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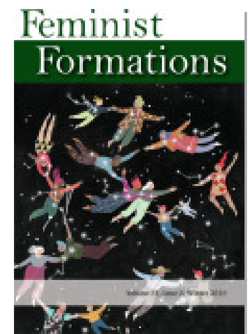

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Riding the *Restless Wave*: Japanese Immigrant Feminism in Ayako Ishigaki's Memoir

Ina Seethaler

Ayako Ishigaki's Restless Wave: My Life in Two Worlds *(1940) is one of the first life writing texts published in English by a Japanese immigrant woman in the United States. This memoir gives its readers insight into the pioneering feminist struggles of many women crossing the Pacific at the beginning of the twentieth century. It offers tremendous understanding of how these women found methods of resistance and agency in highly patriarchal societies as well as xenophobic and sexist environments on both sides of the Pacific. Set during a time when immigrant women from Japan were seen as prostitutes or picture brides and their contributions to the building of a Japanese American community were often ignored,* Restless Wave *presents a powerful narrative of women migrants' lives. In its reflections on gender, race, class, and citizenship status, it constitutes an early articulation of intersectionality by women of color, demonstrating that identities and forms of oppression are interlaced, and that any intersectional analysis must take nationality into consideration. This article calls attention to a work that has, so far, been mostly overlooked, and it proposes an investigation of immigration from Japan that is attentive to women's voices.*

Keywords: feminism / immigration / intersectionality / Ishigaki, Ayako / Japan / life writing / memoir

Ayako Tanaka Ishigaki begins and ends her memoir, *Restless Wave: My Life in Two Worlds*, with what she describes as her first memory: "Before my eyes float the sweat-smeared faces of the women who pulled thick, heavy ropes to build the foundation of our house; I can hear their voices chanting, and see the babies tied on their bending backs" (2004, 249). Ishigaki's description bursts with

words testifying to these women's labor and power. They are physically strong, forcefully united in their song, and nurturing mothers as they are laying the foundation for a family's home. While these women scared Ishigaki as a child because she was unfamiliar with such a powerful performance of femininity, she asserts in her memoir that "[t]hese women give me hope" since they confirm the possibility of a society that values the agency and contributions by women of all classes (5). Ishigaki's politics were uniquely influenced by her social position as an upper-class woman in Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century. She developed a feminist consciousness as she recognized the destructive impact of an oppressive cult of domesticity directed at privileged girls and women and of abusive dehumanization targeting working-class women. Ishigaki's intersectional worldview shaped her self-representation techniques. She told her life story, pushing her audience toward political awareness and action. Her writing of her own life implements an approach that values feminist political rhetoric more than self-idealization. From the beginning, her childhood reflections are marked by an activist tone, even when concealed behind an innocent, childlike voice.

Originally published with Modern Age Books in 1940, *Restless Wave* is one of the first books written in English by a woman of Japanese descent and the author's only book in her second language. In 2004, Yi-Chun Tricia Lin, Greg Robinson, and the Feminist Press republished *Restless Wave*. Other than Lin and Robinson's (2004) discussion in their afterword, however, critics have remained surprisingly silent regarding Ishigaki's rich text. I add to Lin and Robinson's initial reading of the memoir a deeper analysis of specific passages and a stronger connective, synthetic reading of secondary sources to trace links between Ishigaki's writing and later theoretical examinations by women of color feminists. This approach, I propose, may help further strengthen and refine current understandings and practices of intersectionality, which Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991, 1245) defines as the "multilayered and routinized forms of domination that often converge in . . . women's lives, hindering their ability to create alternatives."

Ishigaki's writing can add to important conversations about the historical roots of intersectionality, pushing back against the idea that it is a recent way of interpreting one's life. Vivian May (2015, 68–70), for example, reminds us that women like Anna Julia Cooper practiced intersectionality in the late-nineteenth century. Likewise, Jennifer Nash (2019, 11) points to a long tradition of the "variety of terms black feminists have deployed to capture the complexity of structures of domination." Ishigaki demonstrates how intersectionality was not created as an elite theory or academic method, but how "[o]rdinary people can draw upon intersectionality as an analytical tool when they recognize that they need better frameworks to grapple with the complex discriminations that they face" (Collins and Bilge 2016, 3). Such a use of intersectionality as "critical praxis," as Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016, 32) call it, as well as efforts to "shift how we conceptualize individual and group identities, draft and

sustain political alliances, and examine and transform systems of inequality" (May 2015, 1) stand out to me in Ishigaki's memoir. In this context, *Restless Wave* may be helpful to academics and activists alike at a moment in time when increasing pushback against and critique of intersectionality are being voiced (Nash 2019; May 2015). It further supports Nash's demand that "women's studies move away from its insistent use of black woman as the field's key sign" embodying intersectionality (138), for Ishigaki's work expresses how other minoritized women, too, have been employing an intersectional epistemology.

With this article, I also contribute to recent studies, such as those published in the 2006 special issues of *Genre* on Asian American subgenres, which recover literary texts of early Asian America. As Hsuan Hsu (2006, vi) remarks in his introduction to these issues, such research emphasizes "a sense that the very definition of the scope and field of 'Asian American' studies must be shifted to account for early texts and contexts." With a similar goal of "uncovering, describing, and examining the cultures of the past, [and] also recognizing the political stakes of this undertaking," the edited collection *Re/Collecting Early Asian America: Essays in Cultural History* (Lee, Lim, and Matsukawa 2002) investigates texts in the broadest sense from the beginnings of Asian immigration and restrictions against it to the liberalization of immigration laws in the 1950s and 1960s. A discussion of *Restless Wave* constitutes an indispensable element of such urgent conversations.

