soon followed. The rapid modernization of Japan had created economic havoc throughout the country, but the rural areas, where the land tax had provided most of the state's capital, were particularly hard hit. Furthermore, the importation of cheap raw materials together with the process of industrialization contributed to the destruction of cottage industries. Within this context, both the Japanese government and the populace believed that *dekasegi* was one viable solution to the problems of poverty and dislocation.

The early Japanese immigrants to Canada were primarily *dekasegi* and predominantly males. A few women accompanied their husbands and some joined them later. Some men returned to Japan to marry or to visit temporarily, some produced children and then returned to Canada.

This *dekasegi* or *wataridori* [bird of passage] period between 1880 and 1908 has been identified as the first stage of Japanese immigration to Canada.<sup>15</sup> As was the case with other "sojourner" immigrants, such as the Italians, the goal of the Japanese was to work hard, save money, and return home with greater financial security. In most cases, however, these dreams were frustrated by the low wages they received, the harshness of their labour, and their miserable living conditions. Also many men, leading lonely lives in an unfamiliar, predominantly

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>13</sup> Mikiso Hane, *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1986), 186.

<sup>14</sup> Kodama Masaaki, *Nihon Iminshi: Kenkyu Josetsu* [Introduction to the Study of the History of Japanese Emigration] (Hiroshima: Keisuishsha, 1992), 15.

<sup>15</sup> Audrey Kobayashi, "Regional Backgrounds of Japanese Immigrants and the Development of Japanese Canadian Community," *Albatross Discussion Papers*, Department of Geography, McGill University, No. 1 (May 1986), 1-2.

male society, often squandered their earnings on sake [rice wine], women, and gambling.

While the sojourner pattern of immigration was similar to that of other groups who emigrated to Canada, the Japanese faced far greater levels of racism than did most European immigrants. In British Columbia, which was the primary destination of Japanese and Chinese immigrants to Canada, there was particularly strong hostility. White British Columbians argued that Asian immigrants were "non-assimilable" and undercut the wages of white workers.<sup>16</sup> While there had been violent anti-Asian incidents in B.C. since the 1880s, growing hostility to increasing Asian immigration led to a major riot in Vancouver in 1907. Mob violence during the riot focused on Chinatown and the Japanese section on Powell Street.<sup>17</sup> In the aftermath of the "Vancouver Riot," the Canadian government bowed to B.C. pressure to limit Japanese immigration by entering into the Lemieux-Hayashi Gentlemen's Agreement of 1908, which limited the number of labourers entering Canada to 400 per year. Thus, the year 1908 marked the beginning of the second stage of Japanese immigration.

The Gentlemen's Agreement decreased the number of male immigrants, but accelerated the immigration of women. Some were the wives of earlier immigrants and were accompanied by their children, but the majority were picture brides. Japanese men in B.C., the majority of whom had reached marriageable age and had been unable to achieve their goal of returning to Japan with sufficient capital to purchase some land or to begin a small business, sought wives. They hoped that their lives would become more comfortable and that together they could achieve their dreams sooner. The arrival of these women brought about a transition from *wataridori* labouring overseas to more long-term settlement. Although many still hoped to return to their native land, as the second generation grew up, Japanese families became permanent residents.

The picture bride system was a practical adaptation of the traditional Japanese marriage custom. Marriages were family affairs; decisions were made by the heads of the two households through intermediaries, and the principals were rarely able to get acquainted before

<sup>16</sup> See Patricia E. Roy, "British Columbia's Fear of Asians 1900-1950," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 13, 25 (May 1980): 161-72 and *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989); W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Kingston, Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1978); Ken Adachi, *The Enemy that Never Was* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), 37-62.

