

including generous donations and loans, free meals for the poor and elderly, and the enforcement of unwritten law and order within the immigrant society.⁸⁹ Often, the crime syndicates placed Japanese association affiliates under their thumb, as they habitually manipulated association leaders with money and the threat of violence.⁹⁰

However, moral reform was ultimately doomed for another reason: the subsiding of the organized anti-Japanese movement. During the early 1920s, the U.S. Supreme Court categorically ruled the Japanese to be an inadmissible race that deserved neither citizenship, land ownership, nor agricultural tenancy.⁹¹ By classifying the Japanese as racial pariahs along with the Chinese and other Asians in no uncertain terms, the court thus nullified the foundations of the Issei's reformist endeavors. So different were the Japanese from the white race that no moral uplift or cultural assimilation could overcome the chasm. Although elite Issei did not discard their sense of superiority to the Chinese and compatibility with the whites, the American judicial system declared the Sinified state of the Japanese to be simply a matter of their "Mongolian" origin—one that could neither be discarded nor covered by cultural changes or assimilation. Symbolizing the decisive triumph of racial exclusion, the National Origins Act of 1924 dealt the coup de grace to transnational collaboration in immigrant control, since its ban on immigration from Japan deprived the Japanese associations of their delegated administrative functions and state-authorized disciplining power. Then, in April 1926, with the formal severance of their relations with Japanese diplomats, the Japanese associations found their control network and their influence collapsing rapidly within the ethnic community.⁹²

Yet, convergences and divergences among Japanese in the United States, and between them and people of Japan, were more complicated than the relations revolving merely around the networks of the Japanese associations and the questions of immigrant moral reform and assimilation. Institutionalized racism provided another crucial context, in which a different kind of social formation transpired within the American West and between the two empires during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Unlike the re-form of the immigrant masses, which aimed to construct a community of civilized citizen-subjects according to a modernizationist hierarchy of class and culture, the simultaneous development represented the making of new relations of power in terms of the wholly different logic among three racial(ized) groups—America's Japanese minority, American whites, and imperial Japanese—in a transnational space.

3

Zaibei Doho

Racial Exclusion and the Making of an American Minority

One week before the National Origins Act of 1924 effected the complete ban on Japanese immigration, the *Nichibei Shimbun* of San Francisco elucidated how Japanese residents in the American West had come to form a group distinct from their compatriots in Japan. In response to a call for returning to the bosom of the caring homeland from the anti-Japanese attitude of the United States, an Issei writer hinted at a collective world view that was taking shape in Japanese America: "One sympathetic poet in the motherland . . . urges [us] to come back home quietly, as [the people of Japan] are ready to embrace us with open arms and provide for [us] by sharing and sharing alike." While stressing how grateful Issei were for their "sincere sympathy," the editorial added, "But you see, the Japanese in America have reasons not to leave this place, and that is what we want the people of Japan to understand."¹

As shown by such statements, the first two decades of the twentieth century ushered in the emergence of a community of "the Japanese in America" (*zaibei doho*). That diasporic community evolved around a unique identity, which not only transcended class and intellectual differences among the immigrants but also broke with the Japanese back home. Unlike the collaboration between state officials and Issei elites, this nascent identity did not hinge on the orthodox notion of Japaneseness that was meant to serve the project of modern nation-building on both sides of the Pacific. Instead, what bound diverse groups of Issei was their shared experience of being a racial Other in America, which

revealed the futility of the modernist belief that the Japanese should be able to become honorary whites through acculturation. Whereas moral reform could only precipitate a limited degree of community formation among leading Issei, the collective racial experience of Japanese immigrants conjoined them beyond other kinds of differences. By 1924, *zaibei doho* forged a genuine awareness of their restricted lives in the United States, on the one hand, and their emigrant perspective and interests vis-à-vis those in imperial Japan, on the other. Tracing the developments in racial subordination to white America and of the Issei's parting from their homeland, this chapter delineates the making of an American minority, who engaged but never fully belonged to either racial empire.

THE ANTI-JAPANESE MOVEMENT AND RACIAL SUBORDINATION

In the historiography of Japanese immigrant history, the first quarter of the twentieth century is generally narrated according to the "politics of prejudice," in which a call for Japanese exclusion grew from an agenda of organized labor and its allies in California to a major issue of contention on Capitol Hill. Having fought hostilities, discriminatory practices, and racist laws exhaustively but unsuccessfully, Japanese immigrants of the mid-1920s knew all too well that they were subject inextricably to the regime of institutionalized racism regardless of differences in age, social background, gender, occupation, and wealth. While the laws prescribed the universal definitions of the Issei's hegemonized state in America, the varied dynamics of local political economies produced diversified patterns of Japanese-white relations that were nonetheless hierarchically defined. In particular, landless Issei farmers and members of the working class faced intensified dependency, and propertied rural immigrants and urban residents were placed under the forces of racial containment during the decades of Japanese exclusion.

Japanese dependency was the most common pattern of racial subordination, especially in rural districts of the West, where a majority of Issei engaged in agricultural pursuits. Prior to 1941, the nature of relations between Issei and whites was often predicated on a shifting mode of farming and land tenure. In California, as in other Western states, most Japanese agricultural landholdings were leased or contracted farms, but types of tenancy underwent constant change in the white-controlled agricultural economy. Between 1907 and 1923, the percentage of farm tenancy seldom fell below 80 percent. From the first decade of the 1900s, cash tenancy was dominant, and it peaked in 1920 with an aggregate 192,150 acres. Three years later, the combined total of cash and

share leases plummeted to 131,991 acres, while the farms under "cropping contracts" jumped to 109,756 acres. Then, in 1929, these three forms of tenancy accounted for only 166,762 acres combined, while the land under the cultivation of salaried "foremen" reached a total of 104,560 acres.² These shifts in Japanese tenancy resulted from the enforcement of the alien land laws, whose restrictions on their land leases concomitantly helped to reconfigure the pattern of interactions between Issei farmers and white land owners. From the outset, their relations unfolded vertically rather than horizontally within the preexisting racial order of the West, but Issei could still negotiate or challenge the system until state and federal governments completed legalized Japanese exclusion from Western agriculture. By the mid-1920s, however, interracial relations were uncontested to the point of nearly total Japanese dependency on propertied whites, who could arbitrarily dictate the use of a few loopholes for their Issei tenants.

The interracial situation in Walnut Grove, California, exemplified what transpired in many other Japanese farm settlements during that period. Solely consisting of tenant farmers, the community had the most common pattern of Japanese immigrant agriculture. Situated in the Sacramento River delta, Walnut Grove includes a vast acreage of reclaimed peat fields where a handful of European Americans monopolized land and power once the United States gained control of the area. Beginning in the early 1890s, Japanese entered the region as farm hands, supplanting the Chinese population after their exclusion. Most

Table 3.1. Japanese Agricultural Landholdings in California, 1905-1929

Year	Owned (acres)	Cash Lease	Combined	Share Lease	Cropping Contract	Foremen	Total
1905	2,442	35,258		19,573	4,775		62,048
1907	13,815	56,889		48,228	13,359		132,291
1909	16,449	80,232		57,001	42,276		195,958
1913	26,707	155,488		50,495	48,997		281,687
1918	30,306		336,721		23,608		390,635
1920	74,769	192,150		121,000	70,137		458,056
1922	51,000		152,000		145,000		349,000
1923	62,773		131,991		109,756		304,520
1929	57,028		166,762			104,560	328,350

Notes. For some years, total figures have been adjusted to correct errors in the original sources. Fractions have been omitted. One special category, "sublease" (4,323 acres), is not included in the 1923 total.

