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How to be an American Housewife: American Red Cross Brides' Schools of the Occupation of Japan

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the role of the soldier husbands in the establishment of the American Red Cross Brides' Schools in Japan and their influence on the schools' content. Without an American husband, these women would not have been able to immigrate to the United States, and without this immigration, these schools would not have existed. This paper argues that schools were created for the benefit of the American GI husbands of Japanese women, were a form of pre-assimilation, and an extension of American soft power during the occupation and democratisation of Japan.

Introduction

On 20 September 20 1945, *The New York Times* declared: 'It may be, with regard to Japan, that it is just as Kipling said – East is East and West and West and never the twain shall meet.'¹ Less than a year later, fraternisation was 'all right.'² This rapid policy change reflected the shifting landscape of the postwar order and the United States' ability to alter policy on a dime – when it suited its aims. On 19 January 1952, *The Saturday Evening Post* ran a story entitled: 'They're Bringing Home Japanese Wives' with the subtext noting 'all the little Madame Butterflies are studying hamburgers, Hollywood and home on the range.'³ With the impending end of Public Law 717, which facilitated the immigration of Asian women previously excluded from the War Brides Act of 1945, it was a race against time for these couples to make the jump across the

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¹Frank L. Kluckhorn, 'GI'S IN JAPAN OBEY FRATERNIZING BAN,' *The New York Times*, 21 September 1945.

²Burton Crane, 'GI'S FRATERNIZATION ALLOWED IN JAPAN,' *The New York Times*, 12 July 1946.

³'They're Bringing Home Japanese Wives,' *Saturday Evening Post* (SEP), 19 January 1952.

Pacific.⁴ When it was all said and done, almost fifty thousand Japanese women moved to the United States to be with their American husbands. Before they left, however, there was much to do. Mountains of paperwork and extensive logistical preparations were needed for a move across the world. Still, many wives also took it upon themselves to enrol in Brides' Schools run by the American Red Cross. Why? Amidst the bureaucratic headaches in a pre-Xerox era of marshalling paperwork in duplicate and sometimes in triplicate, taking on additional work before a move across the globe seemed ill-advised. Almost four thousand women enrolled in American Red Cross brides' schools, which claimed to teach formerly single women the skills necessary to be successful housewives in America. But it was not that simple. Students were Japanese women who married American men and learned the tenets of the archetypal American housewife. In the aftermath of the Second World War and the advent of the Cold War, these schools took on greater meaning.

This article seeks to shed more light on the role of the American soldier husband in the establishment and running of American Red Cross (ARC) schools.⁵ Although Japanese women attended the schools, the author argues that the schools were founded to benefit their American husbands. American GI's were the bridge between these Japanese women and their future lives in the United States. In the age of restriction, relationships with an American soldier enabled previously inadmissible women the ability to immigrate to the United States through the war bride visa route. Japanese women were not only in relationships with American men, but also starting

⁴The War Brides Act of 1945 only enabled would-be brides who were then admissible through American immigration laws which did not allow for the immigration of Japanese women. Thus, new legislation in the form of Public Law 717 was enacted in 1950 but had a temporal limitation which put even more pressure on an already stressful immigration process. The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 ended blanket exclusion of Asian immigrants and introduced a preference system hinging on skilled status and family reunification.

⁵At the centre of the Japanese war bride experience are, of course, the women themselves. While this article has focused on the role of the husbands, the experiences and testimonials of the Japanese brides take on a greater role in the larger project. For oral histories of Japanese war brides see Kathryn Tolbert, Lucy Craft, and Karen Kasmauski's work in collecting the oral histories of Japanese war brides, including their own mothers, in the documentary film 'Fall Seven Times, Get Up Eight: The Japanese War Brides.' For a book of oral histories of Japanese war brides, see: Miki Ward Crawford et al., *Japanese War Brides in America: An Oral History*, 1st ed, (Location: Praeger, 2016). The work of Elena Tajima Creef explores her mother's experience as a Japanese war bride in her scholarship in Elena Tajima Creef, 'Discovering My Mother as the Other in *The Saturday Evening Post*,' *Qualitative Inquiry* 6, no. 4 (2000), pp.443–457.

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to form relationships with the United States more broadly. American Red Cross Brides' Schools offered Japanese brides the chance to learn how to be 'successful' wives and mothers in their new American families.

ARC schools started as grassroots efforts, but quickly evolved into something more robust. Volunteers started with a well-intentioned investment in 'teaching Japanese women the American way of life.' Still, the schools were more than that.⁶ Within the postwar context, the schools took on greater significance. The United States engaged in the democratisation of Japan following the Second World War; this project, I argue, extended not only to those who remained in Japan but also to those who emigrated to the United States. American ideals were present across all aspects of the curriculum, particularly as Americans predominantly taught acculturation classes. While skills such as 'cooking & home hygiene' and other tenets of homemaking were taught, the curriculum also included American 'culture, customs, and manners,' as well as religion, history, and geography. The schools' intensive scope and curriculum reflected not only the volunteers' dedication to offering a broad curriculum but also the students' desire to learn as much as they could before emigrating from Japan.