<sup>17</sup> Adachi, 70.

marriage. In the case of picture bride marriages, photographs were exchanged, but beyond that there was little communication.<sup>18</sup> Japanese government regulations stipulated that the name of the bride be entered into the husband's family registry six months before the passport application, and that the bride could not be more than thirteen years younger than the groom.<sup>19</sup> The government also ruled that "women could only emigrate provided that: she already had a spouse living [there]; an immigrant returned to Japan to marry her; or, she had married an immigrant by proxy."<sup>20</sup>

Audrey Kobayashi has aptly described the implications of the *shashin kekkon* [photo marriage] system for Japanese women as follows:

The cruelty for the young bride consisted not in sending her to a husband whom she did not know and who was not of her own choosing. These were quite expected. It lay in placing her, a young girl of 18 or so who had never been away from her village, on a ship to a strange place where she would be required to work hard, to endure the prejudices of a hostile white community, and to bring up her family away from the familiarity of her native environment and the friends and family who would normally support her through the first trials of marriage.<sup>21</sup>

By 1924, 6,240 picture brides had arrived in Canada.<sup>22</sup> The visible increase of Japanese immigrants and the influx of their children into the B.C. school system generated growing concerns and complaints, so that the Canadian government instituted a revised Gentlemen's Agreement in 1928, which implemented a drastically reduced quota of 150 per year, including women and children.<sup>23</sup> As a part of this Agreement, the picture bride system was also terminated.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Milton Maruyama's novel, *Five Years on a Rock* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994) is the story of Maruyama's mother's life. The first two chapters provide an excellent portrayal both of the way in which marriage proposals and arrangements were made and of a picture bride's first experience with her new husband.

<sup>19</sup> Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 164-65.

<sup>20</sup> Nakane Chic, *Japanese Society* (New York: Pelican Books, 1984), 24.

<sup>21</sup> Audrey Kobayashi, "Emigration from Kaideima, Japan, 1885-1950: An Analysis of Community and Landscape Change," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1983), 213.

<sup>22</sup> Rigenda Sumida, "The Japanese in British Columbia," (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1935), 74.

<sup>23</sup> Adachi has noted that by the end of 1920, there were over 4,000 Canadian-born children, but that after 1931, the number of births declined sharply to become close to the rate in other groups within the province. Adachi, 107; 154.

<sup>24</sup> Adachi, 138.

## THE ROLE OF MEIJI WOMEN

The pioneer women who emigrated to Canada had been trained to be *ryosai kenbo* [good wives, wise mothers] in their families and villages, and through the educational system of the late Meiji era. The women were socialized and educated "to become the stable core of family and society."<sup>25</sup> Many of the picture brides were better educated than the average Japanese girl and than their future spouses, having graduated from girls' high school, normal school, or midwifery school. These women had been taught that the ideal woman was "modest, courageous, frugal, literate, hardworking, and productive."<sup>26</sup>

Can we thus understand the emigration of the picture brides as simply the obedient behaviour of well-trained wives and daughters? Certainly some women emigrated in obedience to the dictates of family. Some, like Mrs. M., were forced to marry by elder brothers who wanted them to leave their natal homes.<sup>27</sup> The vast majority, however, played a more active role in the decision to marry and emigrate to "Amerika." For many, this choice was circumscribed by the limited options available to Meiji women. Recognizing that spinsterhood was socially unacceptable within Japanese culture, many chose to become picture brides. Some women felt that emigration gave them the opportunity for marriage which they believed would not otherwise be available to them. For example, women like Mrs. Y. H., who was perceived as over-aged for marriage, or Mrs. I. I., who was divorced, or Mrs. Ishikawa Yasu, who was considered physically unattractive, might "choose" to become picture brides.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Nakamura Tami believed her chances for marriage were low because she had extremely curly hair and would have never been able to have it dressed in the hairstyles that brides wore.<sup>29</sup>

The extent to which remaining single was not a viable option for many of these women is seen most starkly in the fact that a number of *shizoku* [ex-samurai] women who had been married, divorced, and

<sup>25</sup> Sharon L. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1983), 192.

<sup>26</sup> Sharon H. Nolte and Sally Ann Hastings, "The Meiji State's Policy toward Women, 1890-1910," *Researching Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1991), 172. Girls' high school was a "bridal school." Although academic courses were offered, the curriculum stressed sewing, cooking, and manners. Takie Sugiyama Lebra, *Japanese Women: Constraint and Fulfillment* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), 58.

<sup>27</sup> Mrs. M. Personal, interview in Vancouver.

