

The Japanese in Hawaii Before Its Annexation

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Chapter I HAWAII

Throughout the remote island nation of Hawaii, as in the United States, the machine was the symbol of the new era that followed the Civil War. Earlier, Hawaii enjoyed a short period of economic blessing when the gold rush in California brought to the islands demands for supplies of agricultural staples to satisfy the new influx of people there who could not find time except to prospect for gold. By the end of 1851, however, potatoes and other produce were coming to the new-born state from Oregon and other places at prices Hawaii could not meet. The ships, which had previously made a stop at Honolulu, went directly to California from the East Coast ports. Thus, Hawaii in the early 1850's found itself no longer the hub of trade in the Pacific.

The Civil War not only repeated this pattern of quick-come-quick-gone demands, but also it practically wiped out Hawaii's hitherto economically profitable status as a whaling port, a gift to the islanders brought by the great whaling era that began around 1826. At the outset of the Civil War petroleum started to replace whale oil, with the unfortunate result of a diminishing number of whalers visiting Hawaii. In addition, some ships were put to military use. The ships commercially put to sea numbered only half the pre-war fleet¹ and, along with merchantships, quickly became popular targets of Confederate privateers in the Atlantic. Ironically, however, it was the same war that provided the island nation with another demand which has since stabilized the economy of Hawaii: the demand for sugar. It created a tremendous demand for sugar in the northern states.

In 1846, there were eleven sugar plantations on the islands. The processing of the cane at that time took weeks and the quality of the sugar was low, although it managed to find a market in Australia, the East Coast of the United States, and, to a lesser degree, in the West Coast. In 1851, a centrifugal machine which would separate molasses from sugar was built. Irrigation ditches were dug and more land was bought for expanding plantations. By 1860, sugar was the leading crop, replacing

¹ Edward Joesting, *Hawaii*, (New York : W.W. Norton, 1972), p. 176.

rice, potatoes, wheat and silk. The best sugar mill equipment was bought in Scotland and set up in Kauai in 1865, the final year of the Civil War. Modern machines thus prepared the way for the embryonic but promising industry, although the problems that the planters faced were plentiful, including the high tariff imposed upon the sugar by the United States, lack of capital, and labor shortage. In April of 1865, the Hawaiian government decided to solve one of the problems and named Eugene Van Reed, a citizen of the United States, its consul general in Japan. One of his missions was to secure permission from the Japanese government to recruit 400 laborers for the sugar plantations.

In 1867, two years after Van Reed's appointment, the last *shogun*, Yoshinobu Tokugawa, resigned. His resignation brought to an end the 700 years of feudal and military government. The new government would not honor the agreement that Van Reed had reached with the old, to the effect that he was authorized to take 400 Japanese. This prompted his decision to ship the Japanese laborers, and on May 17, 1868, his ship *scioto* sailed, unauthorized, for Hawaii with the first group of Japanese laborers aboard. They were to be paid four dollars a month. Food, shelter and passage were to be provided free. The duration of the contract was for three years. Surprisingly, not one of them was a farmer. They were potters, merchants, cooks, tailors, blacksmiths, printers, *sake* brewers and barbers, plus assorted vagrants. This wide occupational representation was caused by the Japanese recruiters who ignored Van Reed's instructions and picked up men off the streets of Yokohama, instead of contacting the farmers in the country. On June 19, after thirty-three days on the ship, they—141 men (one died en route), six women and one child — sailed into Honolulu harbor. One newspaper described them as a "very good-natured and lusty-looking set of fellows." They were treated cordially and Kamehameha V sent a barrel of salted fish to them. Two weeks of recuperation and adjustment were given before they started to work. On the plantations on the various islands they worked from six in the morning until five in the evening. One half-hour was set aside for lunch. They worked 26 days a month. Their life was close to slave laborers'. Hawaiian law held that a plantation was like a ship at sea, and all hands were subject to the same kind of discipline that seamen faced on sailing vessels. Rules on the plantation were unduly strict, with such minute regulations as visitations, smoking, and conversation (up until 9:00 p.m.), and a 25-cent fine (approximately worth 1.5 days' pay) on a stalk of sugar cane a laborer took for himself. These rules had not been explained to them in Japan. Instead, they had been told that Hawaii was a heavenly place. One laborer hanged himself. The situation grew worse.

The news of their ill-treated life on the plantation arrived and came to be known in Japan, and in December, 1869, an investigative team was sent to Hawaii by the Japanese government which had been enraged by the unauthorized departure of the

Scioto with its citizens aboard. Forty laborers expressed to the investigators their desire to return to Japan. Thirteen more returned when the contracts expired in 1871.