Sources. Nichibei Shimbunsha, *Nichibei nenkan*, vols. 4, 6, 10, 12; *Zaibei Nihonjin jinmei jiten*, 38; Gaimushō Tsūshōkyoku Iminka, *Kashū oyobi Kashū Tochihō shiso keika gaiyō*, 27; *Zaibei Nihonjinkai, Zaibei Nihonjinshi*, 174-175, 187, 192.

rural Japanese farmers came from the ranks of enterprising *dekasegi* migrants, who worked on farms and invested portions of their earnings as a stepping-stone to tenant farming—a main path toward upward mobility in the Western economy. As they accumulated capital and learned farming methods, Japanese tenant farmers appeared increasingly in the delta, as in many parts of the West, by the first decade of the twentieth century.³ While the numbers of Issei sharecroppers and cash tenants there jumped from 254 and 102 to 360 and 198, respectively, the aggregate acreage under Japanese cultivation more than tripled from 2,100 to 7,124 acres between 1904 and 1905, with the especially conspicuous rise of the cash-tenancy ratio from 12 to 27 percent.⁴ The white domination of resources, combined with the exorbitant prices of farmland, nonetheless thwarted Issei land ownership in Walnut Grove.

The quick growth of an Issei farming class in the delta coincided with the cultivation of asparagus. Issei discoveries of niche crops that white farmers tended to neglect—such as asparagus, berries, celery, onions, potatoes, and cantaloupes—enabled them to dominate the production of those crops throughout the Western states. In Walnut Grove, the success of Kamajiro Hotta at cultivating this cash crop led to him being dubbed the Japanese “asparagus king” and induced other Issei to follow.⁵ When Hotta settled in the delta in 1904, no Japanese was reported to have raised the crop; within five years, Issei asparagus farms increased to 5,549 acres, or half of the aggregate Japanese acreage in Walnut Grove.⁶

Despite these impressive statistics, Japanese tenant farmers worked under the rigid control of white landlords and other business interests, who handsomely benefited from their relationship to the immigrants. The *Pacific Rural Press* described how the largest land owner in the delta region, Alex Brown, managed his asparagus farms under Japanese cultivation:

The Brown acreage is leased to tenants who occupy nineteen different camps and each with 100 to 175 acres; though 100 acres is about as much as one camp can handle rightly. Tenants furnish labor only, and get 60 per cent of the crop. They sublet the cutting to [Issei] contractors at about \$1.20 per cwt. . . . Cutting requires about 20 men per 100 acres. Hauling, washing, culling, and cutting to proper lengths requires five men more per 100 acres.⁷

After cutting asparagus, the Issei farmers delivered the crop to a packing shed operated by Brown, from which the land owner shipped it to the New York market and to a nearby cannery.⁸ This system worked so well for Brown that it brought net profits of \$40 to \$50 per acre. Since he had nearly 2,700 acres under asparagus cultivation around 1918, his annual net profit could reach as high as \$135,000. This land owner-tenant nexus made Brown one of the most

successful “farmers” in the region, while his Issei sharecroppers actually cleared, planted, tilled, and harvested the asparagus fields.

Against this backdrop Japanese dependency gradually took hold. Propelled by concerns over the unchecked expansion of the Japanese in agriculture, state governments intervened on behalf of wary white farmers and residents with an eye to circumscribing the modes of Japanese land tenure. In general, land owners preferred share tenancy to cash leasing because of its larger profits, as exemplified in Brown’s case. Under sharecropping agreements, the land owners controlled every aspect of farm operations in exchange for supplying land, farming necessities, and financial assistance. Cash leases, many landlords found, gave lessees too much autonomy, allowing workers like Hotta to keep too large a share of the profits.⁹

Enacted in 1913, California’s first Alien Land Law produced a socioeconomic condition that unilaterally favored white landlords. In keeping with the euphemism “aliens ineligible for citizenship,” the law limited Issei land leases to three years in addition to banning their land ownership, which facilitated rapid conversion of Issei farming to “cropping contracts,” a variation of share tenancy. A cropping contract gave no legal rights over the land and was an employment agreement, simply entitling a Japanese cultivator to a designated share of the crops as his “salary.” Identical to a sharecropping lease in substance, this mode of farming served propertied whites well, while exempting their Japanese “employees”—not “lessees” in legal terms—from the regulations of the 1913 law.¹⁰ In the ensuing nine years, the Japanese acreage under cropping contracts in the Golden State almost tripled, from about 17 percent to 42 percent.¹¹ All Issei farmers of Walnut Grove except Hotta were compelled to adopt this method of sharecropping-in-disguise by the early 1920s—a system particularly suited to the cultivation of asparagus and orchard fruit, which require a long-term commitment.¹²

The 1913 Alien Land Law left conflicting legacies. On the whole, the prevalence of share tenancy, including cropping contracts, accelerated the degree to which Japanese farmers were shackled to propertied whites. It also made tenants more vulnerable to their landlords by forcing the Japanese to count on the whites’ willingness to assist in their evasion of the law. In this respect, Japanese dependency intensified in both economic and social terms after 1913, but it did not become so manifest until 1920. Combined with a wartime boom in the U.S. farm economy, the legal ambiguity of the cropping contract minimized the immediate effects of Japanese exclusion from agriculture, which the law was designed to achieve. Despite its impact on land tenure, the legislation failed to hamper Issei farm operations in the short term. Like their fellow Issei tenant farmers elsewhere, the Japanese of Walnut Grove continued to expand their acreage during the latter half of the 1910s. As the aggregate figures of Japanese

leases in California more than doubled from 179,509 acres in 1909 to 360,329 acres in 1918, so too did the land cultivated by the delta Issei increase from 9,445 acres to 16,541 acres.¹³ And during the First World War, as figure 3.1 shows, the Japanese share in the production of the niche crops exceeded the 80 percent mark. Economic empowerment helped to offset racial dependency, which progressed less visibly.

Landed whites and agribusiness interests began to fear a possible change in the status quo in California agriculture and racial order in light of the steady Japanese economic ascent. Through the 1910s, what they characterized as the Japanese "invasion" took various forms in the Western states. In central California, for example, growing land ownership among local Issei accounted for a major part of the racial "problem," while the formation of ethnic wholesale concerns and produce markets contributed to their economic competitiveness, or "menace," in other places.¹⁴ In southern California, a "horizontal and vertical integration" of niche farm industries brought together wholesale, retail, and production into the composite ethnic economy. This enabled local Issei to participate with Italians and Chinese in the operation of the City Market of Los Angeles (Ninth Street Market), which competed with the older, Anglo-dominated Wholesale Terminal Market (Seventh Street Market).¹⁵ Given these developments, as the election of 1920 approached, incumbent U.S. senator James D. Phelan and committed exclusionists like V. S. McClatchy agitated for a more stringent alien land law in order to hold Japanese immigrants in check and to "keep California white," a political platform that met with enthusiastic support from many disgruntled Californians.

