

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ANTI-  
JAPANESE AGITATION IN THE  
UNITED STATES, VOL. XXXVII,  
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**RAYMOND LESLIE BUELL**

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RAYMOND LESLIE BUELL

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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ANTI-JAPANESE AGITATION IN THE UNITED STATES

### 1. *The Beginnings*

WHEN President Fillmore called the attention of the Congress of the United States to the rude treatment accorded shipwrecked mariners unhappily cast upon Japanese shores, he unknowingly opened up a problem which has already perplexed the western world for three-quarters of a century.<sup>1</sup> Before this time there had been no Oriental problem. It had been forestalled by the stern intolerance of Toyotomi Hideyoshi who, in the seventeenth century, banished all foreigners, whether priests or traders, from Japan, and commanded all Japanese, under penalty of death, to remain at home.

But the pressure of trade and of ideas perforce brought this isolation to an end. In 1853 the Black Ships of Commodore Perry steamed into Yedo Bay. Five years later Townsend Harris signed the first treaty between Japan and the United States. With these acts, Japan was placed in contact with the western world. Intercourse between nations in the past has usually been marred by discord. And in the case of Japan, the opportunity for misunderstanding has been increased by the factor of race.

Immigration was the first cause of friction between Japan and the United States. As early as 1851<sup>2</sup> a few shipwrecked Japanese were tossed upon the Pacific Coast. But the first actual immigrants were brought into this country by a Hollander

<sup>1</sup> Third annual message, December 6, 1852, *Messages and Papers of the President* (Bureau of National Literature edition), p. 2703. For the very early activities of Japanese abroad, see Chapman, *A History of California* (1921), chapter iv, "The Japanese Opportunity in the Pacific".

<sup>2</sup> Treat, *Japan and the United States* (1921), p. 253. For the opening of Japan to the western world, see the same writer, *The Early Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Japan 1853-1865* (1917); also Satow, *A Diplomat in Japan* (1921).

who, driven from the employ of the Japanese Court, sought refuge in America.<sup>1</sup> In 1880 there were only about one hundred and fifty Japanese in the entire country. But their number rapidly increased after the legalization of emigration by the Japanese government in 1885.<sup>2</sup> As early as 1889 some Japanese were employed as section hands at Portland. About the same time others gradually sifted into Vancouver and spread out along the Pacific Coast, entering the mines, the fisheries and the farms. Beginning with 1891, over a thousand Japanese entered America yearly, subject only to the restriction of the general immigration laws. In 1898, the number of immigrants was 2,000; two years later, it jumped to 12,000.

There were three reasons for Japanese emigration to America. The first was economic. Wages averaged about fourteen cents a day in Japan,<sup>3</sup> where the pressure of population had already made the food problem acute. Little wonder that stories of two-dollar-a-day wages in America led the Japanese to forsake the home of their ancestors! In fact, the greatest number of emigrants came from those provinces where agricultural conditions were the worst and where poverty was most widespread.

Secondly, Japanese emigration was caused by the labor shortage in California, which had arisen partly because of the fact that Chinese labor had been excluded by the Acts of 1882 and 1892. Negroes, Mexicans, Filipinos, Hindus, Porto-Ricans and Japanese were now eagerly sought after by California farmers.<sup>4</sup> According to one eye-witness, "568,943 acres of farm land were put out of cultivation. From Bakersfield to Redding, banks had mortgages on farm lands that could not be made productive because Chinese labor had been driven out".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Carey, *A History of Japanese Immigration*, unpublished manuscript taken from Japanese sources, furnished me by Dr. G. W. Hinman.

<sup>2</sup> Ichihashi, *Japanese Immigration, Its Status in California* (1916), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Yoshida, "Sources and Causes of Japanese Emigration," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 34, no. 2, p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (1909), pp. 384-385.

<sup>5</sup> Testimony of J. P. Irish, Hearings before Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, H. of R., *Japanese Immigration* (Government Printing Office, 1921), pp. 43-44. Hereafter cited as *Hearings*.