War bride scholarship is a re-emerging field. Susan Zeiger's work launched further study of the twentieth-century war-bride phenomenon, building on previous scholarship that shed initial light on the experiences of foreign women who fraternised with American soldiers.⁷ At the core of scholarship on postwar Japan is John Dower's

⁶National Archives & Records Administration II (hereinafter NARA II) RG 200 Box 1280 – Brides School ARC Volunteer Services and Armed Forces Women's Club of Yokohama Pamphlet Undated.

⁷Susan Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances: Foreign War Brides and American Soldiers in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: New York University Press, 2010), Elfrieda Berthiaume Shukert and Barbara Smith Scibetta, *War Brides of World War II*, (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1988). For sources on British War Brides see Duncan Barrett, *GI Brides: The Wartime Girls Who Crossed the Atlantic for Love*, 1st ed, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2014), Barbara G. Friedman, *From the Battlefield to the Bridal Suite: Media Coverage of British War Brides, 1942-1946*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), Jenel Virden, *Good-Bye, Piccadilly: British War Brides in America*, Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Series, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996). For a source on British brides who married Canadian soldiers and immigrated to Canada see: Linda Granfield, ed., *Brass Buttons and Silver Horseshoes: Stories from Canada's British War Brides*, (Toronto, Ont: McClelland & Stewart, 2002). For a book about Japanese war brides and their role in shaping Japanese America, see Sonia C. Gomez, *Picture Bride, War Bride: The Role of Marriage in Shaping Japanese America*, (New York: New York University Press, 2024). For a book about Jewish war brides see: Robin E. Judd, *Between Two Worlds: Jewish War Brides after the Holocaust*, (Chapel Hill: The University

work, but the narrative has evolved.⁸ War brides were at a unique nexus of geopolitical and socioeconomic forces, which calls for a broad historiographical base. Historians Sarah Kovner, Robert Kramm, and Mark McLelland have built on Dower's foundation to examine personal and sexual relationships and the United States's attempted governance over them. Historian Brian Walsh has, however, challenged the supposed widespread nature of this sexual landscape. Historian Kristen Roebuck examines the next 'phase' of these relationships by exploring the relationship between kinship and country among mixed-race Japanese children born of relationships between Japanese women and American occupying forces. This scholarship situated Japanese war brides within their unique context, but the most relevant work for this article and the project is Mire Koikari's.⁹

Koikari's work examines the 'central role' that American women play in shaping Japanese women's lives. In particular, Koikari argues these women were driven by a 'zeal for racial uplift.'¹⁰ Within her scholarship, Koikari explores how women in the

of North Carolina Press, 2023). For a book on Pacific Islander war brides see Angela Wanhalla, *Of Love and War: Pacific Brides of World War II*, Studies in Pacific Worlds, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023).

⁸John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1986), John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: Norton, 1993), Sarah Kovner, *Occupying Power: Sex Workers and Servicemen in Postwar Japan* (Stanford University Press, 2020), Robert Kramm, *Sanitized Sex: Regulating Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Intimacy in Occupied Japan, 1945-1952*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), Mark J. McLelland, *Love, Sex, and Democracy in Japan during the American Occupation*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), Kristin Roebuck, *Japan Reborn: Race and Eugenics from Empire to Cold War*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2025), Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), Brian P. Walsh, *The Rape of Japan: The Myth of Mass Sexual Violence During the Allied Occupation*, (La Vergne: Naval Institute Press, 2024).

⁹Mire Koikari, *Cold War Encounters in US-Occupied Okinawa: Women, Militarized Domesticity and Transnationalism in East Asia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), Mire Koikari, 'Exporting Democracy? American Women, 'Feminist Reforms,' and Politics of Imperialism in the U.S. Occupation of Japan, 1945-1952,' *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 23, no. 1 (2002), Mire Koikari, 'Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan, 1945 - 1952,' *Asia-Pacific Journal* 10, no. S4 (2012), pp. 6-28, Mire Koikari, *Pedagogy of Democracy: Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan* (Temple University Press, 2008), Mire Koikari, 'Rethinking Gender and Power in the US Occupation of Japan, 1945-1952,' *Gender & History* 11, no. 2 (1999), pp.313-35.

¹⁰Koikari, 'Exporting Democracy,' pp3-4.

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Civil Information and Education Section (CI&E) were 'chiefly responsible for instituting gender democracy in postwar Japan.'¹¹ This article, and the broader project, do not engage with these particular educational reforms. Instead, it looks at the schools as one element of this overall policy agenda. Against the backdrop of other reforms geared toward Japanese women, ARC schools were unique as they were created to shape Japanese women who would be emigrating to the United States. Here we can see how the United States' acculturation aims extended to Japanese emigrants.

By imposing American conceptions of the ideal homemaker and wife onto Japanese wives, the ARC schools played a significant role in the postwar American imperial project. The curriculum was more than an intensive home economics course. The schools functioned as micro incubators of American democracy and ideals under the guise of teaching American customs and helping women adapt to American culture. But schools did not have explicitly imperial intentions. Volunteers ran them, mostly the wives of American soldiers stationed abroad, some were Nisei, second-generation Japanese immigrants to the U.S., who genuinely wanted to teach Japanese women aspects of American life to ease their transition.

