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Stereotyping Through Gender Lens: A Comparative Study of the First Generation of the
Chinese and Japanese Immigrant in California

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Leung Hoi Ching

HIST 4215 Term Paper

Field: Gendering Immigration

Stereotyping through Gender Lens: A Comparative Study on the first generation of Chinese and Japanese Immigrant in California

I. Introduction

The binary relationship of gender became the metaphor in explaining the relationship among the race. The West symbolized “masculinity” while the East was regarded as “femininity”.¹ Michael Parks drew on the connection between “masculinity” and citizenship. Asian American male were denied from citizenship until mid 1940s.² This implied the group of Asian immigrants were regarded as “non-male” from the U.S government perspective in the 19th and early 20th century. The gendered stereotypes became one of the factors for understanding the American immigration policy.

This article will try to examine the gender stereotypes on the Chinese and Japanese immigrants. That was, analyzing the similarities and differences among the images of Chinese and Japanese men as well as women from American perspective. Those stereotypes helped to understand the racial relationship among Asian immigrants and the white Americans in different genders. More importantly, the differences among the public images among Chinese and Japanese contribute to the diverse American policies towards their community respectively. The time scope for this article would cover from 1850s to early 1920s. The 1850s marked the early massive arrival of Chinese immigrants where 1920s symbolized the end of Asian immigrants in pre- WWII period. Regarding the geographical scope, the study would be limited to

¹ Rosalind S. Chou, *Asian American Sexual Politics: The Construction of Race, Gender and Sexuality*, (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), p.11

² Michael Parks, “Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed: A Legal and Historical Perspective of Emasculation Through U.S. Immigration Practices,” *The Modern American* 8, No. 1 (2013): p. 9

California where it was the most populous state for Chinese and Japanese immigrant in continent America.

In contemporary historiography, there were works discussed Asian immigrants experience in terms of gender contexts. Michael Parks analyzed how the U.S migration policy in relation with the shaping of Asian American masculinity and at the same time emasculating the Asian male subject.³ For the making of Asian American gender stereotype, the article of Chen Chiung Hwang, the contemporary scholar on cultural studies, examined on the contemporary feminization of Asian American men in mass media. He traced the historic origins on the feminized image of Asian men.⁴ For the Chinese and Japanese women experience, Catherine Lee, who was the visiting fellow of the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, compared the image of Chinese prostitutes and Japanese picture brides in order to analyze the different policy regarding the Asian female migration.⁵

The works from above writers provided frameworks and definitions in analyzing immigrant experience and policy through gender lens. However, most of their works separated the two sexes, either focusing the Asian American men or Asian American women only. My work tried to combine both so as to construct the whole picture for stereotyping on the Asian American community. Moreover, most gender analysis on Asian American community mostly based on the case study of Chinese American. However, the Japanese American community was also

³ Michael Parks, "Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed: A Legal and Historical Perspective of Emasculation Through U.S. Immigration Practices," pp. 5-6

⁴ Chiung Hwang, Chen, "Feminization of Asian Men in the U.S Mass Media: An Analysis of the Ballad of Little Jo, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, (Fall, 1996): p. 57

⁵ Catherine Lee, "Prostitutes and Picture Brides: Chinese and Japanese Immigration, Settlement, and American Nation Building, 1870 – 1920", *Working Paper 70, The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies*, (Feb, 2003): p. 2

one of the significant Asia American minority group that should not be neglected. More importantly, Japanese immigrants came as the replacement of Chinese workforce. Their experience shared similarity and differences with the Chinese. Therefore, it is worth to compare their experience through the lens of gender stereotyping.

The construction of gender stereotypes on Chinese and Japanese community justified the superiority of the white American. Those stereotypes were meaningful for understanding the relations among American with Asian races. Thus, this helps to explain the American treatments on different Asian immigrants. The following analyzes and compares three common stereotypes on Chinese and Japanese immigrants.

II. Stereotype of the Gendered Relationship on Asian Men and White Men: A Dilemma

Regarding the gendered relation of Asian men and white men, a dilemma was observed. While the Chinese and Japanese men were feminized from American perspective, on contrast, the American theory of yellow peril depicted the Asians had the agency to pose threat to the nation.

