

Selective Immigration and Ethnic Economic Achievement: Japanese Americans before World War II

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This article examines the determinants of Japanese immigrant economic achievement in the continental United States before World War II. Japanese immigrants to the United States were a select group in terms of their occupational background and education relative to the Japanese population as a whole because of the restrictions imposed on Japanese immigration by both the Japanese and U.S. governments. Furthermore, the selective nature of Japanese immigration contributed to the economic achievement of Japanese Americans before World War II, when their occupational position underwent a dramatic improvement. This finding differs from the standard cultural explanation of ethnic economic achievement. © 2002 Elsevier Science (USA)

INTRODUCTION

When the Japanese first began to emigrate to the continental United States in large numbers in 1900, their economic position was below that of other immigrants and African Americans. But by 1940 Japanese immigrants had surpassed African Americans and were on par with immigrants from Europe in terms of their occupational status. Their upward mobility was especially dramatic given the legal and social discrimination against Japanese immigrants, which included restrictions on immigration, a ban on naturalization, and laws preventing their purchase or leasing of farmland in many states (Chan, 1991; Daniels, 1988; Ichioka, 1989; Takaki, 1989). Using data from Japan's 1920 Census, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) records, and other Japanese and U.S. sources, I compare the educational and occupational characteristics of

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Japanese immigrants to the continental United States with the Japanese population as a whole to show that Japanese immigrants were positively selected in terms of their education and occupational background. Then, using data from a census of Japanese Americans incarcerated into World War II concentration camps, I show that this selective immigration of Japanese was a major factor in their upward mobility in the United States.¹

This article is motivated by the larger debate over differences in ethnic economic achievement, where Japanese Americans are often portrayed as “model minorities” whose success is due to their culture. An alternative view is that the selectivity in the processes of immigration, return migration, and family formation, combined with intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic status, can explain the economic achievement of Japanese Americans relative to other racial minorities.² This article also follows recent historical work on racial and immigrant economic achievement (Darity, Dietrich, and Guilkey, 1997; Hatton, 1997) and earlier work on occupational change among Japanese Americans (Yamato, 1986).

In addition to being an important subject in the debate over differences in ethnic economic achievement, Japanese Americans also provide an opportunity to do an in-depth case study of the economic progress of immigrants. While efforts to gather data on immigrants tended to wane after its peak in the first decade of the 20th century, Japanese immigrants were subjected to special scrutiny by government agencies. While the motivation was discriminatory (the extreme case being the massive amounts of data gathered on Japanese Americans put into America’s concentration camps during World War II), its legacy is a veritable gold mine of data for social science historians.³

This article uses two measures of occupational position to examine the economic achievement of Japanese immigrants. The first is the OCCSCORE

¹ One limitation of this study of Japanese immigration patterns is that it includes only the continental United States and not Japanese who went to Hawaii. Since the political economy of Hawaii differed from the mainland, and there were also differences in the patterns of immigration, the findings of this article do not necessarily apply to Japanese in Hawaii (Takaki, 1989; Daniels, 1988).

² There is also a debate over the extent of Asian American socioeconomic achievement, with the model minority view often stating that Japanese and other Asian American have surpassed Whites in a number of ways, while critics argue that there is still a significant gap (Takaki, 1989).

³ The high tide of immigration around the turn of century (and the growing anti-immigrant movement) prompted the massive (41-volume!) report by the Immigration Commission (1911a, 1911b). But after that census data on immigrants declined (Hutchinson, 1956). The Immigration and Naturalization Service reported detailed data on Japanese from 1908 to 1931 (see *Annual Reports* for these years), but not on other nationalities. The internment of Japanese Americans during World War II was preceded by a congressional hearing (Tolan Committee, 1942) and led to a census of internees by the War Relocation Authority, known as Form 26 (see the Appendix). Aggregate data from this census were published after the war by War Relocation Authority (1946). A number of social scientists such as Broom and Reimer (1949) and Thomas (1952) also used this data in their studies of the internment. The involvement of social scientists with this violation of constitutional and human rights is discussed in Ichioka (1989).

variable provided by the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), which is based on the values of the median incomes of each occupation in 1950.⁴ The second is a categorization of occupations, again based on their median incomes in 1950. This article uses four broad categories of occupations. The highest category includes professionals, businesses owners, and managers. A second category of occupations consists of clerical and sales workers, craftsmen and foremen, and semiskilled operatives. The third category is made up of service workers (including domestics), laborers, and farmers.⁵ The fourth and lowest category has only one occupation, farm workers.

This article begins with a review of the economic achievement of Japanese immigrants and different views of ethnic and immigrant economic achievement. The second section is a brief history of Japanese immigration to the United States and the changing restrictions by both the Japanese government and the U.S. government on this migration. The third section presents evidence concerning selective immigration, and the fourth part provides evidence for intergenerational transmission of the immigrants' economic status. The article ends with a conclusion that discusses the findings of this article in the context of debates over ethnic economic achievement today.

JAPANESE AMERICAN ECONOMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND SELECTIVE IMMIGRATION

The economic achievement of the Japanese immigrant population was indeed noteworthy. Between 1900 and 1940 the economic position of Japanese Americans underwent a dramatic transformation. At the turn of the century, almost 90% of Japanese immigrants were working in unskilled jobs such as farm laborers, railroad construction workers, miners, and domestic servants and less than 2% were professionals or proprietors. At that time they had the lowest occupational score of all racial groups in the western United States.⁶ But by 1940, 18% of Japanese immigrants were professionals, proprietors, or managers, and their occupational score had surpassed all other racial minorities and was basically equal to that of white immigrants (see Table 1 and Fig. 1).

⁴ The OCCSCORE assigns a dollar income to occupations based on the median income of that occupation in 1950. The OCCSCORE is stated in hundreds of 1950 dollars, so, for example, an OCCSCORE of 16 would represent a median income of \$1600 (in 1950). This variable was developed by the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), which developed standardized variables for U.S. Census data from 1850 to 1990 (except for 1890 and 1930). For more information, see the IPUMS web site at <http://www.ipums.umn.edu/usa/index.html>.

⁵ Domestics, whose low incomes would put them in the fourth and lowest occupational group, are included with other service workers because some of the data used do not distinguish between the two groups.

⁶ The IPUMS sample for Japanese in 1900 was very small, with only 10 observations. One of these was for a dentist. Since professionals were only about one-half of 1% of the total Japanese population in the United States in 1900 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1904), but 10% of the sample, I excluded the dentist to get the OCCSCORE used in Fig. 1 and referred to in the text.

TABLE 1
Japanese Immigrant Occupations, 1900–1940^a

Occupations	Year					
	1900		1920		1940	
	Total number	Percentage	Total number	Percentage	Total number	Percentage
Farmers	111	.5	6,277	11	5,899	18
Business owners	304	1	4,340	7	4,948	15
Professionals	132	.6	1,281	2	1,064	3
Subtotal	552	2	11,898	21	11,911	37
Clerical & Sales					2,102	6
Craft Workers					782	2
Operatives					2,244	7
Service					2,977	9
Subtotal	1,959	9	12,326	21	8,105	25
Farm Labor	5,102	23	18,376	32	7,338	23
Laborers	6,277	28	9,001	16	3,179	10
Domestics	8,534	38	6,302	11	2,046	6
Subtotal	20,096	89	33,679	58	12,563	39
Total	22,606	100	57,903	100	32,579	100

^a Bureau of the Census (1904, 1923, 1943).