A Rarely Studied Feminist Foremother

Ishigaki's life, as reported by herself, complicates existing theoretical and historical understandings of Asian immigrant women's identities and experiences as it reveals gendered and political implications of early Japanese immigration to the United States. Studying Ishigaki's life helps tackle questions such as Esther Ngan-Ling Chow's (1996, 252): "[w]hat are the social conditions that have hindered Asian American women from developing a feminist consciousness, a prerequisite for political activism in the feminist movement?" Chow suggests that it was their restricted position in US society that prevented these women's large-scale embrace of feminist thought until the 1960s. And yet, Ishigaki expressed critiques of gender, race, and class oppression from the precarious standpoint of an undocumented, female, Asian immigrant in the first half of the twentieth century.

Indeed, Ishigaki's (2004) book offers insights into early Asian migrant women's feminist epistemology and activism. Contemporary reviews of *Restless Wave* seemed to read the book as a political treatise over a variety of topics, but rarely acknowledged Ishigaki's gender politics. Harold Henderson (1940, 7), for instance, called the memoir "frankly propaganda—propaganda for the people of Japan and fiercely against its present government." Pearl S. Buck (1940, 165), too, saw the criticism of Japan as the book's main focus: "Through the mist one

sees dimly the outlines of a Japan that in the midst of much beauty has sharp and cruel aspects, especially for a woman." Both reviewers point to important elements of the text but overlook Ishigaki's far-reaching intersectional investigation and critique of sexism, classism, racism, and xenophobia in Japan *and* the United States.

Restless Wave speaks to issues of gender, race, class, and nationality and presents a platform for those voices that have historically been silenced. It demonstrates that gender plays a crucial role in Asian migration movements and offers insight into the feminist consciousness of at least some Japanese women immigrants in the early twentieth century. In skillfully and emphatically linking her own experiences of discrimination as a Japanese female immigrant in the United States in the 1920s through the early 1940s with those of other oppressed groups, Ishigaki exposes Japanese women's fight for equality in a rapidly changing, patriarchal society and makes visible racist and xenophobic forces upon immigration.

Ishigaki's privileged upbringing provided her with a high level of literacy and access to elite social groups in Japan and later in the United States. Yet, her astute critical observation skills, her critique of women's second-class status, and her experiences with racism and xenophobia morphed her into a person who dedicated her personal life and career to feminist causes. Ishigaki was born in Tokyo in 1903 into an elite household that sheltered her from most issues of social injustice during her youth. After getting involved in the labor and women's rights movements in Japan, she came to the United States in 1926 at the age of 23. Since the Immigration Act of 1924 made it illegal for Japanese citizens to enter the United States, Ishigaki's immigration was only possible through a temporary visa that she was granted for living with her sister and brother-in-law, who held diplomatic status, in Washington, DC.[1] After living with her sister for some time, she moved to New York, as she felt that her gender, class, and nationality increasingly isolated her. This move rendered her undocumented and therefore a so-called "illegal alien."[2] Most likely due to her status, only a few concrete details about Ishigaki's life after her move are recorded. We know that she chose Eitaro Ishigaki, an artist, as her husband over a fiancé in Japan who could have procured financial stability. Defying familial expectations, she stayed in the United States and worked menial jobs in restaurants and supermarkets as an undocumented migrant. Blacklisted from re-entering Japan because of her antiwar work, Ishigaki (together with Eitaro) was able to return to her birth place in 1951.[3] As a journalist and feminist activist, Ishigaki wrote over twenty books. Many deal with the exploitation of workers and especially women, but only *Restless Wave* is accessible to an English-speaking audience.[4] She died in Japan in 1996.

Ishigaki's entry into the United States constitutes a case study of women's immigration across the Pacific at a time when anti-Japanese sentiments were rampant. Yuji Ichioka (1980, 357) claims that before the Immigration Act of

1924 went into effect, "a few bachelors rushed to Japan to get married . . . and managed to return with their brides before July 1, the effective date of the act. These brides were the last Japanese women to immigrate to the United States until well after World War II." Ishigaki's experiences contradict such historical assertions and are, thus, essential to analyze. *Restless Wave* becomes an even more notable testimony of power and agency when we consider Ichioka's (1980, 339) remark that "[d]espite playing a crucial role in the growth of Japanese immigrant society, Japanese immigrant women are absent from most historical accounts of Japanese immigration." It seems that historians' interest in the experiences and social contributions of immigrant women of color has been limited.[5]

This is a striking omission, as Ronald Takaki (2008, 233) writes that, in 1920, women made up 46 percent of the Japanese immigrant population in Hawaii and 35 percent in California. Unlike other nations, Japan regulated its citizens' migration and actively sent women as picture brides in arranged marriages to the United States in an effort to prevent drinking, gambling, and promiscuity among Japanese men (Takaki 2008, 233–34). Global movements by working-class women of color were almost exclusively reduced to the fulfillment of their patriarchal role as wives or considered to be performing menial labor, which was seen as irrelevant to US society and history by many scholars. A "failure to perceive women's lives as significant outside of or beyond marriage" existed (and still often exists in migration research today) also because of a lack of primary sources, especially about working-class and poor women (Hassel 1993, 554). *Restless Wave* presents material that urges a reconsideration of not just Japanese but all immigrant women's lives in the United States.

While Ishigaki's story is unique due to her elite socioeconomic status, the experiences she recounts that are rooted in sexism, racism, and xenophobia are representative of many Asian women immigrants to the United States. Her memoir links individual and collective history to make a strong statement against injustice. Malve von Hassel (1993, 551) elaborates on the troubling consequences of the above-mentioned academic neglect: "Issei [first-generation Japanese immigrant] women represent literally and figuratively a silent generation of whom little is known even by their children—who frequently could do nothing but repeat the stereotypical descriptions of their mothers as passive, submissive, quiet, gentle, and traditional." Ishigaki challenges the silencing of Japanese immigrant women's experiences in her memoir.

In the following pages, I read Ishigaki's narrative as a case study to explore early incarnations of Japanese migrant women's feminisms. Through a detailed close reading of Ishigaki's memoir, accompanied by historical contextualization, I offer an analysis of how Ishigaki critiques gender norms in Japan and the United States, responds to violations against the Japanese immigrant community in the United States, and spreads awareness about the lives and experiences of women of Asian descent and other immigrant women of color, highlighting the ways that sexism, racism, classism, and xenophobia intersect.

