

## ONLINE RESOURCES

### HISTORY

#### **Japanese Picture Brides in Central Valley**

An 8-minute video featuring photos from the era, translated interviews with actual picture brides, and a brief historical overview of their lives, social structures, and the situation for their children.

<http://video.answers.com/japanese-picture-bride-phenomena-in-central-valley-300995146>

#### **Japanese Picture Brides: Building a Family Through Photographs**

A thoughtful article discussing the traditions, hopes, and pitfalls around Japanese marriages arranged through photographs. Includes several photos of bachelors, newlyweds, newly-arrived picture brides, and families.

<http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/little-tokyo/japanese-picture-brides-building-a-family-through-photographs.html>

#### **Voices of Japanese-American Internees**

A 3-part lesson plan produced by the Anti-Defamation league. Includes a link to the short film "We Are Americans."

[http://www.adl.org/education/curriculum\\_connections/summer\\_2008/default.asp](http://www.adl.org/education/curriculum_connections/summer_2008/default.asp)

#### **Densho – The Japanese American Legacy Project**

A comprehensive independent archive, including extensive video interviews, downloadable curriculum, and other documents.

<http://www.densho.org/densho.asp>

#### **JARDA – Japanese American Relocation Digital Archives**

A comprehensive archive from the University of California, with primary resources and a variety of lesson plans.

Photos, audio recordings, timelines, and more. <http://www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu/jarda/>

#### **JARDA – Links and resources**

The University of California's own collection of resource links.

<http://www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu/jarda/related-resources.html#curricula>

#### **Japanese Picture Marriage and the Image of Immigrant Women in Early Twentieth-Century California**

A scholarly article with a thorough discussion of the topic in the title. Could be used for advanced historical research, or excerpted.

<http://www.soc.nii.ac.jp/jaas/periodicals/JJAS/PDF/2004/No.15-115.pdf>

## PRIMARY RESOURCES

Japanese American Internment: The Library at Vanderbilt University

A small collection of pamphlets and art from the era, including paintings and drawings of internment camps.

<http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/speccol/exhibits/WW2/internment.shtml>

**The Art Of Gaman: Arts and Crafts from the Japanese Internment Camps**

A slideshow of works that were displayed by the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

<http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/gaman/index.cfm>

## PRINT RESOURCES

The Buddha in the Attic by Julie Otsuka – Review

By Elizabeth Day – The Observer – Sunday, April 8, 2012

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/apr/08/buddha-in-attic-julie-otsuka-review>

This is a small jewel of a book, its planes cut precisely to catch the light so that the sentences shimmer in your mind long after turning the final page. With *The Buddha in the Attic*, Julie Otsuka has developed a literary style that is half poetry, half narration – short phrases, sparse description, so that the current of emotion running through each chapter is made more resonant by her restraint.

She takes as her subject the Japanese women brought over in the hundreds to San Francisco as mail-order brides in the interwar period. Instead of a single, named protagonist, Otsuka writes in the first personal plural through a series of thematic chapters. Such a device shouldn't work but does. Although there are no dominant characters, Otsuka's brilliance is that she is able to make us care about the crowd precisely because we can glimpse individual stories through the delicate layering of collective experience.

The opening chapter sets the scene on the boat as the women make their crossing to America, clutching photos of the handsome young men they believe to be their new husbands. When they arrive, they are disillusioned by "the crowd of men in knit caps and shabby black coats waiting for us down below on the dock... the photographs we had been sent were 20 years old."

The reality that confronts the women deals a blow from which they never fully recover. In a devastating chapter entitled "First Night", Otsuka recounts the physical consummation of these new relationships. Some of the women's experiences are harrowing, some stilted, some humorous. Otsuka makes no distinction between them, relying on the rhythm of her words to pull the reader along. Occasionally a single voice will break through and the effect is startlingly good. "They took us by the elbows and said quietly, 'It's time.' They took us before we were ready and the bleeding did not stop for three days. They took us with our white silk kimonos twisted up high over our heads and we were sure we were about to die. I thought I was being smothered."