The feminized image of Chinese and Japanese men was originated from their occupations. Both Chinese and Japanese men held the occupations that were traditionally women works, for instance, the domestic helper in the private sphere. This gave the impression of their femininity. Gary Y. Okihiro, the Asian American scholar suggested that the Chinese men preserved white masculinity since they had done the “womanly” work.⁶ He quoted the memoir of Helen S. Gage, who was the mistress of a Chinese domestic helper. She described her Chinese helper as “nurse” who took good care with her children and devoted wholeheartedly to her family.⁷ To

⁶ Gary. Y, Okihiro, *Common ground: Reimagining American History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 76

⁷ Ibid.,

add, the laundry sector which was also feminized in nature was the common occupation for Chinese as well.⁸ According to the statistics in 1901, half of the Chinese immigrants in California worked in laundry business.⁹ Similarly, the Japanese immigrants also commonly worked in domestic sector. The following manga was published in 1931 by Henry Kiyama, who was the first generation of Japanese immigrant. This reflected the common stereotype of Japanese as servant for the white, which was a clear subordinate relationship. The episode was titled as “Mistaken Identity”. He depicted the scene that a white woman mistaken the Japanese consul as domestic labor. (See Image 1)¹⁰



Image 1

⁸ Joan S., Wang, “Race, Gender; and Laundry Work: The Roles of Chinese Laundrymen and American Women in the United States, 1850-1950,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, (Fall, 2004): p. 86

⁹ “Chinese in California,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 8 May 1901, p. 6

¹⁰ Henry Yoshitaka Kiyama, *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904 -1924*, (Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press, 1999), p. 51

The statistic from the report on Japanese Immigration occupation and wage confirmed that the domestic sector was the occupation field that Japanese “invaded” the most.¹¹ Therefore, as observed above, the domination of Chinese and Japanese men in the feminized domestic sector proved their unmanliness from the American perspective. This justified the fact that Asian men did not have the equal right as white American men. Similar to the women in this era, they did not have the right of citizenship and owning property.¹²

Furthermore, the appearance of Chinese man contributed to their femininity. In this stage of research, there was no significant comparable sources were found in the case of Japanese men. The Chinese male were commonly depicted with their long braided queue which was a very visible symbol to show their racial difference with the American. Chen Chiung Hwang, pointed out that the white saw this symbol as feminine.¹³ On contrast, according to Okihro, in Chinese late Qing community, the queue symbolized the manhood and nationality of Chinese men.¹⁴ This explained why the Chinese men in American generally retained this hairstyle. From the American perspective, this ethnic symbol also represented uncivilized as reflected from the cartoon below. (See Image 2)¹⁵

¹¹ Japanese and Korean Exclusion League, *Japanese immigration, occupation and wages: Complies from U.S Government Reports and Reports if California Bureau of Labor Statistics*, (San Francisco: Japanese and Korean Exclusion League, 1907), p. 15

¹² Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men*, (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), p. 112

¹³ Chen Chiung Hwang, “Feminization of Asian Men in the U.S Mass Media: An Analysis of the Ballad of Little Jo”, p. 58

¹⁴ Gary. Y, Okihiro, *Common ground: Reimagining American History*, p. 78

¹⁵ “The Pigtail Has Got to Go,” *The Puck*, 19 Oct 1898, in Philip P. Choy, Lorraine Dong, and Marlon K. Hom, *Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), p. 103

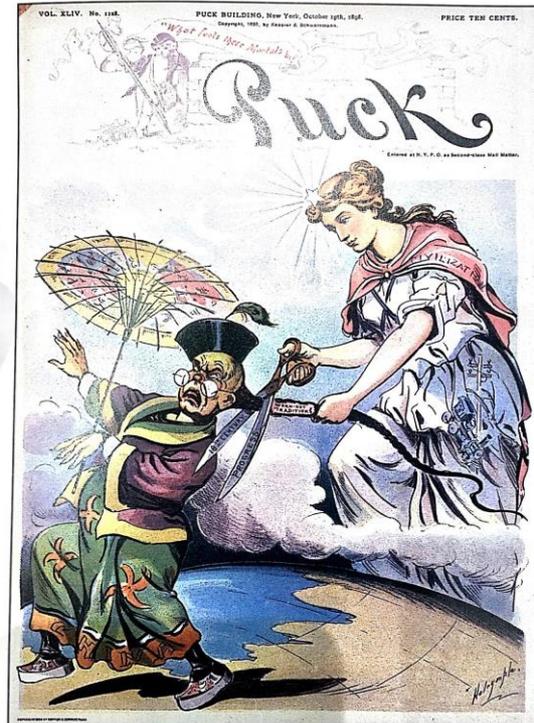


Image 2

The Chinese man was depicted smaller than the white woman who symbolized civilization. The queue of the Chinese man was cut by the white which implied that the white brought civilization to the Chinese man. Therefore, the Chinese visible symbol of keeping the long queue consolidated the American perception of Chinese femininity as they were inferior.

