

Far from Child's Play

Doll Diplomacy following the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924

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In the last two decades of the 19th century, an increasing stream of immigrants from Japan, mostly impoverished farmers, settled in the western United States. This situation alarmed some Americans, especially those in California, where the Japanese immigrant population was concentrated. The sources of Americans' concerns can be grouped into two main categories: economic competition and cultural anxiety. Concern over economic competition stemmed from the belief that Japanese laborers were willing to work for less than their American counterparts, and thus that they were a direct threat to the native-born workforce. And many Americans were unfamiliar with Japanese culture, fearing that the influx of Japanese immigrants would cause (negative) changes in American culture. Many Americans in California and other western states also doubted that Japanese immigrants or their children were capable of assimilation and adopting American cultural norms and values.¹

The hostility toward Japanese immigrants in western states regularly manifested in acts of discrimination and harassment, which was occasionally codified into municipal ordinances and even laws; there was also discussion of banning further Japanese immigration with a Congressional action similar to the humiliating Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The situation came to a head in 1906, when, in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake that destroyed much of the city, the San Francisco School Board passed a segregation measure to preserve the best of the

remaining public school facilities for white students. This provocation, however, did not go unanswered. The Japanese government, flush from recent military victories over both China and Russia and proud of its status as the only non-European imperial power on the global stage, was fastidious in its attempts to manage Japan's image; having its subjects overtly discriminated against abroad would have belied its claim to being a major power.

The Immigration Act of 1924 (Asian Exclusion Act)

To resolve the issue, President Theodore Roosevelt (who was quite sympathetic to the Japanese position) sent representatives to California to quell the outrage. When this failed, he dispatched diplomats to meet with their Japanese counterparts and settle the immigration question fueling the exclusionist sentiments in California. The diplomats reached an agreement to halt Japanese emigration to the United States, and in return, President Roosevelt got both the San Francisco School Board and the California Legislature to stand down. This accord was never officially ratified, and thus is referred to as the "Gentlemen's Agreement."

Although partially effective, the "Gentlemen's Agreement" did not permanently resolve the immigration question nor truly quell the racially-motivated animus in the western United States. Loopholes in the agreement and a lack of uniform implementation meant that Japanese emigrants were still arriving on American shores in significant numbers. This continued immigration prompted a myriad of further discriminatory acts in western states, perhaps most notoriously the California Alien Land Law of 1913, which prohibited aliens ineligible for American citizenship from owning or leasing agricultural land (and which was implicitly aimed at discouraging Asian, particularly Japanese, immigration). By 1924, many considered the "Gentlemen's Agreement" a failure, and members of the United States

Congress succumbed to the persistent anti-Japanese and anti-immigration pressure of delegates from western states and passed the Johnson-Reid Act, which included the infamous National Origins Act, commonly referred to as the Asian Exclusion Act because it effectively barred immigration to the United States from Asia (though it is clear that the act was specifically targeted at Japanese immigrants).

The passage of this legislation was a crushing blow to those who were engaged in efforts to improve cultural, diplomatic and economic ties between the two nations. Noted Japanophile and long-time advocate for close American-Japanese relations, Sidney Gulick, lamented that this single act of Congress destroyed decades of work fostering Japanese goodwill toward the United States. Many in Japan were shocked by news of the Exclusion Act, and some were confounded by the seeming inconsistency in American behavior toward Japan. For example, in the aftermath of the Great Kanto Earthquake just one year prior to the passage of the Asian Exclusion Act, Americans impressed Japan with their generous disaster relief and seeming goodwill toward the Japanese people. Gulick and his associates desired to remedy the apparent duality of American feelings toward Japan: simultaneously generous and caring, and fearful and bigoted.

An undertaking as large and complex as mending the American image in Japan and educating Americans about Japanese culture necessitated the creation of a specialized task force. On June 25, 1926, the Executive Committee of the National Committee on American Japanese Relations met to consider how to react to the Immigration Act. Recognizing that the political climate in the United States was too rancorous for "an aggressive political campaign" against the 1924 legislation, and they instead resolved to conduct "a quiet educational campaign."² They also resolved to avoid touching on any matter that could possibly be controversial. The committee also decided to focus its efforts on the world of children and play, initiating a "charm offensive" to introduce light-hearted, non-threatening,

family-oriented and highly artistic elements of Japanese culture to a general American audience—particularly things they believed mainstream Americans would find palatable. Given the highly contentious and fractious political climate, this “charm offensive,” they felt, would offer the best opportunity for Americans to “begin to know Japan as she really is.”³ While their primary aim was to soften Americans’ attitudes towards Japan, a secondary objective was to demonstrate the largess and goodwill of average Americans toward the subjects of the Japanese Empire amid the strained relations caused by the Exclusion Act.