This transformation took place during a period of social and legal discrimination against Japanese Americans. Early Japanese immigrants not only had to work as laborers and domestics, but also were generally paid less than whites doing the same work (Immigration Commission, 1911). During the 1910s and 1920s, Japanese immigrants were barred from leasing or buying farmland in many states, which restricted their movement up the agricultural tenant ladder. Then, at the outbreak of World War II, all Japanese Americans on the west coast of the United States were forced to move from their homes and businesses, and more than 110,000 were interned in concentration camps in the interior of the United States.

Japanese Americans along with other immigrant groups such as Jews, Cubans, and Chinese are commonly perceived as “model minorities” because of their achievements in contrast to the persistent ethnic economic inequality between (non-Latino) Whites on the one hand and African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans on the other. One explanation for the perceived superior achievement of (some) immigrants revolves around culture and ethnic solidarity. Thomas Sowell (1983) argues that culture shapes the economic success of Japan and Japanese Americans in contrast with the economic difficulties of Mexico and Mexican Americans. Light (1972) and other sociologists have argued that cul-

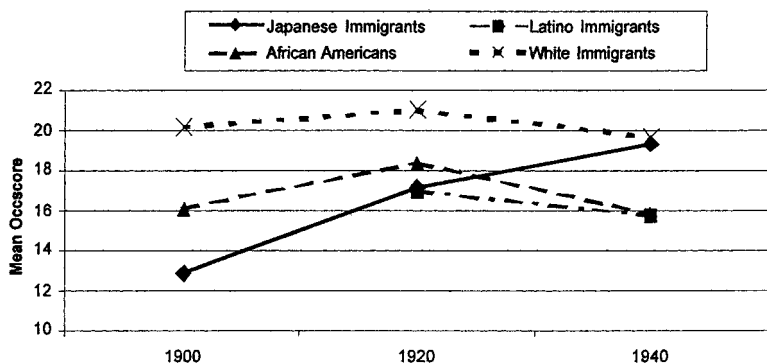


FIG. 1. Occupational change among adult males in western states, 1900 to 1940. OCCSCORES are for adult males 25 to 64 years old in states with a relatively large number (>.1% of total population) of Japanese Americans (California, Washington, Oregon, Utah, Wyoming, and Nevada). White immigrants excludes Spanish-surnamed except for 1900. Latinos are Whites with Spanish surnames. Source: IPUMS.

tural differences in languages, tastes, and bonds of ethnic solidarity allow immigrant entrepreneurs to take advantage of “social capital” in the form of coethnic customers, workers, and informal sources of capital. However, this cultural explanation of ethnic economic achievement has many critics. “If culture is the key,” asks Barry Chiswick (1984), “why were the Overseas Chinese, Asian Indians, Jamaicans, and Lebanese, among others, highly successful [in the United States], while their countries of origin did not develop?”

Another explanation for immigrant success is that they are able to assimilate rapidly into the U.S. economy. Chiswick (1991) argued that Jewish immigrants at the turn of the century were able to economically assimilate faster than other immigrants and that recent immigrants also have been able to rapidly assimilate (see Chiswick, 1978). But Borjas (1989) counters that selective return migration, where the less skilled or less successful immigrants are more likely to return to their home countries, would bias upward the measured economic gains of immigrants who remain. Looking at some of the immigrant success stories, selective return migration is clearly not a factor for immigrants from Cuba. While Jews are generally seen as having had very low rates of return migration (Archdeacon, 1983), Sarna (1981) points out that Jewish return migration was probably significant in the years before U.S. emigration statistics were collected and suggests that the return migration was motivated by hardships in the United States. Suzuki (1995) demonstrated that the selective return migration of Japanese immigrants before World War II could account for much of their (measured) upward mobility.

Finally, immigrants who are more successful in the United States may be a select group compared to the population of their country of origin while other immigrants were not. The large wave of Italian immigrants around the turn of the

century came mainly from the south of Italy, where the economy and education were less developed (Daniels, 1990). In contrast, Jewish immigrants were a select group as compared to the general Russian population in terms of their occupations (Steinberg, 1989). Chiswick (1986) states that it is also possible that immigrants in general are positively selected for characteristics such as ambition, drive, and initiative because of the rigors and risks of the immigration process. In the case of Japanese Americans, there were strong institutional factors in the form of Japanese and U.S. governmental restrictions on emigration and immigration that could have contributed to selectivity in the migration of Japanese to the United States.⁷

This selective immigration meant that immigrants from Japan had a relatively high socioeconomic status with respect to their occupational background and education. Recent research shows that socioeconomic class, and not ethnic culture and solidarity, plays the key role in determining the economic achievement of ethnic groups. Bates's (1997) studies of minority-owned businesses finds that the differences in rates of entrepreneurship between Asian immigrants and African Americans are shaped by differences in class resources (human and financial capital) and not by differences in mobilization of social resources. Darity (1989) argues that it is class background, and not culture, that distinguishes the relative success of immigrant groups such as Jewish, West Indian, Japanese, and Chinese Americans. When the socioeconomic origins of immigrants are taken into account, their economic achievement reflects *lateral* rather than *upward* mobility.

JAPANESE MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

Japanese migration to the United States had much in common with other migrant flows during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but at the same time it was unique in that the governments of both Japan and the United States tried to restrict and regulate migration between the two countries. Japanese immigrants, like other people of color in the United States, faced institutionalized racial inequality characterized by segregation and exclusion. However, Japanese immigrants did have some legal rights under U.S.–Japanese treaties, and Japan's rise as a world power put some constraints on the racial discrimination that they faced.

Like the mass migration from Europe, Japanese migration reflected the growth of capitalism in Japan and in particular the growth of labor markets and the hardships working people faced during the early stages of industrialization.⁸

⁷ Borjas (1989) argues that immigrants from countries with more equal income distributions than the United States will be positively selected with respect to skills because the returns to human capital will be higher.

⁸ Deflationary monetary policies combined with new taxes fell heavily on farmers, and the government had a policy of keeping industrial wages low to maintain competitiveness (Moriyama, 1985; Wakatsuki, 1979). Japan had already developed a form of domestic labor migration, known as

Japanese emigration was promoted by many of the same forces which contributed to European emigration, such as new technologies which lowered transport and communication costs, and by efforts of labor recruiters and steamship companies to promote migration in response to demand for labor by the growth of U.S. industry.⁹ Japanese emigrants were also drawn by the high wages in Hawaii and the United States relative to those in Japan.

The expansion of sugar plantations in Hawaii following the opening of the U.S. market for sugar led to the first mass emigration of Japanese to the Kingdom of Hawaii in the 1880s. Japanese migration to the United States was spurred by the demand for low-wage labor following the exclusion of Chinese in 1882 and by the transformation of California's agriculture from mechanized wheat farming to more labor-intensive crops such as fruits and vegetables. By 1905 Japanese immigrant workers dominated the supply of seasonal farm labor in California and had become a new target of opponents of Asian immigration (Fuller, 1940).

The increase in immigration from Japan and the legacy of the 19th century anti-Chinese movement made San Francisco the center of the anti-Japanese movement in the 20th century. During the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905, the San Francisco Chronicle began a series of anti-Japanese articles. That same year the Asiatic Exclusion League formed in San Francisco, initiated by the building trades unions. In 1906 the San Francisco School Board voted to segregate Japanese American students. But President Theodore Roosevelt, who was well aware of the Great Power status of Japan following its defeat of Russia in 1905, responded to protests by the Japanese government. His efforts led to the so-called "Gentlemen's Agreement" of 1908 in which the Japanese government agreed to end the emigration of laborers to the continental United States and the United States government persuaded the San Francisco schools to rescind their segregation order. The Roosevelt administration also banned immigration of Japanese laborers from Hawaii, Canada, and Mexico, cutting the flow of Japanese laborers passing through these other countries (Daniels, 1977).¹⁰

Following the "Gentlemen's Agreement," the immigration of Japanese laborers to the United States fell. The percentage of family members (women without occupations and children) nearly doubled from 20% of Japanese immigrants

dekasegi, with the rise of commerce during the Tokugawa period, the years 1603 to 1867 (Ichioka, 1988).