Ironically, the American theory of the Yellow Peril suggested the Asian men were capable to pose threat on the United States. According to Okihiro, the theory of yellow peril implied the “masculine threat of military and sexual conquest”.¹⁶ It was notable that the “threat” of Chinese and Japanese men to American manhood were depicted in different ways.

¹⁶ Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), p. 142

For the threat Chinese men were depicted as threatening the working opportunities of the white men. The below illustrations were published in *The Wasp*, which was a San Francisco magazine. They had the common topic on criticizing the Chinese domination the work force. (See Image 3a¹⁷ and 3b¹⁸)

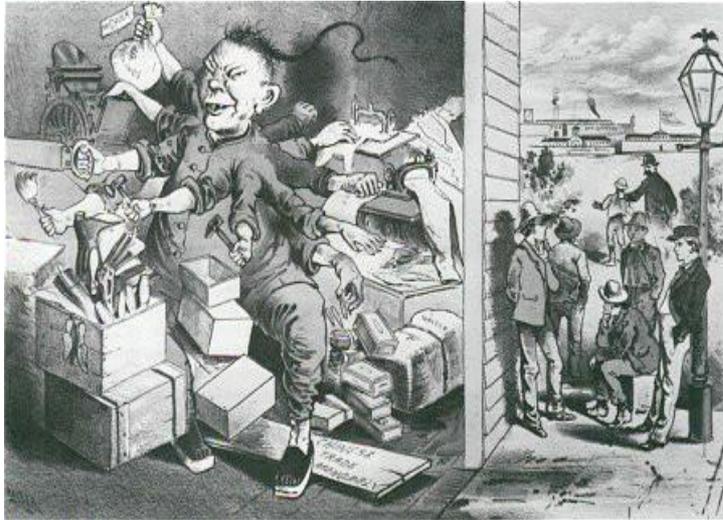


Image 3a (Left) and Image 3b (Right)

In the image 3a, the Chinese man was demonized which shown his domination in different field. The white men at the door looked worry for their future. For the Image 3b, the Chinese man was enlarged to reflect his monopoly in various industry while the men who were protesting to this phenomenon was drawn in a smaller scale to show the ineffectiveness. Those media depictions helped to create the fear among the American in Chinese labor. The Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 also reaffirmed the Chinese threat. As the Act stated, the Chinese labor “endanger” the order of locals.¹⁹

¹⁷ “The worry of Next Generations,” *The Wasp*, 1870 in Philip P. Choy, Lorraine Dong, and Marlon K. Hom, *Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese*, pp. 88-89

¹⁸ “The Coming Man,” *The Wasp*, 20 May 1881 in Philip P. Choy, Lorraine Dong, and Marlon K. Hom, *Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese*, p. 91

¹⁹ Michael Parks, “Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed: A Legal and Historical Perspective of Emasculation Through U.S. Immigration Practices,” p. 8

For the depiction of Japanese men, they were also regarded as the threat to the American workforce. At the same time, the strength of their origin country threatened the American manhood. In terms of their threat to workforce, Theodore Roosevelt commented that the Japanese were “less manly” and thus they would work for lower wages. The existence of Japanese labor resulted in lower wages in the job market, in this way, the American men could not be able to support their family.²⁰ This criticism was also supported by the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League. Their report suggested that the salary of Japanese was 40 to 50 percent less than the American which lowered the competitiveness of the American labor.²¹

The strength of Japan in international diplomacy contributed to the fear of Japanese men in American land. In the late 19th century, Japan became one of the imperial powers and the major competitor for the leadership in East Asia.²² As suggested by Roosevelt, Japanese had proved their masculinity by gaining victory in the Russo-Japanese War. The Japanese race, in the eye of Roosevelt, was civilized, but less civilized than the American. The growth of their power would challenge the “manly dominance” of the America.²³ Moreover, their civilization was incompatible to the American. Thus, the permanent settlement of Japanese immigrants would inevitably lead to the competition among Japanese men and American men. To prevent this racial competition, the Japanese immigration should be controlled. This helped to explain the signing of the Gentlemen’s Agreement in 1907, which limited the incoming Japanese male labor.