On the surface, ARC schools were established to teach Japanese women to help cushion their transition to the United States and to pre-assimilate them to living in the United States, but there was more to these schools than met the eye. At their core, schools were established to teach Japanese women how to be better wives for their American husbands. Yes, these women learned skills that would benefit them individually. But, throughout the texts, the emphasis was on how this new knowledge would benefit their husbands and families. All this was possible because of the American military husband. This article explores the centrality of the husband in sparking these schools and enabling this pre-assimilation project.

ARC schools' curriculum reflected the United States' imperial engagement in Japan. Through 'teaching' Japanese women how to be successful American wives, the United States engaged in civilising practices. Historian Benjamin Coates writes, 'the possibility of assimilation strengthened the ideology of civilisation because it suggested that non-Western people might become full members of the international community if they adopted certain practices.'¹² Despite the absence of the word 'civilisation,' Coates argues, these new 'formulations of 'development' and 'modernisation' still hinged on

¹¹Ibid., p.9. Koikari goes on to outline the roles of Lt. Ethel Weed, Beate Sirota Gordon, and Carmen Johnson in shaping these reform efforts in Japan within the broader context of foreign military occupations.

¹²Benjamin A. Coates, 'American Presidents and the Ideology of Civilization,' in *Ideology in U.S. Foreign Relations: New Histories*, ed. Christopher McKnight Nichols and David Milne (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), p.55.

'similar assumptions about difference and tutelage.'¹³ Thus, tutelage and civilisation were extensions of the empire. While assimilation typically began when new immigrants set foot in their new nation, ARC schools moved up the timeline.

By pre-assimilating Japanese wives in Japan before they went to the United States, schools disrupted and accelerated previous patterns of assimilation. ARC schools were sites of a renegotiation of social, cultural, and national boundaries. Transforming Japanese citizens into American wives was a push-and-pull between each nation's influence and Japanese women's own negotiation of their changing circumstances. Cultural differences between the United States and Japan, and the exceptional nature of their migration, exacerbated the United States' government's concerns about Japanese women's ability to assimilate.

The United States believed it was important that war brides raise their children as Americans. As current and future wives of American soldiers and mothers to the next generation of mixed-race, multicultural Americans, ensuring these foreign brides passed along American ideals was critical. In reference to the U.S. occupation of the Philippines, President Theodore Roosevelt claimed the occupation 'would help them [the Filipinos] rise higher and higher in the scale of civilisation and of capacity for self-government.'¹⁴ This mindset extended to the occupation of Japan half a century later. Through the democratisation of Japan and the pre-assimilation of Japanese wives, we can see how the United States sought to civilise them.

ARC schools and their curriculum were part of the United States' transformation of Japan from a former enemy nation into what historian Naoko Shibusawa deemed the nation's 'Geisha Ally.' This feminisation of Japan mirrored that of the United States' feminisation of the German enemy and of an occupied nation after the war, but there was a notable difference. In feminising Japan, there was an undeniable racial component to this characterisation. Shibusawa talks about the 'prewar Western view of Japanese infantilism as a more or less permanent state.' Japan's meteoric rise over the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century flipped the script.¹⁵ Their rapid ascent into a global force was, at the time, unprecedented. But with this rapid ascent came a sharp decline. This boom-and-bust led to uncertainty regarding Japan's new postwar status. The West had to reconcile two Japans into the new 'United States-led liberal capitalist order.'¹⁶ The United States took the lead in carving out Japan's new role. Unlike Japan, the United States had the certainty and the agency, achieved

¹³Ibid., p.55.

¹⁴Ibid., p.55.

¹⁵Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p.24.

¹⁶Ibid., p17.

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through military, political, and economic power, to dictate the terms of Japan's new role. This was rationalised by the belief that 'nonwhite nations could 'grow up' into modern, liberal capitalist democracies.'¹⁷ The schools were part of democratisation and the extension of American power not only over Japan but also on this group of Japanese women who left for the United States. Under the guiding hand of Uncle Sam, Japan and Japanese war brides could join this new order.

Tackling A Slippery Slope

The soldier was young and somewhat red in the face, but he stood his ground in the lobby of a Red Cross building. The girl beside him was black-haired, olive-skinned and obviously frightened. And her clothes looked too bulky on her, although they were new. The soldier addressed the nearest Red Cross worker, ignoring the awful possibility that this volunteer might very well be his colonel's wife. 'I've been hearing about this brides' school,' he said, 'so I brought her.' He indicated the girl. 'I don't know about this government and history stuff you teach – what I want her to learn is how to wear a slip. I bought her three of them now.' The volunteer blinked once or twice. She repeated, 'How to wear a slip?' 'Yeah,' said the boy. 'I tried and tried, but I can't make her understand. Like I told you, I bought her three of them – and she's got on all three right now.'¹⁸

To the twenty-first-century eye, a slip was a non-essential piece of clothing, today only worn in extraordinary circumstances, such as when under a skirt or dress of a particularly static-prone fabric, such as wool, rayon, or silk, slips are not now an everyday item. In the mid-century, however, slips were worn daily and were integral to Western women's fashion at the time and were a foreign object to a Japanese woman. The cultural disconnect was evident throughout this entire interaction – from the soldier's exasperation and his bride's lack of understanding to the worker's supposed confusion at the man's request. The schools' curriculum gave equal weight to abstract lessons on civics and history and concrete concepts such as cleaning, proper attire, and cooking. For this particular soldier, the concrete lessons were the more significant of the two. A simple everyday object, such as a slip, took on greater importance not only in this relationship but also in the fashioning of a new life. While this scenario and dynamic were not representative of every Japanese-American relationship, they did reflect the complex emotions that could arise in these interactions. The American soldier, wanting his bride to adopt Western customs, was frustrated by her lack of understanding.