⁹ See Archdeacon (1983), Hatton and Williamson (1994), and Wyman (1993). For a different view stressing the continuity of immigration from 1820 to 1914 see Daniels (1990). Lebergott (1984) also points out that relaxation of emigration restrictions in other countries such as Italy also contributed to the growth of immigration.

¹⁰ While Japanese and other immigrants from Asia were increasingly excluded from the United States, they did find some protection in the courts. The same Supreme Court that upheld legal segregation for African Americans in *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896) upheld the citizenship rights of American-born Asians in *Wong v. United States* (1898) (Chin, 1996).

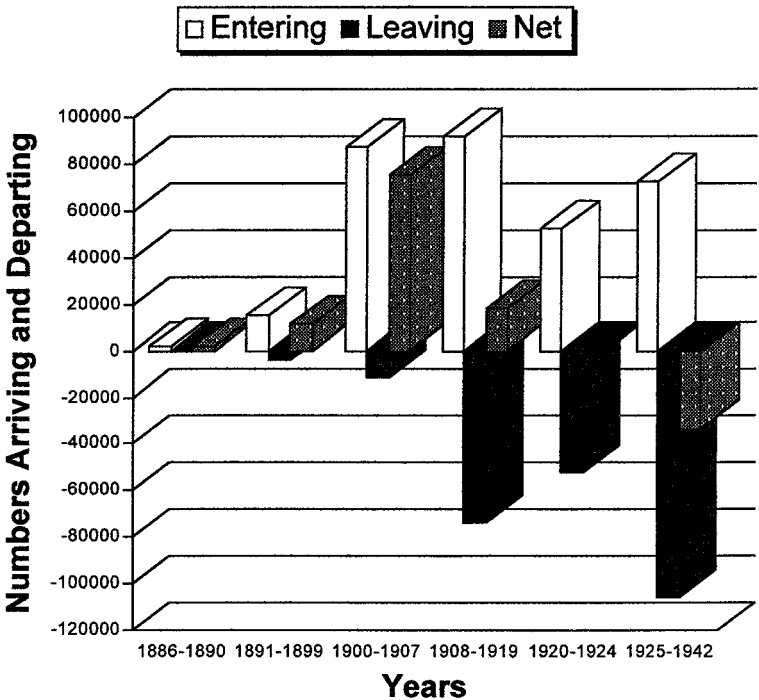


FIG. 2. Japanese immigration to the United States, 1886–1942. Figure includes Japanese entering the continental United States from Hawaii except for the years 1900 and 1901. Japanese arriving to (all years) and departing from the United States (1908 onward) are based on Reports of the U.S. Commissioner General of Immigration. Japanese departing from the United States from 1901 to 1907 is based on Japanese governmental sources. Sources: Ichihashi (1915), Strong (1934), and Thomas (1952).

admitted before 1908 to almost 40% of those admitted from 1909 to 1919.¹¹ Some of the women were following their husbands, who had emigrated earlier, while others were newly married—the so-called “picture brides.”¹² While the number of arrivals only fell slightly, the annual rate of net migration fell sharply as a growing proportion of Japanese entering the United States were Japanese immigrants returning to the United States (see Fig. 2).

Japanese immigrant women became a new target for restriction, as anti-Japanese forces predicted a tide of Japanese babies overwhelming (Anglo) America. One academic article by Chambers (1921) called the Japanese a

¹¹ Calculated from data in Ichihashi (1932) based on reports of the U.S. Commissioner General of Immigration.

¹² “Picture bride” was the name given to women who agreed to marry Japanese immigrants without having met their husbands-to-be. These marriages were arranged through third parties involving an exchange of letters and photos. The brides married their immigrant husbands in absentia in Japan and then immigrated to Hawaii or the United States. See Ichioka (1980).

“marvelously prolific race” and claimed that “by 1949 they [Japanese Americans] will outnumber whites in California.” This view that Japanese immigrants were a colonizing force contributed to growing demands to exclude Japanese immigrants.

In 1924 the Congress passed a new immigration law that established quotas based on countries of origin but which excluded Japanese and other Asians immigrants.¹³ The 1924 Immigration Act combined with the continued return migration of Japanese led to a large net departure of Japanese immigrants between 1925 and 1942 (see Fig. 2). However, Japanese still continued to come to the United States after 1924. Most were former residents who had returned to Japan and were reentering the United States. There were also a number of Japanese who were exempt from the exclusion because their status as diplomats, students, merchants, or professionals such as priests and professors (Consulate General of Japan, 1925). This continued the pattern of more well-to-do Japanese being able to circumvent restrictions on immigration.¹⁴

Japanese migrants to the United States not only faced restrictions from the United States government, but were also regulated by the Japanese government. While most European countries at the turn of the century were mainly concerned with the welfare of their emigrants, Japan had an active policy to restrict poorer and less educated Japanese from leaving the country for the United States.¹⁵ The origins of this policy lie in Japan’s Tokugawa era (1603–1867) when the Japanese government severely restricted trade with other countries and emigration was banned (Ichihashi, 1915). Emigration was legalized in 1866, but until 1885 only students, diplomats, and businessmen could travel abroad.

However, between 1885 and 1940 more than 1 million Japanese emigrated abroad, with the principal destinations being Korea, China (mainly Manchuria and Taiwan), Brazil, the United States, and Hawaii.¹⁶ The first group of Japanese to emigrate en masse was in 1885, when the Japanese government organized boatloads of Japanese contract laborers to work on Anglo-American-owned plantations in the Kingdom of Hawaii. Transport of Japanese workers to and from Hawaii was later turned over to government-regulated private emigration companies (Moriyama, 1985).

During the 1890s Japanese emigration to the continental United States also

¹³ The only exception was for Filipinos who were American nationals.

¹⁴ Other Japanese did evade restrictions on both sides of the Pacific to enter the United States illegally. See Ichioka (1988), Tsurutani (1989), and Ito (1973).

¹⁵ The Immigration Commission (1911a) notes that only Russia and Turkey banned emigration, but that their laws were ineffective.

¹⁶ This estimate is based on a figure of 270,000 Japanese immigrating to parts of Asia colonized by Japan such as Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria in Moriyama (1985). However, there were more than 700,000 Japanese living in Korea alone in 1940. While many of these may have been Japanese born in Korea, since large-scale settlement began around 1900, it seems that this estimate for emigration to Asia is too low. Note that the total Japanese population was 34 million in 1870 and about 80 million in 1940 so that this emigration represented 2–3% of the entire population.

began on a large scale. The growing number of Japanese laborers working in the United States concerned the government of Japan, which saw a connection between the maltreatment of Chinese laborers in the United States and the indignities imposed on China by Western powers (Sawada, 1991; Takaki, 1989). In 1900 the Japanese government banned the emigration of laborers to the continental United States and Canada, although this policy seems to have been relaxed after 1904 (Ichioka, 1988). The Japanese government also limited emigration by requiring emigrants to have two or more guarantors who owned assets of 1500 yen (\$750 dollars) and who would promise to be responsible for the emigrants travel costs; living expenses in the United States; and, if necessary, the cost of returning to Japan (Wakatsuki, 1979). Following the "Gentleman's Agreement" of 1908, the Japanese government required immigrants to have a middle-school (9th-grade) education in addition to not being laborers (Sawada, 1991).

