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# Structural Constraints and the Fertility of Japanese Immigrants in the Pacific Northwest During the Early 1900s

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**Abstract** *This study examines the fertility behavior among the first-generation Japanese (Issei) women who migrated to Seattle, Washington, in the Pacific Northwest during the early 1900s. It assesses how their fertility patterns changed from the time the Seattle Japanese-immigrant community expanded to the time when various anti-immigrant policies in the United States were ratified, beginning in the 1920s. The Issei women in the study sample are grouped into three cohorts according to the year they married to discover the difference in their fertility patterns. The study explores the influence of Japanese cultural norms, their social environment and familial settings in Seattle, and the anti-Japanese political movements and laws enacted during the first half of the twentieth century. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, it closely investigates how the Issei women's fertility behavior was correlated with the cultural and socio-political constraints and also how their life strategies became enmeshed in unequal power relationships.*

## Keywords

Japanese immigrants, fertility, structural constraints, life strategy.

## Introduction

In anthropology, human behavior is understood in context. This means that the study's disciplines examine how humans work within a given "structure," a particular socio-cultural context, where there are rules, expectations, and permissible actions. In other words, human actions are regarded as structurally constrained (Otto and Bubandt 2010:94). Thus, when the rules and expectations of a socio-cultural context are altered, human behavioral responses can change as well. At the same time, individuals also are not free from the constraints of power relationships. In the structure, there is inequality; those who have resources, such as material and organizational capacities, can implement and utilize these resources as power (Giddens 1984).

Those who lack such resources are relatively powerless, but they can strategize for their life within the structure.

Fertility, the act of giving birth to a child, is a biological event, but it is largely embedded in one's socio-cultural and political context. A crucial factor affecting fertility is the biological capacity to reproduce; human females are at their peak reproductive capacity in their early twenties after which time it declines (Wood 1994; Holman and Wood 2001:15). At the same time, various other aspects of one's cultural context affect fertility behavior. These aspects include the availability of resources, cultural norms and values, and current socio-political conditions. In particular, the fertility of immigrants can be constrained by the host country's socio-political environment, in addition to possible prejudice

and discrimination, but their fertility can also be influenced by the values of their culture of origin. Moreover, as social conditions evolve in the host country, immigrants may face different constraints, which may further affect their fertility in other ways.

This study examines the dynamic patterns of fertility behavior among the first-generation Japanese (Issei) women who migrated to Seattle, Washington, in the Pacific Northwest during the early 1900s. It investigates how the fertility of those women changed from the time the Seattle Japanese-immigrant community expanded to the time when various anti-immigrant policies in the United States (U.S.) were ratified in the 1920s and thereafter. Specifically, it focuses on how their fertility differed according to the year they married and how these differences related to structural constraints and the overall life strategies of these immigrants. The constraints include cultural norms, the social environment, familial settings, and the anti-Japanese socio-political movements and laws during the first half of the twentieth century. In other words, this study considers not only the social and political conditions in the U.S., but also the influence from Japanese culture and the political relationship between the two countries (Hoffman and Hanneman 2021:29). With respect to the socio-political movements and laws, Japanese immigrants in the U.S. were relatively powerless and seriously affected by the evolving structure. The study explores the influence of those movements and laws on their fertility as shaped by unequal power relationships.

This study uses cohort analysis to investigate Japanese immigrants' fertility behavior within specific, dynamic conditions in the structure. A cohort is defined as "the aggregate of individuals (within some population definition) who experienced the same event within the same time interval" (Ryder 1965:845). The Issei women are grouped into three cohorts based on the year they married, "1907–1920," "1921–1925," and "1926–after." Those intervals have been adopted because the structural conditions influencing

the Japanese immigrant community and the socio-political movements in the U.S. changed profoundly over that period of time.

## **Background of Seattle Japanese Immigrants and Socio-Political Movement**

Immigrants from Asia and countries throughout the Pacific made tremendous contributions to the economic growth of Washington; however, "they were from the start subject to exclusion and discrimination" (Nomura 1989:125). Japanese immigrants were no exception.

The community of Japanese immigrants in Seattle, Washington, emerged in the late nineteenth century and rapidly developed over the next few decades (Miyamoto 1984; Takami 1998). The economy in the Pacific Northwest was expanding, providing many employment opportunities for Japanese residents (Lee 2010:152–153). Most of the initial Japanese immigrants who came to Seattle were single men. There were few families, and around 1900, "the ratio of men to women was 33 to 1" (Takami 1998:19). Those men initially had planned to return to Japan after saving enough of their earnings, but for many of them, their stays became longer (Ito 1973:30). Consequently, they started forming families. An increase in Japanese immigrants led to an increase in anti-Japanese sentiment. Accordingly, in 1907, the U.S. and Japan established the "Gentlemen's Agreement," which effectively ended further migration of Japanese laborers to the U.S. This agreement, however, still allowed Japanese who were already in the U.S. to bring their family members over from Japan. As a result, many Japanese wives and brides came from Japan, and many children were born to these first-generation immigrants (Yanagisako 1985:3).

Japanese men who were already married summoned their wives and children. Some single men temporarily went back to Japan, got married, and then returned to the U.S. with their new brides (Nomura 1988:208–209). Others used the

“picture-bride” service, which enabled them to marry while they were in the U.S., selecting a wife via the exchange of pictures with brides-to-be in Japan (Ichioka 1980:341–342). “By resorting to the picture-bride practice, single men were able to save the time and expense of going back to Japan and avoid the risk of being conscripted” (Ichioka 1980:343). Although the exact number is unknown, probably over half of all the married women who arrived between 1910 and 1920 were picture-brides. As the Japanese population increased, especially American-born Japanese on the West Coast, there was a corresponding upsurge in anti-Japanese movements. By early 1919, a campaign was formed against the picture-bride practice, which was targeted as an uncivilized custom and against the “Gentlemen’s Agreement.” In response, the Japanese government decided to terminate issuing passports to picture-brides in December 1919 (Ichioka 1980:356; Takaki 1989:47).

