Producing Culturally Pluralist Nation: Teaching Japanese Brides American Domesticity

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Introduction

This thesis challenges the dominant notions of cultural pluralism that upheld the idea of American exceptionalism in the Cold War era. The pluralistic model of society became popular during WWII with the idea that the United States was fighting for democracy as a universal principle regardless of race. Out of the context of the war, the idea that the United States was “a harmonious nation made up of people from diverse ethnic, racial, national, and religious backgrounds” became the widely accepted ideology. Within the subsequent Cold War national ideology, cultural explanations came to replace biological theories of race: if racial differences are superficial cultural differences, culturally different people from all over the world could come to the United States and become assimilated and acculturated Americans. Given that Asia became an important site for the United States to secure its geopolitical hegemony in Cold War politics, the concept of cultural pluralism created the space where alleged “inassimilable” Asians could assimilate and acculturate into the nation. Indeed, achieving racial integration and becoming a democratic and morally superior nation was the nation’s challenge during the Cold War era. This thesis presents how Japanese war brides as “a problem for assimilation” were incorporated into the U.S. culturally pluralist nation.

The new melting pot problems continue to come to this country as an aftermath of war. The latest is assimilation of Japanese occupation brides. [. . . ] THE TENDENCY of United States occupation men to marry Japanese girls proved a surprise to many Americans in Japan, especially civilian girls with the occupation forces. They had believed the American men were merely having flirtations with the doll-like Japanese. But soon a rush to the altar began. Chief opponents of this were the mothers of the
Japanese brides. *They foresaw unhappiness* for their daughters in the United States because of the discrimination they would face.¹

The 1948 Washington Post article reported Japanese brides to be a problem for the U.S. nation. Americans in Japan expected American men to be “merely having flirtations with the doll-like Japanese” during the occupation; they “surprisingly” became American soldiers’ wives. These brides became the subject of the U.S. national problem to solve in terms of the idea of assimilation — that is, whether they could “melt into” the nation as American national subjects in the postwar context.

The following 1952 article which was featured in the *Saturday Evening Post*, also expressed the continuing fear of how all these Japanese brides would fit into U.S. society. These brides received specific attention under the question of whether they could become American wives and mothers.

Nothing much but time and bitter experience can overcome great hazards like language difficulty, racial question marks and the separation of truth about America from the dream of America as expounded by homesick soldiers and distorted movies. But some Americans in Japan have felt that the least which could be done for these potential newcomers was to give them a little idea of how to get along in their new homes. One result was the brides’ schools.²

Brides’ schools run by the Red Cross were established out of the tremendous fear of whether thousands of Japanese brides could fit into American homes. With the idea of “racial question marks,” particularly defined by their immorality and inferiority, Japanese girls’ suitability for American wifehood and motherhood was questionable. Within this kind of postwar context, the bride school became the solution for turning these Japanese women into potential American wives and mothers.

The school was established and defined as “helping” Japanese brides to know American wifehood and domesticity and succeed in their marriages. A *New York Times* article published in 1954 introduced American public to the bride school operated in Japan.
The strange names — half Japanese and half American — exemplify the purpose of the class: to teach young Japanese girls how to make happy homes for their American husbands upon the couples’ return to the United States. [. . .] The lessons give the girls the confidence and training they need to make their marriage successful.³

The bride school was articulated as teaching and training for Japanese brides to make happy homes for their American husbands. The schools’ volunteer women also came to see the project as “helping” these brides overcome the “racial barriers” and fit into American society and domesticity. This thesis argues that the privatized sphere of domesticity became a site of domination and colonization in the context of postwar U.S.-Japan relations at the beginning of Cold War. I conceptualize domesticity — the site for Japanese women to become American wife and mother — not as private and personal, but as central and political. In doing so, this essay sheds light on American women’s role in the colonial project of “assimilation” of Japanese women given that American women tend to become invisible from political and colonial projects and specifically absent from the involvement of American occupation of Japan.