<sup>28</sup> Mrs. Y. H., interview conducted by Catherine Lang for a forthcoming book; Mrs. I. I., information gathered from descendants; Mrs. Ishikawa Yasu, in Makabe, *Shashinkon*, 107.

<sup>29</sup> Mrs. Nakamura Tami, in Makabe, *Shashinkon*, 133.

sent back to their natal homes were subsequently urged to marry a peasant who had emigrated.<sup>30</sup> These women were willing to become picture brides, and to marry far below their class, rather than remain single.

Other women's decisions to emigrate as picture brides can be interpreted as more active, positive choices, although these were still made within the context of limited alternatives.<sup>31</sup> Many picture brides had been daughters of well-situated families, too independent to agree to marry the eldest sons who would have been chosen for them. Such marriages would have entailed subservience to a mother-in-law and possibly a number of sisters-in-law, an unimaginable fate for spirited, adventurous, strong-willed women. For many of these women, the decision to emigrate also reflected a desire for excitement and adventure, a wish to move beyond the confines of their present lives. Some insisted that, in choosing to become picture brides, they had "married Amerika, not the man."

While many picture brides may have defined their decision in these terms, they were nonetheless emigrating as the wives of specific men — men whom they had never met, and with whom they were often very disappointed upon arrival in British Columbia. The majority of these picture brides had agreed to marriage after merely viewing a photograph and reading letters, which were often written by better educated friends of their future partners. Not surprisingly, Japanese men seeking wives exerted considerable effort to present themselves in the best possible light, particularly as attractive, wealthy, well-educated prospects who had taken on the North American emblems of successful manhood. Thus, their letters to future brides often contained rosy stories of their living conditions, and the enclosed photographs often showed prospective husbands wearing black suits, white "high collar" shirts, and at times a homburg. Some interviewees even indicated that they had heard stories of men who had posed in front of a mansion or even the Hotel Vancouver, implying that they either lived in or owned the property.

After waiting approximately a year while the necessary papers were processed, after receiving the fare from their groom, and after an arduous voyage of many days across the Pacific, the picture brides

<sup>30</sup> Mrs. I. I., information gathered from descendants. Divorce merely entailed the erasure of the bride's name from the family register. Often mothers-in-law decided the suitability of brides. There were also trial marriages, when the brides' names were entered in the family register only after a test period.

<sup>31</sup> There is no evidence of a shortage of prospective husbands in Japan, although there were likely villages where a large number of *dekasegi* workers had emigrated.

arrived in the port of Victoria. Clutching the exchanged photographs, the men and women searched for their mates. While many groaned with disappointment but nonetheless accepted their fate, a few refused to disembark and sailed back. The refusal of some brides to accept their mates is an often told story, but these rejections cannot be confirmed for obvious reasons — the recalcitrant brides have disappeared and the abandoned grooms have been too proud and ashamed to admit what had occurred.

The picture brides who remained in British Columbia faced isolation and hard work. While some lived in urban areas, many were taken to remote lumber camps, sawmill towns, fishing villages, and wilderness farms in the Fraser Valley and the Okanagan. Here they often faced harsher economic conditions than those to which they had been accustomed in Japan. Mrs. I. M., for example, remarked that, "I discovered that my husband did not own even two pairs of chopsticks."<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Mrs. Suzuki Moto recalled her first impressions of her new home:

When I came [in 1925] it was like a wild field or like in the mountains — the grass was this high [hip high] . . . it looked like such a deserted wild place, like where foxes might be living. I'm from farm country, but even near my village I'd never seen a place like this. Back home we used to have a little storage shack in the field; I felt as though I were living in that shack. I didn't know anybody.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to facing poverty, isolation and strange surroundings, Japanese immigrant women were expected to take on back-breaking labour. Women who emigrated in the early years of the century faced particularly daunting tasks: many became responsible for caring for the daily needs of as many as forty Japanese males, who were working in the lumbering or fishing camps. This involved not only cooking many pots of rice, miso soup (fermented soy-bean soup), dried fish, and vegetables, but also laundering work clothes covered with pine pitch or odoriferous fishermen's clothes, using washboards, and hauling pails of water. Other women, living in urban areas, ran boarding-houses, and their tasks included cooking, changing the linen, and doing all the laundry.