Critique of Patriarchal Expectations in Japan

Born into a wealthy home, Ishigaki was not immediately aware of the patriarchal forces shaping her life. She describes the environment in which she was socialized as a "quiet world, like the mirrored surface of an ancient pool; . . . sometimes a wind ruffled the surface to waves, but it returned again to ancient, untroubled calm" (Ishigaki 2004, 93). Eventually, though, the reader comes to understand that "in [her] mind, mighty waves were dashing" (160). Ishigaki received a better education than most girls at the time. Only when she started questioning the purpose of her education, to become *rōysai kenbo*, "dutiful wives and intelligent mothers," did she begin to notice the extent of women's oppression as trained servants for the men in their lives (Ichioka 1980, 349).[6] Even though Ishigaki appreciated her father's emphasis on education for his children—he taught them English from a young age—she soon realized the hypocrisy of girls' education: "Girls were taught the value of exercise and then made to sit stiffly, legs under them, knees close together, eyes straight ahead, and faces blank" (Ishigaki 2004, 9). Girls must ignore what little education they receive to fit into the patriarchal mold of passive, oblivious subordinate.

While this was a widespread attitude toward girls' education globally at the time (and still remains so today), certain male-centric understandings of family and hierarchy were unique to the Japanese state during the time of Ishigaki's childhood. Hassel (1993) offers insights into Japanese society during the Meiji period, which modernized the country between 1868 and 1912. She explains that the government employed the Confucian principle of "unquestioning obedience to a higher authority" to prop up its power (554). This understanding ran through all of society, the nuclear family, as well as the nation led by the emperor. Especially in poor and working-class Japanese households, however, ideology did not mirror lived reality for many women, who worked outside of the home and made the country's economic boom possible (555).

Ishigaki observed sexism as a young girl and eventually set out to challenge strict gender norms by making women's strength the main focus of her memoir. She was especially concerned with fighting stereotypes about Japanese women being weak and passive. Memories of women in control, like the anecdote of the strong, building women which opens this article, clash with Ishigaki's family's expectations for her future: "My grandmother pitied me. 'You are gentle and obedient, Haru. . . . You will make an ideal bride when you grow up'" (2004, 8). Aware of the vicious cycle that limits women's opportunities, Ishigaki's grandmother feared that her granddaughter would comply with the "Code of Greater Duties," which tells a woman that her "highest obligation is obedience to man" and that "complete submission [is] the highest virtue of woman" (8, 9). Ishigaki and her sisters were unable to escape this cultural fixation on heterosexual marriage and motherhood. Perpetually, they were told to keep their lives in order or "no one would want [them] for brides" (16). Otherwise, they were not

expected to contribute to Japanese society, bring fame to the family, or carry on the family's legacy. Not surprisingly, Ishigaki "never saw [her] father so happy as the day his son was born" (9). Most families judged investments in girls as futile, a phenomenon that still hinders gender equality in large parts of the world today: "He esteemed his son more . . . [because] his daughters would be given away as brides and would then belong wholly to their husband's families" (19). Even as a little girl, Ishigaki was painfully aware of her father's and Japanese society's favoritism toward male children. Sons received attention and admiration, a bias that Ishigaki pushes her readers to question.

Ishigaki's stepmother served as a daily reminder of the expectations of hegemonic Japanese femininity: "She submitted with strict obedience to carrying out Father's wishes. This was accepted as a matter of course; but so submissively did she discharge her duties that even in the internal affairs of the house, which she was supposed to control, she *did not emerge as a real person*" (Ishigaki 2004, 40; emphasis added). Second Mother functioned as a robot that kept the household in order, not as a human being capable of emotions and desires. Contrasting Second Mother's confinement, Ishigaki heard about "new women" who "'read and write and make speeches . . . [and] even write novels and other books'" (61).[7] Although she found such activities attractive, she was trained to dehumanize these women by seeing them as "demons" (63).

This training worked so well that Ishigaki (2004), as a child, was outraged that a female caretaker at school was the breadwinner in her family: "How could she stand such a life? Did she feel unhappy at the disgrace? I was enraged to think that this kind of woman had such a miserable husband" (60). Due to the pervasive socially-constructed link between womanhood and submissiveness and domesticity, it was initially hard for Ishigaki to imagine that a woman would voluntarily forego a traditional life. Nevertheless, living with Second Mother, who rarely left the house and only had her sewing as a way of mentally escaping her duties, continuously strengthened in Ishigaki the wish to leave the confines of her home. She hoped that by studying diligently, she might be able to achieve that goal.

In addition to gender inequality, Ishigaki became increasingly aware of economic injustice, thereby developing an understanding of systems of oppression as interlocking and mutually reinforcing.[8] When her family went on vacations at the beach, she saw fishermen's daughters sweeping and working in shops at the same age as Ishigaki: "I could not understand why they had gone from childhood to womanhood without, like us, passing through a period of girlhood" (2004, 55). These images stayed with her. It began to dawn on Ishigaki that class status influences the opportunities young women receive. Making connections between the power of sexism and classism over Japanese women serves as just one example of how Ishigaki practices intersectional analysis throughout her memoir. *Restless Wave* points to intersecting patterns to explain how poor women in Japan experienced oppression differently than the author, an upper-class

woman. To bridge class divides, Ishigaki highlights the need for empathy and protest against intersecting forms of subjugation. Her life writing constitutes an important reminder that intersectionality—the "interplay of identities and the push-pull of multiple forms of power" (May 2015, 3)—is not merely a feminist concept "developed" in the 1990s but has always been an analytical tool for women to make sense of their lives and to fight the oppressive status quo.