Dolls as Non-Political Ambassadors

Sidney Gulick, together with others working under the auspices of the Commission on International Justice and Goodwill of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, created the Committee on World Friendship among Children (hereafter referred to as the WFC) in June of 1927. The WFC was tasked with coordinating a campaign to send “doll ambassadors” to Japan to be a “valuable influence... in cultivating goodwill between America and Japan.”⁴ The efforts of the WFC inspired the formation of the Japanese *Sekai Kokusai Jidou Shinzen Kai* (in English the World International Children’s Friendship Association, hereafter referred to as the JSK) in early 1927 by statesman and staunch advocate of positive Japanese-American relations, Shibusawa Eiichi,⁵ and members of several prominent Japanese-American organizations in Japan. The JSK would eventually respond to the WFC’s doll ambassador project by sending their own doll ambassadors to United States—dolls which demonstrated the sophistication of Japan’s artistic heritage and also showcased the refined lifestyles of historical courtiers to Americans largely unaware of Japanese culture, and which were thus presumably intended to challenge the limited and unflattering image of Japan and the Japanese held by many Americans.

The doll ambassador project was first conceived of by Gulick as a way to meet both objectives of the WFC—educating Americans on the finer points of Japanese culture while demonstrating American goodwill to the Japanese. The first, and only, major project of the committee was to organize a massive collection of dolls, to be sent to Japan in time for the celebration of *hinamatsuri* in 1927.⁶ This festival is celebrated by Japanese girls each year on March 3rd; a main component of the celebration is a prominent display of a family's heirloom dolls in the home. The WFC hoped to collect dolls from “every community [in the United States]” to “join the doll families of Japan.”⁷ The committee aspired to send 100,000 dolls to Japan.⁸

Gulick was especially careful to ensure that the doll ambassador project received as much publicity as possible in the United States. Perhaps he wished to reach a wider audience than just school children, their parents, and those who were connected in some way to schools, but it is also likely that he wanted to have stories published in the American media that were not about the immigration question or Japan's increasing militarism and power in Asia; and in Japanese headlines, a break from the description of how “yellow peril” sentiment was becoming entrenched in western states. Regardless of his exact motives, Gulick was deliberate in his efforts to alert news outlets, both in the United States and in Japan, of the WFC's activities.⁹ In fact, he even arranged for American journalists to travel to Japan with the dolls and take video footage to create newsreels for widespread distribution back in the United States.¹⁰

Selecting the doll festival as a means of encouraging international discourse between children lent itself nicely to newspaper write-ups, but also to implementing a general education campaign to teach Americans about some of the finer points of Japanese culture that would be able to avoid the fraught political and social debates occurring at that time. The *hinamatsuri*, specifically, was chosen because it embodies Japanese family values; in the words of Sidney Gulick, it was “a beautiful family custom” that

he desired to make known to Americans.¹¹ The educational campaign began with a pamphlet about *hinamatsuri* written by the committee and augmented with photographs (sent by Japanese friends of committee members) of *hinamatsuri* celebrations that showed the types of dolls displayed in the home, how Japanese girls dress for the festival, and the sorts of activities that comprised the celebrations.¹² This pamphlet was sent to thousands of American schools, churches and other organizations along with a request for donations of American dolls to be sent to Japan. The committee hoped that through this campaign, American children and their families would become “acquainted with [the] beautiful custom of Japan’s Doll Festival [and] learn something of Japan’s love for children and home.”¹³

However, the doll campaign was not without its detractors. Gulick confided to Chinjiro Matsuura that some had criticized the campaign as a waste of monetary and temporal resources. Others asserted that dealing in children’s toys could not bring about an improvement in relations between the two, sometimes terribly misunderstood, nations.¹⁴ This compelled Gulick to justify his doll ambassador project to his Japanese friends, who he feared might wonder about both his priorities and those of the other committee members.

As justification for the project, Gulick specifically linked the doll mission to the prospect of future improvements in diplomatic relations by insisting that it would produce “a great fund of good feeling [that] will spring up in the minds and hearts of the children and young people” of the respective nations, such that “in the decades ahead only friendly relations may prevail between our two nations.”¹⁵ Due to the toxicity that had by this point permeated discussions surrounding the Exclusion Act of 1924, he felt that a positive, non-controversial, and unequivocally non-political educational campaign would be the best way to clear the proverbial air surrounding Japanese and American relations. However, he was careful to reassure his Japanese counterparts that the turn toward utilizing soft power

in no way signified that he and his American cohort were abandoning the fight to repeal the 1924 act—he saw it as a prerequisite if the next attempt to repeal the law was to be successful.¹⁶

Moreover, in a subsequent letter, Gulick explicitly draws a connection between the doll ambassador project and the eventual repeal of the controversial legislation. He confided in Shibusawa that the committee felt the goodwill created by the project in both America and Japan would be “a valuable help” when the time was right for Congress to take the matter up once again. He further indicated that “this doll project [is an important part] of our program for creating those conditions which will lead to a final revision.”¹⁷ Lucy W. Peabody, the Chair of the CWF, echoed this sentiment in a letter to Shibusawa:

If we wait for policies which are to come thru our Parliaments and Senates, we shall fail. If we prepare the hearts of the children, as you are doing, and as we are endeavoring to do, we shall find, in years to come, men and women who behave in this great principle. I do not feel it is a childish thing we are doing. You [Shibusawa] are leading as a great Statesman in Japan when you co-operate with the movement for World Friendship thru these Doll Messengers.¹⁸

Thus, it is clear that while there was no direct mention of the Exclusion Act in connection with the doll ambassador program, the two were very much connected.