The birth of children added to the already heavy burdens of these Japanese women. If they were fortunate, they were attended by mid-

<sup>32</sup> Author's mother.

<sup>33</sup> Marlatt, *Steveston Recollected*, 18.

wives. More frequently, husbands assisted during childbirth, which took place in their lonely wilderness shacks.<sup>34</sup> This childbirthing experience stood in stark contrast to the customary practices in Japan, where women returned to their birth homes to be cared for by their mothers and convalesced for at least three weeks. In B.C., however, women usually resumed their daily labours within a week of the birth of a child, strapping their babies on their backs, or leaving them alone at home in their wicker basket cots. Traditionally, grandmothers would care for the young while the parents laboured in the rice paddies or in other occupations. More affluent families hired wet-nurses and maids. This type of assistance was sadly lacking in B.C. During the early years of settlement, however, children were often sent to Japan to be cared for by their relatives so that mothers could continue to work. Others were sent there when they reached school age in order to obtain an education, even though a Japanese school, following the curriculum of the Ministry of Education in Japan, was established in Vancouver in 1906.<sup>35</sup> In later years, as the goal of returning to Japan appeared increasingly remote or ill-advised, children were sent to Canadian schools and received additional education at Japanese language schools. By 1921, the curriculum at the Vancouver Japanese School focused exclusively on language instruction.<sup>36</sup>

Whether their husbands were worthy or not, most Japanese picture brides behaved as good, obedient wives, as proper Meiji women were expected to and as they had been trained in Japan. Mrs. Yokoi, for example, told Kudo Miyoko that she had received a girls' high school education while her husband had only completed three years of school and had emigrated at the age of fifteen. She added, however, that in spite of this, her husband was a Meiji man and insisted on her being a subservient and an obedient wife.<sup>37</sup>

While most Japanese women may have been obedient to their husbands, they were certainly not passive individuals. They actively sought to improve their lives, and more particularly, the lives of their children. While racism limited the type of jobs Japanese women could engage in, many did take on paid work available to them. A number of women laboured in fish canneries, in lumber camps as cooks and laundresses, in white homes as housemaids, in clothing factories, and

<sup>34</sup> Mrs. Koyata Isa, in Kudo, *Shakonsai*, 149; Mrs. Imada Ito, in Ayukawa, "The Memoirs of Imada Ito," 33.

<sup>35</sup> Sato Tsutae and Sato Hanako, *Kodomo to Tomo ni Gajunen* [Fifty Years With The Children] (Tokyo: Nichibo Shuppansha, 1969), 113.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 621.

<sup>37</sup> Mrs. Yokoi, in Kudo, *Shakonsai*, 113-14.

in their own homes sewing.<sup>38</sup> They carefully saved to purchase small dry-cleaning and alterations shops, corner convenience stores, or rough, uncleared land in the Fraser Valley.<sup>39</sup> The driving force for permanent homes was most often their children's educational needs. Some women were willing to move well beyond women's traditional roles to help provide for the education of their children. Mrs. Imada Ito is a good example of such a determined woman. In her memoir, she described in great detail how she vowed to purchase land in Maple Ridge so that her sons could attend school. She laboured, as her husband's partner, in a cedar-shingle bolt camp, sawing down trees with eight-foot long buck saws, while leaving her little children unattended in a cabin. Her eldest son confirmed her story with his own recollections of those days. The land that was purchased at such sacrifice, however, was seized by the Canadian government in 1943 and sold for a pittance.<sup>40</sup>

Other Japanese picture brides also engaged in non-traditional work. One fisher's wife, Mrs. Kaneda, related a tale about working as her husband's partner on the fishing boat. When he died, her eldest son was only sixteen, and still too young to obtain a licence. Consequently, she took over her husband's licence, and continued fishing with her son until he reached the age of twenty.<sup>41</sup> This woman was not the only picture bride to face early widowhood. Many Japanese faced the dangers of working as fishers, while the majority of male Japanese immigrants were engaged in hazardous unskilled work in forestry, in mining, and on the railway. The wives of these men had to live with the constant worry that their husbands might be injured or killed on the job. As well as the personal loss, the death or injury of the main breadwinner obviously had major financial implications.<sup>42</sup> While some widows, like Mrs. K., married their late husband's sibling, many more married bachelors, who were relieved of having to go through the expense and the complicated procedure of obtaining a picture

<sup>38</sup> There were a few enterprising Japanese people who subcontracted home sewing to Japanese women.