In her critique of workers' poor treatment—a focus in most of her writings—Ishigaki (2004) makes empathetic observations about the connections between class and gender. When she visited a textile factory on a school excursion, she was exposed to young women's harsh work conditions. She shares with her readers a stanza from a workers' protest song: "The factory is just like a hell / Our foreman is like a devil" (112). Ishigaki's activism and writing recognize the feminization of menial labor, a system that abuses women for their supposed docility and nimbleness. She would write about this topic even after her immigration. Her compassion and advocacy for working women motivated her to push for universal labor rights. Together with the image of the female builders that originated in her childhood and the school teacher who is the breadwinner in her family, working women function as symbols of strength throughout the memoir. They initially intimidated Ishigaki but eventually shaped her intersectional consciousness.

Restless Wave reveals the seemingly expendable nature of women's and working-class people's lives. One key episode focuses on the 1923 earthquake that killed thousands in Tokyo. During this catastrophe, women factory workers were prevented from escaping burning buildings: "[T]hey had been thrust back by guards who told them that they had been bought and that their lives were not their own" (Ishigaki 2004, 146). Emergency exits were locked, and many women burned to death.[9] While Japanese society at that time limited upper-class women in their self-development by raising them solely to serve their husband and children, capitalism objectified poor and working-class women as dispensable tools of industrial production. After visiting a community center in a working-class district, where she "felt that poverty's dark heaviness, issuing from the earth unendingly, was shriveling [her] heart" (153), Ishigaki came to an important self-realization: "I had considered the slums, not on a level with me, but below me" (155). As she learned to understand the shared humanity of all oppressed people, she exclaimed, "If I am human, so are these slum-dwellers" (154). This insight served as the main motivation for her economic, feminist, and political activism later in life.

Eventually, Ishigaki rebelled against the forces restricting her life choices. She attended a labor meeting against her teacher's and father's warnings. After leaving the assembly, she voiced for the first time her longing for independence: "I knew that there was something inside me that did not belong to my house, that did not belong to my country, that was neither my family's nor my ancestors', but was all mine" (2004, 102). Ishigaki's process of emancipating herself from oppressive

traditions can be traced to this moment. As she recalled, her "mind was filled with thoughts so stormy and agitating that to sew quietly was wearisome" (115). Because of her growing consciousness about gender and class discrimination, it became difficult for Ishigaki to perform her assigned social role. She stringently criticized her sister's arranged marriage: "[I]sn't it like being a prostitute . . . I think it is the same thing as selling your own body" (117–18). Influenced by her newly awakened sense of gender injustice, Ishigaki could not help but chastise her sister for being complacent with a custom that, to her, keeps up the commodification of women. Since she feared a similar destiny, she started wearing Western dress and cut off her hair to emphasize her independent and rebellious spirit.

Economic independence was the next step for Ishigaki in her quest to challenge patriarchy. Defying her family's expectations for her future, she accepted a job as a magazine writer: "I had decided that if I could earn my own living I would be relieved of the mental burden of being unable to obey my father's wishes" (Ishigaki 2004, 161). For Ishigaki, her father functioned as the personification of Japanese society's oppressive system against women. She writes, "Even though he was my father, he could not put the bird back in a narrow cage" (159). It is fitting that Ishigaki's metaphor of herself as a bird struggling to claim personal freedom resembles Marilyn Frye's (1983) discussion of a birdcage. Frye uses the image to describe how oppression immobilizes people, molding and confining their lives through "forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other" (4). To help shatter these systemic powers of inequality, Ishigaki began writing for the radical feminist publication *Woman and Labor*. She realized that "in order to live I must do something useful" (2004, 169). Her continued labor and feminist activism eventually earned Ishigaki a night in a detention cell.

Throughout the memoir, Ishigaki's critical stance toward Japanese society becomes more and more pronounced, which sets up the realization for the reader that she will have to leave the country of her birth. Her word choice describing one of the final incidents before her departure expresses her feelings of desperation: When a police officer remarks that she had better not attend any labor meetings because "'[w]ouldn't it be terrible if you couldn't become a bride?'" she counters, "The restless waves in my mind felt as though they would dash into my face" (2004, 173). Ishigaki's refusal to accept gender norms as a reason for complacency makes her, as Lin and Robinson (2004, 277) observe, a "bridge figure in Japanese feminism." She rejected feudal gender roles in favor of becoming a "new woman" *and* a migrant.

Gender and Japanese Women's Immigration

Ishigaki's (2004) feminist ideas were uniquely shaped by her social position as a woman migrant from Japan. She moved to a nation that endorsed sexist and xenophobic immigration laws and social attitudes but also afforded her greater

freedom than she had experienced as a woman in Japan. While the Japanese American community offered her protection, there was also an insistence on strict gender norms. In response to these tensions, Ishigaki embraced an intersectional approach toward social change and developed a transnational identity, resisting external pressure to identify with just one nation or culture.

Ishigaki refused to conform to gendered and racialized norms for Asian and Asian American women that stigmatize them as doubly submissive, as a woman and as an Asian. As Yoko Arisaka (2000, 214–15) explains, "*[N]ot* to have an independent or critical voice is not just a female virtue, but a virtue of cultivated personhood" (214–15; emphasis in original). Arisaka contends that the invisibility of women of specifically East Asian descent stems from three main reasons. First, the category "Asian" marks its members as eternal foreigners. Second, Confucianism demands "self-effacement": you "obey authority," "yield to others," and "never call attention to yourself." Third, Orientalism 'others' people of Asian descent. Ishigaki's rebellion against these gendered and racialized constrictions is apparent throughout her memoir.

The author's journey to the United States makes Ishigaki's an important narrative to comprehend feminist epistemologies with regard to women's transnational movements and lives. Not surprisingly, "[t]o all of [her] relatives [her] departure was a relief," since they considered her as having "soiled" the family name by being eccentric and unmarried (Ishigaki 2004, 186). Because she refused to conform to Japanese gender norms, Ishigaki was seen as an outsider to such a degree that leaving her community seemed like the most viable choice. While she was excited about the prospect of living more independently, her words as she sees the Japanese shore vanish from the ship insinuate that her voyage was not purely a choice as "love for my country . . . boiled up painfully" (187). It seems that, had she received the option, she would have liked to remain in her home country and work toward changing oppressive systems from within.