American Doll Selection & Transport to Japan

Considering that the American dolls would be joining Japanese families as “messengers and ambassadors of goodwill and friendship,” the WFC established specific criteria for the dolls they hoped to send. In this way, it sought to actively manage the image of America that was to be

presented to Japan with the doll project at the same time it was managing the image of Americans as friendly toward Japan. First, it stipulated that the dolls had to be new and of good quality. This was important because they would also be presenting a culture to be admired—and possibly emulated. It suggested that the dolls purchased should cost between \$2.50 and \$4.00 (around \$35-\$50 in 2015).¹⁹

The committee stipulated that the dolls were to be new and resemble “attractive American boys and girls.”²⁰ Moreover, a special emphasis was placed on the doll’s clothing. They were to be thoughtfully and meticulously dressed “since they will serve as models in a country where habits and customs are undergoing rapid changes.”²¹ Additionally, the committee reinforced the gendered division of labor prominent in the United States at the time. It suggested that the girls specialize in the aesthetic tasks of selecting the dolls and making their outfits. They emphasized that home-made clothing was more personal, deliberate and caring, and would facilitate a more intimate feeling between the sending and receiving parties than if the dolls were sent with store-bought outfits. Boys, on the other hand, were called on to arrange the logistics of sending the dolls to the WFC for transport to Japan. Each doll was to have a railway and steamship ticket as well as a passport with visa, which the boys of the class were to procure by sending \$1 to the “Doll Travel Bureau” (the office of the Commission on International Justice and Goodwill of the federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America—the parent organization of the WFC). Thus, the committee very clearly specified the kinds of doll ambassadors it was seeking to collect, and why those criteria had been selected.

In keeping with the notion that the doll was an “ambassador,” the group of children sending a doll (usually a class, but also church groups and other organizations such as Girl and Boy Scout troops) were to compose a message of goodwill for the doll to carry to its new home in Japan. This message should express a desire for unity with, and general goodwill

toward, the Japanese children who would be receiving it. Finally, when all of the preparations had been completed, each class or group was encouraged to hold a farewell ceremony for the doll, open to parents and community members, in which the goodwill message was read and *hinamatsuri* was explained to the guests.²²

After the local farewell ceremonies for individual dolls, the little ambassadors traveled to either San Francisco or New York by rail to await their passage to Japan. The WFC was able to solicit support for the campaign from some transportation companies via “in kind” donations, thereby allowing the dolls to be transported for a reduced cost. Additionally, the committee was able to send all of the dolls via steamship to Japan free of charge.²³ In fact, for a period of several weeks from the end of 1926 to the beginning of 1927, every steamship departing from New York that was scheduled to stop in Yokohama carried “doll ambassadors” in this way.²⁴

Before they left on the steamships, however, they were honored with one last farewell ceremony. The roughly 12,000 dolls collected²⁵ fell far short of the initial target of 100,000, but the doll ambassadors generated publicity with multiple send-off celebrations as dolls were sent to Japan in stages. The doll send-offs were held in upscale and impressive locations, and the committee was diligent in ensuring that there was extensive press coverage. The first such ceremony, in which the first 1,000 dolls collected from American children received a last farewell reception before being placed on steamships, was held at the Hotel Plaza in New York City.²⁶

Reception in Japan

The Japanese emperor passed away on December 25, 1925, and this greatly affected the well-laid plans for the reception of the American friendship dolls in Japan. Originally, the JSK had planned to hold the welcome reception on February 20, 1927, at the Imperial Theater, but because

this date fell within the official period of national mourning, and because this venue was connected to the Imperial Household, the plan was deeply problematic. Tokugawa Ietatsu, a prominent member of the JSK (and the person being groomed to lead the organization upon Shibusawa's retirement) strongly objected to the planned festivities, including the planned performance of an orchestra, which he thought to be in poor taste during the mourning period. While recognizing the importance to United States-Japanese relations in celebrating the arrival of the doll ambassadors, he refused to attend if the ceremony was executed as originally planned, and strongly recommended that Shibusawa reconsider the plans.²⁷ Due to these complications, the welcoming ceremony for the American doll ambassadors was instead held on March 3rd, 1926—just past the end of the period of national mourning—at the still-impressive YMCA facility near Meiji Shrine.²⁸

Upon arriving in Japan, the dolls were divided into groups and placed on display in Osaka and Tokyo for several days. After the dolls had toured the country, they returned to Tokyo for a welcome ceremony on March 3, the day of *hinamatsuri*, which was considerably more impressive than their send-offs in New York, which were held over many weeks. This reception, which was on the scale of those for the reception of the human emissaries, was held at the spacious new facilities of the YMCA building in Aoyama.²⁹ The WFC and the JSK hoped that the ceremony would



Mitsukoshi Gofukuten, February 27, 1927,
Shibusawa Memorial Museum Collection.