By this time Hawaii was exporting more than 10,000 tons of sugar, a surprising increase compared to 370 tons in 1850. A treaty was signed between the two countries in 1871, but there was no flow of laborers leaving Japan for Hawaii, much longed for as it was by the planters. For that to happen, Hawaii had to wait for 14 more years, until 1885. The year 1876 was significant for Hawaii on two accounts. One was the Reciprocity Treaty which lifted a high tariff on its sugar; the other was the Philadelphia Exhibition where modern machines were demonstrated. Many businessmen and leaders from the islands who visited it "must have been deeply impressed by the lesson of the machine," and felt "machines would eventually make production easier."² The machine, in fact, seemed to promise them a golden future, only if they had more people to work on the sugar cane fields!

At the time of the discovery of Hawaii by Captain James Cook in 1778, its estimated population was between 300,000 and 400,000. The first Hawaiian census, taken in 1832, indicates a staggering decrease in the population to 130,313. In 1853, it further went down to 73,138 (71,019 Hawaiians; 1,262 Caucasians; 364 Chinese; 493 others). The 1860 figure was 69,000. The population kept diminishing until 1878, when the first group of Portuguese was brought in from the Azores and Maderia Islands (a total of roughly 10,000 in a few years). The population stood at 57,985 that year. In 1881, 600 Norwegians joined the labor force, as well as a group of Germans. But European laborers presented a financial difficulty: they cost more than Oriental laborers both in transportation and wages. Yet, industrial development depended so much on an imported supply of laborers, since the dwindling population could not be expected to meet the needs of the growing industry. Besides, the native Hawaiians, in the eyes of the plantation owners, looked to be an undisciplined people. They had enjoyed an abundant economic life of their own without having to work in the fields under severe supervision.

Chinese immigration was restricted in 1866. The murder that year of Jules Dudoit, a long time merchant in Honolulu, by his Chinese servant, had put a temporary end to Chinese immigration. Besides, the *haole* (white people) had felt that they could not be assimilated. Also, their expanding business was beginning to threaten them. In the meantime in Japan, labor emigration was legalized in 1884 under the new government that followed the resignation of the *shogun*; many farmers, due to a severe depression, were bankrupt. In 1885, Japan finally agreed, after a series of negotiations with Robert Walker, Hawaii's consul general in Tokyo, to send some Japanese laborers to Hawaii. That year, a total of 1,959 passports was issued for those who wanted to

² Ibid., p. 189.

go there under the contract. In February of the same year, the first group of laborers, consisting of 689 men, 150 women and 108 children arrived at Honolulu. By the end of the year, a total of 1,941 arrived. The treatment that they received, however, proved unsatisfactory to the Japanese government and it suspended further emigration temporarily, until next March when it signed a convention and sent 904 people.

The following statistics indicates a rapid increase of the Japanese who worked on the plantations, both in terms of the number and the percentage they occupied among the entire plantation hands:

<i>year</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>Japanese</i>	<i>percentage of Japanese</i>
1882	10, 243	15	
1886	14, 539	1, 949	13%
1888	15, 578	3, 299	21%
1890	17, 895	7, 560	42%
1892	20, 536	13, 019	63%
1894	21, 294	13, 684	64%

It should be noted that both the Japanese and the total population on the plantations were steadily growing—an indication that Hawaii's sugar industry was also growing. During the ten-year period ending on June 13, 1894, 27 shiploads of Japanese laborers were sent to Hawaii, with the total going up to 29,032. In 1894, an Emigration Protection Order was issued in Japan. The emigrants who had left Japan prior to the enactment were called 'public contract laborers.' The new law required the existing emigration 'agents,' who were mostly hotel and boarding house owners at the port cities of Yokohama and Kobe, to incorporate under authorization of the Minister of Home Affairs. The new emigrants were called 'private contract laborers.'

The increasing presence of the Japanese on the islands was obvious to anyone by now, particularly to the *haole*, who felt that the Japanese, if unchecked, would grow predominant not only in terms of the population but of their political power. The Japanese, by 1896, represented close to a quarter of the total population. If this trend was alarming to the *haole*, there were good reasons for the Japanese to emigrate to Hawaii then, since immigration under contract was not permitted in the United States and the Japanese government did not encourage emigration to the United States as they were well aware the existence of the Chinese Exclusion Law enacted in 1882 and its implication. There was a military conscription going on in Japan at the time, which required every male citizen to take a physical examination for military service for three years. Emigrating temporarily to Hawaii was one of the means to dodge it legally. Another factor that explains this rapid increase of Japanese immigration was the index number of wages and prices for the period between 1887 and 1907. Both of them rose rapidly, and although the former rose

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faster than the latter, it was still not sufficient for the impoverished farmers. Between 1894 and 1896, furthermore, 37,616 laborers left Japan under the new contract system, according to the Hawaiian Board of Immigration. The 1895 Hawaiian census showed the following :

Hawaiians/part-Hawaiians	36%	39,504
Japanese	22%	
Chinese	19%	
Portuguese	13%	
other Europeans/Americans	10%	

In its efforts to solve the problem of Japanese predominance, the Hawaiian government resorted to a political solution: minimizing the Japanese votes by holding up naturalization for a time. In 1897, Hawaiian officials denied admission to 1,200 Japanese laborers, enforcing laws that had been formerly ignored. Strong notes were exchanged between the two countries, and some Japanese naval vessels frequently appeared off the Hawaiian shore to warn the islands of possible consequences. This action on the part of the Japanese government may have prompted the annexation of Hawaii to the United States, for it had been argued among the proponents of the annexation that it would eventually fall into the hands of the Japanese if left a political and military vacuum.