In doing so, this paper conceptualizes ideas of “American housewife, family and domesticity” as a site that differentially but relationally constructs Japanese brides and American wives. At one session, a bride school president concluded the meeting articulating the school in this way:

There is no way to measure how much effective help we might be giving these brides as they leave us, if we could let it be known widely in America that close contacts with these girls have brought to us understanding and a sympathetic love that breaks through all racial barriers.⁴

Indeed, the bride school was conceived of as an American benevolent project to help these girls. Yet, I wonder how these bride school projects emerged right after the war and when the United States still occupied Japan. In the postwar context, where both American military personnel and Japanese citizens likely regarded each other as enemy figures, why and how did American women become benevolent teachers who taught Japanese women American ways of domesticity? Why and how did the bride schools appear as helping and teach-
ing rather than forced inculcation? This thesis understands the Japanese war bride difference as a strategy of power to produce premise of universal ideas, especially the notion of gender freedom and equality that sustained the superiority of American wives. With this, I am interested in how the bride school teaching depoliticized and naturalized understandings of what American domesticity and family / gender relations are always in relation to what Japanese ways are.

I. Brides’ Schools as a Possible Solution to Otherwise Tragic Marriages

Brides’ school was rooted in the volunteer works initially held by the Christian Woman’s Association of Tokyo. The association started the volunteer work in Tokyo in 1948 to help Japanese brides adjust to American society and domesticity. Public Law 717 in 1950, Public Law 6 in 1951, and the 1952 McCarran Walter Act, which removed the racial restriction for marriages, triggered a number of marriages between American men and Japanese women. The Army took up the Christian association’s idea and asked the Red Cross to establish the brides’ schools to teach Japanese wives American ways of life. The military asked the Red Cross because:

“The military feels that because this school proved itself to be so beneficial it now asks that Red Cross volunteer units to set up similar activities wherever possible throughout the Far East Theater of Operations.

“. . . . . . It is hoped that each volunteer group will undertake the planning and conducting of such a school as this had become an important way that we, as Americans, can assist in preparing these Japanese brides for their new life in the United States.”

The Army saw women’s organizations assisting Japanese brides beneficial and started a joint force of the Christian woman’s association and the Red Cross in Yokohama in 1951. The American consulate sent invitation letters to the servicemen who had married Japanese women and also distributed them through the military units.
The military requested schools, run by the Red Cross, expanded throughout Japan in the 1950s. Since the first school started in 1951, the number of schools and graduates shifted as below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. Schools</th>
<th>No. Graduates</th>
<th>No. Volunteers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>326</td>
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<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>390</td>
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<td>1954</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>563</td>
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<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1,122</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>885</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>3,979</td>
<td>2,474</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of the schools and graduates was at peak in the mid-50s. The schools had a unified system, held usually twice a year — spring and fall. They had edited and revised the textbook — a thick volume resembling a telephone directory — throughout the years. As of 1955, the text book included Japanese translation in addition to English originals and consisted of 243 pages. The class usually covered American culture and customs, religion, cooking, nursing and child care, American history and geography, information on passports and visas, grooming, life in American home and social life in America. These topics were usually taught for eight weeks and there was a graduation ceremony giving a certificate to prove their completion of the program at the end of the courses. The schools were held inside of the camps, usually at the chapel. It was sometimes held in teachers’ homes, especially in the cooking class due to the need for kitchens, and also homemaking class to show what an “American home” looked like.

The military covered the basic costs for schools so it was practically free for Japanese brides. The military provided classrooms, printing of brides’ school books, interpreters, speakers, posters, and radio and newspaper publicity. The rest was financed by the volunteers, volunteer clubs, and religious groups and the Red Cross. The majority of class teachers consisted of military personnel’s wives. The Red Cross sometimes invited volunteer teachers from other areas; the American Embassy and educational groups such as Fulbright commission.

While the bride school was perceived as a Red Cross volunteer project, it was in actuality a military project. The military not only funded the schools but it intended to produce Japanese brides who could assist their American soldier husbands. To make sure Japanese girls learned American wifehood and motherhood, the school asked their husbands to watch them and report back, “if [his] wife does not understand any subject or is getting the wrong impression.” The schools’ first aim was also articulated as an effort “to help the girls and their husbands establish a good and happy home” and “to introduce [Japanese girls] to American customs and manners and the American way of life.” The school’s purpose was to help Japanese girls to “make a happy home” for their American husbands. With completion of the school session, “Japanese girls” graduated from the school with their husband.
Before analyzing the Red Cross’s bride school project, I first situate the bride school mission within the larger context of the relationship between the U.S. military and the Red Cross within the international politics. While the International Convention of the Red Cross (ICRC) announced that its mission was in assisting war victims and that the Red Cross activities were impartial and neutral humanitarian missions, Nicholas O Berry critically points out that the ICRC was complicit with America and its allies’ military activities by mediating and covering up the violence of war.20 David P. Forsythe argues that the ICRC reorders the morality for international relations during the Cold War and points out that the United States and its allies used the ICRC’s moral organization for their military purposes.21 It is important to understand the Red Cross “benevolent” activity of establishing the bride schools within the larger U.S. military activities of the occupation. The U.S. military asserts the bride school as its activity of “charity” along with its mass production of the “tragic” marriages between American soldiers and Japanese women.