¹⁷Ibid., p7.

¹⁸Janet Wentworth Smith and William L. Worden, 'They're Bringing Home Japanese Wives,' *The Saturday Evening Post*, 19 January, 1952.

In contrast, the Japanese woman, was understandably upset by her husband's lack of patience and understanding after she did her best to meet new American standards. While this relationship should not be judged solely on a single incident of frustration captured by journalists, the tension between the two parties was unmistakable. This friction represented the gap between two groups of people that the schools tried to smooth over. While the bride schools did not exist solely to teach Japanese women about Western dress customs, they sought to bridge the cultural divide between husband and wife and help Japanese women integrate into American society.

Learning to wear a single slip correctly was not only an important skill to master as a woman in mid-century America, but also a metaphor. Slips helped dresses and skirts hang smoothly, reducing static and providing modest coverage by covering visible lines from undergarments. Brides' schools provided a similar service for the Japanese women. In the Far East Area American Red Cross Brides School Textbook, students were encouraged to preserve selected aspects of Japanese culture, such as 'the virtues of love, honesty, faithfulness, cleanliness, and orderliness.'¹⁹ Just a few years prior, the United States and Japan were engaged in brutal warfare, but times had changed. Japan's militarist past was seemingly swept under the rug in favour of a value system devoid of its ardent patriotism, or perhaps this patriotism was shifted to support the United States.²⁰ With these schools functioning as the slip, patriotic values were repackaged and redirected to support an American husband, an American family, and the United States as a whole. Enabling this redirection while simultaneously concealing a complex past and pre-assimilating Japanese women, the slip was also transformative. Within the broader context of the American agenda of democratising Japan, ARC schools were one way in which Americanisation took place. In the words of the *Saturday Evening Post*, these 'little Madame Butterflies' were learning the American way and were well on their journey to becoming Americans – a journey enabled by their relationship and marriage to an American soldier.

¹⁹NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – Far East Area American Red Cross Brides Schools Textbook.

²⁰For more on the brutality of the Pacific theatre of World War II see Gerald F. Linderman, *The World Within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1986), Eugene B. Sledge, Samuel Hynes, and Alvin B. Kernan, *World War II Memoirs: The Pacific Theater*, ed. Elizabeth D. Samet, The Library of America 351, (New York, N.Y: The Library of America, 2021), Peter Schrijvers, *Bloody Pacific: American Soldiers at War with Japan*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

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Pre-assimilation

Through the establishment of schools and the material taught to Japanese women, the United States crystallised and disseminated its national identity as it cemented its status as a global superpower. Historian Gary Gerstle asserted that wars were an 'opportunity to sharpen American national identity against external enemies' but also a time to 'transform millions of Americans whose loyalty was uncertain into ardent patriots, to discipline those within the nations who were deemed racially inferior or politically and culturally heterodox, and to engage in experiments in state building that would have been considered illegitimate in peacetime.'²¹ This occupation project extended wartime liminality, with the United States exerting its influence long after the final surrender. First, American national identity, as seen through the history, geography, and civics lessons, was distilled and explicitly stated in ARC textbook materials. Second, schools transformed women from former enemies into suitable wives of American servicemen and future American citizens. Finally, ARC schools served as an extension of the American democratisation of Japan, which would not have been possible without the unique alchemy of the postwar context. The schools were a place to simultaneously reaffirm the American belief system while transforming women from Japanese citizens into future American citizens and patriots.

On a broader level, the schools served as a form of pre-assimilation for would-be immigrants. With crowds of young, impressionable Japanese women eager to learn everything there was to know about their future homes, the schools had a captive audience. Japanese women were already tied to the nation through their marriage to American soldiers, but they had not yet moved to the United States and assimilated into American culture. Between 1945 and 1955, the American Consulate in Tokyo recorded twelve to thirteen thousand marriages between Japanese nationals and American citizens, with more than five thousand in the Tokyo-Yokohama area alone.²² This amounted to about a hundred marriages a month. The scale of Japanese-American marriages and subsequent immigration marked a massive shift in population to the United States. While optional, ARC schools were attended by almost four thousand Japanese women. In the years since the war ended, 'Japanese girls observe Western manners everywhere, even if they find them hard to understand.'²³ ARC volunteers and schools claimed to bridge this gap. Japanese brides schools offered them the opportunity to formally acquire knowledge about their new homes. With over eighty thousand American occupiers present, this was not their first foray into American

²¹Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), p.9.

²²NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – Brides School – American Red Cross (ARC) Far East Area (FEA) – JWB A78.

²³NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – December 1954 ARC Bride School Volunteer Informational Pamphlet.

culture, but it was unique. The purpose of the school was to 'lead the way to familiarisation and some understanding' of the United States and its customs.²⁴ Many women saw the appeal of learning about American customs and culture in a readily available, accessible format and enrolled in these schools. This article argues that this familiarisation was pre-assimilation and transformation of Japanese women into wives to American soldiers.