involve school children, especially school girls, to a great extent.³⁰ This objective was met, as more than 1,000 school girls were invited guests, and several hundred boys and adults were also in attendance.³¹ The ceremony also attracted an impressive number of political elites, including several members of the

Imperial Family, and government ministers, such as the Japanese Ministers of Education and Finance, and other politicians.³²

The Master of Ceremonies was Matsuura Chinjiro, the Vice-Minister of Education, who also delivered the opening speech. The dolls were presented by the American ambassador, Charles MacVeagh, who did not miss the opportunity to speak to the diplomatic mission of the toys, speculating the event would be remembered as “one which has greatly helped to forge the chain of complete understanding and friendship between America and Japan.”³³ He joked that even though he was too thin to be a convincing version of the jolly old saint, he was invoking the spirit of Santa Claus in that he was delivering presents that would bring joy and love to the children of Japan.³⁴ In his subsequent address, Shibusawa Eiichi, perhaps the biggest supporter the WFC had in Japan, joked that his somewhat portly physique qualified him to be a stand-in for the beloved imaginary saint³⁵ before waxing poetic when he took the stage and delivered a speech about the wonder and possibility of childhood. He recalled the importance of the Boys' Day festival to the foundation of his own personality in youth and invoked the hope that children would skillfully lead the way of international friendship by using the proverb, “the child is father to the man.”³⁶

The ceremony also featured various entertainments and pageantry. After the speeches, the Toyama military band played the national anthems of both Japan and the United States. The ceremonial exchanging of the dolls was the highlight of the evening, and 40 American school girls had been selected to make the trip to Japan to participate. The American girls were met by an equal number



Shibusawa Eiichi holds two of the American "doll ambassadors" at the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, March 3, 1927, Shibusawa Memorial Museum Collection.

of Japanese girls on the stage and performed a scripted transfer of the dolls from the Americans to the Japanese. The Japanese girls on the stage were led by Tokugawa Yukiko, granddaughter of Prince Tokugawa, former President of the House of Peers in the Japanese Diet. Once the dolls had been handed over, the girls treated the audience to a musical performance. The American and the Japanese girls in turn sang an original work by a Japanese composer. The Japanese girls went first, singing in Japanese, and the American girls followed by singing the same song in translation.³⁷

The human delegates from the United States wore stylish dresses each of her own choosing, while their Japanese counterparts were dressed in navy-blue uniforms, each with a black arm band attached to her sleeve in mourning for the former emperor. Princess Teru later recalled that she envied her American counterparts because, unlike she and her classmates from Gakushuin (a school deeply connected to the Imperial family), the American girls were able to wear attractive civilian clothes, did not have to queue in a military-style formation, and chatted with impunity between speakers. Thus, what was supposed to be a friendship-building exercise among the children morphed into a ceremony where cultural differences came to the fore.³⁸

As for the role of the dolls, although many of them were destined to reside in private homes or in school collections, some would serve as physical reminders of American goodwill toward Japan in more official capacities. For instance, “Miss America,” the largest and most impressive doll, and 48 dolls representing each of the then-48 American states, were added to the holdings of the Tokyo Museum of the Ministry of Education after a private showing to Shigeiko, the Princess Teru, the eldest child (and at the time, the only child yet born) of the Emperor Shōwa and Empress Kōjun.³⁹ This impulse to document and display was common to all events connected to the doll ambassadors. In fact, the WFC had films from these events compiled into a commemorative motion picture, a copy of which was

returned to the United States.⁴⁰

Responses to the Doll Ambassador Campaign

Despite having gathered only a fraction of the number of dolls the WFC had hoped to collect, the doll ambassador campaign was hailed as a great success in almost every corner. The reach of the doll campaign meant that roughly one half of all the kindergartens and elementary schools in Japan received one of the American doll ambassadors.⁴¹ However, the actual effectiveness of the campaign once the dolls were in Japan was dependent on cooperation of the Japanese Ministry of Education, which arranged for individual schools to receive the dolls. Shibusawa had presented the doll ambassador plan to the ministry in early 1926, and the final pervasiveness of the campaign is in large part due to this partnership which was brought about by his efforts.⁴² However, the WFC provided the funding for each doll to travel to its respective new home.

Gulick was adamant in his belief that individual doll ownership was essential to the mission of the project because it would allow Japanese children to create a strong emotional bond with the doll (and thus, presumably, to develop an affinity for the United States). Therefore, he and the WFC advocated presenting the dolls to individual students, but the ultimate decision of whether to do this, and if so, the manner in which this was to be done, was left to school administrators. Thus, once a doll had arrived in a school and was displayed for the students, the administrators determined where the doll would reside. In cases where they determined that an individual student should have the doll, some sort of contest—usually an academic one—ensued. Typically, an essay contest was used to determine which female student would have the honor of taking the doll home to join her *hinamatsuri* collection. In keeping with the mission of the doll ambassadors, the essays were usually on the topic of how to foster

world friendship among children.⁴³

The committee was quite pleased with the warm response of the Japanese people toward the doll ambassadors, and many of the recipients indicated that they wished to demonstrate their appreciation by some sort of reciprocal action. However, Gulick was adamant that he did not want Japanese children or families to “feel under any necessity” to send Japanese dolls to American children in return for the doll ambassadors sent to Japan.⁴⁴ He insisted that the endeavor was not a “doll exchange” but an “expression of goodwill,” and equally important, an exercise that may help to foster better relations between the two nations in the future. In this sense, he felt that the sending of American dolls to Japan was sufficient because it allowed “our children to understand and appreciate a beautiful Japanese custom... and convey to the Japanese children something of the goodwill which our children are beginning to feel through this enterprise.”⁴⁵ Thus, he felt that Japanese children, parents and officials should not trouble themselves to reciprocate, and that a nicely-penned thank you note to the American children who sent the dolls was all that was needed to cement the warm feelings generated by the mission.