What occurred in Walnut Grove was illustrative of the impact of the new Alien Land Law (1920), which was designed to counterbalance Issei economic strength with their intensifying dependency on white patrons. In the delta, the local Caucasian population felt threatened especially by the Issei efforts to build their own asparagus cannery, spurred by the dramatic expansion of Kamajiro Hotta's asparagus farm. In addition to his original 400-acre farm, Hotta had leased in 1917, under a cash rental arrangement, 1,000 acres, which he had sublet to other Issei.¹⁶ In 1920, the asparagus crop on this farm was ready for its first harvest. In tandem with the 5,755 acres of asparagus under cultivation by other Japanese growers in the delta, Hotta's 1,400-acre farm appeared to hold out the promise of controlling supply in the market, since the Japanese acreage in Walnut Grove would amount to nearly 60 percent of the aggregate 12,000 acres in the entire state. Seeing this as their best chance to gain autonomy in farming, local Issei asparagus growers, who had already formed a guild to challenge the white landlords' control, began to draft blueprints for a cannery, and by March 1920, the immigrant press joyously predicted that a Japanese-owned cannery would "come to reality before long."¹⁷

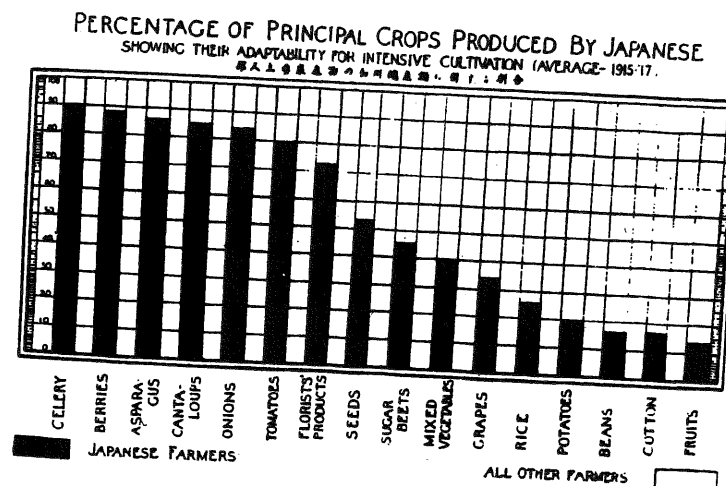
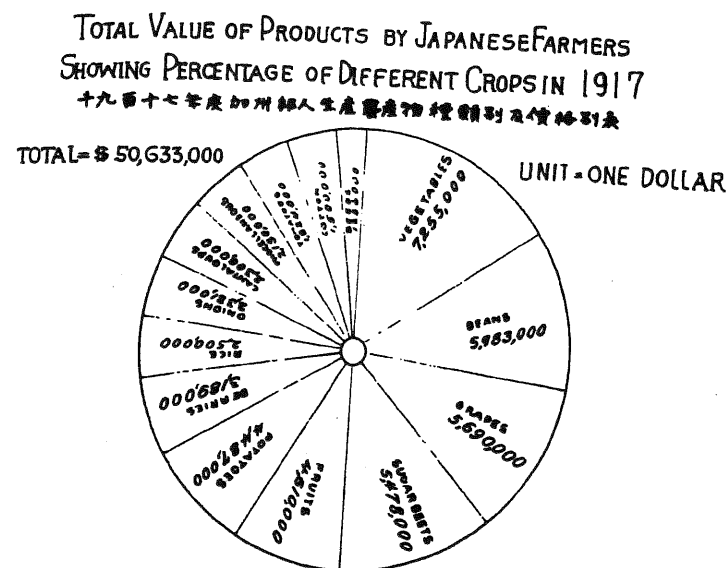


FIGURE 3.1. Achievements that Illuminate Marginality

These graphs illustrate the multi-million-dollar Japanese agricultural industry in California in 1917. The comparison of the two graphs shows that Issei dominated in production of labor-intensive field crops such as berries, onions, and asparagus, where much hand labor was essential for crop cultivation and harvest. The cheapness of co-ethnic labor was a major reason for their "success" in such niche farming that was neglected by white farmers. Reprinted from Japanese Agricultural Association, *Japanese Farmers in California* (1918).

This turn of events particularly offended Alex Brown, who had already been forced by collective bargaining to raise the crop share of his tenants in 1918. As the largest landlord in the region, he brooked no further attempts by the Japanese to establish themselves as autonomous farmers. At this juncture, Phelan and exclusionist groups sponsored an initiative to amend the 1913 Alien Land Law. Intended to deny Japanese tenancy altogether, the new land bill offered a practical solution to the local Japanese problem that Brown and other land owners faced. Because even Hotta's farm was under a cash lease, a ban on Japanese immigrant tenancy would nullify the Japanese cannery plan.¹⁸ Indeed, after passage of the law in November 1920, all talks of a cannery ceased among the delta Japanese, exemplifying the poisonous impact that legalized racism had on the lives of Issei farmers in California and, subsequently, in other states.

In the years to follow, Japanese-white relations were transformed in terms both of legal and economic practice and of Issei consciousness. First, institutionalized racism in agriculture circumscribed the Japanese vision of social existence within the narrow bounds characterized by dependency. Not only did legal deprivation strengthen the dominance of propertied whites, but it also cemented their hierarchical relations so firmly that there was no longer much room for Issei to be able to negotiate, much less challenge the regime of consolidated white power in the American West. Without legal entitlement to tenancy, Issei farmers found it virtually impossible to defy their landlords, who could now dictate the terms of their relations in the local political economy at will. White elites still tolerated the presence of the Japanese, continuing to employ Issei farmers rather than lose a good source of profits and able caretakers of their land.¹⁹ As long as such financial incentives remained available, the situation did not cause most Issei significantly greater difficulty than the post-1913 adjustment, and yet, they now were almost totally dependent on the whim and favor of their landlords. In Walnut Grove, a contemporary observer noted that "the close entanglements of interest" between white landlords and Issei farmers made the former still willing to offer a "verbal promise to perpetuate [the Japanese] farming endeavor." In the central California town of Hanford, the situation was similar, but reportedly, local Issei farmers "were put in such a precarious position as to live continuously with a deep sense of insecurity."²⁰

Indeed, in light of the contingency of economic ties, white paternalism was never a reliable insurance. With their steadfast grip over rural Japanese engendered by the law, land owners could—and often did—mistreat Issei tenant farmers if and when such actions served their financial interests. A Japanese diplomat chronicled how some Japanese in Placer County found themselves left to the mercies of white exploitation:

Those who have verbal agreements for cash leases with landowners theoretically have maintained close economic ties for a number of years, and so have sharecroppers built a relationship based on mutual trust. In actuality, these growers never ceased to encounter one trouble after another, because they are an easy prey to deception. . . . The [Issei] farmers, who cannot seek help from the authorities [due to their illegal leases], are placed under the thumb of landowners and fruit-shipping houses that control the marketing of the crop.²¹

Extreme abuses of course convinced many to give up on farming, as was the case in the central California community of Armona where the vast majority of Issei tenants left for urban areas or other states.²² Yet, for those who managed to avoid the worst abuses and betrayals, it was still better to count on the capricious favor of landlords after 1920.

The practice of dependence on white paternalism notwithstanding, there was a brief moment when Japanese farmers envisioned collective resistance as a viable option. This popular struggle, spearheaded by ordinary Issei residents, was short-lived, lasting only from 1921 to 1923. Paradoxically, when the show-down was all over, the poignant memory of their common experience in defeat compounded Issei feelings of being a subordinate minority under consolidated white power. In this sense, the significance of the mass resistance lay not so much in the act of protest in and of itself but in its impact on the popular consciousness. While failed resistance further reinforced the general practice of dependence, it expedited the process in which a racialized identity as *zaibei doho* took shape among these Japanese in America.