This transformation was not instantaneous, far from it. Assimilation was evasive and, at times, impossible for certain immigrants. While true assimilation was a white whale for most non-white immigrants, Japanese war brides did everything in their power to learn this previously unfamiliar American way of life. Japanese women had 'an almost complete lack of knowledge' of the United States and were preparing to step into terra incognita.²⁵ ARC schools promised to teach them. Students were told not to divest themselves of their Japanese identity and practices completely, but there was still the expectation that American skills and practices would take precedence. Japanese women were told to 'be proud of both [origin and country]' and to 'concentrate on the virtues of love, honesty, faithfulness, cleanliness and orderliness.' These tenets were carefully chosen cultural attitudes of Japanese culture that were deemed acceptable to perpetuate with other aspects of Japanese culture to be selectively jettisoned as they would not align with their newfound American values.²⁶ For Japanese war brides, Americanisation, as defined by University of Pennsylvania professor Grover Huebener, meant 'transcending diversity through assimilation into a uniform conception of national identity through the actual raising of the immigrant to the American economic, social and moral standard of life.'²⁷ This concept was built upon by political scientist Desmond King, who wrote not only of the dramatic shift in immigration policy in the decades leading up to the Johnson-Reed Act, but also the construction of a distinctly American identity as a 'product of melting-pot assimilationism' wherein immigrants were expected to 'conform' and become transformed into Americans.²⁸ This expected conformity and eschewing of ethnic identity and identity markers in favour of a 'uniform national identity' was clear in the schools' teaching. War brides were not expected to shed all aspects of their Japanese identity; however, they were expected to conform to the American way of life. Thus,

²⁴NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – History of Bride Schools Memorandum 27 September 1956 (A36)

²⁵*Saturday Evening Post*, 19 January, 1952.

²⁶NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – Far East Area American Red Cross Brides Schools Textbook

²⁷Grover G. Huebner, 'The Americanization of the Immigrant,' *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 27 (1906), p.653.

²⁸Desmond S. King, *Making Americans: Immigration, Race, and the Origins of the Diverse Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp 86-125.

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ARC schools were both a crash course in the ways of the American housewife and part and parcel of the transformation of an immigrant into not just a hyphenated American but an American.²⁹

It was clear from the war bride legislation who was considered ideal. The ideal war bride was a woman who would be able to easily assimilate into American society with very few cultural barriers and little to no language barrier. Japanese war brides did not fit into this mould. Huebener proposed in a turn-of-the-century article, 'Some nationalities have a greater capacity to become Americanised than others,' with the number of immigrants each year being 'of nationalities who are inherently more difficult to Americanise than immigrants of the past.'³⁰ While Huebener was referring to southern and eastern European immigrants, this extended to non-European immigrants. Japanese women were seen as being difficult to Americanise. By teaching them Western ways of living, ARC schools attempted to pre-assimilate Japanese women into American life and bring them closer to the idealised war bride.

Japanese war brides had a unique immigration pathway. It was important to note ARC schools were only accessible through marriage or engagement to an American citizen, oftentimes a soldier, but sometimes a civilian. Historian Mae Ngai proposed 'access to naturalisation ensures that the condition of alienage, with its limited rights, is temporary', but only for those who were 'lawfully present.' Under the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, Chinese, Japanese, Indians, and other Asian peoples were deemed ineligible for citizenship. The War Brides Act of 1945 and subsequent Public Law 717 enabled previously ineligible Asian women to enter the United States with their husbands, facilitating a lawful presence. In a presentation to a prefectural community relations council, Chairman of the American Red Cross Volunteers, Doris A. Kramer, declared herself and other volunteers to be 'interested in the welfare of your Japanese girls' and stressed the importance of this school's orientation 'to the future of these girls as American citizens.'³¹ ARC schools had a vested interest in teaching Japanese women and were clear about their objective in preparing them for their future as American citizens. Bride schools hold particular significance because their targeted audience consisted of people otherwise ineligible for immigration without their relationships to American men. Therefore, their relationship and marriage to an American soldier cleared an otherwise impossible path to immigration and citizenship. The husbands were key to their migration.

²⁹For more about hyphenated Americans see Theodore Roosevelt's 12 October 1915 Speech entitled 'Americanism' delivered at Carnegie Hall in New York City, NY.

³⁰Huebner, p.675.

³¹NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – Brides' School Discussion as given by Mrs. Doris A Kramer (JWB A81).

Origin and Aim of the Schools

A fluorescent orange poster emblazoned with bold forest-green cursive script advertised the Brides' School taking place at the Tokyo Chapel Centre. Registration and class information were displayed in both English and Japanese, with 'Japanese wives of security forces are invited to attend', leaving no room for misinterpreting the intended audience. Flanked by imagery of pumpkins, wheat, and corn on one side and a kneeling Japanese woman in a kimono on the other, the advertisement leapt off the page.³²

Chopsticks to knife and fork, flowing kimono to Western chic, a jackknife bow to warm handclasp – even an un-Japanese kiss. That's how far daughters of Nippon break with customs a thousand years old after learning to make homes for their new American husbands in brides' schools conducted in Japan by the American Red Cross.³³

Wanting to help ease their transition to the United States, some Americans in Japan sought to teach Japanese women about the United States. The first school was established in collaboration with the Christian Women's Association (CWA) in the spring of 1948, with the second following later that year at the General Headquarters Chapel Centre. Additional schools sprang up in collaboration with the Japanese Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). A few years after the first school, the American Red Cross (ARC) and the CWA launched the first ARC school, with two more following in 1953 and 1954.³⁴ While the schools were tuition-free for students, they cost hundreds of dollars to run, which was 'very unselfishly' funded by the YWCA and the ARC, with many Japanese brides contributing money or food to their homemaking teachers.³⁵ In this way, the schools were a collaborative effort. Following the successes of the first schools, more sprang up quickly across Japan to meet demand, with the first schools being 'swamped' by potential applicants. Brides' schools were so popular that students wanted to attend multiple times and praised the program, with one student quoted as saying, 'I just wish the school could last forever.'