Each subsequent chapter charts some aspect of immigrant life – getting jobs, giving birth and dealing with the casual racism of pre-war America ("They learned that they should always call the restaurant first. Do you serve Japanese?"). Their children grow up to be more comfortable with their adopted land than their parents: changing their names to sound American and making fun of their mothers' accents. Some of the marriages survive and some don't.

And then, after Pearl Harbor, the order comes for the Japanese to be interned. Entire communities are uprooted, forced to give up their houses and livelihoods. It is here that Otsuka finally gives her women their names: "Iyo left

with an alarm clock ringing from somewhere deep inside her suitcase but did not stop to turn it off. Kimiko left her purse behind on the kitchen table but would not remember until it was too late. Haruko left a tiny laughing brass Buddha up high, in a corner of the attic, where he is still laughing to this day."

This sudden individualisation is extremely poignant, especially when, in the final chapter, Otsuka's collective voice shifts from the Japanese to the Americans: "The Japanese have disappeared from our town. Their houses are boarded up and empty now."

Lyrical and empathetic, *The Buddha in the Attic* is a slender book of real, haunting power.

**Julie Otsuka's 'The Buddha in the Attic,' reviewed by Ron Charles**

By [Ron Charles](#), Published: November 15, 2011 | Updated: Wednesday, November 16, 12:35 PM

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/julie-otsukas-the-buddha-in-the-attic-reviewed-by-ron-charles/2011/11/08/gIQAHxqhPN\\_print.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/julie-otsukas-the-buddha-in-the-attic-reviewed-by-ron-charles/2011/11/08/gIQAHxqhPN_print.html)

A year after the attacks of Sept. 11, Julie Otsuka published her spare first novel about a family of Japanese Americans consigned to an internment camp in Utah. "When the Emperor Was Divine" hit a lot of notes just right in our newly paranoid country: Its lyrical style, emotional poignancy and historical content appealed to book clubs; its brevity, chastity and diversity appealed to schools. While splashy books like "Lovely Bones," "Middlesex" and "Life of Pi" soaked up attention, Otsuka's quiet debut lay the foundations for paperback immortality.

Her follow-up novel, a kind of prequel that's just as slim, starts off with a louder critical boost: It's one of the five finalists for the National Book Award in fiction to be handed out Wednesday. Every year the shortlist makes an easy target for complaints: The finalists are too commercial, too obscure, too not the books I happened to like. Otsuka's "The Buddha in the Attic" can't be dismissed on any of those grounds, but the National Book Award judges have burdened this delicate novel with expectations it can't comfortably carry.

Writing in the first person plural ("we"), Otsuka begins with a group of Japanese "picture brides" — some as young as 12 — sailing to San Francisco, thrilled to be marrying successful, good-looking men. Each carries what she thinks is a photo of her fiancée. "Most of us on the boat were accomplished, and were sure we would make good wives," they say. "We knew how to serve tea and arrange flowers and sit quietly on our flat wide feet for hours." Those will be less useful skills than they imagine in their new California lives.

The dramatic irony gets laid on thick in this anxious opening section, "Come, Japanese!" when these naive immigrants reassure themselves that "it was better to marry a stranger in America than grow old with a farmer from the village." But the book's plural voice is particularly effective at capturing their long, giddy conversations on the ship as they wonder if American men really grow hair on their chests, put pianos in their front parlors and dance "cheek to cheek all night long" with their lucky wives.

It turns out that guys have been larding their personal ads with exaggerations long before Match.com. Enticing letters to Japan had claimed, "I own a farm. I operate a hotel. I am president of a large bank" and my favorite new

pick-up line: “I am 179 centimeters tall and do not suffer from leprosy.” In fact, as their young brides discover upon arrival, most of these men don’t own anything at all. They’re poor, old and coarse. Still, “there was no going back.” What follows is a chorus of muted laments and complaints, beginning with a bracing short chapter called “First Night” that details scores of — mostly — painful consummations.