At the heart of this struggle and transformation was the cropping contract. Initially, during the first half of 1921, a large number of Issei tenant farmers switched, or planned to switch, to that mode of farming, for it was still a safe and easy loophole that allowed them to remain virtual sharecroppers.²³ Although most landed whites were no longer dissatisfied with their relationship to the Japanese, exclusionist zealots continued to press the state government for vigorous enforcement of the law and prosecution of evasions. The cropping contract became a prime target of this racist judicial effort, and in the summer of 1921, California's attorney general, Ulysses S. Webb, himself an ardent advocate for Japanese exclusion, declared in no uncertain terms that the cropping contract was a form of lease, and therefore illegal.²⁴

Webb's attack on the last bastion of Japanese immigrant agriculture provoked grassroots mobilization and resistance of unprecedented form and scale. Previously, the leading circle of urban merchants and intellectuals set collective agendas and community policy mandates, like moral reform, which usually moved downward within the hierarchy of immigrant control mechanisms under

the Japanese Association of America (or its equivalents). By contrast, this popular struggle emerged from rural farm districts where most ordinary Issei resided, thereby thrusting *their* concerns and *their* desires on those in the cities. For the first time, the Issei masses formed a tangible and formidable political force within Japanese immigrant society, marking a significant shift in power relations and community representation.²⁵ When the core of their self-interest was in peril, the apparatus of immigrant control conveniently functioned as a vehicle for ordinary residents to have their voices heard by the elite and their concerns reflected in its agendas and programs. Not only did residents take advantage of the Japanese associations on their own behalf, but they moreover tried to quell the racist assault by turning the American judicial system against it.

By the fall of 1921, Issei farmers of northern and central California had already reached a consensus about pursuing test cases against the Alien Land Laws in the courts. Given the ambiguous legal status of the cropping contract, the Japanese thought it offered the best chance for defending their interests as de facto sharecroppers. Following Webb's statement, rural representatives met in San Francisco on September 2, 1921, to demand that the Japanese Association of America immediately seek a test case concerning the legality of the cropping contract. The San Francisco elites dragged their feet, first consulting the Japanese consul and requesting his assistance.²⁶ No sooner had this inaction become public knowledge than rural Japanese association affiliates began to take direct action, lambasting the central body as "useless" and its leaders as "inept"—a rare instance of outright defiance.²⁷ Backed by popular demands, for example, the Walnut Grove association leaders held a joint conference with their counterparts from nearby Courtland and Isleton, where they agreed to persist in pressing the Japanese Association of America for a test case. On October 2, the region's Issei leaders traveled to San Francisco to meet with other representatives from throughout California, but there was still no response from the central body. Disappointed, the delta's Japanese farmers assembled for a second time and argued that in view of the situation local residents should be prepared to deal with the crisis on their own. To fight for their survival, the immigrants declared that they must disregard the established order of the community hierarchy in their quest of a judicial solution, even if local residents had to bear the financial burden.²⁸

The wrath directed against the Japanese Association of America in the fall of 1921 mirrored the urgency of the situation for great numbers of Issei farmers in California. In the north and central valleys, the majority of Japanese tenants expected the renewal of their leases in October or November 1921.²⁹ Because they had believed in the legality of the cropping contract, they had assumed a simple transition to this arrangement. Nevertheless, as Webb's announcement

forecast the real possibility of prosecution, white landlords began to cancel or refused to enter into cropping contracts with the Japanese. According to one source, many Issei in the counties of Placer, Yolo, and Tulare had already been placed in such a predicament by the end of October, and those in Sacramento, Solano, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Kings counties were on the verge of losing their contracts. The acreage under the threat of state prosecution amounted to more than 90,000 acres, or about 30 percent of the total Japanese leases in California.³⁰

On October 13, 1921, overwhelmed by popular pressure, the Japanese Association of America finally filed a bill of complaint for a cropping-contract test case, followed by another lawsuit that challenged the ban on Issei holding stocks in landholding companies—an issue that imperiled many farmers in Fresno and Yolo counties.³¹ Similar grassroots efforts compelled the Central Japanese Association of Southern California, based in Los Angeles, to contest the constitutionality of the ban on leasing, which was most crucial to this area's residents. After the Washington state legislature passed its own Alien Land Law in the spring of 1921, the Japanese association headquarters in Seattle sponsored its own test case.³²

Two years later, the Issei's legal battle ended in great disappointment. The prospect for the cropping-contract case looked deceptively bright at first, whereas most other test cases in California and Washington were quickly rejected. On December 20, 1921, a lower court in California upheld the Japanese argument that the cropping contract was not in violation of the 1920 statute, which the state of California swiftly appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. In the meantime, while other Western states, including Arizona in 1921 and Oregon, Idaho, and Montana in 1923, enacted almost identical laws against Japanese immigrant agriculture, the Supreme Court also heard and rejected a Japanese plea for citizenship in the historic *Ozawa v. U.S.* decision of 1922, a decision that made the application of the alien land laws to unnaturalizable Issei a permanent fact of life. Consequently, Japanese farmers of the American West braced anxiously for the definitive judgment on the last bastion of Japanese immigrant farming, but in November 1923, the Supreme Court failed the Issei, declaring the cropping contract to be illegal.

"Dumb-founded," the immigrant press uniformly expressed disbelief and anger after the ruling, which nonetheless soon gave way to a call for acquiescence.³³ Having exhausted every means of fighting legalized racism, "most growers cannot but engage in farm labor from now on," wrote the *Rafu Shimpo* of Los Angeles resignedly. "It will surely be painful to bear the downfall from an independent farmer to a mere laborer, but nothing can be done about it."³⁴ A Sacramento Japanese daily urged readers to accept the grim reality with good grace and endeavor to procure the "sympathy" and "trust" of white landlords

through hard work.³⁵ Speaking of the social status that would necessitate such attitudes, one editorial compared Issei to *burakumin*, Japan's outcast group that was often thought to be of alien origin, and another paper paralleled their lot to those they viewed as marginalized and powerless races, like "Mexicans, Armenians, Poles, and Negroes."³⁶ These comparisons poignantly show that Issei collective consciousness began to incorporate the notion of Japanese in America being socially and racially subordinate at the core, as depicted in a cartoon in a San Francisco Japanese daily (fig. 3.2). Interviewing Issei in the northern California town of Suisun, a Japanese diplomat reported the psychological state of rural residents: "[Japanese farmers] are in such low spirits. . . . One would



FIGURE 3.2. Issei under Racial Subordination, 1921

Printed at the height of exclusionist agitation, this 1921 cartoon exemplifies an emerging sense of the collective self among many Japanese immigrants. Here a struggling Issei man personifies the "Japanese in America." Despite his heavy bundle, labeled "exclusion," he still envisages a better future. In English and to the right in Japanese, the weeping sun promised him: "Be patient and do your best, someday you will win." Reprinted from *Shin Sekai* (New World, San Francisco), Jan. 21, 1921.

feel as if the [Alien] Land Law of 1920 and 1923 had robbed them of their arms and legs, leaving no autonomy to them. When land ownership and leases were legal, they had so much hope and vigor; today, all you see are dejected old men."³⁷

Adding nuances to this process of racial formation, however, the Issei's chorus of acquiescence also manifested a future-looking rhetoric that attempted to mitigate their degraded position in American society. When addressing the issue at hand after the Supreme Court ruling, immigrant writers chanted a specific Japanese phrase, *innin jicho* (prudence and perseverance) as if it were a new motto for all Japanese in the United States. Reified in the cartoon, the concept corresponded to what the empathic Sun advised the struggling Issei omnisciently: "Be patient and do your best; some day you will win." Not only did it offer confused immigrants direction, the promise of *innin jicho* also helped them to historicize their bitter experience as simply an unexpected setback. Because the land laws applied only to the immigrants, their negative effects would pass with the growth of Japanese American citizens, the Nisei. Believing that their subordination was tied to their legal status, not to racial heritage, many Issei felt that this was a temporary situation. Rather than wasting their time lamenting what they had lost, the immigrants agreed that they might as well consolidate forces and rebuild the ethnic agricultural economy.³⁸ The situation, in their opinion, would only improve if they persevered, hence they accommodated racial subordination as a matter of expediency.