³²NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – Brides School Banner

³³NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – December 1954 ARC Bride School Volunteer Informational Pamphlet. For more on this see Mark McLelland, "'Kissing Is a Symbol of Democracy!'" Dating, Democracy, and Romance in Occupied Japan, 1945-1952,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19, no. 3 (2010), pp.508-535

³⁴NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – December 1954 ARC Bride School Volunteer Informational Pamphlet.

³⁵NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – October 18, 1955 Brief History of ARC FEA Bride Schools (JWB 36A).

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I love every minute of it.’³⁶ The only entrance requirement was that students were ‘legally married’ to a U.S. citizen or had ‘serious intent to wed,’ as evidenced by papers from a chaplain.³⁷ ARC bespoke schools were created for and accessible only to a select population – those already legally or intended to be legally tied to an American citizen. Again, the American husbands were the key to admission.

Just as military bases sprang up around the world during the war, so did these schools around Japan during the occupation.³⁸ Following the success of the Brides’ School in Yokohama, ‘the Military requested similar ARC projects’ be set up throughout the command.³⁹ What started as a ‘purely volunteer’ project by a group of Tokyo churchwomen quickly evolved into an institution.⁴⁰ By the time the schools closed their doors, the American Red Cross had run 102 schools between 1951 and 1957, with 3,979 graduates and 2,474 volunteers.⁴¹ The military provided ‘classrooms, printing of Brides’ School books, interpreters, speakers, posters and radio and newspaper publicity’ in addition to encouraging soldiers whose wives were Japanese to attend the schools.⁴² Volunteers were the backbone of the school’s success. Some volunteers were with the Red Cross, while others were the wives and daughters of U.S. servicemen (ranging from colonel to sergeant) stationed in Japan during the occupation. Collaboration between the American Red Cross and American military-adjacent personnel reflected their joint investment in teaching Japanese women the skills needed to succeed in their new lives in the United States.

The schools’ intentions were clear from both the press surrounding the school and their own internal documents and publications. In an Army Times article entitled

³⁶NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – *The Tokyo Volunteer* (ARC Publication) Bride’s School Issue Vol. No. 3 (JWB A90)

³⁷NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – October 18, 1955 Brief History of ARC FEA Bride Schools (JWB 36A).

³⁸For more on the expansion of the United States military bases during World War II, see Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), pp.216-219 and pp.355-372, Zach Fredman’s chapter entitled ‘Military Occupations and Overseas Bases in Twentieth-Century U.S. Foreign Relations’ in Christopher R.W. Dietrich’s *A Companion to U.S. Foreign Relations: Colonial Era to the Present*, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2020).

³⁹NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – Excerpt from Bi-Monthly Volunteer Services Report for July-August 1951 (B88)

⁴⁰SEP ‘They’re Bringing Home Japanese Brides’ January 17, 1952.

⁴¹NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – Washington Heights Civilian Club Minutes of Meeting on Brides Schools 19 August 1957.

⁴²NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – 18 October, 1955 Brief History of ARC FEA Bride Schools (JWB 36A).

'Soldiers' Jap Wives Clued on U.S.,' the field director of the Yokohama school, Mary Shaw, outlined the school's intentions: '[t]he objective of our school is simply to help the couples establish good and happy homes and to prepare the girls for life in the United States, since most of them plan to live there sometime in the future.'⁴³ Shaw was clear that Japanese ways of life would not be forgotten. The schools 'merely try to teach them the western way in addition to their own.'⁴⁴ This was backed up by an informational pamphlet from a Yokohama Brides School, which expanded upon Shaw's stated primary objectives of the school into three distinct aims:

To help the girls and their husbands build a good, happy home.

To introduce them to American customs and manners and the American way of life.

To teach them a few simple principles of American Democracy and the fact that for every privilege there is a corresponding responsibility.⁴⁵

The schools' aims were revealing in many ways. Firstly, they show how knowledge about the United States was a key component of ARC schools, two of the three aims were related to the education of American customs, manners, way of life, in addition to teaching American democratic principles. Secondly, the contrast between using 'girls' to describe the young Japanese women and 'husbands' to describe the American soldier husbands creates a dichotomy between the young, impressionable, and inexperienced Japanese female and the older, established, and experienced American male. This designation followed a pattern of racialised infantilisation, misogyny, and exoticisation against Asian women and furthered the inequity between Americans and Japanese women.⁴⁶ This paternalistic wording furthered the divide between the enlightened American teacher and the unenlightened Japanese student. Coupled with