The bride schools sponsored by the military came out of the strong belief that the marriages between Japanese brides and American soldiers were doomed to be failures. The school started on March 26 in 1951 at the chapel center in Tokyo and had a meeting on May 25 1951 at the end of the session. In the meeting, in addition to eight chairmen of the school, some volunteers and interpreters exchanged their opinions and comments about the school.

Figure 4.2 Graduation Ceremony

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The opinion exchange articulated that the brides’ school was captured as a possible solution for otherwise tragic marriages between American husbands and Japanese women. Initially, some of these volunteers even doubted the legitimacy of these marriages and Japanese women becoming American wives. As a volunteer worker opined,

I think I have been in the narrow-minded category, too. When I was asked to help with the school I said I did not want to any part in it, that I had five sons and it would break my heart if one of them should marry a Japanese girl.\textsuperscript{23}

This woman’s remark suggests that Japanese women were not even considered assist-able and loveable subjects whom American volunteers would want to help. Another American volunteer expressed that she started the volunteer work with the idea that “a mixed marriage could end only in tragedy.”

Most of us were brought up to feel that a mixed marriage could end only in tragedy, and when we were in school I think most of our professor had the same feeling.\textsuperscript{24}

In sum, the bride school project was carried out with the idea that marriages between American GIs and Japanese girls were going to be otherwise “unsuccessful” and that Japanese women were not even fit to enter into these marriages.

While marriages between American soldiers and Japanese women were “doomed to fail” because of their racial difference, the school project came to explain their racial difference as cultural. The idea that these Japanese brides can “learn” American ways animated the brides’ school project. The Red Cross explained its school project as such:

Chopsticks to knife and fork, flowing kimono to Western chic, a jackknife bow to warm handclap -even an un-Japanese kiss. That’s how far daughters of Nippon break with customs a thousand years old after learning to make homes for their new American husbands in brides’ schools conducted in Japan by the American Red Cross.\textsuperscript{25}

Some scholars in the field of Cold War studies argue that the cultural explana-
tion of human differences was used for Cold War politics within the U.S. attempt to represent itself as a democratic and humanitarian nation for people all over the world regardless of race. Within the popular idea of assimilation and acculturation in the Cold War context, brides’ school projects tended to be captured as a site to teach American domesticity to Japanese brides and considered that they can learn American ways by acquiring American cultural values. More importantly, however, it was the Cold War U.S. empire that brought about the need to overcome racism through the bride school projects. Japanese women were a threat to the then popular idea of miscegenation so that they were “impossible subjects” to become American wives. Marriages between American soldiers and Japanese women happened out of occupation, and how these brides could be incorporated into the nation became the nation’s challenge at the shifting moment from wartime politics to Cold War politics. Rather than whether Japanese brides could overcome racial barriers, the question became whether the U.S. nation can overcome racism and incorporate Japanese brides.

II. New Postwar U.S.-Japan Alliance: The United States would Overcome Racial Barriers in Cold War Politics

The bride school, launched as a military project in 1951, was presented as a potential solution for otherwise tragic marriages. Soon after the school started, volunteer women saw their activities as helping these women to overcome “racial barriers” in the United States. In the meeting held in May 25, 1951, a volunteer remarked about her engagement in school activities:

I think many of us now have decided that we were mistaken and that the only way to get a United Nations spirit the world over is to forget that there are such differences and to realize that there can be successful inter-marriage, regardless of differences in race. As we send some of these girls we have met here over to the United States and through them show some of the people in the United States that Japanese and those of different races are fundamentally the same and that we can get along together, perhaps it will help.

These volunteer women recognized their activities as support for the racially-different brides to be able to break the racial barrier and succeed in their inter-
racial marriage. American woman’s engagement with bride school project can also be read productively as an allegory for the reconstruction of a new relationship between the United States and Japan. An American woman volunteer remarked that “we can get along together” at the new era of the Cold War. At the end of the meeting, another woman concluded that the bride school gave a hand to these impossible brides to “break through all racial barriers.”