From 1900 to 1920, the Japanese population in Seattle increased from 2,990 to 7,874 (Taylor 1991:407–409). Correspondingly, as the Japanese community grew, businesses/organizations diversified setting up an array of shops, churches, hospitals, and leisure establishments. The growth was further amplified by the U.S. entry to World War I in 1917. This event resulted in bringing a large influx of white workers to Seattle where ship-building activities increased, and the new Japanese businesses and shops served many of those laborers. As Japanese immigrant businesses became more successful, anti-Japanese sentiments and movements began to increase, but the Japanese and U.S. alliance during World War I and the attention the U.S. public directed toward the war in Europe acted to subdue these tensions (Pullen 1974:227; Fiset 1997:14).

It should be noted that the success of many Japanese businesses in Seattle was attributed to the symbiotic relationships they developed with their Japanese counterparts in the rural areas. In particular, the Japanese farmers in rural western Washington provided agricultural products to Japanese-owned stores and businesses in Seat-

tle, and such ties provided them a measure of economic independence and prosperity (Taylor 1991:410–411). Also, ironically, their economic success appeared to result in part from racial discrimination. Japanese were denied work in the large entrepreneurial companies that were governed by white employers, and, therefore, they turned to small-scale businesses, becoming self-employed and employing other Japanese. In addition, they developed aid-oriented associations, such as the *kenjin-kai* and *tanomoshi*, which provided social and economic aids among the members of those groups (Miyamoto 1984:20–25; Hosokawa 2002:156; Nosaka and Leonetti 2018). These were parts of their life strategies that contributed to the survival and resilience of the Japanese community under the discriminatory condition (Takaki 1989:180).

After the war, there was a reemergence, or amplification, of anti-Japanese sentiments. Modeled after a similar 1913 California law, the Alien Land Law was passed in 1921 in the state of Washington. According to this law, aliens (not citizens) and corporations controlled by aliens were not allowed to own or lease land, and were not qualified to be trustees with respect to land holding.<sup>1</sup> Theoretically, the law applied to all aliens, but it was clearly directed at the Japanese immigrants in the state because they were prominent farmers in Washington, supplying 75 percent of the vegetables and fruits in the Seattle region in the 1910s (Pullen 1974:244; Nomura 1989:124). There were ways to circumvent the law, however. For example, many Japanese farmers renewed their leases before the law went into effect or placed the land title under the name of their American-born children, who by default had U.S. citizenship (Pullen 1974:247–248). To do away with such loopholes, the state passed a new land law in 1923, prohibiting minors who were children of aliens from holding title to land (Pullen 1974:250). Then, families that had placed their land under the name of their American-born children arranged putting the land in the trust of a white lawyer (Grant 2008). Despite their

various endeavors to keep their land, Japanese land holding declined considerably, especially during the mid-1920s. This outcome damaged the Japanese businesses in Seattle, which were dependent on exchanges with Japanese farmers in rural Washington (Miyamoto 1984:12).

In the 1920s, the anti-Japanese immigrant sentiment was accelerated by the growing conflict between Japan and the U.S. After World War I, Japan became increasingly more powerful internationally and started competing with the U.S. over control of the Asian region (Wang 2008:41). Corresponding to this international tension and the growing domestic sentiment against Japanese immigrants, the U.S. enacted the Immigration Act of 1924. Although this law considerably reduced the number of immigrants from any country, it had the strongest effect on the Japanese, practically prohibiting any further immigration (Wang 2008:56). Thereafter, Japanese migration to the U.S. was extremely limited until well after World War II.

In the 1930s, as the anti-Japanese movement and legal exclusions continued, the Great Depression threatened the survival of many Japanese immigrant families (Jin 2016:129). Shopkeepers faced difficulties staying open or actually had to close their businesses. Moreover, the Seattle Japanese community bank eventually collapsed, and many Japanese immigrants went back to Japan or moved to California (Miyamoto 1984:16). Despite those socio-economic and political difficulties, however, Japanese immigrants maintained or even increased their overall prosperity. Such prosperity funded investment in their children, especially education (Takaki 1989:213; Taylor 1991:422–424). Also, some Japanese immigrants and their descendants became upwardly mobile, moving out of the original settlement areas where they had established businesses at the beginning of the century. These trends reflected “a rising standard of living, a better adaptation to American life on the part of the foreign-born as well as a marked increase in the number of American-born Japanese” (Schmid 1944:136).

These accomplishments were, however, shattered in the early 1940s. Most Japanese in the U.S., both citizens and resident aliens, were forced to move to “concentration camps” because of Japan’s entry into World War II.<sup>2</sup> The majority of those in Seattle were interned in the Minidoka War Relocation Center in southwestern Idaho between 1942 and 1945. The center was “one of ten permanent camps designed to house more than one hundred thousand people from the West Coast states and Arizona” (Fiset 1997:66). Needless to say, the internment heavily interrupted the lives of Japanese Americans in various ways, and it hit the first-generation Japanese hardest, having “ruined a half century of work and community effort” (Takami 1998:41–72, 76).

After the war, although many Japanese returned to Seattle, it was never the same as before. Between 1940 and 1950 the city’s Japanese population steadily declined from 7,000 to 5,800 (Takami 1998:78). The first-generation was reaching old age, and their children were beginning to take over various leadership positions. Despite ongoing anti-Japanese sentiment and discrimination, Japanese Americans worked their way into white-collar jobs between 1950 and 1960 (Varon 1967). They obtained a high standard of living and moved into predominantly white, middle-class, suburban residential areas in Seattle in the 1960s and 70s (Leonetti 1976). Meanwhile, the Seattle Japanese community itself shrank, and as the second-generation retired, many Japanese businesses were closed for good.

## Methods

To examine Japanese immigrant fertility in relation to the structure in which they were embedded, this study uses data originally collected from Japanese American women living in Seattle in the mid-1970s (see Yanagisako 1985:265–266 for details). These women were interviewed face-to-face to learn about their socio-demographic and life-history information. Here, statistical analyses are conducted first,

and then the life-history data are qualitatively analyzed.