A consistent pattern in Ishigaki's descriptions is that of migration as both a liberating and isolating experience. Upon arrival, her doubts and concerns increased. She felt lonely and thought about the quiet life that she would be leading in Japan had she conformed to local gender norms. She was "frightened" that the "real America" would turn out differently from her "dream-America" (2004, 189). Her worries were certainly warranted. Ishigaki reached the United States shortly after the first wave of Japanese women migrants, who arrived between 1909 and 1924. The 1907–8 Gentlemen's Agreement limited the entry of Japanese male workers but allowed wives to join their husbands. Before the Immigration Act of 1924 stopped legal immigration from Asia, women constituted two-fifths of all migrants from Japan (Glenn 1986, 8). Most of them arrived from small, rural towns in the South of Japan as the wives or daughters of male immigrants (22, 27).

Valerie Matsumoto (1993, 17) describes how "arrival [for Japanese immigrant women most often] meant adjustment to unfamiliar foods and customs as well

as immediate immersion in a grueling round of labor." These women played a crucial role in keeping the Japanese American community together. In 1920, over 20 percent of Japanese immigrant women over the age of ten were employed outside the home (68–69). The same year in Hawaii, 14 percent of all fieldworkers were women, and most of them Japanese; they performed the same strenuous work as men but were paid less (Takaki 2008, 240). Additionally, women had "double duty," as they were also responsible for all housework and other forms of unpaid labor for the family (254). As farmers were not allowed to lease land for more than three years, families needed to relocate constantly and replant their crops. These responsibilities tended to increase women's workload. Their contribution to family finances, however, often raised issei women's status in the family. In addition, not living with their mothers-in-law—often gatekeepers of a strict family hierarchy—was a welcome change for many (Nakano 1990, 38).

Ishigaki's gender and class status made her unique among immigrants. She was not a wife, seeking to reunite with a husband who had left her behind. Nor was she a wife traveling with a new husband who had returned from the United States to find a suitable bride. She also was not a picture bride married to a man she had never met. These husbands tended to be absent at the actual wedding ceremony because they either could not afford to travel or did not want to risk being drafted into the Japanese army (Ichioka 1980, 341–42). The Japanese and US government made it difficult for women to receive passports. Officially, they sought to prevent the purchase of sex among the predominantly male immigrant community after the anti-Chinese movement in the United States targeted Chinese prostitutes for spreading supposed immorality (343). As Patti Duncan (2004, 174) illuminates, the stereotype of the Chinese woman as prostitute in combination with "imperialist and capitalist expansion into Asian nations [and] United States and other Western powers' occupation of and subsequent demand for prostitution economies within Asian countries" resulted in a long history of "denigrating stereotypes about Asian women's deviant sexuality, erotic sensibilities, and exotic sexual practices."

Regardless of Japanese immigrant women's sexual propriety, their arrival caused a public outcry. Their presence, economic contributions to their families, and ability to bear children assisted in the shift of the Japanese immigrant community from sojourners to permanent residents. American-born children allowed Japanese immigrants to circumvent the alien land laws that only allowed citizens to own land. As a result, in 1921, the Japanese government under pressure from the United States banned picture prides from receiving passports. Their immigration and subsequent labor practices were interpreted as violations of the Gentlemen's Agreement (Glenn 1986, 50). While all migrants of Asian descent were perceived as an unassimilable "yellow scare," gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality intersected for Japanese women to produce stereotypes that continue to negatively affect Asian and Asian American women. They "were generally portrayed as degraded creatures, cheap commodities, and sex objects

who took jobs from whites, spread disease and vice, and corrupted the young" (Chow 1996, 258). Issei women's bodies were turned into rhetorical tools to support xenophobic propaganda.

Due to harsh policing tools put in place by US society and the Japanese immigrant community itself to perpetuate women's submission and to assuage anti-immigrant forces, issei women rarely opened up about their "fears, loneliness, doubts, sadness, or anger" (Chow 1996, 563). For Ishigaki to assert her freedom, to assume an independent role in US society, and to make her thoughts and emotions public was a move of intense courage; doing so meant that she was likely to experience ostracism from her own community, which prioritized xenophobia as a worthy target of struggle and frequently ignored sexism. Crenshaw (1991, 1258) echoes Ishigaki's determination in having her voice heard when she writes that "women of color need not await the ultimate triumph over racism before they can expect to live violence-free lives." Silence was impossible for Ishigaki as she advocated for intersectional social change.

Ishigaki initially journeyed as a privileged migrant, but she identified with stories of hardship, racism, and financial insecurity and discovered political inspiration from less privileged women. One day, she saw a woman walk upright in the streets: "To my eyes used to the timorous gait of Japanese women, who walked with short steps, drooping shoulders, and eyes cast down, these figures of women were a symbol of free, unhampered womanhood" (2004, 194). Ishigaki attributes the confidence of the Japanese immigrant woman to her new geographical location. Thinking back to the image of strong women lifting beams at the beginning of the memoir, it seems that Ishigaki did not intend to imply that women in Japan were passive victims, but that Japanese patriarchy limited their self-actualization. The immigrant woman figure confirmed for Ishigaki that migrating and challenging gender norms can be intricately connected.