Whereas the legal defeat placed rural Japanese immigrants in utter dependency, the Issei's consent to their powerlessness ironically spared them from total exclusion from Western agriculture. Among available loopholes, the "foreman" system emerged as the most prevalent replacement for the cropping contract. This method allowed Japanese to maintain a standard of living equivalent to tenant farmers, while playing the role of salaried workers. It of course required the blessing of landlords even more than a cropping contract, and depending on the degree of interracial bonds, there appear to have been many variations of farm foremanship. In Holister, California, for example, many Issei foremen received a flat salary of \$300 every month, three times greater than the income of a mere laborer (\$80–\$100), while their Vacaville counterparts tended to use the foreman arrangement simply as a front for sharecropping. Walnut Grove Japanese, meanwhile, preferred to combine a monthly payment of \$100 to \$175 with an annual cash bonus of \$2,000 to \$3,000.³⁹ Foremanship, albeit a symbol of racial subordination and economic retreat, still enabled many Issei to remain forward-looking, since they thought the arrangement continued to help them lay sound foundations for the next generations. In this reconfiguration of race relations in Western agriculture, however, Japanese tenant farm-

ers coalesced an awareness of being a minority with their understanding of their collective self on the basis of their frustrated past struggles, restricted present circumstances, and shared optimisms for the future.

While dependency accounted for the situation of most rural Japanese, landholding Issei experienced a different kind of racial subordination. In California, the farms under Japanese land ownership constituted between 10 and 20 percent of the aggregate acreage from 1907 to 1923. The ratio of Issei land ownership in Washington, on the other hand, neared 30 percent around 1923, due likely to the absence of an alien land law in that state until 1921.⁴⁰ Despite this relatively low percentage, propertied Issei tended to concentrate in certain rural areas, engendering distinct race relations there. According to the 1914 California data, landholding Issei farmers of Fresno and Los Angeles counties controlled about 24 percent and 12 percent, respectively, of the total 29,735 Japanese-owned acres in the state. In smaller communities, like Florin, Vacaville, Loomis, and especially Livingston, Japanese farmers held markedly higher shares. In other states, similar patterns of concentrations were evident, as in Hood River in Oregon.⁴¹ These communities and regions witnessed different patterns of Japanese-white entanglements than the tenancy-dominated areas.

Around 1920, many Issei land owners encountered the forces of racial containment, whereby they were forced into living in accord with the will of their white neighbors despite their ostensible autonomy. The passage of the alien land laws effectively arrested the expansion of independent Japanese farming, squeezing the settlements of Issei land owners into tighter areas. California landholding statistics reveal a steady decrease in property from 74,769 acres in 1920 to 62,773 acres in 1923 and to 57,028 acres in 1929.⁴² As landed Issei saw their settlements diminished under the pressures of legalized racism, they sought a greater degree of integration into the local white societies and political economies. While Japanese tenants seldom collided squarely with their landlords over economic issues, independent Issei farmers tended to compete directly with their white neighbors, which reinforced strained relations and the latter's feverish support for discriminatory legislation. Out of concern for their own survival and for interracial peace at the local level, these Issei often became obsessed with their image as loyal community members, and therefore they allowed the dictates of local whites to take precedence over general ethnic concerns when necessary.⁴³

The central California town of Livingston offers a good example of Issei containment. Known as the Yamato Colony, the ethnic community there started with the expansionistic vision of Kyutaro Abiko, publisher of the *Nichibei Shimbun*, who imagined an agricultural settlement comparable to New England's original Puritan colonies. In 1906, Abiko formed a landholding company and purchased 3,200 acres of undeveloped land in Merced County. The

tract was subdivided into 40-acre parcels, which were then sold to Issei families who wished to settle permanently as pioneer farmers and live frontier Christian lives. Thus, the Yamato Colony consisted solely of land-owning farmers, who later organized their own agricultural cooperative equipped with a packing shed and private railroad platform.⁴⁴ After enlarging the Yamato Colony by adding more tracts, Abiko proceeded to establish a similar agricultural colony in neighboring Cortez in 1919—when exclusionist groups were engaged in a fierce propaganda campaign focused on the Japanese “takeover” of California before the upcoming election.

Led by the coalition of the Livingston Board of Trade and the Farm Center, anti-Japanese advocates organized a local political movement specifically targeting the influx of new Issei settlers into the region. Many white townspeople believed that Abiko was financed by Tokyo to advance “a great Japanese invasion” in the area. In January 1920, they hastily resolved to erect signs announcing “No More Japanese Wanted Here” alongside the highway entrance at both ends of the town.⁴⁵ Although local agitators stressed that they opposed the arrival of “low class Japanese,” not the current Issei residents, whom they described as “high class men,” this distinction came with a veiled threat. These agitators effectively demanded that Japanese land owners align with them, not with their compatriots who wished to move to the Livingston-Cortez area. At an informal conference with Issei residents, the director of the white Farm Center argued: “[W]e don't want them [new Japanese settlers] and I am sure you don't want them either. . . . You must join us in this movement to protect you[r] interests as well as ours. We must work together.” To local Japanese, the consequences of declining this “proposal” were frighteningly clear; a mob of exclusionists had already threatened in a mass meeting “to treat roughly any who might sympathize with the [low-class] Japanese.”⁴⁶

The responses of Livingston Issei illuminated their “fragile position” in the local political economy despite their landed status.⁴⁷ Because the Japanese residents were fully aware that their own safety and livelihoods were under threat, they were left with no alternative than to join forces with local whites in their fight against “Japanese invasion.” As soon as the uproar began, the Japanese Yamato Colony Association (YCA) convened an emergency meeting, where the overwhelming majority voted to stage an exclusionist campaign of their own. First, they decided to circulate a petition to all Japanese households in Livingston, urging them to pledge steadfast opposition to the entry of any more Japanese into Merced County. The YCA formed a three-person disciplinary committee to severely punish anyone who refused to sign the petition. As an example to the community, they then singled out a renegade who had prepared to enlarge his farm operation by bringing in new Issei tenants and workers. The YCA set up a sort of kangaroo court to coerce him into abandoning the

plan, which this man did at the loss of several thousand dollars already invested in the project.⁴⁸ Pitting the "interests" of Livingston Issei against those of their co-ethnics, white racism induced local Issei farmers to act as accomplices in blocking further Japanese settlement and land acquisition in the area.