The study data were collected from 98 immigrant women, referred to collectively as the *Issei* (first generation). These *Issei* women were born between 1881 and 1912, immigrated to the U.S. prior to 1925, and settled in Seattle before World War II (Yanagisako 1985:265).<sup>3</sup> All of them married at least once sometime between the ages of 16 and 28 years. Some of them experienced divorce or the death of a husband, including 5 women who were not married for 5 or more years during their reproductive years (up to 44 years old).<sup>4</sup> Those five women were included in the analyses because having them in the sample did not significantly change the statistical results. Also, the study sample included four childless women; there were no data on whether they and/or their husbands were infertile or had any particular conditions contributing to their childlessness. The characteristics of the sample are described in Tables 1a and 1b.

This study examines how *Issei* women's fertility differed according to changes in the socio-cultural and political context and how it could be understood in connection to *Issei* people's life strategies under the constraints of power relationships. Cohort analysis is used to investigate how their fertility behavior differed among them and how the difference can be understood in relation to the particular structural context where they were. The study divided the 98 *Issei* women into 3 cohort groups based on the year they married: "Group 1: Married between 1907 and 1920," "Group 2: Married between 1921 and 1925," and "Group 3: Married in 1926 or later (as late as 1936)." The age at marriage for the Group 1 women ranged from 16 to 28 years old. During those years (1907–1920), despite anti-Japanese sentiments, the Seattle Japanese community formed, expanded, and developed socio-economically. The age at marriage for the Group 2 women also ranged between 16 and 28 years old. The early 1920s are significant because of the increase in anti-Japanese movements and

**Table 1a. Characteristics of Women: Marriage, Live Births, and Child Survival.**

| Characteristics                      | N  | Mean   | St. Dev. | Range |
|--------------------------------------|----|--------|----------|-------|
| All                                  | 98 | -      | -        | -     |
| Age at Marriage                      | -  | 20.949 | 2.8768   | 16–28 |
| Total Live Births                    | -  | 4.133  | 2.2089   | 0–13  |
| Number of Children Survived at Age 5 | -  | 3.878  | 2.1263   | 0–13  |
| Group 1: Marriage 1907–1920          | 68 | -      | -        | -     |
| Age at Marriage                      | -  | 20.397 | 2.6039   | 16–28 |
| Total Live Births                    | -  | 4.132  | 1.9154   | 0–8   |
| Number of Children Survived at Age 5 | -  | 3.779  | 1.7522   | 0–8   |
| Group 2: Marriage 1921–1925          | 16 | -      | -        | -     |
| Age at Marriage                      | -  | 21.875 | 3.5190   | 16–28 |
| Total Live Births                    | -  | 4.563  | 3.2243   | 2–13  |
| Number of Children Survived at Age 5 | -  | 4.500  | 3.2660   | 2–13  |
| Group 3: Marriage 1926–After         | 14 | -      | -        | -     |
| Age at Marriage                      | -  | 22.571 | 2.6520   | 18–26 |
| Total Live Births                    | -  | 3.643  | 2.2398   | 0–8   |
| Number of Children Survived at Age 5 | -  | 3.643  | 2.2398   | 0–8   |

**Table 1b. Characteristics of Women: Fertility and Length to Live Births since Marriage.**

| Characteristics                                   | Frequency (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Fertility of All Women (N=98) <sup>a</sup>        |               |
| High (> 4 Live Births)                            | 35 (35.7)     |
| Average (= 4 Live Births)                         | 22 (22.4)     |
| Low (< 4 Live Births)                             | 41 (41.8)     |
| Years Taken to 1st Live Birth (n=92) <sup>b</sup> |               |
| Less Than 2 Years                                 | 44 (47.8)     |
| 2 or More Years                                   | 48 (52.2)     |
| Years Taken to 2nd Live Birth (n=90) <sup>b</sup> |               |
| Less Than 4 Years                                 | 41 (45.6)     |
| 4 or More Years                                   | 49 (54.4)     |
| Years Taken to 3rd Live Birth (n=76) <sup>c</sup> |               |
| Less Than 6 Years                                 | 28 (36.8)     |
| 6 or More Years                                   | 48 (63.2)     |
| Years Taken to 4th Live Birth (n=56) <sup>c</sup> |               |
| Less Than 9 Years                                 | 24 (42.9)     |
| 9 or More Years                                   | 32 (57.1)     |

<sup>a</sup>Including 4 childless cases.

<sup>b</sup>Excluding 2 cases of birth year unknown.

<sup>c</sup>Excluding 1 case of birth year unknown.

the enactments of the three aforementioned laws: the 1921 Alien Land Law, 1923 Alien Land Law, and the Immigration Act of 1924, all of which heavily affected immigrant lives. The age at marriage for the Group 3 women ranged from 18 to 26 years old. There are 68 women in Group 1, 16 women in Group 2, and 14 women in Group 3.

The main study question here is: How can the comparative fertility characteristics of these cohort groups be explained with reference to the structure they were situated in—specifically in the context of their native Japanese culture, socio-economic conditions in the U.S., and the wider U.S. socio-political movements? In order to answer this question, two additional, more specific questions are addressed. Are there between-group differences in a) the age at first marriage, b) the total number of live-births, and c) the number of children who survived to at least the age of five? Are there between-group differences in the lengths of time from marriage to the first, second, third, and fourth live-births, respectively?

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS (statistic 24). For the first question, this study used t-tests to examine the between-group differences in mean age at marriage, mean number of live-births, and the number of children who survived at least to the age of five. Young marriage and child death experience are factors that are likely to lead to high fertility, and therefore, age at marriage and child survival are included in this analysis.

For the second question, this study used ordinal-by-ordinal crosstab analyses to make between-group comparisons of the time that it took from a woman's marriage to her first, second, third, and fourth live birth, respectively. The study examines up to four live births because the average number among women in the sample was 4.13 (Table 1a). Binary codes were assigned to each study subject (Table 1b). If it took less than two years from marriage to first birth, a woman was coded "less than 2 years;" otherwise, she was coded "2 or more years." If it took less than four years until a second birth, a woman

was coded “less than 4 years;” otherwise, she was coded “4 or more years.” If it took less than six years until a third birth, a woman was coded “less than 6 years;” otherwise, she was coded “6 or more years.” And finally, if it took less than nine years until a fourth birth, a woman was coded “less than 9 years;” otherwise, she was coded “9 or more years.”