<sup>39</sup> In 1931, there were eighty-one cleaning and pressing businesses in Vancouver alone. They were family-run shops which invariably included alterations and often dressmaking, for which wives were responsible. Charles H. Young and Helen R. Y. Reid, *The Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1938), 74.

<sup>40</sup> Imada Ito, in Ayukawa, "The Memoirs of Imada Ito" and "Bearing the Unbearable: The Memoir of a Japanese Pioneer Woman" (M.A. thesis, University of Victoria, 1990).

<sup>41</sup> Tsurumi Kazuko, *Sutebusuton Monogatari* [Tales of Steveston] (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1962), 74.

<sup>42</sup> See Nancy Forestell, "All That Glitters is Not Gold: The Gender Dimensions of Work, Family, and Community Life in the Northern Ontario Gold Mining Town of Timmins, 1909-1950" (Ph.D. thesis, Department of History and Philosophy, OISE, 1993).

bride.<sup>43</sup> Others did not remarry. Returning to Japan was rarely an option, since their impoverished families would have been unable to support them. Rather, as was the case with most widows in Canada, they struggled to survive in a society which assumed that all women were or should be financially supported by men.

While Japanese widows faced major financial hardships, some married women also faced significant difficulties. Wives were expected to adhere to the Meiji gender ideology and remain subservient to their husbands. Like many Canadian women, some had to deal with physical abuse from their male partners, an aspect of Japanese pioneer society that is rarely mentioned. Meiji husbands expected absolute obedience. Thus, a woman who objected to any decision that her husband made would be perceived as undermining his hierarchical rights. As well, the frustrations of Japanese men, working at poor jobs at low wages and suffering racial slurs and insults, were often vented on members of their families. After indulging in sake, some husbands beat their wives. In the face of physical abuse from their husbands, most women quietly bore their shame and pain. To reveal the family secrets to relatives or friends would have been unthinkable.

Those few Japanese women who refused to put up with domestic violence, and those widows who could not manage to support their children had few options. The extended families of most of these women lived in Japan, and the racism of the host society meant that most of the limited public and private welfare services of the early twentieth century were not accessible to them. As a result, some turned to the Victoria Oriental Home, which was run by the Women's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church. As Karen Van Dieren has shown, the Home was intended "to teach girls a Christian meaning of womanhood coupled with essentially white middle-class behaviour and values. In effect, the missionaries hoped that foreign girls and women would assimilate the values of the dominant culture and would in turn raise their children in Christian and Western homes."<sup>44</sup> Despite the declared intention of the Home, and even though it was considered a social disgrace among the Japanese to seek assistance outside the Japanese community, some Japanese women did make use of the Home as a refuge from poverty and abuse.

Recourse to a church-run Home as part of a survival strategy in the face of very limited options was a pattern familiar to widowed and

<sup>43</sup> Personal knowledge.

<sup>44</sup> Karen Van Dieren, "The Response of the WMS to the Immigration of Asian Women: 1888-1942," *Not Just Pin Money*, ed. Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984), 82.

other poor and abused women of all races across Canada.<sup>45</sup> In one case, when Mrs. Tagashira's first husband, badly injured in a logging accident, tried to commit suicide, and later died in Essondale, a hospital for the mentally ill, she left one of her two children at the Oriental Home. She continued to care for the other child, while she worked as a housekeeper for a white family.<sup>46</sup> Mrs. Murata Hana, who had been married twice in Japan, was sent to Canada to replace her deceased sister.<sup>47</sup> She discovered that her new husband was involved with another woman and already had a child from that liaison. She left, and married a fisher who made her life unbearable because of his extreme jealousy. When he became physically violent, she escaped and found shelter at the Oriental Home. In both cases, the women were eventually able to support themselves, due in part to the help and training that they received. Mrs. Murata never remarried, while Mrs. Tagashira eventually did but did not have any more children. Both became devout Christians. Unlike many other women who made use of church-run homes simply as a short term survival strategy, these particular women clearly found solace in the religious teachings of the Home.