²⁰ Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization a cultural history of gender and race in the United States, 1880 - 1917*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 199

²¹ Japanese and Korean Exclusion League, *Japanese immigration, occupation and wages: Complies from U.S Government Reports and Reports of California Bureau of Labor Statistics*, p. 16

²² Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*, (Princeton: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), p. 250

²³ Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization a cultural history of gender and race in the United States, 1880 - 1917*, p. 200

In short, the contradiction of gendered stereotype of Asian men was found. The major purpose for this complex construction of stereotype was to preserve the American manliness and superiority. The feminization of Asian men consolidated the strength of American men. The illustration of Asian threat justified the exclusion policy and thus preserved the superiority of American men. Differences were observed among the stereotypes on Chinese and Japanese men. Both were feminized from American perspective. However, Japanese men were seeming to have higher level of manliness due to the national strength of Japan.

III. The Stereotype on the Relationship of Asian Men and White Women

The threat of Asian men was not only limited to the American men. In the illustration of describing the relationship between Asian men and white women, they were also depicted to have the agency to harm the white race. Catherine Lee described that women, land and nation were co-related concept. Women was the representation of the national boundary.²⁴ The intermarriage of the white and Asian race would destroy that boundary. The presence of Chinese and Japanese men represented the potential threat of racial mixing. Furthermore, the Chinese men were even being regarded as the harm to white women as described below.

The intermarriage of Asian men and White women was criticized. The white women were condemned for the marriage. The article published on *Marin Country Tocsin*, the weekly newspaper in San Rafael of California, warned the white women the risk of losing citizenship for marrying to Chinese and Japanese men. The editor commented that the country should deprive the right of citizenship for those the white woman who decided to marry a Chinese

²⁴ Catherine Lee, "Prostitutes and Picture Brides: Chinese and Japanese Immigration, Settlement, and American Nation Building, 1870 – 1920", p. 6

man.²⁵ Similarly, the woman who made the choice of marrying a Japanese man was regarded as “insensible”. They ignored the obligation of the white race and motherhood and thus contributed to the moral decade of the state.²⁶ In the hearing committee on Immigration and Naturalization, there was similar testimony which commented that the women who married the Japanese were generally not the best class of women.²⁷ Moreover, the failure of intermarriage among Japanese man and White woman was celebrated as reflected from the following news in *Los Angeles Herald*s. The case of a fail marriage between Ms. Stella Hurns, a Hollywood white woman and S. Matuoka, a Japanese man was titled as “Promises She will not wed her Japanese”. The language used again reflected the subordination of Asian man. S. Matuoka was described as Ms. Stella Hurns’ “Japanese” despite their relationship was not master and servant. Also, S. Matuoka was not titled with “Mr.” throughout the report. This couple was arrested in Portland on their way to Idaho, where they believed marriage between Japanese and white was possible. At the end, Ms Hurns gave up the marriage while Matuoka became the suspect for further investigation. Her decision of giving up her marriage with Japanese was described in the subtitle as “Hollywood Woman set at Liberty in Portland”.²⁸ The above examples from the press reflected the society criticism on the marriage between Chinese and Japanese man with white woman. The white women became the subject of condemnation under this context.

Other than the criticism on intermarriage, the Chinese men were also accused for harming the morality of white women. In this case, the white women were “victimized”. However, there was no similar accuse for Japanese men. The Chinese men were regarded as the threat of white

²⁵ “California should not permit Marrying between Whites and Orientals,” *Marin County Tocsin*, 20 Mar 1909, p. 2

²⁶ *Ibid.*,

²⁷ “Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization: H. of R., 66th Congress,” (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), p.229

²⁸ “Promises she will not wed her Japanese,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 24 Mar 1909, p. 1

women morality in the way of bringing the opium smoking behavior. In the memoir on discussing the effect of Chinese immigrants, James Roger, who was the Chief Police of San Francisco, observed the opium smoking was formerly the practice of Chinese men. However, this behavior was spread to white men as well as women. He commented that this was a humiliation to manhood to see white women smoking opium alongside with the Chinese men.