To interpret the statistical results, the life-history data were qualitatively analyzed. Here, each individual was closely examined with respect to their natal family background, work/employment before and after marriage, household member composition, age at marriage, timing of child-bearing years, and experience with child death (if it occurred).

## Quantitative Results

With respect to the first question about age at marriage, there are statistically significant differences between Group 1 and Group 2 and between Group 1 and Group 3 (Table 2). Women in Group 2 and 3 were likely to marry older than those in Group 1. Also, the average number of live births in Group 3 is considerably less than that for Group 1 or Group 2, and that for Group 2 is the highest of all groups (Table 1a). Moreover, there is a noticeable difference between the mean number of live-births and that of children who survived to at least the age of five for Group 1, but this is not the case for Groups 2 and 3. However, between-group differences in the number of total live-births and in the number of children who survived to at least the age of five were statistically insignificant (not depicted in table format). It should be noted that there are two outliers in Group 2—one had 11 live-births; the other one had 13 births. Statistical analyses were conducted including and excluding those outliers, and in either case, there were no statistically significant between-group differences.

For the second question, there is a significant between-group difference in the length of time until first live-birth; this is also the case for

length of time until second birth, although its significance is borderline (Table 3). This suggests that women in Groups 2 and 3 were likely to have their first two children much sooner after marrying than was true for Group 1.

## Interpretation and Discussion

Based on the quantitative results, different patterns in fertility can be identified. Women who married before 1921 (Group 1) were likely to get married at younger age and took longer to have their first two children than those who married in or after 1921 (Group 2 and 3). Group 1 women were also more likely to experience child death. In contrast, Group 2 women were likely to get married at an older age and have their first two children in a shorter amount of time. Group 3 women were also likely to marry at an older age and to have their first two children in a shorter length of time. What is different between Group 2 and Group 3 is that the average number of live births in Group 3 is noticeably less (3.643 vs. 4.563, Table 1a). This difference, however, is not statistically significant, which is likely to be the result of the small sample sizes for Groups 2 and 3, and the relatively large variance characterizing each group.

How can these differences in the fertility among Issei women be explained with reference to the evolving structure at the time? How can their fertility behavior be interpreted in relation to their native culture, socio-economic contexts, and larger-scale changes in the socio-political climate?

### *Response to Public-Health Environment*

With respect to Group 1, there is a marked difference between the mean number of total live-births and that of children who survived to at least age five (4.132 vs. 3.779, Table 1a). Relatively speaking, this indicates that the women in this group experienced many cases of infant and child death. Indeed, among the 98 women in the entire study sample, 19 experienced infant and/or child death; 18 of them belong to Group

**Table 2. Significance Value for Difference in Mean Age at Marriage.**

|                | Group 1 | Group 2  |
|----------------|---------|----------|
| <b>Group 2</b> | P=.060  | -        |
| <b>Group 3</b> | P=.006  | Not Sig. |

**Table 3. Cross-Tabulation Between Time Length Taken to Birth and Timing of Marriage.**

|                                  | Group 1<br>Freq. (%) | Group 2<br>Freq. (%) | Group 3<br>Freq. (%) | Total<br>Freq. (%)    |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Marriage to 1st Birth (p=.029)   |                      |                      |                      |                       |
| Less Than 2 Years                | 26 (40.6)            | 9 (60)               | 9 (69.2)             | 44 (47.8)             |
| 2 or More Years                  | 38 (59.4)            | 6 (40)               | 4 (30.8)             | 48 (52.2)             |
| Total                            | 64 (100)             | 15 (100)             | 13 (100)             | 92 <sup>a</sup> (100) |
| Marriage to 2nd birth (p=.070)   |                      |                      |                      |                       |
| Less Than 4 Years                | 25 (39.7)            | 8 (53.3)             | 8 (66.7)             | 41 (45.6)             |
| 4 or More Years                  | 38 (60.3)            | 7 (46.7)             | 4 (33.3)             | 49 (54.4)             |
| Total                            | 63 (100)             | 15 (100)             | 12 (100)             | 90 <sup>a</sup> (100) |
| Marriage to 3rd birth (not sig.) |                      |                      |                      |                       |
| Less Than 6 Years                | 19 (34.5)            | 5 (45.5)             | 4 (40)               | 28 (36.8)             |
| 6 or More Years                  | 36 (65.5)            | 6 (54.5)             | 6 (60)               | 48 (63.2)             |
| Total                            | 55 (100)             | 11 (100)             | 10 (100)             | 76 <sup>b</sup> (100) |
| Marriage to 4th birth (not sig.) |                      |                      |                      |                       |
| Less Than 9 Years                | 16 (39)              | 5 (55.6)             | 3 (50)               | 24 (42.9)             |
| 9 or More Years                  | 25 (61)              | 4 (44.4)             | 3 (50)               | 32 (57.1)             |
| Total                            | 41 (100)             | 9 (100)              | 6 (100)              | 56 <sup>b</sup> (100) |

<sup>a</sup> Excluding 2 cases of birth year unknown.

<sup>b</sup> Excluding 1 case of birth year unknown.

1. Those 18 women experienced a total of 24 infant/child deaths (some women experienced multiple cases), and all but 1 (96%) occurred before 1930; 18 cases (75%) occurred before 1925. The 1918–1920 Spanish flu pandemic, which killed 1,513 people in Seattle (Lacitis 2020), accounts for some of the cases dating before 1925. Six women experienced a total of seven infant/child deaths during the pandemic; two cases were in 1919 and five in 1920.