The Question of Reciprocity

However, despite Gulick’s insistence that reciprocity was unnecessary, some prominent Japanese did not feel that they could let the goodwill gesture go unanswered. In early 1927, the *Sekai Kokusai Jidou Shinzen Kai* (or World International Children’s Friendship Association, referred to in this paper as the JSK) was formed by members of several prominent organizations that had for years been working toward improved relations between their nation and the United States. The members of this new organization, especially Shibusawa, made clear that they wished to send Japanese doll ambassadors to the United States. When he learned of

their intentions, Gulick warned the new committee that undertaking such a project as the doll ambassadors was “very much more serious and costly than one would expect who has had no experience in the matter.”⁴⁶

As an alternative to sending dolls to the United States, Gulick suggested that there might be some other way that the Japanese committee might reciprocate the shipment of the American doll ambassadors, perhaps something “equally effective and far less costly,” especially, he asserted, since sending dolls would “merely be an imitation” of what his organization had done.⁴⁷ Instead, he suggested that Japanese schools send albums, though not more than two from each school, which could feature artwork by the children on the theme of childhood in their country. Pupils might, for example, submit drawings representing *hinamatsuri* or other children's festivals, or perhaps something of home life or Japanese traditions, even nature scenes—anything that would convey how the artist experienced his or her world, and would introduce an authentic image of Japan to American children.

Gulick also proposed as a second alternative that the schools in Japan that had received dolls might send a “friendship bag” to their American doll sponsors. This concept was that the each of the children of the school would each add a “picture or any inexpensive thing” that he or she might want his or her counterparts in the United States to have.⁴⁸ However, Gulick reported to Shibusawa that the general consensus from the members of his committee was that the album would be preferable, and, with characteristic frugality, he pointed out that this option would be the less expensive option for the school children when it came time to send the parcels to the United States.⁴⁹ Shibusawa then shared the contents of Gulick's letter suggesting the friendship bag and picture book as reciprocation for the American doll ambassadors at a JSK meeting. They decided, however, to go ahead with the idea of sending Japanese doll ambassadors to the United States instead of the other options suggested by Gulick, and also to allow the Japanese Ministry of Education to decide the details of the dolls (including

what kind of dolls to send and how to dress them).⁵⁰ Shibusawa then met with the United States' Ambassador to Japan, Charles MacVeagh, about the prospect of sending doll ambassadors to the United States. Shibusawa asserted that the American doll ambassadors had done much to mend the relationship between the United States and Japan, and asked MacVeagh to inform President Calvin Coolidge of how well the American dolls had been received in Japan. MacVeagh suggested that the JSK delay the shipment of Japanese dolls to the United States so as to maximize the publicity of the exchange; sending the dolls at the end of the year would help to keep the doll ambassadors in the minds of people on both sides of the Pacific Ocean longer, and thus increase the ultimate success of the project. The JSK subsequently decided to send the Japanese doll ambassadors during the Christmas season of 1927.⁵¹ Shibusawa met with officials in the Japanese Ministry of Education in charge of overseeing elementary schools in Japan and agreed that the Ministry of Education would arrange the details of the doll ambassador campaign.⁵²

Creation of the Japanese Dolls

Undaunted, however, the JSK proceeded with the doll ambassador project. Utilizing the donations of some 2,610,000 school children, the organization commissioned highly-skilled artisans to craft 58 custom dolls—one for each of the 47 Japanese prefectures, and 10 representing major Japanese cities and Japanese-held territories: Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, Nagoya, Yokohama, Korea, Taiwan, Kuril Islands, and the Canton area in China.⁵³ The final, most impressive, doll was “Miss Dai Nippon,” who represented Japan as a whole and was a gift of the then-Emperor's daughter Shigeko, the Princess Teru. “Miss Dai Nippon” stood three feet tall and cost around \$350 (in 1927 dollars), and the others were between two and two-and-a-half feet tall and cost approximately \$200, making the Japanese dolls

between 50 and 80 times costlier than the dolls sent to Japan by the WFC. However, due to their smaller number, the final cost of the Japanese dolls was only roughly one-third of the total cost of the American doll project.⁵⁴

The funds to pay for these exquisite dolls were collected entirely through small contributions by individuals, and these far exceeded the expectations of the planners. These funds were contributed by children, parents, and teachers.⁵⁵ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had initially budgeted ¥3,500 for shipping but in the end this was not needed;⁵⁶ the funds collected totaled ¥27,000, which was more than sufficient to pay for the dolls and the cost of shipping them to the United States.