While some Japanese wives demonstrated through their survival abilities under very difficult conditions that they were more than passive, obedient wives, a minority of picture brides rebelled more dramatically against the precepts of Meiji womanhood. One of the most colourful of these rebels was Mrs. Kiyoko Tanaka-Goto.<sup>48</sup> She arrived in Canada in 1914 as a nineteen-year-old picture bride and initially worked hard with her husband, Mr. Tanaka, on a white man's farm in Duncan, and later on Saltspring Island. Hoarding every penny, she also cleaned chicken coops for three or four hours a day and did laundry by hand for a local hotel. After four years, having saved \$2,000, she left her husband, went to Vancouver, and with three other Japanese women purchased a bawdy house on the corner of Powell and Gore Streets. They converted it into a restaurant, where the emphasis was more on drink than on food, and the business was a success. Subsequently, Mrs. Tanaka-Goto required medical attention for venereal disease and went to Kamloops, where Mr. Goto paid her

<sup>45</sup> See Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993); Diane Purvey, "Orphanages and Social Change in Vancouver, 1890s to 1930s" (M.A. thesis, University of Victoria, 1990).

<sup>46</sup> Amano Mieko, *Chikara to Kibin* [Strength and Dignity] (Vancouver, B.C., 1987); Nancy Knickerbocker, *First Generation* (Vancouver: Asia Pacific Initiative, 1990), 45-50.

<sup>47</sup> Murata Hana, in Makabe, *Shashinkon*, 69-96.

<sup>48</sup> Daphne Marlatt and Carole Itter, *Opening Doors*, 102-05; Mrs. Tanaka-Goto was interviewed by Maya Koizumi in Japanese and the tapes are held in the B.C. Archives.

medical expenses.<sup>49</sup> In order to repay his kindness, she stayed with him for a few years, cooking and doing the laundry for his CPR crew. Eventually, she returned to Vancouver where she ran another bawdy house on West Hastings Street for many years. Mrs. Tanaka-Goto was a rebel in many ways: she not only rebelled against the gender expectations of both Japanese and Canadian society, she also challenged the racist decrees of the Canadian state. When the Japanese were forcibly removed from the west coast in 1942, she refused to cooperate, was arrested, and spent a few months in Oakalla prison before she was shipped off to Greenwood. Moreover, a few years before the Japanese were allowed to return to the west coast (April 1949), she found her way back and lived in Vancouver's Chinatown, masquerading as a Chinese. She was indeed an unusual Japanese pioneer picture bride.

Mrs. Tanaka-Goto's unconventional life as the owner of a bawdy house was undoubtedly quite different from the lives of those Japanese women, who, like many Chinese women, were illegally brought into Canada at the turn of the century to work as prostitutes. In most cases, these Japanese women were put to work in brothels on the Prairies, or in the mining towns of southeastern B.C. The story of Japanese prostitutes was told in a book by Nagata Shohei, entitled *Kanada no Makutsu* [Brothels in Canada], which was printed in 1910 by *Tairiku Nippo*, a Vancouver Japanese-language newspaper. Based on his travels across Canada, during which he visited brothels and spoke to both the owners and the prostitutes, Nagata's candid revelations caused a stir in the Japanese community and were said to be responsible for putting an end to the business.<sup>50</sup> While the demise of the mining industry was a more plausible explanation, Japanese prostitutes did continue to ply their trade. Even though they remained relatively few in number, they were generally treated as social outcasts by the Japanese community.

Mrs. Tanaka-Goto was certainly not the only picture bride to dramatically defy Meiji gender expectations. However, most did not. The majority of Japanese picture brides who did move beyond accepted roles did so for traditional reasons, such as the willingness of certain women to take on non-traditional work to further the interests of their families, particularly their children. In their relationships with husbands and children, most picture brides appear to have learned their lessons well

<sup>49</sup> Mr. Goto is undoubtedly the "Nippon Supply Company's Goto" mentioned by Adachi, 68.