The Japanese government also restricted the emigration of women to the United States. Until 1915 laborers in the United States were prohibited from bringing their wives to the United States, while farmers and businessmen had to document their income and savings in order for their wives to emigrate. After 1915 these restrictions were relaxed so that any Japanese in the United States could bring their wives provided that they could show \$800 in savings, which comes to about \$14,000 in current dollars (Ichioka, 1988).¹⁷

WAS JAPANESE EMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES SELECTIVE?

Scholars have long noted the middle-class backgrounds, high education level, and relatively strong financial position of Japanese immigrants compared to both other immigrants and to other people of color in the United States.¹⁸ However, it is not clear whether these immigrants were positively selected from the Japanese population or whether this was just a reflection of the population of Japan that was becoming more modern, more educated, and more well-to-do because of Japan's modernization effort and rise as a world power. This section compares the occupational and educational characteristics of the Japanese population with those of Japanese immigrants to argue that positive selection of emigrants to the United States did indeed happen.

Between 1886 and 1908, 21.5% of Japanese emigrants receiving passports in Japan for travel to the United States listed their occupation as "merchant," and another 21.1% applied as "students." Only 21.4% said that they were "laborers," with the rest stating that they were "farmers," "fishermen," or "artisans" (Ichihashi, 1915). This pattern continued after 1908, with U.S. INS records showing that 33.2% of all Japanese who entered the United States between 1908 and 1931

¹⁷ Current (2001) dollars calculated using CPI-U (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001).

¹⁸ For example of an early work, see Ichihashi (1915). In addition, Murayama (1991) noted that Japanese emigrants to the Pacific Northwest were more likely to come from more prosperous prefectures in Japan, although the regression coefficients for this were statistically insignificant.

TABLE 2
Occupations of Immigrants to the United States, 1899–1914^a

Occupations	Percentages			
	Jewish	Japanese	Italians	Poles
Professionals, Businessmen, and Skilled Workers	75.1	19.0	16.6	7.0
Farmers and other occupations	1.6	20.0	1.7	0.6
Farm Laborers, Laborers, and Domestic Servants	23.3	61.0	81.7	92.5
Total	100	100	100	100

Note. Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

^a From Commissioner General of Immigration (1899–1914) and Strong (1934).

declared their occupations to be “professionals” or “business people” and another 10% said that they were “skilled workers” (Ichihashi, 1932; Commissioner General of Immigration, 1929, 1930). In contrast, between 1899 and 1909, 54.3% of all Europeans (and 73.7% of those declaring an occupation) who migrated to the United States were farm workers, laborers, or servants (Immigration Commission, 1911a).

Table 2 compares the occupations of immigrants from Japan with those of immigrants of Jewish, Italian, and Polish ancestry during the peak years of immigration to the United States. Jewish immigrants include the largest proportion of professional, business, and skilled workers (75%) and the smallest fraction of farm workers, laborers, and domestic servants (23%) of these four groups. Other Eastern and Southern European immigrants such as Italians and Poles had the opposite distribution, with 80 to 90% being laborers and domestics, while only 7 to 17% were in the highest occupational group. Immigrants from Japan fell in between, with fewer laborers and domestics than the Poles and Italians and many more farmers and “other” workers.¹⁹

Japanese immigrants also had a relatively high level of education. Ichihashi (1932) reported that the Japanese immigrant had on average a higher level of education than the average European immigrant to the United States during that time. The Reports of the Immigration Commission (1911a) found that Japanese immigrants in 1909 were more literate than Eastern and Southern European immigrants such as Italians, Slovaks, Poles, Montenegrins, Croats, Slovenians, and Greeks. By 1940, the median level of education for Japanese immigrants, 8.3 years for men and 8.1 years for women, exceeded that of White immigrants, which was only 7.3 years for both men and women (U.S. Bureau of

¹⁹ The figures for Japanese were adjusted to take into account the more than 64,000 Japanese who migrated to Hawaii and the more than 38,000 Japanese who moved from Hawaii to the continental United States who are included in the original data from 1901 to 1907. The figures for Jews, Italians, and Poles were not adjusted since their immigration to Hawaii was very small. Other workers would include those not in other categories such as transport, service (other than domestic service), and semiskilled workers or operatives.

TABLE 3

Occupations of Japanese Immigrants Entering the United States 1899–1931 and in Japan in 1920^a

Occupations	Japan to United States (%)			Japan, 1920 (%)
	1899–1907	1908–1924	1925–1931	
Professionals, Businessmen, and Skilled Workers	20.2	38.8	60.9	17.1
Farmers and other occupations	20.6	31.3	17.4	25.6
Farm Laborers, Laborers, and Domestic Servants	59.1	29.9	20.9	57.4
Total	100	100	100	100

Note. Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

^a Sources: For the years 1899–1907, Commissioner General of Immigration (1899–1907) and Strong (1934); for 1908–1920, Ichihashi (1932); for 1921–1931, Commissioner General of Immigration (1921–1931); and for Japan, 1920, Cabinet Statistics Bureau (1920).

the Census 1943a, 1943b). Japanese immigrant education was much greater than that of African Americans, which was only 5.3 years for men and 6.1 years for women.

However, the relatively high occupational and educational background of Japanese immigrants could reflect Japan's modernizing society. One reason for the relatively high level of education of Japanese immigrants was the universal system of elementary schooling developed by Japan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Between 1885 and 1920 the enrollment rate of Japanese school-age children rose from 50 to 99% (Statistics Bureau, 1987). Over this same period of time industrial production rose 20-fold, and employment in agriculture, forestry, and fishing fell from 79 to 55% (Liesner, 1989).

To look for evidence of selective emigration and immigration in terms of occupations, I compared the occupational backgrounds of Japanese admitted to the United States between 1899 and 1931 with the occupations in Japan in 1920, the year of their first modern census (Cabinet Statistics Bureau, 1920). The results can be seen in Table 3, which breaks down Japanese immigration into three periods: 1899 to 1907, the period of peak immigration, which was relatively unrestricted by the United States side; 1908–1924, a period of restricted immigration following the "Gentlemen's Agreement"; and 1925 to 1931, following the exclusion of Japanese.²⁰

Between 1899 and 1907 the occupations of immigrants were fairly similar to those of the population as a whole.²¹ In addition, Japanese immigrants who were

²⁰ Occupational data for Japanese immigrants is not available after 1931.

²¹ The data for 1902 to 1907 are adjusted to account for the immigration of Japanese to Hawaii and their remigration to the continental United States. The *Annual Reports of the Commissioner General of Immigration* combines the numbers of Japanese entering both Hawaii and the United States for the years 1901 to 1907. Japanese emigration to Hawaii was less selective than emigration to the continental United States. For example, a survey of pre-World War II emigrants from Hyogo Prefecture found that 60% of emigrants to the continental United States had middle school (9th grade) education or more as compared to only 9% of emigrants to Hawaii (Wakatsuki, 1979). In addition,

classified as farm laborers (who made up the majority of the laborers and domestics categories in all periods) were mainly children and wives of land-owning farmers.²² The Immigration Commission (1911b) describes Japanese immigrants who were farm laborers as “youths or young men working on their fathers’ farms without wages, for farm laborers working regularly for wages have been relatively rare.” Data from the War Relocation Authority (1942) census of Japanese immigrants interned in concentration camps confirms this since 75% of immigrants who were farm workers and other laborers gave their father’s occupation in Japan as “farmer.”

After 1908 there was positive selection among immigrants with respect to the Japanese population. There was increasing selectivity of immigrants between the early period (1899 to 1907) and the middle period (1908–1924), where the “Gentlemen’s Agreement” banned the immigration of laborers, causing an increase in the proportion of immigrants who were professionals, business people, and skilled workers and a decrease in farm laborers, laborers, and domestics. The selectivity of immigrants grew even more after 1924, when the United States excluded Japanese with the exception of merchants, diplomats, students, and some professionals.