Even after this observation, though, Ishigaki does not simply describe immigration as a unilaterally positive experience. She acknowledges that she "could get no glimpse into the substance of American life. . . . It seemed to [her] that [she] had lost [her]self when [she] landed in this country" (2004, 197). These feelings of a lost sense of self were only heightened by the continuous loneliness she experienced living in Washington, DC. She remarks that she "began to stay at home more and more, because it was easier to sit alone than to appear before people" (198). She does not specify what led to these feelings of isolation; one might suspect that a resistance on the part of her family to let a young woman explore the city on her own, her foreigner status, and the widespread suspicion against immigrants from Asia might have made it harder for her to connect with people outside her immediate family or circle of diplomatic acquaintances. It became clear to Ishigaki that merely being physically present on a different continent would not help her experience independence, fulfillment, and a sense of identity that is not rooted in assimilation. To achieve

her goals, she decided to leave for New York City, a more vibrant, cosmopolitan city, despite her father's disapproval and restrictions put on her by US immigration services. With her move, she effectively challenged patriarchy both on the familial and national level.

Ishigaki's feminist philosophy was especially influenced by her astute understanding of the intersections of gender and class oppression, which—as I have elaborated on earlier in this article—she already expressed before leaving her birthplace. Her critique of gender inequality in connection with economic exploitation served as the foundation for most of her activism, writing, and lecturing while residing in the United States as well as after her return to Japan. Reminiscent of contemporary theories of intersectionality, Ishigaki points to her gender, race, class, and nationality as interlaced aspects of her identity, shaping her experiences of privilege and oppression. During the Great Depression, she experienced poverty herself. She worked in factories, as a clerk, and, at one point, by selling waffles. The connections between gender and class became especially painful for Ishigaki when she miscarried. This period of her life reminded her of a farmer wife whom she had met in Japan. The woman explained that nothing was as hard as losing a child. Ishigaki recalls, "I knew for the first time the mind of the mother who lives in poverty, unable to care adequately for her children" (2004, 223). Ishigaki saw the ability to give birth to and raise children in a safe environment as a fundamental feminist issue.

The connection of motherhood with class and race is important to explore for Japanese women migrants and other women of color. Ishigaki, in her role as a journalist, wrote extensively about the relationship between gender and economic exploitation especially of poor rural women in Japan (Lin and Robinson 2004, 258). But her understanding of these connections did not remain geographically contained in Japan. Shaped by racism and xenophobia, as well as patriarchy and labor exploitation, Japanese immigrant women in the United States experienced excessive physical demands. They were regarded as the sole caretakers of children and the household. Women also had to work outside the home under hard conditions "as workers whose labor was indispensable in the operation of labor camps, farms, and small businesses" (Ichioka 1980, 349). Being expected to work these "two shifts"—in both cases often under primitive conditions—took a toll on many women. It was especially hard for picture brides whose grooms usually had promised them a vastly different lifestyle. Often struggling with the English language, American social customs, as well as the effects of US racism and heteropatriarchy, many working-class Japanese women became dependent on their husbands in almost all spheres of life, which made emancipation a far-fetched goal (355).

Ishigaki (2004) critically comments on this dynamic of women's reliance on men and patriarchal subordination. She writes, "The women I met on the street walked with backs rounded and faces down, taking short steps with toes pointed inward. . . . It was as though hereditary Japanese etiquette had seeped

into their bodies, so that their heads dropped naturally" (227). The earlier image of the upright Japanese woman, which initially inspired Ishigaki, demands an intersectional interpretation: While physically being in the United States provided Ishigaki with the chance to experience greater freedom, she observed that this is not the case for all Japanese women migrants. Traise Yamamoto (1999) explains that "Japanese immigrant and Japanese American women have often lived difficult lives, laboring under harsh, frequently humiliating, conditions of poverty and subject to the authority of their fathers and husbands" (2). Patriarchal ideals—which exist in white, western communities as much as in immigrant communities—still exert, upon immigration, enormous power over those women who, due to their families' economic situation, do not have the privilege to prioritize their own needs.

Since the Japanese immigrant community set up a tightly knit system of social policing that disproportionately targeted women's behavior, women risked social shaming and ostracism for debating the possibility of leaving their husbands (Ichioka 1980, 352). And yet, these women were often able to show admirable dignity and strength in the face of adversity. Japanese women were not only policed within their own communities but also by US cultural forces and Orientalist beliefs that stereotyped Japan as a country inhabited by childlike, servile, and passive women. This infantilized image exerted negative influences on immigrant women: The "Japanese woman has been constructed not as a subject with subjectivity but as a subject of serviceability" (Yamamoto 1999, 60). Through her stories about Japanese women's agency, Ishigaki challenges these oppressive powers and demands full personhood for women of Japanese descent.

Yet, leaving the safe space her family offered in Washington, DC, proved especially risky for Ishigaki since, as Ichioka (1980, 355) states, "For anti-Japanese agitators Japanese women were easy targets to attack." Ishigaki (2004) recognized the hostility towards Japanese people in the United States and the regional variations of anti-Japanese sentiment. With a growing Japanese immigrant community in the late nineteenth century, xenophobic and nationalist attitudes increased, especially in California where the majority of Japanese immigrants resided. All Asians were deemed an unassimilable Other, a yellow peril that supposedly threatened white society economically and sexually. In Los Angeles for a visit, Ishigaki observed that she "had had little occasion to know the suffering and pain of the Japanese in America. . . . [T]hese people had special strength to endure the suffering" (229). While immigrating brought certain liberties to Japanese nationals, the racism within US society regularly made life difficult and demanded perseverance from all communities of color. She continues that "[i]n California the notion that the Japanese are an inferior race is still prevalent. . . . In order to avoid the hard, lonely feeling of having their pride trampled upon, the Japanese cling together as closely as they do, and do not mix in American life" (231). She seeks to explain to her readers that the Japanese immigrant community stuck together not for disinterest in American

life—a stereotype that was used to emphasize a supposed lack of assimilation efforts—but for fear of racist retaliation. Targeting another prevalent xenophobic accusation against Asian immigrants, Ishigaki defended their lack of English skills. She points out that "they have been so busy working, smeared with mud, that they have had no time to learn even a word of English" (233). Because of their mostly working-class status, many issei did not have the luxury to take the time to become fluent in English. When one must work daily to secure survival, language skills are not a priority.