<sup>50</sup> Roy Ito has dramatically described this journalistic endeavour and the reaction of the Japanese community in his book, *We Went to War* (Stittsville, Ont.: Canada's Wings, 1984), 15.

and fulfilled their roles as subservient “good wives and wise mothers.” Their lives were difficult, with strenuous exhausting work, inside and outside the home. While many worked alongside their husbands, or in some form of paid labour, some were forced to take on most or all of the responsibility for keeping their families together. This was certainly true for women who were widowed. Some married women also faced other difficulties, as their male partners continued the dissipated lives that they had led in their early years and continued to gamble and drink. Many dedicated, devoted mothers, such as Mrs. Imada, struggled single-handedly to provide stable homes for their children.<sup>51</sup> Even after the family purchased a piece of land in Haney, it was Mrs. Imada who grew the berries, picked and shipped them, and looked after her children. While her husband did clear land when he was at the farm, he worked in a lumber camp and only returned home in the winter months when it was closed. She also wrote that he never brought any of his earnings back, but squandered them on gambling and alcohol. In fact, he often took money from her.

Although the majority of the picture brides were hard-working, uncomplaining working-class or farm wives, they are not the women who were celebrated by the early twentieth-century Japanese community. The print of that period extolled the virtues of the women who lived comparatively more comfortably. A 1921 publication, *Kanada Doho Hatten Taikan* [Encyclopaedia of the Japanese in Canada] included the brief biographies of fifty-four women, the majority of whom were married to ministers and successful businessmen. These women were praised for their feminine modesty, dedication to their husbands, their charitable works, and their involvement in women’s organizations. One widow, Kado Mine, was extolled for her chastity, for not “shaming the family name,” and for carrying on the family business, an inn.<sup>52</sup> Thus, as in Western societies, there were clear differences in expectations according to class.

However, for all Japanese women, “absolute submission and self-denying service — were the highest virtues. Search for, or preoccupation with one’s own happiness was sheer selfish indulgence.”<sup>53</sup> Many strove to behave as they had been taught, and succeeded in leading what appeared to the outsiders to be exemplary lives. Privacy is treasured in Japanese Canadian society, and few publicly flaunted their independent thinking or behaviour.

<sup>51</sup> Ayukawa, “The Memoirs of Imada Ito” and “Bearing the Unbearable.”

<sup>52</sup> Nakayama Jinshiro, *Kanada Doho Hatten Taikan* [Encyclopaedia of Japanese in Canada] (Tokyo, 1921), 569.

<sup>53</sup> De Vos and Wagatsuma, “Value Attitudes,” 1209.

The Meiji gender ideology certainly played a central role in the lives of the picture brides — but it did not define the behaviour of all. While many of those who emigrated to Canada did so within the confines of gender roles which provided women with few alternatives to marriage, some actively chose the adventure and excitement they hoped to find in “Amerika,” while others rejected the subservience that would be expected of them by their mothers-in-law if they had remained in Japan. Once in B.C., most appear to have obeyed their husbands, as good Meiji women were expected to do. The strength and endurance of the Meiji gender ideology is further revealed by the fact that those Japanese women, who had emigrated to Canada and had thereby escaped the criticism of their mothers-in-law, became strict adherents of the Meiji family codes, in the socialization of their own daughters and sons, and in their treatment of their daughters-in-law. They often tyrannized their daughters-in-law and made greater demands on their children than did fathers. Moreover, while the *nisei* (second generation, Canadian-born) daughters were more exposed to Canadian social mores than their mothers, they were also taught both at home and at Japanese school to adhere strictly to Meiji morals and customs.

Besides the dictates of gender expectations, what also shaped the lives of most Japanese picture brides was the unending struggle with back-breaking domestic labour, farm labour, and paid work in seeking to better their lives and those of their children. In their efforts to improve their children's opportunities, some were willing to move well beyond traditional “women's work.” But the various difficulties they faced stemmed not only from the exigencies of immigrant life but also from the racism of Canadian society, which further limited their options and those of their children. While a few of the picture brides dramatically rebelled against both gender prescriptions and racist policies, most simply struggled and endured.