Japanese immigrants were also positively selected from the population of Japan with respect to education. Evidence for this can be found among surveys of Japanese emigrants. One such survey of Japanese emigrants from Hyogo Prefecture going to the United States showed that 35.8% completed only the compulsory 6 years of primary school education, while 60.4% completed middle school (9th grade) or above. According to Wakatsuki (1979), this was “much higher than the average educational level for Japan at the time,” where secondary school enrollments were only about 20% of the elementary school level.²³

On an aggregate level, we can try to compare the educational levels of Japanese in Japan and in the United States in 1910, right after the peak years of Japanese immigration between 1900 and 1907. At that time, about 60% of working-age Japanese men, and three-quarters of working-age Japanese women,

at least 38,000 Japanese migrated from Hawaii to the United States between 1901 and 1908, according to Strong (1934), since there were no (legal) barriers after Hawaii was annexed by the United States. I adjusted the data assuming that Japanese migrating to Hawaii had the same occupational distribution as all migrants to Hawaii. Since Japanese immigrants mainly served as plantation laborers, this estimate probably overstated the occupational status of Japanese immigrants to Hawaii. Subtracting this estimate from the numbers of Japanese going to both Hawaii and to the continental United States provides an estimate of the occupations of Japanese coming to the United States only, which probably understated the level of selectivity. Emigration data from the Japanese government for Japanese going to the United States (and not Hawaii) indicate that these immigrants were even more selective. These figures show that more than half (51.1%) were professionals, businessmen, or students and only 5.9% were laborers (Ichihashi, 1915).

²² Sumiya and Taira (1979) state that only about 5% of the Japanese agricultural labor force in 1930 were wage laborers.

²³ In 1920 elementary school enrollment in Japan was 7,727,500 while only 1,385,700 were enrolled in secondary schools (Liesner, 1989).

had not completed the 4 years of primary education that was compulsory in Japan and which would have meant that they were likely to be functionally illiterate (Ohkawa and Rosovsky, 1973).²⁴ While no exactly equivalent data is available for Japanese immigrants, the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1913) does show that only 8.6% of Japanese immigrant men and 14.1% of Japanese immigrant women were illiterate. The survey of 9720 Japanese immigrant workers by the Immigration Commission (1911b) found that less than 3% of the men and less than 30% of the women could not read and write Japanese.

Aside from Japanese government regulation, literate Japanese would have had more access to written information about the United States and emigration, which played an important role in Japanese emigration (Wakatsuki, 1979). Another reason for selectivity with respect to educational level is that emigrants tended to be younger and thus to have had more education than the average Japanese adult at that time.

To conclude, it is important to emphasize that the regulation and restriction of Japanese emigration by the Japanese government was with respect to emigration to the United States. Japanese government policies toward emigration to Brazil, which today has the largest Japanese population outside of Japan, were not as restrictive and were based on concerns about surplus population and high unemployment (Hastings, 1969). This can be seen in the educational level of Japanese emigrants to Brazil as compared to the (continental) United States. A survey of pre-World War II emigrants shows that almost two-thirds (63.4%) of the Japanese going to Brazil had only a primary school education and one-third had attended middle school or higher. However, these proportions were reversed for the more highly educated emigrants to the United States, where almost two-thirds (60.4%) had middle school or higher levels of schooling, while a little more than one-third (35.8%) had only a primary school education (Wakatsuki, 1979).²⁵

THE IMPACT OF SELECTIVE IMMIGRATION ON JAPANESE IMMIGRANT ECONOMIC ACHIEVEMENT

How might the selective immigration of Japanese immigrants have contributed to their economic advance in the United States? One way, of course, would have been through their education. Many studies have shown education to be an important determinant of economic achievement and years of education is commonly used as a measure of human capital in many historical studies of immigrant economic achievement (see, for example, Chiswick, 1991, 1992). However, many of these studies have had to rely on census or other data which

²⁴ The Japanese government raised the number of years of compulsory education to 6 years in 1908, but this would not have affected those who were adults in 1910.

²⁵ This difference would also argue against travel costs being the main reason for selectivity of Japanese emigration to the United States, which Murayama (1991) proposes, since travel to Brazil would have been more expensive than going to the United States.

provide information on literacy, but not more detailed information on the actual number of years of education.

Selective immigration could have also acted via intergenerational transmission of economic status. Borjas (1992) found that there was an important link between the earnings of immigrants and the earnings of their American-born children. Darity (1989) argues that Japanese immigrants, like Jews, had selective immigration patterns in which immigrants from middle-class backgrounds were forced to take unskilled jobs when they first came to the United States, but then were able to regain their previous occupational status relatively quickly. Thus the occupational changes that occurred in the United States were not really upward mobility but lateral or sideways movement from their preimmigration status.²⁶

The rapid rise in the occupational status of Japanese immigrants relative to other immigrants and racial groups seen in Fig. 1 could also have been a result of their increasing experience over time and their assimilation into the U.S. economy. Experience, along with education, is commonly included in studies of economic achievement as a factor to indicate one's increasing productivity. Immigrants also show increasing wages and/or occupational status as their stay in the United States lengthens: Chiswick (1991, 1992) attributes the high achievement of Jewish immigrants at the turn of the century to their rapid assimilation.

The principal previous study of Japanese immigrant economic achievement was done with data from the Japanese American Research Project (JARP) collected in the 1960s.²⁷ Analysis of this data showed that both the immigrants' education in Japan and their fathers' occupations were important factors in determining the occupations of male immigrants in the United States (Levine and Montero, 1973).²⁸ The JARP data also showed some support for Darity's lateral mobility thesis in that only 7% of Japanese immigrants reported having professional, managerial, or craft work in their first job in the United States, but this figure rose to 36% by their third job in this country (Levine and Montero, 1973). However, this study of the JARP data was based on cross-tabulations and did not do a statistical analysis of individual-level data.

To examine the impact of occupational background and education on the

²⁶ For other references to the selective immigration of Japanese Americans, see Ikeda (1973) and Wakatsuki (1979).

²⁷ The JARP gathered a list of about 18,000 older Japanese immigrants from membership roles of community groups, which came to about 70% of the Japanese immigrant male population in 1960. From this they selected a sample of 1047, of which 907 responded. These immigrants had 3817 children, of which 2304 (60.5%) were surveyed and 793 (34.4%) of these were interviewed. Of the adult third generation 1063 were also surveyed, with 802 respondents. The principal investigator for this study was Gene Levine, whose findings can be found in Levine and Montero (1973) and Levine and Rhodes (1981).

²⁸ Sociologists Levine and Montero (1973) found that the educational level of the prefecture of origin also had an impact on occupational status of Japanese immigrants in the United States. Borjas (1992) also found this effect for other ethnic groups, which he called "ethnic capital."

economic achievement of Japanese immigrants, I analyzed individual data from the records of the War Relocation Authority (WRA), the U.S. government agency that ran the concentration camps for Japanese Americans during World War II. The WRA took a census of all of the internees in 1942, which provide records of 37,849 Japanese immigrants. This sample included more than 90% of Japanese immigrants living in the states of Washington, Oregon, California, and Arizona (see the Appendix for more information on the WRA census).²⁹

The WRA data set has a number of advantages over other data sets used in studies of late-19th- and early-20th-century immigrants. In comparison to state labor bureau surveys taken in the 1890s, it includes nonindustrial workers. The WRA data allow for individual-level analysis, unlike the 1909 Immigration Commission report, which only provided grouped data. The WRA census also provides information on both the date of immigration and the number of years of education, whereas the 1910, 1920, and 1940 U.S. Censuses only provide one or the other. But most of all, the WRA data set provides data on the occupation of the immigrants' fathers which can be used as a proxy for the family background of the immigrants.