The local exclusionist pressure was so strong that Yamato Colony Japanese continued to pursue interracial "cooperation" despite criticisms from their fellow Issei, who reprimanded them for their "shameless treachery" and "disloyalty."⁴⁹ Faced with ostracism from their compatriots, Livingston's Japanese residents were compelled to defend their position by issuing a statement in the Japanese immigrant press. It argued that local Issei had never approved the injustice of racism *per se*, but they had to "respect" the prevailing "public opinion" there. In the document, the YCA president emphasized that the specific social dynamics of Livingston required this response. The solution to race problems must first take into account the "locally particular circumstances," he reasoned, dismissing any criticisms without such consideration as "worthless." And their informed compromise, according to the YCA statement, had helped to rehabilitate the Japanese race in the local perceptions.⁵⁰

Ever faithful to the cause of their neighbors, a Livingston Japanese representative also appeared with white exclusionists before a congressional hearing on the "Japanese problem," testifying against further immigration from Japan. Asked if he thought there were "enough" Japanese in the United States, the Issei told the chairman: "I think it is quite hard to Americanize [them]. I think we have plenty of foreigners in this country; that we should first Americanize those foreigners who are here, and after that I think it is better to prohibit the newcomers." Following this statement, a local white leader unabashedly praised this Japanese speaker—and other Livingston Issei in effect—for their cooperation and loyalty to Livingston, while hinting at a contrarily sinister image of the rest of the Japanese in California:

[I]n about February or March Mr. [X] lived here actually in danger for the attitude he took in attempting to solve the problem locally in Livingston; and also in Oakland and San Francisco, Mr. [X] was in danger when he was there [to explain his position to other Issei]. His thought is in harmony with ours, and we have these people [Japanese residents in Livingston] with us.⁵¹

By adhering to this accommodationist thinking to the temporary detriment of ethnic unity, Livingston Issei sought further integration into the local society. They collaborated with whites in forming the Livingston Anti-Japanese Committee, which served as "an American-Japanese clearing house for all matters affecting the two people[s] in the district."⁵² By stipulating a local ban on the sale or lease of land properties to Japanese, the institutionalized interracial part-

nership decidedly slowed down the influx of Japanese settlers into the area to the extent that local whites no longer made it an issue by the fall of 1920. And in exchange for their compliance, Livingston Issei succeeded in securing from the white residents an affirmation of their presence there. Several months after the campaign, the town's white leader praised the area's Japanese for proving themselves to be "the only [Japanese] group in the state who have maintained independence from their strenuously objecting and fighting countrymen."⁵³

Tranquillity came to Livingston, but at no minor cost. The pacification of local interracial relations precipitated the self-induced containment of Issei under the dictates of white townspeople. Local ethnic agriculture stagnated, and the colony struggled to grow thereafter.⁵⁴ Critically, moreover, the 1920 episode revealed the pliability of landed Issei to immediate political pressures, as well as the contingency of their racial identity. The "racial" consciousness of Livingston Japanese was so responsive to the will of their white neighbors—or what they termed the "locally particular circumstances"—that it was easily manipulated to function as a wholly localized identity, if necessary, even in disagreement with the larger concerns of their fellow Issei. A shared notion of being *zaibei doho* did not emanate out of a single, monolithic racial experience; it stemmed from an amalgam of experiences and understandings that varied in separate locations and for different classes of people, albeit under the overarching effects of legal discrimination that categorically defined them as a racialized Other. Without external interventions to distinguish the local Japanese from the rest, the Yamato Colony did not witness any more instances of intraethnic divergences after 1920, but the potential for such conflict was always present there, as elsewhere, despite the general condition and consciousness of racial subordination.

In the early 1920s, many urban Issei also encountered forces of racial containment, which manifested in a different manner. In addition to occasional instances of commercial competition, the chief issue was whether or not interracial interactions should be permitted beyond the realm of economics. With the rapid increase of the Japanese population during the war years, the lines of racial demarcation had become blurred in some urban residential areas. Because the remarkable expansion of agriculture and farm-related ethnic industry in southern California induced many Japanese to relocate from the north, notable exclusionist drives against the cohabitation of whites and Japanese took place in Los Angeles and its vicinity. Some of these campaigns prescribed restrictive covenants or deed restrictions regionwide, while others lobbied the City Realty Board to "recommend that Realtors . . . not sell property to other than Caucasians in territories occupied by them."⁵⁵ Despite tenacious demands for residential segregation, a considerable number of Japanese immigrants still managed to move into new areas—a situation that provoked violent white reactions

and localized efforts to contain Issei in Little Tokyo and other "colored" sections.

Influenced by the statewide exclusionist movement, anti-Japanese agitation surged in Los Angeles around 1922. In the district of Rose Hill, the acquisition of a residential tract by an Issei-owned firm stirred a commotion. While housing was being built, nearby whites threatened to destroy the construction company unless it scrapped the project. The same year, a proposed plan for a new Japanese Methodist church building met staunch opposition from the neighborhood association of Pico Heights. In 1923, an Issei found that the house he had just acquired in the Belvedere section of Los Angeles was burned in an arson attack, and afterward white residents erected a "Japs Keep Out" billboard. In Sherman, an immigrant family encountered anti-Japanese signs, placards, and banners when they moved into a new house there. Hollywood emerged as another hot spot for segregationist activities. Local whites sought advice from veteran agitators in Pico Heights and Belvedere, and, in a combination of political lobbying and intimidation, they used the newly established Hollywood Protective Association to fight "the invasion and colonization of the Japanese in that section."⁵⁶ Such racist harassment successfully deterred Issei residential development in Rose Hill, frustrated the establishment of Japanese Christian churches in Pico Heights and Hollywood, forced the Japanese family to abandon their property in Belvedere, and likely discouraged other Issei from moving to new neighborhoods.⁵⁷ This experience taught the area's Japanese immigrants that white America would not tolerate them unless they remained segregated in Little Tokyo.

Whether through dependency or containment, by the mid-1920s, racial subordination had become the inescapable reality that pragmatically oriented much of Japanese immigrant life. When the National Origins Act added further insult by terminating Japanese immigration, no visible uproar or anger emanated from Issei, who rather calmly interpreted it as a natural culmination of the white supremacy that they had fought in vain. On July 1, 1924, the day that the law became effective, an Issei woman resignedly wrote in her diary, "We, the [Japanese] residents in America, are so accustomed to the unfair treatment that this immoral nation has waged upon us, that we no longer find it unfair. We are made to take it as business as usual." A Los Angeles man likewise recorded the community consensus, noting that "the Japanese in America . . . do not seem to think much of it any longer."⁵⁸

Vernacular newspapers all expressed similar sentiments, but they valorized the idea of *innin jicho* (prudence and perseverance) as usual. While lamenting the "failures of the past twenty-some years of struggles against white exclusionists," the *Shin Sekai* of San Francisco expressed an ironic sense of closure and determinedly swore to still "work out our destiny by ourselves." Right after the

passage of the law by the U.S. Congress, the immigrant newspaper wrote: "Now it is all over. . . . We are clearly branded as pariahs in America. . . . Yet, even if [America] dealt with us as pigs, or perceived us as dogs or cats, we must focus on our work obstinately." Admonishing against "rashness," Seattle's *Taihoku Nippo* echoed the importance of *innin jicho* by urging readers to "be only concerned with defending [their] interest." A few months later when the law was enforced, the *Nichibei Shimbun* repeated the prevailing view in its editorial statement: "[W]e can easily lose our livelihood in America unless we acclimate . . . to our [new] circumstances."⁵⁹