In July, 1898, the United States Congress annexed the Hawaiian Islands by a joint resolution, thus relieving the *haole* greatly. For the standards and customs of Hawaii would be, it was expected, those of the United States, rather than of Japan. The same year, the use of English at all schools was made compulsory by law. With the monarchy wiped out of the throne, the *haole* on the sugar plantations established themselves as the authority both in name and in fact, although they were well under 10 percent of the entire population. If the coming of Captain Cook was the first stage of the beginning of assimilation towards the Caucasian standards, the annexation of 1898 and the Organic Act of 1900 meant the second stage of that assimilation for non-Caucasians who composed, by far, the majority of the new territory of the United States. In 1900, there were 25,700 Chinese, 39,656 Hawaiians, including 9,857 part-Hawaiians, 61,100 Japanese and 8,547 Caucasians on the islands. The total population stood at 154,001.

Chapter II THE UNITED STATES

The first Japanese recorded as having been to the United States are the eleven sailors who managed to return home in 1803. Records indicate that there were more lucky survivors of shipwrecks rescued to safety on both sides of the Pacific. A Spanish ship, for example, saved twelve such Japanese and took them to California in

1830. Commander James Glynn of the U.S.S. *Preble* recovered, by a show of firmness, twelve American sailors in 1849, who had drifted to Japan. In the 1850's there were more castaways recorded. Japan's isolation from the rest of the world for two centuries, except a limited trade with Holland and China, was still in effect when President Fillmore, in his third annual message delivered on December 6, 1852, pointed out the rude treatment that the shipwrecked Americans had to face in Japan. Following this message, he decided to send Commodore Matthew Perry to Japan. His two voyages to Japan with an impressive squadron, in 1853 and 1854, paved the way to the signing of the Commercial Treaty by the two governments in 1858, which was to provide the United States with the access to some Japanese ports. Similar treaties soon followed and were signed between Japan and Holland, Russia, Great Britain and France. It was not until 1866, however, that the Japanese government permitted its nationals to leave the country, and then only for one purpose: to study abroad. General immigration was still to be prohibited. It had been advocated in some quarters of Japan to seek knowledge among the Western nations—a necessity if Japan was to deal with them successfully—and some stowed away to the United States at the risk of death if caught.

The 1870 census showed fifty-five Japanese living in the United States—a dubious figure since, in 1868, a Dutchman named Schnell took some forty Japanese to California, and also in 1869 another group of similar size arrived in an attempt to establish a colony in El Dorado County, California. The Chinese population in California at the time of the census was already 49,277, a one-to-ten ratio with the Caucasians. In 1880, there were 75,132 Chinese in the state, maintaining the same one-to-ten ratio with the white majority. Japanese, on the other hand, were still an insignificant minority, eighty-six. Nationwide, there were 148 Japanese. The peak of Chinese immigration was achieved in 1882, when some 40,000 new arrivals reached the West Coast. The anti-Chinese agitation, which had started soon after California's statehood, also reached its peak that year in the form of Chinese Exclusion Law. It was only natural, then, for the Japanese government to take cautious measures and discourage its people from emigrating to the United States. Before 1891, in fact, Japanese immigration to the country never exceeded 1,000 a year. Even after that, the number did not exceed 2,000 annually until 1898.

Five years after the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Law, the first cry "Japs must go" was heard in San Francisco. Its leader, Dr. O'Donnel, though, failed in his propaganda since there were only 400 Japanese in the entire state. Most of them were engaged in domestic service and attended school. They were called 'school boys,' a term never applied to the Chinese immigrants. Between 1868 and 1884, a total of 1,361 passports was issued for those Japanese who wanted to go to America. As it was 1884 that labor emigration was legalized in Japan, these early arrivals are

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considered mostly students. In 1886, there were 237 students while there were 38 merchants and 47 laborers. In the 1890 census, the figure for Japanese was 2,039. In California, there were more than one million whites, 72,472 Chinese and 1,147 Japanese. During the following ten years, there was an average of 2,594 Japanese immigrants entering the country every year, bringing the total of the Japanese population to 24,326 at the time of the next census in 1900.

Prior to the turn of the century there was not much open manifestation of hostility against the Japanese immigrants, mainly due to two factors. To begin with, the Japanese population was small, only 24,000, and half of them arrived in 1900. A second reason that explains, if not completely, this lack of anti-Japanese agitation was the fact many of the Japanese in the United States were students, who presented no economic competition to the white majority. This trend, however, did not prove long-lasting as the history of Japanese immigration to the United States turned to the 20th century. For there were already some sporadic anti-Japanese agitations in San Francisco in the last decade of the 19th century.

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