To examine the effects of selective immigration, I removed from the sample those immigrants who came over with their fathers, who attended school in the United States, or who came as younger children under the age of 10 whose experiences would be more similar to American-born Japanese (Hatton, 1997). In addition, I removed those immigrants who did not report their occupation or their father's occupation. This left 4,851 Japanese immigrant women and 12,134 Japanese immigrant men in the sample.

To test the effects of selective immigration I ran an OLS regression using the log of an occupational score based on the occupation's 1950 median income measured in hundreds of dollars as the dependent variable. Three independent variables are included in the model to describe the characteristics of the immigrants acquired in Japan. The family background of the immigrant is represented by the immigrant's father's occupation in Japan, using the same metric as with the dependent variable. The human capital that the immigrant brought to the United States is represented by the number of years of schooling and the work experience of the immigrant in Japan.³⁰ The occupational achievement of Japanese immigrants could also be due to economic assimilation: as the immigrant spends more time in the United States she or he will learn English, learn more about economic opportunities, and improve and adapt their skills to the demands

²⁹ The sample included 37,799 immigrants, or 92.5% of the Japanese immigrant population, from the evacuation states of Washington, Oregon, California, and Arizona according to the 1940 Census of the Population. The difference was caused by return migration to Japan, deaths, and movement out of these states between 1940 and 1942 to avoid the camps.

³⁰ Child labor is not included in experience, so those immigrants with less than 8 years of education (which was the median level) had their work experience start at age 14. Also, only years of experience in Japan was included as the variable since total years of experience was highly collinear with years in the United States.

TABLE 4
Summary of Characteristics of Japanese Immigrants^a

Variable	Means for men	Means for women
Father's Occupational Score	19.11	20.98
Highest grade of schooling in Japan	7.81	7.66
Years of experience in Japan	6.90	7.76
Years in the United States	35.21	25.42
English Literacy	0.31	0.13
English Speaking Ability	0.54	0.29
Immigrant's Occupational Score	17.32	16.31
Number of observations	12,134	4,851

Note. English Literacy and English Speaking Ability are dummy variables where 1 = is literate in English or can speak English, respectively, so that the mean represents the percentage who are literate or can speak English.

^a Source: WRA Form 26.

of the U.S. labor market. Years in the United States, English speaking ability, and literacy in English are included as independent variables reflecting these factors.³¹ Separate regressions were also run for men and women because of the occupational segregation by gender and because other studies have shown different patterns of occupational mobility for men and women (Stevens, 1986).

Both Japanese immigrant men and women had similar occupational scores, father's occupational scores, level of education, and years of experience in Japan (see Table 4 for a summary).³² On average, Japanese immigrant men had spent about 10 more years in the United States than women, which reflects their pattern of immigration where men came earlier. Finally, Japanese immigrant men were much more likely to speak and be literate in English than women.

The results of the OLS regression for Japanese immigrant men and women are provided in Table 5. Results for male immigrants show that both the immigrants' fathers' occupational score and the educational level of the immigrants had a statistically significant and positive impact on the occupational score of the immigrant in the United States. These results demonstrate that the selective

³¹ Years of experience squared and years in the United States squared are commonly included in human capital regression to take into account possible nonlinear effects. I did not include these variables, as they were highly collinear with the nonsquared terms. Using a variable inflation factor (VIF) test, years in the United States had VIFs of 32–34 (for women and men) and years of experience in Japan had VIFs of 65–84 (for women and men). I also did not include a variable for a kink in the age–occupation profile as Hatton (1997) did since the age–occupation profile for men was relatively smooth while that of women was basically flat.

³² The occupational scores understate the income difference between men and women since the score for each occupation is based on a weighted average of the median incomes for both sexes so that it measures occupational differences, but not wage or income differences, within occupations. Also, many Japanese immigrant men were farmers, which had a low median income in 1950 and which pulled down their score.

TABLE 5
OLS Analysis of Japanese Immigrant Occupations^a

Variable	Japanese Immigrant Men	Japanese Immigrant Women
Constant	2.374* (0.043)	1.786* (0.073)
Log Father's Occupational Score	0.102* (0.012)	0.140* (0.020)
Years of Schooling in Japan	0.020* (0.0016)	0.044* (0.003)
Work Experience in Japan	-0.0046* (0.00086)	0.0029 (0.0016)
Years in the United States	-0.0052* (0.00062)	0.0013 (0.0014)
English Literacy	0.113* (0.012)	0.153* (0.28)
English Speaking Ability	0.147* (0.011)	0.084* (0.021)
R ²	0.14	0.13
Number of Observations	12,134	4,851

^a Source: WRA Form 26.

* Indicates that the coefficients were significant at the 1% level. Coefficients without asterisks were not significant at the 5% level either.

emigration of Japanese to the United States was a major factor in their economic achievement in the United States. The English literacy and English speaking abilities of Japanese male immigrants also had a positive and statistically significant impact on their occupational achievement, which reflects the economic returns to fluency in English. However, the impact of years of experience in Japan and the years in the United States on the immigrant's occupational score were both statistically significant and negative. While other studies of immigrant economic achievement have found that experience has little impact, years in the United States has been found to improve the economic achievement of other groups (Chiswick, 1991). Dropping the English variables from the model still left the impact of years in the United States negative and statistically significant.

The estimated coefficients for Japanese immigrant women were similar to those of men in terms of their sign and statistical significance with respect to the father's occupational score, years of education, and English literacy and speaking abilities. For female immigrants, education and their father's occupation mattered more as compared to male immigrants. Here again one can conclude that the selective emigration boosted the occupational achievement of Japanese immigrant women. However, the signs of the coefficients for years of experience in Japan and years in the United States were both positive for Japanese immigrant women, but the estimated coefficients were not statistically significant at the 5% level.

I also ran an ordered logistic regression using the occupational rank of the Japanese immigrant as an ordinal dependent variable. This method has two advantages over the more standard OLS regressions. Current studies of Japanese and U.S. social mobility show a high correlation in occupational rankings across countries (Ishida, 1993) so that there is a strong basis for using the same occupational rankings for the immigrants' occupation in the United States and their fathers' occupational rank in Japan as variables in the ordered logistic

regression. The OLS regression uses the U.S. median income for occupations in both the United States and Japan, which makes the stronger assumption that occupations in Japan have the same relative incomes as occupations in the United States.³³ Further, the ordered logit regression can be used to look at the importance of different variables in specific transitions from one occupational rank to another.

The occupational categories were ranked using the OCCSCORE variable provided by the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), whose value is the median income of the occupation in 1950 in hundreds of 1950 dollars. Census data on wage and salary income of occupations in California in 1940 gives basically the same ranking of occupations (Bureau of the Census, 1943d). Professionals, businesses owners, and managers are in the highest category; clerical and sales workers, craftsmen and foremen, and semiskilled operatives are in the second category; service workers (including domestics), laborers, and farmers are in the third category; and farm workers make up the fourth and lowest category. The signs on the coefficients in the ordered logit were all the same as with the OLS regression.³⁴ All of the coefficients were statistically significant. The only difference here was that the logit analysis found the coefficients for years of experience in Japan and years in the United States for women to be significant, while the OLS regression did not.

To present the ordered logit results, I transformed these coefficients into estimated probabilities, which are shown in Figs. 3 and 4.³⁵ One can see that immigrants whose fathers were professionals or managers were more than twice as likely to be professionals or managers in the United States as those immigrants whose fathers were farm workers. At the same time the children of professionals or managers were less than half as likely to become farm laborers as compared to the immigrants whose fathers were farm laborers.