There is no way to measure how much effective help we might be giving these brides as they leave us, if we could let it be known widely in America that close contacts with these girls have brought to us understanding and a sympathetic love that breaks through all racial barriers.29

Within the Cold War framework, Japanese brides became “hopes” who can overcome racial barriers, just as Japan could become a friend of the United States as allies of Cold War.

Japanese brides stood for the postwar Japan as a new nation of the allied for the United States in Cold War politics. Christina Klein made a significant argument that “the mixed-race families offered a way to imagine Americans overcoming the ingrained racism that so threatened U.S. foreign policy goals in Asia” during the Cold War.30 At the beginning of the Cold War, Japan became the first important nation for the United States to expand the U.S. geopolitical hegemony over Asia. Given that family entails emotional unity with internally structured hierarchies of difference, it serves for a model of Cold War “free world” community “that included Western and non-Western, developed and underdeveloped, established and newly created nations.”31 The visibility of the Japanese brides could be understood within this framework; Japanese girls who married American GIs became symbolic figures who potentially overcome the racial barriers in the United States in the way in which Japan overcome racial barriers and become a U.S. ally during the Cold War.

Japanese girls who potentially overcome the racial barriers were also read as those who “want to learn American domesticity” within the framework of U.S. cultural pluralism. For example, a director in the bride school, Mrs. Frank O. Blake, gave a speech about the bride school project as “love” and mentioned, “It represented the regular attendance by the brides and their eager attentiveness; their willingness and honest wish to master American ways and
Another director praised Japanese brides as those who were eager to learn everything American.

Though the new ways are indeed strange, if not impossible, these students are eager to learn them; class attendance is nearly perfect, and few flunk the course. In the almost nine years since the war ended, uniformed Americans have become commonplace in the Japanese scene, and Japanese girls observe Western manners everywhere even if they find them hard to understand. But they try.

“What are you most interested in?” is a question asked in the ARC school application. Typical of the spirit of these young ladies is the answer of a brand new bride, “Everything American.”

She perceived the success of the school by viewing Japanese brides as those who want to learn everything American. In her speech, I liken Japanese girls’ spirits of wanting to learn everything American to Japan’s spirits of wanting to learn Western manners in the Cold War moment. Another story released in the Red Cross newspaper also emphasized that the students are the ones who want to learn “our cooking and the way to keep an American house.”

She wants to learn our cooking and the way to keep an American house. She has heard about our modern appliances and wants to see them. In many instances since her marriage, she and her husband are still living Japanese style. Therefore, the art for making beds, modern bathrooms and kitchen are of great interest. Through the kindness of volunteer dependents, the Japanese bride is invited into their homes for this practical experience.

Japanese women’s mindset, “want[ing] to learn,” was something necessary for the U.S. Army and Red Cross: Japanese women “who want to learn” makes the bride school project as “help” and “love” but not “force” and “power.” Indeed, Japanese women who want to learn everything American were the perfect subjects at the beginning of the Cold War: Within the framework that these Japanese girls stood for the postwar Japan, the discourse of these girls offered to envision Japan’s willingness to learn American ways under the U.S. occupation over Japan. The idea of Japan’s willingness effectively made the U.S. occupation of Japan American benevolent liberation and rehabilitation,
and not domination and exploitation.

III. “We Are Ambassadors of the United States”: Teaching Modern and Democratic Ways of Domesticity

As the bride school itself was captured as a symbol for the new national relation in Cold War politics, women volunteers gained their identity as ambassadors between the United States and Japan. A woman director described the role of the bride school in this way.

The role of the American Red Cross volunteer in the Far Eastern Area is outstandingly expressed in brides’ schools. They are a continuous, round-the-year project, the results of which can be a strong link between Japan and the United States for generations. This enormous Red Cross volunteer effort represents an unbroken chain of dependent wives who have come and gone from the Far East over the past several years.35

Within the context of the beginning of the Cold War, these women identified themselves as “grass-roots ambassadors” who build new friendship with Japanese girls. In this sense, the bride school project was also articulated as “love.” One of the directors of the Red Cross explained what the diploma that Japanese brides received in bride schools stood for as: “It represented love; first, the kind of love that brought about the Japanese American marriage, meeting and overcoming many obstacles, and second, the kind of love the members of the Red Cross and the other volunteers manifested in wishing to teach, to lead and to help.”36 Indeed, the bride school project came to be expressed as love and friendship that American volunteer wives provided Japanese girls whose fitness for American domesticity was deemed questionable.