⁴³'Soldiers' Jap Wives Clued on U.S.,' *Army Times*, 30 May, 1951.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – Yokohama Brides School Informational Pamphlet, Undated (B9)

⁴⁶While this designation could be attributed to language conventions of the time period and the young age of the brides, this designation and word choice were still emblematic of these patronising patterns. For more on these patterns, see: Sylvia Shun Huey Chong, *The Oriental Obscene: Violence and Racial Fantasies in the Vietnam Era*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012) and Sheridan Prasso, *The Asian Mystique: Dragon Ladies, Geisha Girls, & Our Fantasies of the Exotic Orient*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2006). For more on this phenomenon as seen in the Vietnam War era, see: Gregory Daddis, *Pulp Vietnam: War and Gender in Cold War Men's Adventure Magazines*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

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phrasing such as 'learning to make homes for their new American husbands,' the power dynamics of the occupation carried over to bride schools.⁴⁷ While Japanese women were eager to learn and the American volunteers eager to teach, there was still an inherent power imbalance. Third, the establishment of a social contract between the privileges and freedoms afforded by American Democracy and the corresponding civic duties. These responsibilities included their new role as a homemaker and wife in the United States, as well as additional civic responsibilities. This established a transactional relationship between new immigrants and their new home. Japanese women would otherwise not be able to immigrate to the United States without their relationship to American men. In this era of immigration restriction, the privileged position as a war bride gave Japanese women the ability to bypass these restrictions. But by accepting the immigration pathway afforded to them through their marriage to American soldiers, there were strings attached.

Responsibilities were open-ended in these course aims and perhaps intentionally so. While the course literature describes the responsibilities of a homemaker that Japanese wives would take on, the course materials also describe the responsibility of raising and teaching American democracy to any future offspring. In this way, the schools will then ensure Japanese brides were not only taught American civic values for their own personal edification but also to pass down to their Japanese-American children. Thus, these women were not only being incorporated into the American nation but also would serve as the first educators to future generations. In a list of 'homemaker' duties, the fifteenth was 'Creator of Family Happiness.' The scope of this was broad,

A lot of your family's happiness can and should come from you. We who have come to your country to live for a while know how it feels to be in a strange place, to be stared at and regarded with curiosity. This can make you very unhappy, or you can remember several things:

- a) In America, every person you meet is different – height, weight, colouring.
- b) Your husband loved you enough to marry you and take you home with him. His love is going to be strong enough to help you get adjusted IF you do your part by trying, and then ask for help when you need it.
- c) There's an American phrase that says, 'It takes a heap of living and loving to make a house a home.'; and it's going to take a lot of work

⁴⁷NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – December 1954 ARC Bride School Volunteer Informational Pamphlet.

on your part to make good family happiness so you have a HOME, and not just a house. (L. Young's 'Because of You')

- d) You can't learn about a new language or a new country or the members of your new family if you don't try. No one will mind your mistakes as much as you do; and people in American almost all love to help.⁴⁸

While many of the duties on this list of homemaker duties were full-time professions in their own right, this duty was one of the most onerous and abstract. Not only did Japanese war brides have to navigate moving to an entirely different country on the other side of the globe, but they were then, supposedly, solely responsible for ensuring their family's happiness. This inherent pressure was coupled with assurances that school volunteers had experienced a similar phenomenon, albeit under different circumstances, and had managed the transition, so that the Japanese brides should be similarly successful. This was a false equation. Volunteers had come to Japan temporarily and in a privileged position as occupiers. In contrast, these brides would be part of a very small minority when they arrived in the United States and would lack the same backing from their government on both social and economic fronts. The tone of these duties was not only patronising to the Japanese female reader but also implied that these women would not already be trying in earnest to meet the unwritten social standards. As emphasised by the second point, Japanese women should be grateful for the opportunity to be 'taken home' to the United States, and, rather than wallowing in 'unhappiness,' they should make a concerted effort to embrace the new roles and responsibilities with gusto.

Throughout the responsibilities, the woman's husband was central. The love of a husband was portrayed as a stabilising force. Strong enough to overcome the bureaucratic and social hurdles to sustain the relationship, this love was deemed 'enough' only if the woman did her part. This established a symbiotic relationship between the husband's romantic interest and the wife's efforts at assimilation. While the husband was, of course, a critical part of the woman's new life and the one who enabled her immigration to the United States, he was the reason for their founding and the judge of their success.

⁴⁸NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – Customs and Manners in the American Home. Homemaker Jobs. (JWB Schools B18, B20). To discuss these responsibilities in their entirety would not be feasible in the scope of this article, however, this final responsibility was perhaps the most abstract and ripe for analysis. The other responsibilities were more straightforward and included 'cook', 'driver', and 'cleaner.'

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To the Husband

These bride schools were particularly unique as admission and attendance hinged on the woman's marriage or engagement to an American soldier. Thus, the husbands were a key component of the schools' histories. An American husband was an admission ticket to life in the United States and citizenship, and, by extension, these schools. Relationships were not only intercultural but also interracial. In the mid-twentieth century, before *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), interracial relationships were not only illegal in some states but also experienced backlash both in the United States and in Japan.⁴⁹ Therefore, these relationships were particularly exceptional. While Japanese women's migration was possible through the war bride migration exception, the relationships themselves could exist in the liminal space of American occupation abroad.⁵⁰ These schools and the husbands were of particular importance, as they served as the stepping stone between Japan and the United States.