Using the ordered logit regression, I was also able to examine the effects of each of the independent variables in the immigrants' transition from one occupational category to the next higher one. For women, the first transition was from farm laborers to mainly service workers (few women listed "farmer" or "laborer" as occupations). In this transition, the ability to speak English was very important, with a large increase in size of the coefficient for this variable, while the coefficients for English literacy and years in the United States became statistically insignificant. For men, the first transition was from farm laborers to mainly farmers. In this transition, the sign of the coefficient for years in the United States

³³ I could find no empirical evidence to support or contradict this assumption that relative incomes were the same in the United States and Japan in the first half of the 20th century.

³⁴ The likelihood ratio chi-squared was 1032 for the women and 1937 for the men, with the probabilities equal to 0 in both cases in the ordered logit regression.

³⁵ The probability of an being in an occupational category is equal to $1/(1 + e^{Sj-k_2}) - 1/(1 + e^{Sj-k_1})$, where $Sj = x_{j1}B_1 + x_{j2}B_2 + \dots + x_{jk}B_k$, where x is the mean of the independent variable, B is the coefficient estimate, and k_1 and k_2 are the cutoffs between occupational categories.

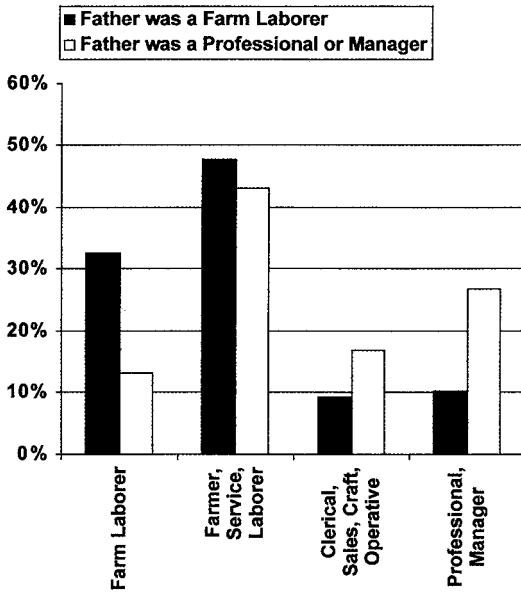


FIG. 3. Occupational probabilities of Japanese immigrant males. Source: WRA Form 26.

changed from negative (in the overall ordered logit) to positive, showing that time did matter for moving up the agricultural tenant ladder.

The second transition was mainly one of male farmers and female service workers to operatives (for both sexes), since few Japanese immigrants held craft, sales, or clerical jobs. For the men, the coefficients had both the same sign and statistical significance as in the overall ordered logit regression. However for the women, the coefficients for English speaking, English literacy, and years in the United States all became statistically insignificant, while the sign of the coefficient for both years of experience in Japan and years in the United States became negative. This could be due to women operatives largely being younger women.

The third transition was mainly one from operatives to managers or business owners for both sexes. For Japanese immigrant women, the coefficients for English literacy, years of experience in Japan, and years in the United States all became larger, while those for father’s occupation and English speaking ability became statistically insignificant. For the men, the biggest change was again that the signs of the coefficients for the years of experience in Japan and years in the United States changed from negative to positive, showing that experience and assimilation did matter.

JAPANESE IMMIGRANT ECONOMIC ASSIMILATION

In addition to confirming the hypothesis that the selective immigration of Japanese immigrants was a factor in their economic achievement in the United

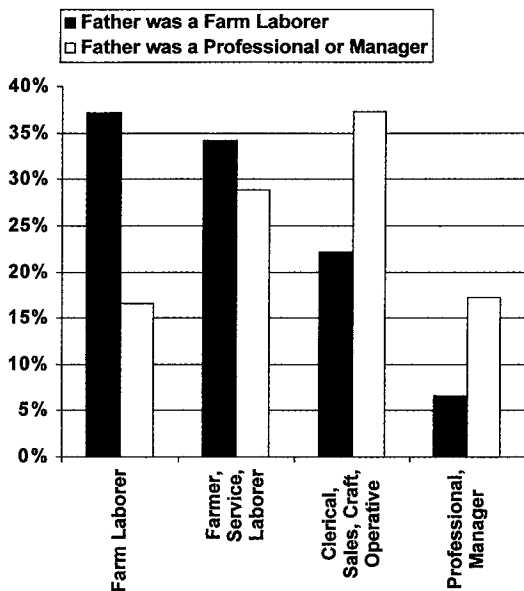


FIG. 4. Occupational probabilities of Japanese immigrant females. Source: WRA Form 26.

States, the analysis also seemed to show that the less time the immigrant male had been in the United States, and the less work experience that they had in Japan, the greater their economic achievement in the United States.³⁶ These findings go against both the outcome one would expect from economic theory where greater work experience and time in the United States should increase one's economic status and against the findings of other studies of immigrants.

The finding that immigrants with less work experience in Japan did better in the United States may be due to an omitted variable of having family in the United States. The typical immigrant from Japan was in his or her early 20s, with 8 years of schooling, so that he or she had on average 7 or 8 years of work experience in Japan (see Table 4). Thus those immigrants with less work experience in Japan were more likely to be teenagers, who almost surely had older relatives in the United States who helped bring them over. These relatives could have helped to "show them the ropes," increasing their economic achievement in the United States.

Before considering any explanations of why Japanese male immigrants who

³⁶ I note again that the usual years in the United States squared and years of work in Japan squared terms were omitted because of multicollinearity in the variables. If the squared variables are included, the coefficients on both the years and the years squared terms become statistically insignificant. However, the negative signs on the coefficients for male immigrants remain, while the sign on coefficient for years in the United States changes from positive to negative for female immigrants when the years-squared term is included in the regression.

had been in the United States longer had lower occupational income scores, it is important to state that the analysis of the data does not say that assimilation does not matter, since fluency and literacy in English do significantly increase the occupational score. Further, the dependent variable, occupational income, only shows occupational mobility and no wage or income gains made within the same occupation. Japanese male immigrants could well have increased their incomes over time without showing any gains in their occupational income score.

There are at least two possible explanations of the finding that Japanese immigrant men who came to the United States earlier on had lower occupational scores, all other factors being equal. First, many early Japanese immigrants worked in agriculture, and their occupational mobility consisted of moving up the agricultural tenant ladder from farm worker to tenant farmer to landowning farmer. However, in the 1910s and 1920s all of the Pacific Coast states passed Alien Land Laws that banned Japanese and other Asian immigrants who were barred from naturalization from buying or leasing farmland. This meant that Japanese immigrants who came later could no longer pursue opportunities in farming and more entrepreneurial immigrants started nonfarm businesses. Since farmers had fairly low occupational scores relative to businesspeople, immigrant entrepreneurs who came earlier, and had more years in the United States, would be likely to be farmers and have lower occupational scores than immigrants who came later and went into (nonfarm) businesses.³⁷

Second, the finding that earlier Japanese male immigrant did not seem to do as well, occupationwise, as later immigrants is consistent with an alternative explanation of immigrant economic achievement offered by Darity (1989). Darity argues that the rapid occupational advance of select immigrant groups such as Jews and Japanese was a process of lateral mobility, where these immigrants had to take unskilled work upon their arrival, but later regained their preimmigration occupational status. If this process were at work, then the earlier Japanese immigrants, who came from lower educational and occupational backgrounds than later immigrants (see Table 6), would end up with lower occupations than immigrants who came later.