It is also interesting to note that American women themselves thought that they overcame racial barriers and came to love Japanese girls through the school project. A woman who had once harbored hatred against the idea that her son would have a Japanese bride expressed how she came to love Japanese brides:

But by the time I had been teaching these girls eight weeks I was admitting that I could understand why the American boys fell in love with such lovely girls. I cannot help saying here that I would enjoy having one
of them as my own daughter-in-law. They are a fine lot of girls and I thoroughly enjoyed my experience in teaching and helping them adjust to American ways.37

By overcoming racial hatred, especially strengthened during the war, women volunteers gained their identity as ambassadors who overcame racism and “loved” Japanese brides. They recognized their activities as establishing friendship with Japan / Japanese brides at the beginning of Cold War.

Then, did this love mitigate hierarchy between colonizer / victor and colonized / defeated? Did this love and sisterhood make both Japanese girls and American volunteers overcome racial barriers? Did American women volunteers and Japanese girls fight against male dominance together? I argue that the love and sisterhood between American women volunteers and Japanese girls further articulate the racial differences and produce the hierarchy allowing American wives to be superior, modern and democratic and Japanese wives to be inferior, traditional and feudalistic. Indeed, the process of how to learn everything American was learning what is American. Here, I also argue that American wives gained superior status as their Cold War identity through the bride school project. By articulating the school project as a friendship building and loving project, American volunteers gained superior, modern, and democratic identity through Japanese domesticity as unfree, male dominant, and hierarchical.

Given that homemaking class was one of the main curricula in bride school, the idea of cooking and household became a site to define the superiority of American domesticity. In homemaking class, a teacher articulated what American domesticity was in this manner.

Some of you are probably thinking, “Why, my grandmother, and my mother and I have done the cleaning and the washing and the cooking for years; what’s so different about that?” The biggest difference is that [. . . ], American women try to plan not to have to do them all every day. For example, most girls in America who have washing machines will wash just once a week — it saves us time and money and it’s often a long way to the store; maybe we even plan to do a lot of cooking at one time to save fuel and time, and with a refrigerator to store food in, that is possible.38
American domesticity was defined by modern technologies such as a vacuum cleaner, a refrigerator, and a washing machine. These technologies defined the superiority of American domesticity. These tools that make homemaking easier were also tied to the idea of American housewives who can enjoy their freedom. In homemaking class, while Japanese brides learned how to use ovens, toasters, coffee makers, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, and so on, they also learned that American wives can enjoy freedom with the modern appliances while Japanese wives were enslaved all day doing hard work.

By teaching Japanese brides how to use these technologies, American volunteers displayed their superior identity as American wives. Interestingly, in the report of the classes, American teachers emphasized Japanese brides’ inability to use these appliances rather than anything else. For example, in the meeting held in May of 1951, a volunteer reported; “[Japanese girls] were wondering how they could make some of the things learned in the cooking class in their Japanese homes, because they have no stoves with ovens which we consider so necessary to good cooking.”39 This comment expressed Japanese girls’ inability to do good cooking because modern technology was not available in Japanese domestic culture. The superiority of American domesticity is confirmed with the idea of inferiority of Japanese domesticity defined by traditional ways of cooking. Another volunteer reported about her class in 1954 as such: “[T]hey learn how much easier cooking can be with an electric oven instead of the smoky hibachi (charcoal burner), a pressure cooker’s advantage over an okama (rice steamer).”40 By perceiving that Japanese domestic culture enslaves wives who lacked modern tools, American domesticity and wifehood became superior and liberated.

Family relations, especially bridehood and in-law relationships, also became a site to define American superiority: American bridehood and in-law relationship was narrated as egalitarian and Japanese family relation as hierarchical and feudalistic.

Undoubtedly you have learned by this time that your husband’s mother does not hold the same traditional position in American as she would in Japan, nor will you, as a member of her household. You will be treated more as an equal member of the family than you have been trained to expect in a Japanese household. As an example, the order of precedence for
taking a bath in a Japanese home is first the father, then the sons in order of age, mother, daughters, in order of age, then the servants. In an American household, there is no order of precedence and if the bathroom isn’t in use, anyone may use it.\textsuperscript{41}

In-law relations also endorsed the idea of American superiority narrated as equal. In doing so, American “equal” family relation becomes possible compared to Japanese family relations, or more to say, defined by “unequal” Japanese family relations. By defining Japanese family relation as hierarchical and unequal, especially Japanese women oppressed in patriarchal Japanese family system, the American wife became those who enjoy freedom, equality and independence inside of the family. Again, this understanding nicely serves to present American women as liberators rather than dominators. This is how Japanese girls became “loveable” subjects through the bride school project — Japanese girls who produce American family and wife as free and equal. In doing so, American volunteer women came to love these belated girls “who can eventually become American wives” and identified themselves as ambassadors who embody and teach about American freedom and equality.