In the case of children, the average donation was one sen,⁵⁷ and while this may sound like a trifling amount, Koresawa⁵⁸ points out that in 1927, rural children may only receive this amount during major festivals, and during hard times, children may only receive this amount once per year.⁵⁹ Though the Japanese economy was depressed after the devastating Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, Koresawa asserts that in the minds of the parents and children who had been delighted by the gift of the American dolls, reciprocation was considered “natural,” so there was no dissention.⁶⁰

All of the dolls were completed by September 10th. After this, the dolls which represented each of the prefectures were sent to their respective prefectures for a showing and to be designated as official representative ambassadors before returning to Tokyo to participate in an official departure ceremony. By the end of October, the dolls had all been gathered in Tokyo and on November 3rd the JSK held a farewell ceremony.⁶¹

The stated purpose of this Japanese doll ambassador program



Farewell ceremony at Nippon seinenkan, November 4, 1927, Shibusawa Memorial Museum Collection.

was to thank the Americans for the dolls sent to Japanese children for *hinamatsuri*, but it is also likely that the decision to send dolls that were hand-crafted by eminent artisans was an attempt to illustrate the sophistication of the Japanese cultural arts to a nation which had, through its legislature, deemed their emigrants to be so undesirable that they were banned.

Thus, the 58 Japanese dolls were markedly different from their 12,000 American counterparts.⁶² Most notably, they were of a much higher quality. While the WFC had stipulated that each American doll should be well-made, and even set a recommended retail value for the dolls, they were mass-produced. The Japanese dolls, on the other hand, were hand-crafted artisanal productions, as were their wardrobes, home furnishings, tea sets, musical instruments and the cases for all of these items.

Who Accompanies the Dolls to the U.S.?

The events surrounding the selection of a delegation to accompany the Japanese doll ambassadors indicates that although they shared the same overall aims, there was nevertheless a degree of tension between the WFC and the JSK. When it became apparent that Japanese doll ambassadors would, in fact, be sent to the United States, the WFC suggested candidates for the dolls' entourage: a married couple, Professor Inui Kiyosue and his wife Minnie (née Kimura), a glob-trotting duo well-versed in many cultures.⁶³ It seems that the committee was especially eager to see Mrs. Inui as the guardian of the dolls owing to her American birth, English proficiency and "acquaint[ance] with American ideals and prejudices." In fact, six members of the committee wrote to Shibusawa asking for his support in appointing her to this task.⁶⁴ However, in the end, the JSK did not send the Inuis. Though the materials utilized for this article do not indicate why other representatives were chosen, it seems likely that they wanted to have a delegation with a higher, more official, status, and

with ties to the Japanese government, perhaps they could ensure that the doll mission would be taken seriously in the United States. Thus, the human entourage that accompanied the dolls had official connections to the Japanese state, unlike the Inuis. When the Japanese dolls arrived in San Francisco, California, in October of 1927, they were in the care of a delegation of four, led by Sekiya Ryukichi, special envoy to the United States and former director of general education of the Department of Education of Japan. In fact, Sekiya resigned as director of general education specifically to accompany the dolls on their several-months-long tour of the U.S.

On the tour, Sekiya's main duty was to give lectures that helped American audiences understand the uniqueness of the Japanese doll ambassadors, especially the craftsmanship of the dolls, and explain their many, many personal effects (including a variety of weather-appropriate clothing and kimono with a unique family crest embroidered on each) to audiences mostly unfamiliar with Japanese customs and everyday items.⁶⁵ Receptions for the Japanese dolls were held in San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, Los Angeles and Riverside in California before departing to be shown in Chicago, New York, Boston and Philadelphia; they were then broken up into eight groups and sent to more-remote parts of the United States—a journey that would take months. In fact, there were over 200 requests from various cities and towns to have an opportunity to display some of the dolls.⁶⁶

Reception in the U.S.

As was the case when the American dolls arrived in Japan, speeches made at the welcoming ceremony for the Japanese dolls emphasized the ties of friendship between future generations on both sides of the Pacific Ocean that they symbolized, and discussed the possibility of peace between the respective nations. This was a reception with very



Welcoming ceremony in Washington, D.C., December 27, 1927, Shibusawa Memorial Museum Collection.



New York City mayor Jimmy Walker holds one of the Japanese "doll ambassadors", December 28, 1927, Shibusawa Memorial Museum Collection.

distinguished guests, including the wives of former American presidents Woodrow Wilson and William Howard Taft, and as well as the wife of Republican presidential candidate Lou Hoover. (Eleanor Roosevelt viewed the dolls in a more intimate setting at the home of a family friend, Whitelaw Reid.) A former Ambassador to Italy, Robert Underwood, composed and read a poem for the occasion. Also, like the reception for the American doll ambassadors in Japan, this reception had a full film crew documenting the proceedings.⁶⁷ Japanese Ambassador Matsudaira Tsuneo, addressing a crowd at the National Theater in Washington, D.C., joked that he was glad to have 58 “fellow ambassadors” to aid him in his duties. Then striking a more serious, if hopeful, note, he asserted that the dolls “can do what I can not [sic]... [because] they will have an unrestricted entrée to the beautiful world of innocent happiness, disinterested friendship and unaffected fraternity—the world of childhood, the doors of which are but slightly opened for diplomatic officials.”⁶⁸

The Secretary of Labor for the United States, James J. Davis, echoed Matsudaira’s comments in his subsequent remarks. He asserted that a “new diplomacy” made up of a “spontaneous outpouring of good feeling from the various peoples themselves” was developing, and speculated that it would

“serve as an outlet for this splendid new sentiment.”