³⁷ One unresolved issue in the studies of Japanese American economic achievement has been how to rank farmers. Farmers had a low median income in 1950 and have generally been ranked low in the occupational hierarchy in the post-World War II era because of their low incomes and educational levels (Blau and Duncan, 1967; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1963). However, before World War II, many studies categorized farmers as a "high" occupation (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1943c). Studies of Japanese American economic achievement in the pre-World War II period in economics, sociology, and history have also portrayed Japanese American farmers as economic successes (Higgs, 1978; Bonacich and Modell, 1980; Daniels, 1988; Suzuki, 1995). But because of the Alien Land Laws in California and other states, about three-quarters of Japanese American farmers were still landless tenants as late as 1940, which would have limited their income, wealth, security, and status.

TABLE 6

Education and Occupational Background of Japanese Immigrants by Period of Immigration and Sex^a

Year of Immigration	Before 1899	1899-1907	1907-1924	1925-1942
Japanese immigrant men				
Father's Occupational Score	18.64	18.80	19.76	23.04
Immigrant's Years of School in Japan	6.43	7.54	8.74	11.18
Japanese immigrant women				
Father's Occupational Score	20.64	20.37	20.62	26.40
Immigrant's Years of School in Japan	3.74	5.28	7.51	10.07

^a Source: WRA Form 26.

CONCLUSION

Japanese immigrants to the continental United States made strong gains in their occupational status before World War II both absolutely and relative to other groups such as African Americans, Latinos, and (non-Latino) white immigrants. This article finds that these immigrants were positively selected from the Japanese population with respect to occupational background and educational level and that this selectivity was an important factor in the occupational achievement of Japanese immigrants in 1942. The findings of this article, together with research on selective return migration (Suzuki, 1995), suggest that selectivity in immigration and return migration can account for much of the rapid economic achievement of Japanese immigrants in the pre-World War II period.

This research also speaks to the debate over immigrant economic achievement. The view that successful immigrant groups such as Jews rapidly assimilate (Chiswick, 1991, 1992) does not seem to be the case with Japanese, where length of time in the United States actually had a negative effect on the male immigrants' occupational status. However, assimilation in the form of English speaking and literacy was important to Japanese immigrants economic achievement, which differs from studies of enclave economies that find little correlation of English ability with occupational achievement (Portes and Bach, 1985).³⁸

Research on the history of Japanese American economic achievement also speaks to current debates about ethnic economic achievement. Today Japanese and other Asian Americans are often perceived as success stories, whose strong

³⁸ One way that English ability mattered can be seen in the early immigration of large numbers of Japanese students to the United States who wanted to study English and Western ways. Between 1886 and 1908, 21.1% of Japanese immigrants receiving passports in Japan for travel to the United States listed their occupation as students (Ichihashi, 1932). While students were expected to return to Japan, many ended up staying in the United States. Because of their command of English and familiarity with American laws and customs, many of these students were able to become labor contractors who organized and supplied Japanese immigrant workers to railroads and farmers for a fee. Profits from labor contracting enabled them to become proprietors or farmers (Ichioka, 1988).

economic achievement without government aid and despite a history of discrimination make them a “model minority” for other groups to emulate. However, this overlooks the existence of selective immigration among many (but not all) Asian immigrant groups, which have a disproportionate number of well educated and professionals among them (Steinberg, 1989). Further, this success story overlooks the fact that many Asian Americans today are in poverty or lack education (Takaki, 1989). The same can be said for Japanese Americans historically: Despite their rapid occupational advance in the years before World War II, in 1940 many more Japanese immigrants were still stuck at the bottom of the labor market as farm laborers and domestics (29%) than had made it to the top occupations of professionals and proprietors (18%) (see Table 1). Japanese American households also had a higher poverty rate than Whites at that time.³⁹

Last, but certainly not least, the experience of Japanese immigration to the United States reiterates the importance of viewing markets as institutions in economic history (Wright, 1987). The development of new markets for labor on both sides of the Pacific, and the technological change in oceanic transport, were necessary for the flow of Japanese to the New World. But which Japanese came to the United States, what skills and knowledge they brought with them, and how they were able (or unable) to use these in pursuing a livelihood were profoundly shaped by efforts of both the Japanese and U.S. governments to regulate and restrict the trans-Pacific labor market, who in turn were responding to strategic geopolitical concerns and local issues.

APPENDIX

The War Relocation Authority Form 26 Data Set

In February of 1942, President Roosevelt signed executive order 9066, which authorized the removal of all individuals of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast of the continental United States (but not Hawaii). More than 110,000 people, two-thirds U.S. citizens by birth and the rest barred from becoming citizens by law, were rounded up and put into concentration camps in desolate areas. More than 40 years later, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians concluded after lengthy public hearings that this event was a result of “race prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a failure of political leadership” (Chan, 1991).⁴⁰ Its recommendation that the survivors be given an official apology and be paid reparations was later passed by Congress and signed into law.

Following the issuance of Executive Order 9066, Japanese Americans were

³⁹ Figures provided by Linda Barrington show that 54% of Japanese male-headed households were in poverty in 1939 vs 44% of White male-headed households. See Barrington (1997) on extending the poverty threshold back in time.

⁴⁰ There are a number of histories of the Japanese American concentration camps, including Daniels (1981).

put into temporary assembly run by the Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA) of the Western Defense Command of the United States. The War Relocation Authority (WRA) was established as a civilian agency to take responsibility for running the permanent concentration camps. As Japanese Americans were transferred from the assembly centers to permanent camps later in 1942 the WRA conducted a census labeled "Form 26." This census was done for all individuals who entered the camps between June and December of 1942.

The WRA census gathered information on a total of 111,170 individuals (War Relocation Authority, 1946). This total included everyone interned in 1942 with the exception of some individuals interned but released before being sent to permanent camps. Many of the people released by the WCCA were either non-Japanese spouses or part-Japanese children of Japanese who had married non-Japanese (Spickard, 1986). The 15,000 Japanese Americans who lived in the continental United States but outside of the evacuation areas of California, western Washington and Oregon, and southern Arizona were also missing from the WRA census. Another 5,000 Japanese Americans who had resided in the exclusion zone but who had left before the roundup also escaped the camps (Wartime Civil Control Administration, 1943).

The WRA used bilingual Japanese Americans to collect their census data so there was less chance of errors caused by language than in the regular decennial census of the entire U.S. population. However, this meant that the answers were less anonymous than with the decennial census. Broom and Reimer (1949) compared the WRA census records with those of the 1940 Census and found that a significantly smaller number of women reported occupations in the WRA census than had in the 1940 census of the population.

The WRA census forms were later verified and the data transferred to punch cards, which were tabulated by the WRA. Tables from the census were summarized in *The Evacuated People: A Quantitative Description* (WRA, 1946). The original forms and punch cards were later sent to the Bancroft Library of UC Berkeley, where they were transferred to $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch computer tape in 1982 under the direction of Paul Spickard. The computer tape has records on 109,400 individuals, or 98% of the 1942 records, and includes the following information: (1) WRA camp and WCCA assembly center; (2) Permanent residence: state, county, and city; (3) Birthplace of mother and father; (4) Father's occupation in Japan and the United States; (5) Years and level of schooling in Japan; (6) Educational degrees and certificates; (7) Year of immigration to the United States; (8) Japanese residence: years, number of times, and age; (9) Military service, public assistance, pensions, and physical defects; (10) Household number; (11) Sex and marital status; (12) Race of individual and spouse; (13) Year of birth; (14) Place of birth; (15) Attendance at Japanese language schools; (16) Highest grade attained in United States or Japan; (17) Spoken language and literacy; (18) Religion; (19) Primary, secondary, and tertiary occupations as well as potential occupations; (20) File number.

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