In addition, the idea of relationship between men and women defined superiority of American family and wifehood. In home management class, their teaching of woman’s relations with men highlighted the idea of American “courtesies by men” which are supposedly not available in Japan.

As you have found out in your years or months of marriage to an American man, the behavior of an average American man toward women is different from Japanese men to Japanese women. Women in the United States are given courtesies by men — even strange men — and they are accepted as a matter of course. A strange man may open a door to a public building for you, or pick up something you have dropped. These attentions should be accepted graciously but impersonally. When they are offered, simply smile, say “thank you” and go about your way. It is not necessary to be drawn into conversation; that is not expected. American men take their wives to most parties. There are stag parties, just for men, but these are the exceptions, not the rule.\textsuperscript{42}

American gender relations between women and men were articulated in cour-
ties by men such as opening the door, picking up something and taking their wives to most parties. “Nicest” American gender relations were defined by the idea that Japanese men looked down upon women and these men’s courtesies were unavailable in Japanese gender relations.

Indeed, bride school itself became visible through Japanese brides who were liberated from Japanese male dominant tradition. For example, the 1954 *New York Times* article introduced what bride school taught Japanese brides:

> The brides are also told that when there are guests in the house they don’t have to act like maids, to bow and scrape and stay in the kitchen as their sisters and mothers and grandmothers must do. Equality between the sexes is not stressed, but every bride-student realizes at the end of the course that in America she will no longer be a second-class citizen just because of her sex.43

Gender relations became a site where the United States claimed its superiority in Cold War politics. Lisa Yoneyama argues that stories of Japanese women’s liberation were framed “within the binary logic of gender relations between Japanese men and women.”44 Japanese women became victims of only Japanese male dominant culture and patriarchy, but not victims of racism and colonialism by the West, especially the United States. Japanese women’s liberation was recast just as “achieving equality and freedom in conjugal relations within an imagined bourgeois domesticity.”45 Yoneyama calls this logic “Cold War feminism.” This logic worked well within the Cold War U.S. empire which tried to represent the U.S. occupation of Japan as liberation and rehabilitation, but not domination and exploitation. I argue that the bride school project became a site that articulated only Japanese wives as victims of Japanese patriarchy and male dominant tradition. In doing so, American wives gained their superior identity as women who enjoy freedom and independence.

This idea of gender equality and freedom was indeed embedded in the narratives of Japanese brides of their life stories. When Japanese brides explained how they adjusted to American wifehood, they highlighted that they learned “equality between wife and husband” as a proof of their adjustment to American wifehood. A bride, Kazuko Umezu Stout narrated about American wife-
Here in America, a wife is free to work outside the home enjoying independence but in Japan, a newly wedded shy young wife is rarely free. The young wife lives with her mother-in-law and there the mother-in-law with her rules the home. Our two cultures are centuries apart in time as well as space.46

As the above statement saying “A wife is free to work outside the home enjoying independence” in America while in Japan, a wife is unfree and subordinate to her mother-in-law, Stout illustrated that wives’ freedom and independence are only obtainable in the United States. Here, her statement highlighted the sense of time embedded in the idea of two cultures of the United States and Japan: While the United States where accomplished freedom and equality was defined by advanced sense of time, Japan where only existed traditional ways of life was defined by lagged sense of time.

By referring to Japan as a place where wives’ freedom and independence are unimaginable, Stout represents herself as someone who has adjusted to American wifehood and has acquired freedom and independence in the United States.

I told her [my sister], in America women are free to speak their minds. A freedom I indulge in frequently in my own home . . . They [my sister and her husband] were going home to Japan with a culture centuries old and full of ceremony and formal tradition with its careful attention to the smallest of details.47

Through her narrative in which she indulges in freedom and independence in the United States, Stout herself becomes a subject who “would-have-been unfree,” obeying the mother-in-law and exposing herself to centuries old traditional culture and ceremonies. These “would-have-been” narratives became prominent in that women’s “authentic voices” lend credit to the idea that free and independent lives as wives were only available in the United States. Ethnic Studies Scholar Yen Le Espiritu finds the refugees’ narrative of “would-have-been” endorses the idea of better life in the United States. She argues, “the ‘would-have-beens’ are the most powerful in communicating the allures of the
United States because they assume the form of a testimonial — a looking back from individuals who have tasted life on the ‘other side.’” Her argument was specific to the case of Vietnamese refugees, but is helpful to understand that Japanese brides’ narratives in involving “would-have-been unfree in Japan” became effective discourses that endorse not only “worse” lives in Japan but also confirm freedom which is only available in the United States.