The difference in the number of live-births and child survival in Group 1 suggests that the fertility of women in that group was likely

affected at least in part by the social conditions perpetuating a relatively high level of infant/child mortality. Many previous studies have discussed a correlation between child-death experience and an increase in fertility (see Hashimoto and Hongladarom 1981; Knodel 1982; Doepke 2005; Lindstrom and Kiros 2007; Nosaka and Leonetti 2020). In this study, for example, regarding the six women who experienced the infant/child death in 1919 or 1920 (during the Spanish flu pandemic period), four of them gave birth in 1921 and two in 1922. Interestingly, the number of Group 1 women's

children who survived to at least age five was similar to the amount for the Group 3 women (Table 1a). It seems that their compensatory behavior for the loss eventually led to achieving a number of children (surviving to at least age five) comparable to that of Group 3 women, who did not experience infant/child death.

A decline in the experience of Issei women with infant/child death is likely to be related in part to the U.S. government's efforts to address this issue. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was widespread concern about the problem of infant/child health in the U.S., and various measures were implemented to reduce it (King 1993:119–142; Fox and Myrskylä 2015; Bhatia et al. 2019). Consequently, the overall U.S. child mortality rate dropped considerably from 238.76 (per 1,000 live births) in 1900 to 184.93 in 1920 and to 102.86 by 1930 (O'Neill 2022). It appears that Seattle did not miss out on this trend. A study by Crum (1920) shows that the rate of infant mortality (the death of an infant before their birthday) in Seattle was relatively low compared to many other major U.S. cities between 1918 and 1920. However, it is likely that in the Seattle Japanese immigrant community, an improvement in the social conditions associated with the prevention of infant/child death was delayed or still relatively underdeveloped before 1925. Such improvements became significantly more prevalent in the community after that date, at which time the rate of infant/child death significantly declined.

### *Response to Anti-Japanese Movement*

One of the major findings is that women in Groups 2 and 3 were more likely than those in Group 1 to have their first two children relatively soon after marrying. On one hand, this pattern could be explained by a different experience in the first few years of marriage for the Group 1 women compared to those in Groups 2 and 3. First, Group 1 women were more likely to have migrated from Japan to the U.S. after marrying; Groups 2 and 3 women were more likely to have

migrated to the U.S. at the time of their marriage. The stress associated with international relocation may have had an influence on woman's fecundability and fertility, such that the Group 1 women tended to need more time before having children after marrying. Also, Group 1 women were more likely to experience lag-time between when they were officially married and when they actually began their real marriage life. In some cases, women, including picture-brides, married by proxy; the brides were in Japan, while the grooms were in the U.S. In other cases, women married in person in Japan, but shortly after marrying, their husbands returned to the U.S. alone, and they then followed at a later date. In either case, their actual marriage life began when they immigrated to the U.S. after being separated from their husbands for one month to three years, which may have contributed to delaying the onset of their fertility.

On the other hand, the pattern of childbirth among Issei women can also be interpreted with reference to a series of anti-Japanese movements and laws. In the early 1920s, anti-immigrant laws were enacted in 1921, 1923, and 1924 in the state of Washington and in the U.S. as a whole. In addition, there was the infamous *Ozawa* case, which shut down Issei hopes of becoming U.S. citizens. In this case, Takao Ozawa filed an application for U.S. citizenship, which eventually made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1922. Despite a rigorous effort to provide evidence reflecting his qualifications for citizenship, the court denied his petition on the basis that he was an alien born in Japan (Ichioka 1977; Takaki 1989:208–209). Those socio-jural events prompted first-generation immigrants to acknowledge that their future opportunities were becoming more restricted, and therefore, “a new emphasis was placed upon the second (American-born) generation” (Miyamoto 1984:12). This emphasis was likely to encourage the Issei to have (more) children, especially those who were childless or had only one or two.<sup>5</sup> Those American-born children, of course, were U.S. citizens lawfully and grew up speaking English as their native

tongue, and consequently, they faced fewer socio-political barriers than their Issei parents, although they still experienced discrimination (Hosokawa 2002).

Interestingly, one Issei woman in this study sample who was a mid-wife stated that she did the most of her mid-wifery from 1920 to 1925. Indeed, the year 1921 saw the peak of the birth rate of the American-born Japanese (La Violette 1941:518), and also the long-term fertility rate of Japanese immigrants became higher than that of native whites during the 1920s and 1930s (The Civil Liberties Public Education Fund 1997:38). These suggest that the timing of the high fertility rate by Japanese immigrants corresponded to the time in which a series of anti-immigrant laws and decisions were made. Thus, the immediate focus on having more children might have been one response to the accelerating anti-Japanese movements. Japanese immigrants were placed in a relatively powerless position socially, and the pattern of childbirth among Issei women could be understood as a part of their overall life strategies under socio-political constraints.

Japanese immigrants did not have much socio-political power for bargaining with the world outside their local communities. In a sense, their community was “quite capable of lobbying for its economic and social welfare” (Yanagisako 1985:4). This was especially the case for establishing and maintaining Japanese language schools (Asato 2003). Educating children in Japanese language and culture was a way of enhancing inter-generational connections and keeping Japanese cultural heritage alive (Neiwert 2005:84). Japanese immigrants were attached to their kin and held the identity with the region that they were from in Japan, but they also had an overriding awareness that they were Japanese (O’Brien and Fugita 1991:6). Their group solidarity based on the “Japaneseness” helped unite them together, dealing with difficulties they faced in the host country (Kitano 1969:20). However, their organizational capacities were not strong enough to effectively pressure to have those laws revoked, at least prior to the post-WWII period

(Neiwert 2005:61–64). Being constrained by their structurally defined positions in society, it is likely that they saw having children as a means of eventually obtaining social legitimacy (Bledsoe 2004). With that means, they also hoped for a future where they and their families could become a more ordinary part of the U.S. social fabric. Their rights and opportunities were denied because of U.S. laws, and they used the laws to secure a legitimate place in U.S. society.