²⁹ In the *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, the illustrator depicted the opium den in the Chinatown of San Francisco which visualized similar concern of Roger. (See Image 4)³⁰

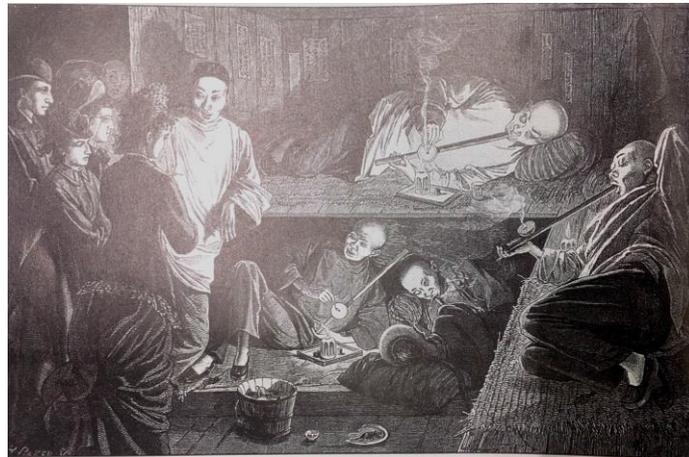


Image 4

As shown above, the Chinese men were introducing the white women with the opium smoke. The white women opium smoking behavior was also reported on newspaper. In 1900, a white woman was arrested and fined for visiting the opium den with two Chinese men.³¹ In Santa Barbara, the coastal city of California, there were testimonies claimed that the white woman opium smoking behavior in the Chinatown was common.³² Those news reports associated the

²⁹ California Legislature Senate, *Chinese immigration. The social, moral, and political effect of Chinese immigration. Testimony taken before a committee of the Senate of the state of California, appointed April 3d, 1876*, (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1876), p. 152

³⁰ "The Opium Den in China Town, San Francisco," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* in Philip P. Choy, Lorraine Dong, and Marlon K. Hom, *Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese*, p. 108

³¹ "White Woman Found in an Opium Joint," *San Francisco Call*, 17 Mar 1900, p. 4

³² "White Slavery in Chinatown," *Morning Press*, 11 Apr 1903, p. 2

white women smoking behavior with Chinese men and Chinatown which further reaffirmed the Chinese men responsibility in threatening the white morality.

In short, Chinese men and Japanese men were perceived as the damage to white race and their morality. Their existence was the threat to the white women. This helped to build up the sentiment to support the government exclusion act in late 19th century and early 20th century.

IV. The Stereotype on the Relationship of Asian Women and White Men

For the Chinese and Japanese women population, they were depicted as prostitute in the late 19th century. The existence of prostitute in both community was regarded as lack of sexual morality from American perspective.³³ In other words, they were perceived as the threat the American morality. The Page Law was then passed in the Congress in order to remove Asian prostitute in 1875. Asian women were banned for immigration as they were assumed to be prostitute. However, different from the Chinese women, the Japanese women were allowed to come to Americans in early 20th century. The section would first analyze the stereotype on Chinese and Japanese women followed by their differences.

Both Chinese and Japanese women on the whole were being regarded as prostitute from American perspective. Their existence harmed the morality of the white. For the situation of Chinese women, Horace Greely wrote in the *News York Times* to present his view in 1854. He stated Chinese as a whole were uncivilized, every female in Chinese race was the prostitute of the basest order.³⁴ This reflected explicitly on American assumption on Chinese women.

³³ Sidney L. Gulick, *The American Japanese Problem*, (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1914), p.15

³⁴ George Anthony Pepper, *If they don't bring their wife here: Chinese Female Immigration Before Exclusion*, (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1999), p. 101

Horace F. Page then examined the effect of Chinese women on American society. According to his comment, the Chinese women broke the moral integrity of the white male.³⁵ As further explain by Chan Sucheng, a Chinese historian, concluded the American perspectives on Chinese prostitute. They were regarded as bringing venereal diseases, opium addiction and enticing the white boy to the “life of sin”.³⁶ In this way, the Chinese women were seen as the destructor of white men morality.