Another woman, Toshiko, attended the bride school in Tokyo in 1954. She vividly remembers that she was impressed by learning how to use all the “modern appliances” such as ovens, irons, washing machines, and vacuum cleaners. Along with learning how to use all these appliances, she admired the “cool” and “kind” American housewives who taught her how to use all these modern appliances. Here, again, the women volunteers were narrated as “cool” and “kind” teachers along with the idea of modernity. When she moved to the United States, her husband bought her washing machine, vacuum cleaner and so on that she learned how to use in bride school. She thought that she could do household chores much easier. She explained that she could have used a broom and washing board that would have taken more time to clean the household if she were in Japan. Her narrative about households also entails the idea of “would-have been” which credits American wives’ freedom which is only available in the United States.

The idea that Japanese brides “would-have-been slaves” if they were in Japan also became powerful discourses in the postwar U.S. media. For example, the article titled “Pursuit of Happiness” published in 1955 carries the story of a Japanese war bride, Sachiko. Sachiko became visible endorsing her “would-have-been” slaveness within Japanese domesticity that credits American liberated wifehood. It appeared in this way.

When asked if she wants to go back to Japan, Sachiko laughs mischievously and cries, “Oh no! I not answer that question. I not dumb. Japan I be slave. Cold water. Work all day. No rugs on floor. I stay here.” Sachiko’s idea of “would-be-slave in Japan” endorsed the notion of freedom that American wives enjoy.

Japanese brides who defined American domesticity as free and gender relations as equal became perfect objects of American Cold War national fanta-
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Japanese brides’ “would-have-been” narratives endorsed the idea that equality and freedom are only available in the United States. “Japanese war brides” precisely became objects of “the U.S. rescue fantasies” at the moment that America was striving for racial integration and cultural pluralism at the beginning of Cold War. The rhetoric transformed Japanese brides from problematic subjects of assimilation to the liberated and American volunteers from (possibly) dominators to benevolent teachers and freedom providers. Seen as those who were problematic subjects facing American racism, Japanese women served to represent the United States as a racially and culturally pluralist nation by becoming “American wives who enjoy freedom and equality at home.” As Caroline Chung Simpson explains, “Japanese war bride” became a prototype of model minority to demonstrate American pluralism, they were indeed incorporated into the nation as “belated subjects” as American wives. In so doing, “Japanese war brides” unwittingly became “imperial subjects” who proved American superiority of not only domesticity but its nation itself as culturally pluralist.

IV. Conclusion

This thesis closely pays attention to cultural differences embedded in the idea of the United States as a culturally pluralist nation. I view the bride school run by the Red Cross sponsored by the U.S. military from the early to mid-1950s throughout Japan as a place where the occupiers taught American ways of life to Japanese brides. I argue that the idea of gender freedom and equality became key concepts that defined the superiority of American wives whom Japanese brides should imitate. Within this idea, Japanese women’s interviews showed that they used the concept of gender freedom and equality as proof of their assimilation and acculturation to the United States. Along with this notion, the American volunteer women articulated that Japanese women were enslaved wives to their husbands within the Japanese feudalist patriarchy. The bride school situated them as Japanese brides who “would” be liberated and become like American wives. Their belatedness is a valuable and necessary component for the bride school as well as the United States to become an advanced and benevolent project and nation.
Notes


2 Lindsay, “Marriage Melting Pot,” 27.


4 “The Japanese Brides’ School of 1951, Held Under the Auspices of the Christian Woman’s Association of the Tokyo Area,” May 25, 1951, RG 200, box 1,280, file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.

5 To answer these questions, I rely on Denise Ferreira da Silva’s theory of “analytics of racinality.”

6 To support Japanese brides, there was a comprehensive citizenship training course held by the American Legion in Tokyo area around the same time.

7 “To: Chairman of Volunteers from Office of Volunteers, Japanese — Philippine — Okinawa — Brides Schools” September 20, 1956, RG 200, Box 1,280, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.