For the Group 2 and 3 women, having the first couple of children at a faster pace might also have related to the fact that they married at a relatively late age compared to those in Group 1. It is possible that they wanted to make sure they would have at least a couple of children before their reproductive capacity began to decline. However, the fast pace characterizing the Group 2 and 3 women seemed to go against the general trend at that time in the U.S., which also supports the inference that those Issei women might have been incentivized to have at least their first couple of children quickly. During the early part of the twentieth century in the U.S., family planning campaigns promoted proper childbirth spacing and limiting family size, and there was an increase in information about and access to contraception (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1999). It is probable that Issei women witnessed such campaigns.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Group 2 and 3 women were likely to have their first couple of children in a relatively short period of time. A study by Suchindran and Koo (1992:236) indicates that the average birth interval between the first and second child by U.S. women (all ethnicities) who were born in 1903 was 4.18 years. In contrast, the majority of Group 2 and 3 women (born between 1896 and 1912) who experienced at least two live births had their second child before they had been married for 4 years (Table 3). Although a direct comparison cannot be made based on these figures, it seems that Issei women who married after 1920 had more children at a faster pace than other U.S. women during that time period.

The fertility of the Group 2 women is the highest among the three groups. It is likely that their rush to have their first couple of children led to their overall high fertility. Although the Group 2 women were likely to marry at a later age than Group 1 women, they still achieved higher fertility (Table 1a and Table 2). Also, compared to Group 3 women, they married during the enactment of a series of anti-immigrant laws. Perhaps their marriages during this uncertain period promoted a stronger anxiety for and desire to have more than a few children as soon as possible.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that further analyses of the 68 Group 1 women also indicates that their fertility peak coincided with the period associated with anti-Japanese movements and laws, as described in Table 4. Their marriages occurred between 1907 and 1920, most predominately between 1918 and 1919, during which time 25 women married (36.8%). Three women in Group 1 did not give birth at all; hence, 65 of the Group 1 women experienced at least 1 live birth (this includes one case with an unknown birth year). The peak of this first birth wave was from 1919 to 1921, during which 32 (49.2%) births occurred. There were 64 women who experienced a second live birth, 26 (40.6%) of which occurred between 1921 to 1923. Similarly, there were 56 women who experienced a third live-birth, 22 (41.1%)

of which occurred between 1922 to 1924. Finally, there were 42 women who experienced a fourth live birth, 17 (40.5%) of which occurred between 1923 to 1925. These figures indicate that a considerable number of births occurred between 1921 and 1925.

More interestingly, the duration of peak years overlapped after the first birth (Table 4). For example, the wave of first births began in 1919 and ended in 1921, which was the beginning of second birth wave. Then, the wave of second births ended in 1923, which overlapped with the third birth wave beginning in 1922. Similarly, the wave of third births ended in 1924, which overlapped with the fourth birth wave beginning in 1923. These patterns show that the period of overlap was greater for the third and fourth birth waves. These findings indicate that Group 1 women were likely to have additional children at a quicker pace after 1921 when the state of Washington passed the Alien Land Law, with more anti-Japanese policies soon to follow. This behavior can be interpreted to be part of their life strategy and response to the increasing anti-Japanese movement around that time.

#### *Marriage at Older Age and Family Obligation*

As described above, the Group 2 and 3 women had a tendency to have their first children rather early. This tendency is also consistent

**Table 4. Group 1 Women's Marriage, and First, Second, Third, and Fourth Live Birth.**

|           | Number of Cases | Range of Years Occurred | Peak Years | Number Occurred During Peak Years (%) |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------------------|------------|---------------------------------------|
| Marriage  | 68              | 1907–1920               | 1918–1919  | 25 (36.8)                             |
| 1st Birth | 65 <sup>a</sup> | 1908–1935               | 1919–1921  | 32 (49.2)                             |
| 2nd Birth | 64 <sup>a</sup> | 1911–1931               | 1921–1923  | 26 (40.6)                             |
| 3rd Birth | 56 <sup>a</sup> | 1915–1932               | 1922–1924  | 22 (41.1)                             |
| 4th Birth | 42 <sup>a</sup> | 1918–1935               | 1923–1925  | 17 (40.5)                             |

<sup>a</sup> Including one case of unknown birth year.

with their ages at marriage (Table 1a and Table 2). They married relatively old compared to those who married prior to 1921. In part, this may be related to influence from their native country of Japan. Around 1920, the average age at marriage of women in Japan was about 21 (Greenspan 1992); it was about this time that the age at marriage began increasing. This trend coincided with an increase in job opportunities for women and a greater social acceptance for Japanese women to marry older as modernization and industrialization advanced. It is likely that these social trends resulted in relatively older ages at marriage for the Group 2 and 3 Issei women, and they tended to have the first two children relatively fast, a fertility strategy that compensated for a delayed marriage.

However, a close look at their life-history data provides a new angle for interpreting the age at marriage and fertility of Group 2 and 3 women. Some of these women had their parents living with them in the U.S.; this included five Group 2 women (31%) and nine Group 3 women (64%). Interestingly, these women were more likely to have had delayed marriages. The vast majority of them immigrated relatively young to join their parents already in the U.S., or they immigrated with them. Either way, they lived with their parents (and siblings in many cases) before marriage, and some of them worked for the businesses or farms of their parents. It would appear, therefore, that their labor providing roles and/or financial contributions to their natal families delayed their marriages. In addition, interestingly, many of those women happened to be first children, or first daughters of the family. This was especially the case for the Group 3 women; seven out of the nine of them fall into this category.

The following three examples are from Group 3. One woman was born in Japan in 1907 as the first child in the family, and then her father immigrated to the U.S. that same year. Her mother died when she was four years old, after which her father re-married. She immigrated to the U.S. in 1920 and lived with her parents

(father and stepmother) and half-siblings in Seattle. Her parents were apartment owners. By age fifteen, she had two full-time jobs, and continued to live with her parents until she married at age 25. Another woman was born in Seattle in 1910 as the second daughter in the family, but she moved to Japan at age three and lived with her paternal grandmother. She returned to Seattle when she was 20 to join her father, who ran a grocery store. All her siblings remained in Japan. In Seattle, she lived with her father and helped run his store until she married at age 26. Finally, one woman, born in Japan as the first child in the family, immigrated to the U.S. in 1920 when she was 15 years old, and lived with her parents and four younger siblings. The parents were farmers outside Seattle, and she helped run the farm until she married at age 24.