While the husbands did not attend the schools with their wives, their influence was present in many ways. Student feedback was important to shaping the delivery of the lessons, but the husbands' opinions held more weight. They were the arbiters of the schools' success. Loleta Dean, Public Information Chairman of the Tokyo Office of Volunteers, stated husbands were 'encouraged to help their wives with their lessons' and 'glow visibly over the first pies their little Japanese wives make after a Brides' School cooking class.'⁵¹ The schools and their lessons proved so popular that many

⁴⁹Books on interracial relationships and anti-miscegenation laws: Paul R. Spickard, *Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth Century America*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Both books provide in-depth overviews of interracial marriage laws, public perceptions of these relationships, as well as source material from interracial couples during this time period reflecting upon their experiences. A more specific source is Renee C. Romano, *Race Mixing: Black-White Marriages in Postwar America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁵⁰Until the passage of the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952, people from Asian nations were unable to migrate to the United States because of exclusionary policies; for sources on military occupations see: Susan L. Carruthers, *The Good Occupation: American Soldiers and the Hazards of Peace*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016) and Camilo Erlichman and Christopher Knowles, eds., *Transforming Occupation in the Western Zones of Germany: Politics, Everyday Life and Social Interactions, 1945-55*, (London New York Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

⁵¹NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 - Brides' School Scores New Record by Loleta Dean (Public Information Chairman, Tokyo Office of Volunteers) from American Red Cross Far East Review Vol. 5 No. 2 June 1955 (JWB A80).

brides took the course multiple times, and advanced cooking classes were offered to these 'second terms.'⁵² Testimonials from the brides' husbands praised the schools' curriculum and their wives' newfound talents. One husband remarked, 'My wife's cooking is 100% better than it was before, and I'm so grateful', and another praised an apple pie made by his wife because it was 'just like my mother used to make.'⁵³ While the attendees' opinions were important to the schools, the husband's opinion mattered more. As the schools were teaching these Japanese women American ways, it was the American husband who determined if these ways were being taught to a sufficient level.

Schools not only asked for feedback on the lessons' efficacy but also for suggestions on potentially expanding the curriculum to tailor the schools to the husbands' needs and desires. Notably, the schools asked the husbands to relay their wives' comprehension rather than asking the wives directly. To be sure, the women provided feedback to the schools, but this letter explicitly asked for the husbands' opinion, evoking a parent receiving a letter from their child's school. In a letter enclosed in the course materials, addressed to the husbands, the chairman of one of the Yokohama schools explicitly asked the husbands for their feedback on the current curriculum and whether their wives understood the material. And, instead of having them relay this to the schools directly, they were to put their suggestions in writing and have their wives pass the notes along to the school.

TO THE HUSBAND:

Please cooperate with us by telling us if your wife does not understand any subject or is getting the wrong impression. Let us know if there is anything you would like stressed which is not in our program. Please remind her it is important to be at the classes on time and perfect attendance is essential. Do not telephone but put your suggestions in writing and let your wife give it to Mrs. Johnstone, Chairman of the School.

Thank you for your help.

Mrs. Gerald B. Johnstone, Chairman⁵⁴

Addressing the letter directly to the husbands highlighted their centrality to this story. Without these American men and their relationship to Japanese women, the schools would not exist. While the women were ostensibly at the centre of the story, the husbands' opinions mattered more to the schools. Husbands judged whether existing

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – *The Tokyo Volunteer* (ARC Publication) Bride's School Issue Vol. No. 3 (JWB A90)

⁵⁴NARA II RG 200 Box 1280 – 'To the Husband' (JWB Schools B10)

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lessons were imparting knowledge to an acceptable level and shaped future curriculum changes. Wives were the students, but the husbands determined the coursework. In this way, the article has argued for the central role of American husbands in both the creation and the running of the schools.

Conclusion

The American Red Cross Brides Schools were unique for many reasons. From growing out of a grassroots volunteer movement to scaling up into a nationwide operation with the full backing of the United States military and government, the schools grew rapidly. They taught over four thousand in homemaking and civics lessons. But these schools were more than that. As this article has argued, ARC schools were founded for the purpose of supporting the American GI husbands by teaching their Japanese wives how to be 'successful' wives to them. With high ambitions, these schools sought to assimilate these Japanese women into acculturated wives of American servicemen. By examining the schools' stated aims and the responsibilities assigned to these women, we can see how the United States extended its influence over them before they even began their physical journey to American shores. While Japanese brides were undoubtedly the focus of these schools' attention, the husbands held equal, if not more, importance. Seeking the husbands' feedback and shaping the curriculum around what they wanted their wives to learn not only reflected the gender roles of the time but also reinforced their status as the linchpin of the entire operation. The intercultural and interracial nature of the relationships between American servicemen and Japanese women inspired the founding and rapid expansion of these schools. While Japanese war brides' histories are important to examine and study, this study would not be completed without interrogating the centrality of the husbands to this equation. What these schools taught these women offered insight not only into what the United States deemed important for an ideal wife of this period, but also into the knowledge they believed these Japanese women lacked. Thus, the schools served as bridges across cultures and nationalities, but also as a bridge between a husband and wife.