8 The 1955 Far East Review reported that it was successful and since then, the school project under Red Cross leadership spread not only throughout Japan, but also Okinawa and Philippines.

9 “Brides’ Schools,” September 20, 1955, RG 200, Box 1,280, American National Red Cross, NA.


11 “Brides’ Schools,” RG 200 Box 1,280, Sep 20, 1955, American National Red Cross, NA.

12 The commanding officer’s support was necessary for holding the schools at the military bases.

13 “Minutes of Meeting on Brides Schools,” August 19, 1957; “Washington Heights Civilian Club,” RG 200 Box 1,280, file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.

14 ARC Hazel Braugh Records Center, VA September 20, 1956, American National Red Cross, NA.

15 In some classes, interpreters were allocated: These interpreters were usually previous graduates of Bride Schools and Japanese wives who have lived in the United States.

16 “Minutes of Meeting on Brides Schools,” August 19, 1957; “Washington Heights Civilian Club,” RG 200 Box 1,280 file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.

17 Brochure, July 6, 1954, RG 200, Box 1,280, file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files,
American National Red Cross, NA.

18 Brochure, July 6, 1954, RG 200, Box 1,280, file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.


21 Forsythe, The Humanitarians: The International Committee of the Red Cross, 52, 54.

22 Interpreters were either Nisei or Japanese who were already familiar with the class materials.

23 “The Japanese Brides’ School of 1951, Held Under the Auspices of the Christian Woman’s Association of the Tokyo Area,” May 25, 1951, RG 200, box 1,280, file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.

24 “The Japanese Brides’ School of 1951, Held Under the Auspices of the Christian Woman’s Association of the Tokyo Area,” May 25, 1951, RG 200, box 1,280, file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.

25 “American Red Cross, Public Information Office, Tokyo, Japan,” April 20, 1954, RG 200, Box 1,280, file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.

26 While cultural explanation of human differences in attempt to replace the theories of biological fundamental differences existed since the 1920, here, I do not argue when and how cultural explanation replaced for biological theories, but only point to that cultural explanation for race came to be used for the U.S. Cold War ideological strategy.


28 “The Japanese Brides’ School of 1951, Held Under the Auspices of the Christian Woman’s Association of the Tokyo Area,” May 25, 1951, RG 200, box 1,280, file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.


31 Ibid.

32 RG 200 Box 1,280 file 618.4 Red Cross Central Files, American National Red
Cross, NA.

33 “American Red Cross, Public Information Office, Tokyo, Japan,” April 20, 1954, RG 200 Box 1,280, file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA. Emphasis Mine.

34 ARC Hazel Braugh Records Center, VA September 20, 1956. Emphasis Mine.

35 ARC Hazel Braugh Records Center, VA. September 20, 1956.

36 “Excerpt from report from Mrs. Frank O. Blake, Director, Volunteer Services,” July 1953, Box 1280 RG 200, American Red Cross, Far Eastern Area, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.

37 “The Japanese Brides’ School of 1951, Held Under the Auspices of the Christian Woman’s Association of the Tokyo Area,” May 25, 1951, RG 200, box 1,280, file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.

38 “The Japanese Brides’ School of 1951, Held Under the Auspices of the Christian Woman’s Association of the Tokyo Area,” May 25, 1951, RG 200, box 1,280, file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.

39 “The Japanese Brides’ School of 1951, Held Under the Auspices of the Christian Woman’s Association of the Tokyo Area,” May 25, 1951, RG 200, box 1,280, file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.

40 “American Red Cross, Public Information Office, Tokyo, Japan,” April 20, 1954, RG 200, Box 1,280, file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.

41 “Camp Kokura Brides’ School Handbook, 1956,” RG 200, box 1,280, file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.

42 “Introduction to Home Management Course’ in Brides’ School handbook, 1954,” RG 200, box 1,280, file 618.4, Red Cross Central Files, American National Red Cross, NA.


45 Ibid.

46 Kazuko U. Stout, “To Mother, My Independence Translated to Selfishness,” The Olympian, April 10, 1983.

47 Kazuko U. Stout, “To Mother, My Independence Translated to Selfishness,” The Olympian, April 10, 1983.


49 Toshiko (pseudonym), interview by author, (telephone interview) San Diego,


51 Espiritu argues that Vietnamese refugees became objects of the U.S. rescue fantasies as that to which the United States became “moral authority of U.S. leadership on world stage” and “rescue refugees” produced by Vietnamese war.