Correspondingly, Japanese women as a whole were regarded as prostitute. Dr. Sidney Gulick, an American author in late 19th century examined the Japanese problem in California, one of those was the prostitute. As he stated, Japanese women were so subservient so that they would become prostitute easily. Japanese man made their living through asking their wife to be prostitute.³⁷ The press in San Francisco, also assumed all of the Japanese women came to California for prostitute. As the *San Francisco Bulletin* stated, the importation of Japanese women was for the immoral purpose. The continuation of importing Japanese women would spread immorality in the United States.³⁸ For the *San Francisco Daily Report*, the editors described the incoming of Japanese women as the Slave Trade, which as notorious as the Chinese traffic of women.³⁹

³⁵ Ibid., p. 103

³⁶ Sucheng Chan, *Entry denied: exclusion and the Chinese community in America, 1882-1943*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 138-139

³⁷ Sidney L. Gulick, *The American Japanese Problem*, p.15

³⁸ “Questionable Arrivals,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, 14 Feb 1890, p.3

³⁹ Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: the world of the first generation Japanese immigrants, 1885-1924*, (New York: Free Press, 1990), p. 38

As shown above, both Chinese and Japanese women were assumed to come to California as prostitute which created moral threat to the Americans. This explained the enactment of the Page Law in 1875 which limited the entry of Asian female immigrants.⁴⁰

However, in the early 20th century, a large number of Japanese women were allowed to enter the United States after the signing of the Gentlemen's Agreement. They came with the identity of "picture bride". This agreement limited the number of Japanese male immigrant in return for allowing family reunification. Under this context, as Lee commented, Japanese women had a greater chance to immigrate to the United States than the Chinese women.⁴¹ The statistic supported her view. In the aftermath of the Gentleman Agreement, Japanese women made up of about 35% of Japanese population in California, while for the case of Chinese women, they were accounted for only 5% of Chinese population.⁴² The gender ratio for the Japanese community became more balance than that of the Chinese. This then created the concern on the growth of Japanese American population. Japanese women were under attacked by the American again. Eventually, the Immigrant Act of 1924 barred all immigrants from Asia. The following explained the changes of Japanese women image as well as the criticism they encountered in the early 20th century.

With the effort of Japan government and the Japanese American community, the incoming of Japanese "wives" outnumbered the prostitute. In Early in the late 19th century, different from the Chinese government, the Japanese government was highly sensitive to their image so as to

⁴⁰ Michael Parks, "Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed: A Legal and Historical Perspective of Emasculation Through U.S. Immigration Practices," p. 10

⁴¹ Catherine Lee, "Prostitutes and Picture Brides: Chinese and Japanese Immigration, Settlement, and American Nation Building, 1870 – 1920", p. 5

⁴² Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), p. 247

maintain their national honor. For the Japanese American community, they urged for the ban of prostitute in order to avoid the American criticism and in fear of the exclusion. They saw the Japanese prostitute in the United States brought shame to Japan national image and morality. Eventually, the Japanese government co-operated with the American officials and implemented measure to prevent the Japanese prostitute reaching the United State in 1891.⁴³ In the early, 20th century, with the implantation of Gentlemen's Agreement in 1907, the incoming of Japanese women were no longer being regarded as immoral prostitute. They came to the States for the purpose of family reunification according to the agreement.

With the growth of Japanese American population under the effect of the Gentlemen's Agreement, Japanese women were again being perceived as the threat to the American men. Similar to Japanese male, they came to work as labor. From the perspective of American, the use of cheap female labor among Japanese created unfair competition to the Americans.⁴⁴ More importantly, according to V.S. McClatchy, the prominent figure of Anti-Japanese advocates, the Japanese bride produced a child once a year.⁴⁵ This created the fear of growing Japanese population in California and contributed to the yellow peril theory. Furthermore, the incoming of Japanese women meant the permanent settlement of Japanese immigration and responsible for the increase of Japanese American population. McClatchy saw this as a "deadly menace" to the America.⁴⁶ In this way, Japanese women once again became the threat to the United States in terms of enlarging the unassimilated Japanese population.

⁴³ Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: the world of the first generation Japanese immigrants, 1885-1924*, p.39

⁴⁴ "Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization: H. of R., 66th Congress," p.942

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 250

⁴⁶ Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), p. 132

V.Conclusion

All in all, the gender stereotypes Chinese and Japanese immigrants helped to explain various American immigration policies. The stereotypes on Chinese and Japanese community were not necessarily be identical. The various characteristics of their communities as well as the national strength of their country of origins contributed to the differences. In general, the stereotypes of Chinese and Japanese community under gender context were negative. From the American perspective, the Chinese and Japanese men were perceived as feminized. The existence of Asian immigrants was regarded as harm and threat to the white community on the whole. This explained the American immigration policies regarding to Asians in this era were featured in exclusion. Those gender related stereotypes regarding the Asian immigrants are still existed in contemporary America. It is worth for the historians to discuss its historic origins and development so as to examine the experience of Asian immigrant in different angles.

(4,252 Words)

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