And yet, every effort was made to seem content and worry-free: "Fearing to be called betrayers of the nation, the people concealed their fears and even restrained their sighs" (Ishigaki 2004, 235). Ishigaki commented sadly on how these struggles affected the relationship between the issei and their American children, the nisei. Because the issei put all their hopes for integration and prosperity into their children, the latter often grew up completely Americanized with no connection to the traditions their parents held dear to their hearts. She also clarified that the nisei were not rewarded for their loyalty toward their place of birth. Instead, they found "themselves pushed toward social ostracism because they are yellow; and they tend to accept discrimination as their fate" (233). She observes that "the Japanese are treated as stepchildren by American society, and are always hedged in by fences of prejudice" (230–31). Ishigaki made this eerily accurate statement two years before the internment period, which literally put Japanese immigrants and their US-citizen children between fences and watchtowers.

Ishigaki and her husband themselves escaped internment camps during World War II as a result of geographical location. Within four months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, 120,000 Japanese Americans on the West Coast were dispossessed and relocated to ten camps in the interior parts of the country for fear of sabotage. No evidence of treason was ever found. In addition, the majority of those interned were US citizens. Ishigaki was not detained because she lived on the East Coast, but she and her husband had to register as enemy aliens; they too "were subject to curfews and random searches" (Lin and Robinson 2004, 265). With their financial assets frozen, like other issei, they experienced financial hardship as well as a sense of precarity as they were more likely to become targets of racism and various forms of violence.

Ishigaki (2004) condemned racism against Japanese Americans and other people of color in the United States and critiqued the sexism within her own Japanese American community. She challenged the single axis approach of having to prioritize either gender or race/ethnicity. Her stance mirrors Yamada's (1983, 75) claim that "my ethnicity cannot be separated from my feminism." Similarly, Chinese American poet Nellie Wong queried in "Under Our Own Wings": "How can we separate our race from our sex our sex from our race? / And we hear again and again we must struggle against racism / at the exclusion of sexism. / And we hear again and again we must struggle against sexism / at

the exclusion of racism" (2003, 6). Collectively, these authors undermine the demands to prioritize nationalistic, masculinist goals within their communities. For Ishigaki (originally writing in 1940), Yamada (1983), and Wong (2003), struggles against racism, sexism, and xenophobia intersect and cannot be fought separately. Their words express a continuum that exhibits interlocking systems of oppression as lived experience for women of color, and *Restless Wave* stands as an important reminder that migration and citizenship status are essential elements to consider in an intersectional analysis.

Ishigaki's Intersectional Story-Telling as Activism

In terms of its genre, *Restless Wave* strives to do more than chronicle the author's life and convey a sense of her own identity. While the text carries the subtitle "memoir," Ishigaki herself called the work "'a novelistic semi-autobiographical text'" (Lin and Robinson 2004, 254). As memoir, testimonio, fiction, political treatise, "prose essay, Asian American history, feminist manifesto, anti-war tract, and bildungsroman," *Restless Wave* functions as a vessel to offer an Asian immigrant woman's perspective on a variety of pertinent social justice issues (253–54). Conscious of the "importance that knowledge plays in empowering oppressed people" (Collins 1991, 221), Ishigaki (2004) conceived of her memoir as a declaration of women's strength. Importantly, the work presents the reader with an alternative to the stereotypical script of the Japanese (American) woman as a passive victim of patriarchal oppression. Ishigaki's mixing of genres and her social justice focus might explain the lack of attention her work has received. As Hsu (2006, xvii) points out, most literary analysis of migration has focused on traditional (oftentimes male-centered) forms of ethnic autobiography and the Bildungsroman, sweeping more experimental forms, like *Restless Wave*, "under the rug of identity politics and assimilation narratives." This attitude too easily ignores women's and other marginalized groups' voices and those stories that identify and critique oppression.

Ishigaki's (2004) hybrid genre, which pushes for social change with its heavy reliance on personal experience and its ability to create close connections with the reader, offers a powerful venue for women of color to share their lived experiences. Patricia Hill Collins (1991, 232) comments that African American women, from their marginalized social position, "make creative use of their outsider-within status and produce innovative . . . feminist thought." I propose that Ishigaki's publication of her Japanese woman migrant standpoint likewise holds the power to "refashion[] the concrete and reveal[] the more universal human dimensions of [in her case, Asian immigrant] women's everyday lives" (233). Aware of the controversial nature of some of the topics she wrote about, Ishigaki published the work under the pen-name Haru Matsui to protect her family (Lin and Robinson 2004, 258). Intersecting with the silencing pressures of sexism and racism, her precarious immigration status might have contributed

to her desire for anonymity. Ishigaki published all her writings in the United States as an undocumented alien; hence, offending her audience held dangerous repercussions for Ishigaki especially since, as Mitsuye Yamada (1983, 71) elucidates, "[w]hen Third World Women are asked to speak representing our racial or ethnic group, we are expected to move, charm or entertain, but not to educate in ways that are threatening to our audience." In sharing information about Ishigaki's community with the didactic goal of creating empathy, *Restless Wave* functions as a rebel text that challenges patriarchal oppression.

Ishigaki understood both the control of culture and the control of the nation state, and she manipulated, through her writing, both forces in the name of social justice. She especially empathized with mothers who lost their children to war. This led to Ishigaki's protest of Japanese aggression in China during the Second Sino-Japanese War between 1937 and 1941 (Lin and Robinson 2004, 258). Her memoir accuses Japan of destructive militarism and sympathizes with the soldiers dying in the war and their wives: "Their sorrow beat against my breast, and within my heart burned hatred of the power that started the war which destroyed this peaceful family" (Ishigaki 2004, 246). In an emphatically pacifist voice, she declares that "when gentleness was condemned as cowardice and femininity, when cruel violence was exalted as strength and valor, when massacre was made their duty as soldiers—then these soldiers extinguished their human minds and threw away their souls" (245). Ishigaki critiques the insistence on the performance of masculinity as solely violent and aggressive. Doing so turns human beings into mindless, disposable killing machines. She was certain that the soldiers will eventually "know that they were deceived in believing that it was for the sake of the nation" (246). To her, such a manipulation of patriotic feelings for the political and economic gain of the elite constitutes a human rights violation.