Our governments still need their formal representatives, to handle the solemn matters of state. But this is no longer enough. It does not bring the people themselves into the direct personal contact and understanding they seem to desire. So they have taken to sending to each other ambassadors of their own—representatives not of national policy, but spokesmen sent to carry the real heart sentiments of the people themselves... . If the future mothers of our peoples once take into their hands the work of spreading their tender good will, then friendliness and good will are still more certain to come.⁶⁹

All of the Washington, D.C. newspapers carried stories of the reception for the doll ambassadors from Japan, many of these stories featuring photographs of the exquisite dolls.⁷⁰

Throughout the United States, at hundreds of public viewings of the dolls in venues both large and small, in formal receptions and more casual events, many thousands of people came to see the dolls.⁷¹ These viewings were equal parts entertainment and education, and the Japanese presenters seemed eager to utilize these events as opportunities to impart the values of their culture. For instance, a Mr. Uchiyama's comments at a reception at a high school tied the dolls' stoic expressions to Japanese cultural traits. He explained that the dolls were not only lifelike in that they had the features of Japanese women but also in how they displayed the fabled stoicism of his culture. He tells the audience that “owing to their traditional discipline, most Japanese are not accustomed to showing their feelings in public.” Thus, the unchanging, painted face of the dolls were supposed to be a representation of Japanese emotional equanimity and self-control. He drew on a contemporary event for his audience and ventured to say that being ever “reserved and conservative... . the true character of Japanese women is shown at the time of some great disaster” such as the devastating earthquake of 1923.⁷²

Conclusion

For the WFC, the JSK, and all of the other people involved in the exchanges, the doll ambassador campaigns were intended to serve two main purposes: (1) to mend the American image in Japan following decades of increasing hostility towards and discrimination against Japanese immigrants in the United States, which culminated in the passage of the 1924 Asian Exclusion Act, and (2) educating Americans about Japanese culture through the sharing of Japanese family values (through the connection with *hinamatsuri*) and artisans' crafts, in the hopes of softening Americans' attitudes towards Japan and ultimately achieving a repeal of the 1924 immigration law. Regardless of the similarities and differences among the receptions and viewings of the American and Japanese doll ambassador missions, nearly every aspect of these missions was carefully documented and publicized, for this was essential to these projects' objectives. As mentioned above, a film compilation of Japanese reception ceremonies for American dolls was created and distributed in the United States. And in the case of the Japanese doll delegation to the United States, a commemorative book of the receptions was created and sent to the governors and mayors of the districts that sent dolls. Special copies were presented to the Empress Kōjun and her daughter, the Princess Teru.⁷³ Gulick was careful to arrange for press coverage during the presentation of the books to the women of the Imperial Household, and took great pains to ensure that the books could be delivered to both women despite considerable scheduling conflicts. He used the timing of the book presentation ceremony, on the third anniversary of the American dolls' arrival in Japan, to generate as much publicity as possible. He also arranged for news wire services to pick up the story and spread the story to media outlets back in the United States to keep the doll mission in the minds of ordinary Americans.⁷⁴

These doll exchanges between the United States and Japan, while

not officially tied to a government, were in fact intended to be used as a soft-power diplomatic tool by several parties that were considerably invested in seeing improved relations between their respective nations. Within the strained and antagonistic political environment of the post-Exclusion-Act era, the members of the WFC actively redirected their energies away from direct efforts to overturn the legislation and instead attempted to create a space within which subsequent attempts to address the situation may prove more fruitful. The JSK later joined in this endeavor, with similar aims. The preferred approach was the employment of doll ambassadors, tasked with the dual purpose of presenting their native culture to those in the other nation, and to foster goodwill between the two nations. That a completely non-political “charm offensive” in the form of doll diplomacy was felt to be both necessary and the best way to, in a roundabout way, achieve their aims, indicates just how tenuous, hostile, and fractious the relations between the United States and Japan were following the passage of the Asian Exclusion Act in 1924.

Notes

- ¹ The author would like to thank Ms. Jessica McLeod of Michigan State University for making editorial comments on this article.
- ² Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, June 25, 1926, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 14]
- ³ Committee on World Friendship among Children, “Doll Messengers of Friendship: A Project for Promoting Understanding and Goodwill between America and Japan,” Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 15]
- ⁴ Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, June 17, 1926, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 12]
- ⁵ Japanese names are given in standard Japanese order, surname followed by given name, unless the individual has previously chosen to use a different order in English.
- ⁶ Committee on World Friendship among Children, “Doll Messengers of Friendship: A Project for

Promoting Understanding and Goodwill between America and Japan,” Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 15]

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, September 15, 1926, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 19]

⁹ Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, June 17, 1926, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 12]

¹⁰ Tamakoto to Tokugawa Iyetatsu, June 3, Showa 10, America-Japan Society Archives, box A1-15.