The behavior of these women can be understood as consistent with the rules that largely structured the Japanese immigrant community. Social rules are recognized in a variety of ways; they can be implicitly understood, broadly approved, frequently discussed, and/or commonly followed (Giddens 1984). In Japanese immigrant communities, the labor and/or economic contribution that adult children provided to their parents may have derived from the commonly discussed and generally accepted, traditional Japanese concept of filial piety—respecting and helping one's parents (Yanagisako 1985:160–170; Hoffman and Hanneman 2021:36).<sup>7</sup> Considering that the parents of these women were not native to the U.S. and therefore working in an unfamiliar socio-cultural environment, the Seattle Issei women might have been strongly compelled to help their parents. For those who were the first child or daughter in the family, they might have been more inclined to do so, taking on a senior child/sibling role.

Having parents in the U.S. likely delayed their age at marriage, but it also seems to have affected their fertility. Based on the life-history data, there was a tendency for these women to have a relatively few children if they were living with or close to their parents after they married.

This is interesting because usually when close family members live nearby, they can provide a woman with childcare and other household assistance, which consequently can lead to higher fertility (Nosaka 2009). For the Issei women in this study, however, this was not the case. For example, in Group 3 there were six women who had their parents living with them, or within walking distance, after they married. All but one of them had less than the average of four live births. In comparison, there were eight women in Group 3 who did not have their parents living close by, and five of them had four or more live births. One out of the other three women had no live births, and the other two had three. This comparison supports the inference that when married Issei women had parents close by, they provided them with assistance before and after marriage, a pattern indicating that this filial act might have compromised their fertility.<sup>8</sup>

Not only did these women continue to help their parents after marriage, but they also married relatively late.<sup>9</sup> This practice likely further compromised the fertility of some of these women because one's reproductive capacity declines over time. In many cases, these women were busy playing a role as "the heart of marriage, family, and home," in addition to being employed, running, and/or helping with the family businesses (Hartse 2017:23). This might have been especially the case for those families who were not fully tapped into the community circle of aid (Nosaka and Leonetti 2018). In general, it appears that when Issei women devoted themselves to filial responsibility, it acted as a constraint to their fertility. However, those women were likely to have a relatively quick pace of having children after their marriage (Table 3), and this might have been their strategy to achieving at least a couple of children while fulfilling the cultural expectation of filial obligation.

According to the traditional Japanese filial norms, married daughters are not responsible for taking care of their parents; this responsibility typically goes to the first-born son and his wife. In reality, however, there are normative deviations,

depending on economic conditions, geographic proximity, and other circumstances (Suenari 1972; Yanagisako 1985:65–170). In the Japanese immigrant community, strict adherence to traditional norms was impossible or impractical in many cases, considering the availability of family members and socio-economic resources. Therefore, it is highly likely that married Issei women who provided assistance to their parents living close by was behavior that was implicitly understood, encouraged, and even assumed.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, their behavior transformed the traditional filial norm, thereby changing the structure in which they had to operate.

#### *Great Depression in the 1930s and Internment During WWII*

Some may wonder if the low fertility, especially of Group 3 women who married after 1925, was due to the Great Depression, which started in 1929 and lasted for several years. During those years, fertility in the U.S. as a whole declined significantly (Caldwell 2006; Emeka 2006). Without a doubt, the depression hit Japanese immigrant economy as well; however, it does not appear to have had a significant influence on the fertility of Issei women in this study sample. Out of 16 women in Group 3, 12 gave birth to children between 1930 and 1935, and 8 of them had multiple births. Even Group 2 women, who married between 1921 and 1925, show a similar pattern; 12 out of the 16 women had at least 1 child between 1930 and 1935. These cases imply a relatively insignificant influence of the economic depression on the fertility of Issei women in general.

There are a couple of possible explanations for this pattern. First, as discussed earlier, the early 1930s witnessed an increase in anti-Japanese sentiment, particularly in relation to the growing visibility of Japanese military power. Correspondingly, the U.S. government started to place mainland U.S. Japanese residents, clubs, and organizations under surveillance in preparation for a possible Pacific war (Fiset 1997:27–28). Given the conditions associated

with this socio-political environment, making sure to have a few children as soon as possible might have had a stronger effect on their fertility than the limitations of their overall economic situation. Second, related to the first explanation, Japanese immigrants might have been able to maintain a relatively decent standard of living because many of them were self-employed and/or in close symbiotic networks with various other Japanese businesses, both urban and rural. Being small business owners, holding the overarching Japanese “ethnic economy,” and being independent with the ethnic group were also part of their life strategies in the social context where they faced racial discrimination (Kitano 1969:7; O’Brien and Fugita 1991:6). In turn, such strategies helped to mitigate the pressure brought about by the drastic overall impact that the Great Depression had on all household economies, helping these Issei to continue to have children during this period.

What might have had a significant impact on the fertility of Group 3 women was their internment during World War II. In 1942, the year during which the majority of Japanese Americans moved to concentration camps, none of the Group 1 women and only 4 of the 16 Group 2 women were younger than 40 years old. In comparison, all 14 Group 3 women were less than 40 years old, and 4 of them were less than 35. In many cases, their camp life lasted for about three years, during which time it would not be unusual for relatively young women, like those in Group 3, to have an additional child or two; however, only three of the women in this group had any children. Life in the camps was difficult in many ways, considering the climates where they were located, the housing conditions, and the overall quality of health care (McKay 1997; Jensen 1999; Smith 1999). With respect to reproduction, they were constrained by “stratified reproduction,” a power relations structure where “some categories of people are empowered to nurture and reproduce, while others are disempowered” (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995:3; also see Colen 1986).