Candidly admitting that there existed very few options or leeway, the *Rafu Shimpō* of Los Angeles summed up the situation for all Japanese residents in the American West at this juncture. If an immigrant wished to stay in the United States, he could not but "resign to the reality of being excluded." Anyone who found it too hard to swallow would either have to "return to Japan" or "leave for other countries."⁶⁰ Accepting their shared status as pariahs was hence a prerequisite for remaining "the Japanese in America." As much as the long social process of marginalization contributed to the Issei's feelings of oneness, they also crafted their racial consciousness calculatedly in order to "acclimate . . . to [their new] circumstances," "defend [their] interest," and above all, "work out [their] destiny" in the United States. Such mental (re)orientation provided for what an Issei leader aptly characterized as their emergent "spiritual alliance," or a teleological collective identity, as racially subordinate.⁶¹

ISSEI "DIASPORA": AN ESCAPE FROM RACIAL SUBORDINATION

While most Issei chose to stay, many immigrants rejected lives under the command of another race. In order to break away from such social conditioning, they left the United States for their homeland, or for third countries, where they believed they could remain "the people of a first-class nation." The departure of these people further accelerated the formation of a relatively cohesive, self-contained group by moderating the multiplicity of racial identities within the population. According to U.S. government statistics, annual Japanese disembarkation peaked in 1923 and 1924. An analysis of the occupational breakdown reveals that the figures of these two years included more than twice as many farmers as in other periods—a direct consequence of the alien land laws and defeated test cases.⁶² Local Issei statistics corresponded to this trend. Between 1920 and 1925, Walnut Grove's Japanese farming population was cut in half from 158 to 80, and the community of Turlock shrank by 80 percent. The grim reality likewise caused an exodus of Issei from Oregon; in the four years

following 1924 the Japanese population of the state dropped from 2,374 to 1,568, a decrease of more than 30 percent.⁶³ Observing each transpacific steamer departing with several hundred Issei, a Los Angeles writer reported in 1922:

Having handed over their farms and businesses to others, they take [their] entire families along with all the wealth they have amassed here. It is doubtful that most have a plan to return to the United States. Should they find some means of making a living in Japan, they are going to stay there. If any of them happen to return here again, it is not because they truly wish to do so, but because they are forced to, being unable to get viable work [in Japan].⁶⁴

In the meantime, a number of Issei made their way south of the border. In April 1924, the Pacific Coast Japanese Association Deliberative Council—an assembly of all associations in the American West—passed a resolution to investigate the prospects for mass remigration to other U.S. states or other countries. While the Japanese Association of America conducted a series of agricultural surveys in the American South and in a few central states, the Central Japanese Association of Southern California took charge of studying Mexico.⁶⁵ Many Issei there argued that the country was pro-Japan, free from an ideology of white supremacy, and possessed an undeveloped frontier where the Japanese could legally own land. The *Rafu Shimpō* was a leading advocate of these ideas, but as its editor, Shiro Fujioka, warned, the remigration to Mexico was not recommended for ordinary laborers, and anyone who decided to stake the rest of his life in Mexico had to carry enough capital to start out as a land owner.⁶⁶ Although Fujioka did not relocate to Mexico, some Issei took his advice and crossed the border to become self-sufficient colonists.

Many remigrants appear to have been relatively well-educated immigrants, who either shared or appreciated the views of early expansionists. Some resembled romantic colonialists in a return to the 1890s. Too humiliated to resign themselves to racial subordination, this group of Issei, albeit small in number, entertained the idea that the Japanese could conquer the wilderness of Mexico “by providing guidance for Mexicans, assimilating them, and cooperating benevolently with them.”⁶⁷ Others fell into the category of expansionist entrepreneurs, who invested in farming or fishing ventures in Baja California and Sonora. By 1927, for example, two dozen Japanese from southern California had acquired barren land near Ensenada for the development of vegetable farms for a growing Los Angeles consumer market.⁶⁸

Hachiro Soejima was a quintessential expansionist entrepreneur, who rejected the ideology of white supremacy. Founder of the *Shin Sekai* newspaper, he was part of the core leadership in the nascent community of San Francisco Japanese around the turn of the twentieth century. Born a samurai in 1861, he

attended the Japanese Army Academy after the Meiji Restoration and came to California in 1890 with a dream of building a “new Japan” on the Western frontier. His parting with the *Shin Sekai* and subsequent business failures led to his relative obscurity during the 1910s, but at the peak of anti-Japanese exclusion, Soejima published a weekly newspaper in which he advocated the colonization of Mexico’s northern frontier. Then in 1926, with the purchase of 500 acres near Hermosillo, Sonora, this sixty-five-year-old man, along with two other Issei from California, took it upon himself to do just that.⁶⁹ Planning to build several dozen residences for additional Japanese colonialists, both from California and Japan, he had delivered boxcars of furniture, construction materials, farm tools, machinery, and even a large motorboat for coastal fishing. Soejima’s ambitious venture was nonetheless short-lived; in 1928, a Mexican employee murdered him and another Issei in the course of a robbery, resulting in the dispersal of other Japanese and the abrupt demise of his colony.⁷⁰

With better luck, some Japanese founded similar colonial enterprises in Brazil, a popular destination of emigrants from Japan after the Gentlemen’s Agreement. Nagata Shigeshi, a one-time Issei who had taken over Shimanuki Hyodayu’s emigration society called Rikkokai, was most responsible for the remigration of these Issei to South America. In late 1923, Nagata visited California and personally witnessed the defeat of the cropping-contract test case. Incensed, he had local Rikkokai disciples form a Brazil Study Group in Los Angeles. Following the passage of the 1924 Immigration Act, Nagata had a tight network of Issei Rikkokai alumni spread propaganda to encourage Japanese to leave racist America for friendly Brazil, where experienced Issei farmers could take the lead in creating a colonial utopia with their compatriots from Japan.⁷¹ Nagata’s disciples in California eventually obtained 2,600 acres in the forest of Paulista near São Paulo, Brazil. One group established a Christian settlement named Cultural Colony, and another established Tokyo Colony.⁷²

Another group of Issei traded lives as a racial minority in the United States for those of colonialists in Manchuria. Toyoji Chiba, president of the Japanese Agricultural Association in San Francisco, played a pivotal role in this movement. Educated at Waseda University in Tokyo, Chiba was a typical Issei intellectual who interpreted Japanese immigration to North America as part and parcel of Japan’s overseas expansion.⁷³ In light of exclusionist agitation, he became progressively pessimistic about the future of Japanese immigrant agriculture in the United States. He predicted how badly the new Alien Land Law would affect Issei farmers, noting in one of his commentaries in 1921: “[T]he Japanese in America will not be able to withstand the troubles caused by the strict enforcement of the law, which should eventually impel them to quit farm operation, abandon permanent residency [in America], and relinquish their vested interests there.”⁷⁴ A few months later, Chiba himself abandoned per-

manent residency and headed for Manchuria, because he expressly wished to "live in the sphere where Japan's sovereign power extends, and work under the Japanese flag in such a way that the fruits of our labor can directly benefit our homeland."⁷⁵ Hired as an agricultural specialist and colonial planner by Japan's South Manchurian Railway, Chiba found the Issei's farming expertise beneficial for agricultural development in Manchuria and called for remigration to Manchuria. The successful case of a former Fresno resident, Man'ei Awaya, who developed a large apple orchard near Dalian, Manchuria, convinced Chiba of the promise which that part of Japan's "frontier" held for experienced Issei farmers.⁷⁶