Incensed by her strong feelings against Japanese war tactics, Ishigaki entered a more open path of political activism by giving public talks about the war and Japan in general. She became active as part of protest marches and as a member of the Japanese Communist party (Lin and Robinson 2004, 257–58). She did so despite the fact that as an undocumented immigrant in the United States, she had little protection against arrest and deportation. While she understood the danger inherent in speaking up about injustice, she also could not force herself to acquiesce: "But still I cannot be silent; I cannot betray humanity and my people" (Ishigaki 2004, 251). Not even the knowledge that her activism made it "impossible for [her] to go back soon to Japan" kept her from protesting what she saw as violations of human dignity (251). Her fears of criticism and possible retaliations were not far-fetched, since her father seemed to have shunned her and the Japanese consulate reprimanded her for her activism (Lin and Robinson 2004, 263).

Once she returned to Japan in 1951, Ishigaki continued her anti-oppression work as a well-known expert on the United States at a time when Japanese

citizens could not migrate to the United States. During the occupation, most views on the United States were necessarily tame. However, Ishigaki established herself as a fearless critic of American racism and anticommunism. She wrote articles, gave lectures, worked as a radio commentator, and translated books from English to Japanese. She authored many articles encouraging Japanese women to fight for emancipation from stifling gender roles. In the 1955 article "Housewife: The Second Profession," published in *Fujyin Koron*, she calls for wives and mothers to pursue employment and activity outside the household to avoid being "starved of intellectual stimulation and [made] increasingly infantile" (Lin and Robinson 2004, 273). At the time, the essay caused a nationwide "housewife debate." After her writing had mostly fallen into oblivion, Japanese feminists revived her legacy in the 1970s (274).

Conclusion

Ishigaki's (2004) writing and activism demonstrate early resistance against oppression on the part of Asian American women. *Restless Wave* and Ishigaki's other writings are powerful examples of a Japanese immigrant woman breaking through forced invisibility and speaking out against various forms of injustice. Many issues that Ishigaki discusses in her memoir are still of vital importance to Asian American women today. Women of Asian descent in the United States experience multiple, intersecting forms of oppression. They are frequently stereotyped as either passive and docile, or threatening and hypersexual. Through a set of controlling images, they are deemed submissive geishas as well as sexually-serving dragon ladies. These images create a "highly publicized market for the sexual services of Asian women, both in the United States and abroad, comprised of mail-order bride businesses, massage parlors and brothels, and racialized pornography" (Duncan 2004, 174). In addition, the model minority stereotype marks people of Asian descent as the reputedly "best" kind of immigrants, presents them as lacking in economic struggles, and pits them against other minoritized communities. Asian American women are pushing back against these experiences with oppression in various and creative ways. For example, performance artist Kristina Wong's work, such as her short film *Asian Vaginas End Racism!* (2014), uses poignant feminist satire to critique the hypersexualization of Asian bodies that are perceived as female.

From Sonia Shah's 1997 edited collection *Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire* to Lynn Fujiwara and Shireen Roshanravan's 2018 *Asian American Feminisms and Women of Color Politics*, Asian and Asian American women's voices exploring what it means to be a feminist of Asian descent in the United States have been receiving attention. In an effort to continue recognizing and celebrating the feminisms of women of Asian descent, I recommend reading and analyzing Ishigaki's *Restless Wave* as a fruitful work on intersectional

feminism, gender studies, and migration studies which offers important insights into the life of a feminist foremother.

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Notes

1. While, in reality, Ishigaki came to the United States to help her pregnant sister for only a year, leaving behind a fiancé, who planned to get her father's approval of their marriage while she was gone, the memoir has Ishigaki stay with an uncle and aunt possibly to protect her family's identity (Lin and Robinson 2004, 255). The immigration restrictions on Japanese immigrants were not fully repealed until the Immigration Act of 1965.
2. In 1947, a bill was introduced into Congress to grant Ishigaki permanent resident status due to her support of the United States during World War II, but the bill was never considered (Lin and Robinson 2004, 268).
3. While Ishigaki and Eitaro had made plans to return to Japan, Eitaro was, in fact, arrested and deported before the couple could leave voluntarily (Lin and Robinson 2004, 271).
4. For a list of selected works by Ishigaki see http://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/166232, a very informative entry on Ishigaki in University of Minnesota's *Voices from the Gaps* online series (Boone, Diedrichsen, and Fosse 2006).
5. Some studies have attempted to close this gap. Among them are Kikumura 1981; Glenn 1986; Hune and Nomura 2003; Sueyoshi 2005; and Tsu 2009.
6. Ichioka (1980) mostly focuses on the experiences of picture brides—women selected as brides based on photographs by male Japanese immigrants in the United States who were unable to travel to Japan for a wedding—but her comments on the social construction of femininity in Japan are still vital for reading *Restless Wave*.
7. See also Lowy (2007, 1): at the beginning of the twentieth-century marked by efforts of modernization, discussions ensued in Japan about gender roles to foster a "strong national identity" (1). That time period saw the expansion of educational opportunities for both sexes, but women remained restricted to domestic roles as "rational homemaker[s]" (4). Because women's political activity was punishable in the 1890s (according to Article 5 of the Public Peace Police Law), some women started expressing their ideas in women's magazines (7). The Japanese women most associated with the term "new women" in the media were the members of Seitōsha, a feminist literary organization founded in 1911, and the women who wrote for its journal, *Seitō*. Hiratsuka Raishō, as founder and editor of the journal, was one of the most prominent new women (9).
8. For a detailed social history of Japan's modernization period, see Hane 2003.

9. For more information on the 1923 Kanto Earthquake and the ensuing fires that killed over 140,000 people, see Hammer 2011.

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