It was not until the year 1885 that the Japanese government authorized the emigration of Japanese. In that year it was permitted, but with express stipulation that the emigrants should never lose their allegiance to the Mikado. Each Japanese subject was required to register in his native prefecture, which he could leave only with the permission of the authorities. If he wished to go out of the country it was necessary to procure a passport which provided that he must return within three years.<sup>1</sup>

Based as it was upon a paternal feudalism, the Japanese government attempted to make certain that its emigrants abroad should creditably represent their fatherland, and that in case of destitution they should return home. With this purpose in view, the "Emigrants' Protection" Law was enacted by the Japanese parliament in 1896. It provided that every laborer leaving the country should have some responsible surety at home who could be compelled to provide for his care during sickness and, if necessary, for his return.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the excellent intentions of this law, it actually stimulated the emigration of Japanese to the United States. The requirements were so stringent that few laborers could individually meet them. Consequently, a number of emigration companies sprang up which provided every laborer with a surety, furnished him with transportation, and gave him a job at his destination. Working in connection with labor contractors in the United States, these companies built up a business of great profit. In order to regulate their activities, the government required a guarantee. It was necessary also that their foreign agents be approved. These emigration societies soon began to wield a tremendous power in Japan. The aggregate capital of twelve of them was 558,999 yen, and stock was held by the leading business men and politicians of the country.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rice, *Immigration of Japanese*, House Doc. No. 686, 56th Congress, 2d sess., May 14, 1900, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Third Report of the Commissioner of Labor on Hawaii*, Bulletin of Bureau of Labor, no. 66, September, 1906, p. 505.

<sup>3</sup> Rice, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Six of these companies maintained agents in the United States and Canada.

As a result, emigration to the United States and Hawaii increased tremendously. In the five years between 1899 and 1903 the number of emigrants going to foreign countries, excluding Korea and China, was 84,576. Eighty per cent went to the United States.<sup>1</sup> In the year 1900, four times as many Japanese entered America as in the previous year. Naturally this irritated the sensibilities of California—easily aroused after a riotous twenty-year struggle with Chinese immigrants.

California's attention was first attracted to Oriental labor in 1888 when a San Francisco shipowners' association manned several of its vessels with Japanese. In 1891 a Mr. Doyle, a former resident of Japan, came to San Francisco and proposed to bring in 5000 Japanese from the Hawaiian islands—a suggestion which was immediately protested by the city Trades' Council.<sup>2</sup> The first real protests against the Japanese were not made, however, until 1900. In March of that year symptoms of bubonic plague appeared in San Francisco. Immediately Mayor Phelan and the Board of Supervisors quarantined the Chinese and the Japanese quarters, but no other part of the city.<sup>3</sup> This discrimination led the Japanese to form the "Japanese Association of America" for the purpose of protecting their interests. Feeling was further heightened by a belief that stories of the plague were based on unfounded evidence, and that they were being circulated purely for political purposes.<sup>4</sup> Partly because of the excitement stirred up over the plague and partly because of the increased number of Japanese immigrants, a mass meeting was held in Metropolitan Hall, on May 7, under the auspices of the San Francisco Labor Council. After listening to addresses by Professor Ross, then of Stanford University, and Mayor Phelan (who later became

<sup>1</sup> Yoshida, *op. cit.*, pp. 160, 161.

<sup>2</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 20, 1905; special article by Walter MacArthur.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, March 7, 1900.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, May 30, 1900; editorial, "Phelan in the Rôle of a Fakir".

United States Senator), the meeting passed a resolution urging the extension of the Chinese Exclusion laws to include the Japanese.<sup>1</sup> In the same year, the State Labor Commissioner also referred to the sudden increase in Japanese laborers;<sup>2</sup> while Governor Henry T. Gage called the attention of the legislature to the "Japanese problem" in his message of January 8, 1901.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of this agitation, the Japanese government showed the conciliatory disposition which it has usually held toward American opinion, by amending the Emigration Act of 1896. In July, 1900, the Foreign Department announced that henceforth no passports whatever would be issued to Japanese coolies wishing to go to the United States.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the number of Japanese arrivals declined one-half in 1901.<sup>5</sup> This voluntary limitation was the first "Gentlemen's Agreement." However, it did not satisfy many elements in the State. In November, 1901, a Chinese Exclusion Convention was called in San Francisco by the Board of Supervisors. Its official purpose was to urge upon Congress the necessity of re-enacting the Chinese exclusion laws which were soon to expire. But it also adopted a resolution which recognized "in the character and rapidly increasing numbers of Japanese and other Asiatic immigrants a menace to the industrial interests of our people." Likewise, the American Federation of Labor, in its convention in San Francisco, November, 1904, demanded that the exclusion laws be applied to Japanese immigrants. However, there was no vigorous movement against the Japanese on the Pacific Coast until 1905. In order to understand this agitation, which for intensity recalled the days of Dennis Kearney and his stormy Sand-lotters, and very nearly involved the country in war, it is necessary to take some account of the political situation in California at this time. Partly because of the Chinese

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, May 8, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> *Ninth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1899-1900*, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 9, 1901.

<sup>4</sup> Statement of K. Uyeno, Japanese Consul-General, *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 5, 1905.

<sup>5</sup> From 12,626 in 1900 to 4,909 in 1901.