¹¹ Committee on World Friendship among Children, “Doll Messengers of Friendship: A Project for Promoting Understanding and Goodwill between America and Japan,” Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 15]

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Sidney Gulick to Matsuura Chinjiro, December 18, 1926, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 31]

¹⁵ Sidney Gulick to Matsuura Chinjiro, December 18, 1926, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 32]

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, April 4, 1927, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 57]

¹⁸ Lucy Peabody to Shibusawa Eiichi, February 18, 1928, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 155]

¹⁹ Committee on World Friendship among Children, “Doll Messengers of Friendship: A Project for Promoting Understanding and Goodwill between America and Japan,” Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 14-17]

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, September 15, 1926, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 19]

²⁴ Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, December 20, 1926, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 25]

25. "Gifts of Friendship," *New York Times*. March 14, 1927, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 72]
26. Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, December 20, 1926, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 25]
27. Koresawa [2010: 92-23]
28. Ibid.
29. Koresawa [2010: 92-93]
30. Tamakoto to Tokugawa Ietatsu, June 3, 1935. America Japan Society Record. A1-15.
31. "Official Welcome to Dolls: Ambassador, Like Santa Claus, Gives Dolls to All Good Girls," *Japan Advertiser*, March 4, 1927, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 58-60]
32. Koresawa [2010: 93-94]
33. "Official Welcome to Dolls: Ambassador, Like Santa Claus, Gives Dolls to All Good Girls," *Japan Advertiser*, March 4, 1927, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 58-60]
34. Koresawa [2010: 95-96]
35. Ibid.
36. "Official Welcome to Dolls: Ambassador, Like Santa Claus, Gives Dolls to All Good Girls," *Japan Advertiser*, March 4, 1927, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 58-60]
37. Ibid.
38. Koresawa [2010: 94]
39. "Official Welcome to Dolls: Ambassador, Like Santa Claus, Gives Dolls to All Good Girls," *Japan Advertiser*, March 4, 1927, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 58-60]
40. Ibid.
41. "Remarks at Reception of Japanese Dolls at Girls [sic] Commercial High School, Brooklyn, N.Y. by Mr. K. Uchiyama," Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 137]
42. Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, April 15, 1926, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 6-9]
43. Ibid.
44. Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, November 12, 1926, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 21-22]
45. Ibid.

46. Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, February 10, 1927, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 40-42]
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Koresawa [2010: 106-8]
51. Koresawa [2010: 104]
52. Koresawa [2010: 105]
53. Koresawa [2010: 110]
54. "Honor Wax Princess: Doll Royalty Visits U.S. as Good Will Ambassadors," *Riverside Enterprise*, December 10, 1927, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 103-105]
55. Koresawa [2010: 112]
56. Koresawa [2010: 113]
57. Sen were a smaller denomination of currency that were used in Japan until 1953; one yen was equal to 100 sen.
58. Koresawa [2010: 112-113]
59. Koresawa also gives an example of the real-world purchasing power of one sen in 1927, to illustrate the opportunity cost of participating in the Friendship Doll program: one sen could buy two *manju*, or sweet bean buns. Koresawa [2010: 113]
60. Koresawa [2010: 112-113]
61. Koresawa [2010: 110]
62. "Honor Wax Princess: Doll Royalty Visits U.S. as Good Will Ambassadors," *Riverside Enterprise*, December 10, 1927, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 103-105]
63. Mary Pierce to Shibusawa Eiichi, July 26, 1927, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 95]
64. E.C. Bellows, et al. to Shibusawa Eiichi, August 8, 1927, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 96-97]
65. "Japanese Visitors Feted at Inn as Tribute to Goodwill Offering," *Riverside Enterprise*, December 11, 1927, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 107]
66. Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, December 12, 1927, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan

Ryumonsha [1961: 101]

67. Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, January 20, 1928, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 125]
68. "Address of the Japanese Ambassador, Tsuneo Matsudaira, at the Japanese Doll Reception at the National Theater, Washington, D.C., Tuesday, December 27, 1927," Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 121]
69. "Remarks of the Honorable James J. Davis, United States Secretary of Labor, at the Reception of the Doll Ambassadors from Japan, National Theater, Washington, D.C., December 27, 1927," Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 121-123]
70. Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, January 20, 1928, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 125]
71. Ernest W. Clement, Untitled news article, *Japan Times*, March 26, 1928, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 141]
72. "Remarks at Reception of Japanese Dolls at Girls' Commercial High School Brooklyn, N.Y. by Mr. K. Uchiyama," Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 136-138]
73. Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, June 25, 1929, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 168]
74. Sidney Gulick to Shibusawa Eiichi, January 18, 1930, Shibusawa Seien Kinen Zaidan Ryumonsha [1961: 173]

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