Despite these difficulties, some Issei women did reproduce.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of the marriage groups, eight women in this study sample gave birth between 1942 and 1945, and interestingly seven of them already had at least four surviving children. The average number of total live births among those eight women was surprisingly high (8.00), which is much higher than the overall study sample average of 4.13 (Table 1a). Besides having a relatively high fertility, there are no other characteristics that those women seem to share in common. It is possible that further investigation may reveal some influential features that are not yet clearly evident.

## Conclusion

This study has examined the fertility patterns of first-generation Japanese immigrants under the constrained structural system in which they were embedded. Their fertility behavior can be understood as the actions within specific, dynamic conditions in the structure associated with their Japanese cultural orientation, the social setting of the Seattle Japanese community, their individual family circumstances, and the wider socio-political environment. The study has contributed to enhancing our understanding of Japanese immigrant fertility in the early 1900s by exploring the socio-political constraints, cultural orientations, familial settings, and biological capacities of the Seattle Issei women, topics largely unaddressed by previous studies (see Sabagh and Thomas 1945; Miyamoto and O’Brien 1947; Leonetti 1976 for examples). It has also shown how their life strategies were inextricably entangled with their fertility behavior. Moreover, this research has also added to the anthropological understanding of the complexity of childbearing for new immigrants in general who enter a new country that is not necessarily welcoming.

It has revealed some surprising findings about the study sample Issei women and their lives. First, those who had their children before 1925 had a considerably higher child mortality

rate. This contrasts with an overall improvement in the reduction of child mortality in the U.S. during the first quarter of 1900s. Such a reality implies that for this minority community the national intervention measures were delayed. Second, those who had their parents living with or near them were likely to marry at a relatively late age and have fewer children. Here, these patterns are likely to relate to their family obligation to help their parents successfully adjust to living in an unfamiliar socio-cultural environment. Lastly, the fertility of Issei women in this study sample did not appear to be markedly affected by the Great Depression. This study argues that this may have related to a strong desire to have children during a time of increasing anti-Japanese sentiment and to a life strategy of self-employment and the nature of the symbiotic networks of the ethnically Issei businesses.

Finally, the findings of this study can be broadly applicable to projects aimed at enhancing immigrant wellbeing. We should acknowledge that members of any immigrant group are not behaviorally homogenous, even within a specific generation. This study has shown that the fertility behavior of Issei women differs according to their timing of marriage, family structure (i.e., whether or not they have parents residing with them or nearby), and family roles (i.e., first daughter). Acknowledging behavioral heterogeneity is important especially when a project is to be designed and evaluated for its effectiveness. The investigation of individual cases and the incorporation of qualitative analyses has the potential to reveal how a project affects the entire targeted group, thereby leading to more effective projects in the future. Anthropological training and methods, including first-hand data collection, detailed examination of individual life events, and the use of holistic and culturally relativistic perspectives, would be exceptionally useful for revealing the impacts of a project on different individuals.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The first-generation Japanese were denied U.S. citizenship until the late 1950s.

<sup>2</sup>In October 1942, the U.S. War Relocation Authority enacted "leave clearance procedures," which enabled many U.S. born Japanese Americans to leave the camps and reenter civilian life after a loyalty check (Daniels 1971:110). Archeological studies conducted in Japanese American incarcerated sites have enhanced our knowledge about not only building facilities and landscaping features, but also the adaptations and resistance strategies of those who were incarcerated (Densho Encyclopedia Contributors 2015).

<sup>3</sup>The study sample includes five women who were born in the U.S. Those women lived in Japan for the majority of their childhood and immigrated (or came back) to the U.S. at or after age 18.

<sup>4</sup>There are overall 14 women in the study sample who experienced a divorce or the death of their husband during their reproductive years (up to 44 years old). Their marriage durations before these experiences ranged from 3 to 37 years. The majority of women (10 cases, 71%) had more than 15 years of marriage before such events occurred. The marriage durations of the other 4 cases are 14, 11, and 2 cases of 4 years, respectively. One of the four-year cases was a woman who married in 1920 at the age of 20 and divorced at the age of 24, after which she never remarried. The other 4-year case is a woman who married in 1932 at the age of 22, divorced at age 26, and then re-married at age 28.

<sup>5</sup>At the same time, the desire/incentive to have children might also have come from the Japanese fertility trends during the early twentieth century. Japan conducted its first official census in 1920. Based on this census, it is estimated that the total fertility rate (TFR) was 5.35 in that year (Cabinet Office, Japan 2006). The TFR is defined as the expected number of births a woman will give according to age-specific fertility rates.

<sup>6</sup>Sabagh and Thomas (1945:654) suggest that although the young Japanese brides who arrived in the U.S. early on were not yet informed about Western methods of birth control, the motherhood strategies of the Issei women appear to have been increasingly planned since 1920s. However, there has been no solid investigation of any actual contraceptive behavior practiced by those Japanese immigrants.

<sup>7</sup>The labor and economic contributions from adult children to their parents is not only the case for the Japanese American community, but also for many other ethnic migrant communities.

<sup>8</sup>Married women who had their parents living close by did not seem to have any in-common notable features with respect to their educational background, employment status, husband's occupation, and the socio-economic status of their parents. However, focusing on four of those women, who did manage to have more than four children, reveals a notable commonality. All of them also had sisters living in close proximity. It should be noted that some of the other women also had their sisters close by, but did not have high fertility. Perhaps in some cases, Issei women with helpful sisters around could not only share in the task of caring for their parents, but also in caring for their children.

<sup>9</sup>Regarding women in Group 3, there is a difference in age at marriage between women who lived with or near their parents after marriage and those who did not (23.8 vs. 21.6 years old,  $p=.052$ ; not depicted in table format).

<sup>10</sup>A study by Yanagisako (1985:177–180) examines filial responsibilities of the second-generation Japanese Americans (Nisei). It discusses that Nisei daughters were more likely than Nisei sons to be expected to provide care to their parents, which reflects the traditional Japanese symbolic placement of gender, men “outside” and women “inside” the home.

<sup>11</sup>The U.S. government record indicates a total of 5,981 live-births in Japanese American internment camps between 1942 and 1946, and 665 babies were born to Issei women (U.S. Department of the Interior 1946:138–142; Smith 1999).

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