The departure of these expansionists and colonialists narrowed differences among Japanese immigrants in the United States. Inasmuch as their frames of reference and the material bases of their livelihood were both embedded in American social relations, the remaining Issei became a unique group of Japanese, who not only shared a lived racial experience but also endeavored to forge a common destiny under racial subordination. In terms of their perspectives and identities, white racism had brought different cohorts of the immigrants much closer, and an awareness of mutually comparable social positioning and collective interests had taken shape among them. The exodus of those, like Soejima and Chiba, who would rather have lived as colonial masters than as the racially subjugated helped further to facilitate the racialization of Japanese immigrants as an American minority. This does not mean that "the Japanese in America" came to form a homogeneous community; it continued to be full of internal friction and divisions. Yet, initial diversities within the populace, including nationalist mercantilists, colonial expansionists, and *dekasegi* individualists, became less pronounced, because all Japanese immigrants had to grapple with the totalizing forces of American racism. The Othering and domination of Japanese immigrants not only produced the appearance of an undifferentiated race in the eyes of whites but in fact propelled Japanese immigrants to categorize themselves consciously into a corporeal group, which they began to call *zaibei doho*.

Whereas the much-desired label of honorary white slipped through the Issei's fingers in the context of America's hierarchalized race relations, the formation of the new community set them apart decisively from their home compatriots in a transnational context. Borrowing from Rogers Brubaker's formulation of "triadic relational interplay," we can envision that the society of Japanese immigrants (a racialized national minority) came to stand tangentially between white America (a disciplining racial regime) and imperial Japan (the external national homeland) by the mid-1920s.⁷⁷ The cases of Japanese-white entanglement and estrangement underscored the trajectory in which the Issei were transformed into minority "Americans," marked by their racial Otherness,

in the constellation of power on the borderland of the American West.⁷⁸ Questions of race and power were also at the center of the growing cleavages between the Issei society and their external national homeland, Japan. Whereas the manner in which the Japanese in America understood their relationship to whites was contingent on their everyday experiences of rejection, subjugation, and cooptation, the imperial Japanese perception of race relations drew on how their empire interacted with Western powers. In contrast to the Issei's localized perspective, most people in Japan interpreted their racial identity and position in terms of geopolitics and international power relations.

RACIAL DIVERGENCE: AN AMERICAN MINORITY AND THE "LEADER OF THE ASIATIC"

Unlike the Issei's strategic compliance with white America, the people of Japan countered Japanese exclusion from the United States with their own racism. After the passage of the U.S. Immigration Act on April 12, 1924, a whirlwind of anti-Americanism swept the Japanese islands. Domestic newspapers carried sensational stories of racial oppression across the Pacific, and opinion makers registered fury against the treatment of the Japanese as inferior. Shibusawa Eiichi dispatched a telegram to white friends and associates in the United States: "We earnestly pray that [the] proposed exclusion provision will not become law for in that event we fear all past efforts for [the] promotion of good will between the two nations will be nullified."⁷⁹ After the president signed the bill into law in May, optimism vanished, and intense protests emanated even from America's most ardent supporters in Japan. Kaneko Kentaro, a Harvard-educated statesman, abruptly resigned his post as the president of the America-Japan Society, professing that he "felt as if the hopes of [his] life were destroyed" and that "the wounds will not be healed so long as the racial discrimination clause remains in the law." Nitobe Inazo, an alumnus of Johns Hopkins and undersecretary general of the League of Nations, echoed Kaneko's ire, declaring that he would never set foot on American soil again unless the United States repealed the racist immigration law.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, anti-American meetings were convened throughout Japan. Between April and early July, Tokyo alone witnessed more than a hundred anti-American gatherings, some of which attracted several thousand participants. The day that Japanese exclusion officially went into effect, July 1, was solemnly observed as a day of national humiliation.

America's rejection of racial equality made a significant dent in the collective Japanese mind. Major themes of discussion in the enraged nation included the hypocrisy of American democracy, the domination of the world by Americans and Europeans, and even the notion of immigration exclusion as a dec-

laration of war against Japan, but the crux of the debate converged upon the matter of race.⁸¹ In light of white American definitions that insisted on scientifically rationalized boundaries, many Japanese intellectuals also started to accept the biological basis of differences among racial/national groups. Highlighting the physiognomic proximity of the Japanese to the peoples of the neighboring region, a new appreciation of scientific racism by many Japanese ironically propelled them to embrace an idea of racial responsibility for their "Asian brothers." In the scheme of global power politics, this perspective saw California's exclusionist movement as yet another manifestation of ongoing confrontations between whites and other races throughout the world. As Japanese understandings of American race relations were projected onto the worldwide hierarchy and struggle of races, protesters of the U.S. Immigration Act in Japan came to consider it their own destiny as the "leader of the Asiatic" to assemble a unified racial front against white Americans. While immigration exclusion helped to steer Japan's diplomacy away from international conciliation, the Japanese idea of race relations underwent a notable shift, one which, some historians have argued, paved the way for the wartime ideology of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere.⁸²

Generally, Issei showed little sympathy for anti-Americanism and overly confrontational racial attitudes in their native land. From their standpoint, the Japanese were getting caught up in the same kind of irrational rhetoric that they had long fought in the United States. Los Angeles leader Shiro Fujioka warned the Japanese people "not to give measure for measure." Even if the United States humiliated Japan by classifying its people as unworthy of admission, he stressed that the nation must avoid lowering its standard to the level of the "moral losers," that is, the white exclusionists.⁸³ A San Francisco vernacular paper criticized the Japanese for retaliating against American racism with unreasonable boycotts and unjustified attacks on white Christian missionaries in Japan. Comparing the plight of American residents in hostile Japan with the sufferings of their own under white supremacy, Issei writers took exception to the Japanese confusion of local social relations with international politics—the very rhetorical manipulation that had allowed California exclusionists to construct a notion of "Japanese invasion." In their criticisms, immigrants focused squarely on the ramifications that anti-Americanism would have on their livelihoods in the United States. A *Shin Sekai* editor characterized the homeland reactions as "a nefarious nuisance" to "the Japanese in America," arguing that antagonism toward Americans in Japan would likely come back to haunt them. "You may all feel good afterwards, but what will become of us?" asked the writer of his home compatriots.⁸⁴ Yet, Japan's new politics of racial confrontation demonstrated no real concern for overseas residents, whose

welfare was only of secondary significance to the empire's overall quest for power and its ascent in the global order.⁸⁵

White American racism, while binding Issei closer together, cleaved their identity and community from their native land during the first half of the 1920s. Divergent paths—one characterized by Issei struggle for survival under racial subordination and another that led to the racial supremacy of the imperial Japanese—complicated the relationships between *zaibei doho* and their homeland in the ensuing years. Until the attack on Pearl Harbor, however, these paths did not directly collide with, or completely repel, one another, as much as Japanese America never simply confronted or completely cast away from white America. In the changing historical contexts of domestic race relations and international relations, the Japanese immigrant community and its native state continued to find each other useful for their respective goals. While grappling with the dilemmas of life as a racial minority in America, Issei maintained intricate ties with Japan and yet strenuously guarded their new identity and ethnic interests from cooptation by imperial racism. The triangular relationship among *zaibei doho* and the two empires turned even more convoluted during the turbulent decade of the 1930s.