But no story in the conventional sense ever develops, and no individuals emerge for more than a paragraph. Whereas each chapter of “When the Emperor Was Divine” presented the family’s experience from a different point of view, in this new novel, each chapter focuses on some general aspect of Japanese immigrant life — sex, employment, children — and the great variety of their experiences is blended, often sentence by sentence: “Home was a bed of straw in John Lyman’s barn alongside his prize horses and cows. Home was a corner of the washhouse at Stockton’s Cannery Ranch. Home was a bunk in a rusty boxcar in Lompoc. Home was an old chicken coop in Willows that the Chinese had lived in before us. Home was a flea-ridden mattress in a corner of a packing shed in Dixon. Home was a bed of hay atop three apple crates beneath an apple tree.”

Though they’re often lovely, harrowing or surprising, these lists will have limited appeal to readers pining for more extended narratives and more emotional investment in individual characters. The very best sections of the novel reminded me of the poetic catalogues in Walt Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass,” but periodically the rhythm turns flat and the lists betray a kind of pedestrian pattern, as when the Japanese women recite everything they learned from their white employers: “How to light a stove. How to make a bed. How to answer a door. How to shake a hand. How to operate a faucet, which many of us had never seen in our lives. How to dial a telephone. How to sound cheerful on a telephone even when you were angry or sad. How to fry an egg. How to peel a potato. How to set a table.” How to hide my impatience?

Unfortunately, we learn the strategy of Otsuka’s variations on a theme too quickly: Many poignant experiences, interspersed with rare joyous ones, all presented in parallel sentences, leading to an emotional punch line that’s witty, forlorn or tragic. A chapter titled “Babies,” for instance, contains more than 60 sentences that begin “We gave birth . . .”: “We gave birth under oak trees, in summer, in 113-degree heat. We gave birth beside woodstoves in one-room shacks on the coldest nights of the year. We gave birth on windy islands in the Delta.” Etc., etc. And then this devastating last line: “We gave birth but the baby had already died in the womb and we buried her, naked, in the fields, beside a stream, but have moved so many times since we can no longer remember where she is.” But our over-anticipation of that finale taxes its impact, as though we’re hearing a comic who sets up every joke the

same way. Aware of the author's effort to manipulate our sympathies, we gradually become inured to the story's emotional power.

As the internment demanded by Executive Order 9066 approaches, the book's communal voice again becomes more appropriate to the paranoia and confusion these women feel. Their voices mingle, and isolated images, so precisely captured by Otsuka, deliver an explosion far beyond their size. And yet I'm troubled by the friction between this novel's theme and its style. These are, after all, people who were cruelly stripped of their individuality and regarded as a monolithic peril in the heightened anxiety of the war years. Why, then, describe that injustice by reducing them all again to lists — albeit beautiful lists — of fragmented concerns, manners and moments? The plural voice is necessarily blurring and distancing. It can make us feel appropriately sad about how these Americans were treated, but it never really challenges the prejudice that made their internment possible. Had we known them as full individuals — as real and diverse and distinct — we couldn't have whisked them away to concentration camps in the desert. A great novel should shatter our preconceptions, not just lacquer them with sorrow.

## Tragedy of the Picture Brides

By Jane Ciabattari – September 16, 2011

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/09/16/julie-otsuka-talks-about-new-novel-the-buddha-in-the-attic.html>

Novelist Julie Otsuka is an Upper West Sider, with a regular spot at her neighborhood café, the Hungarian Pastry Shop. “No internet access, no music, no outlets, and the coffee refills are endless and free. I have a favorite table in the back, which is where I wrote both my books,” she says.

But the material for Otsuka’s first two novels is rooted in the West Coast. She was born in Palo Alto, California, and moved to Palos Verdes when she was nine. Her father was an electronic engineer in the aerospace industry; her mother worked as a lab technician in a hospital before having Julie and her two younger brothers.

Otsuka came east to study art at Yale, and some years later ended up in the MFA program at Columbia, where she began writing her first novel. [When the Emperor Was Divine](#), published in 2002, captures the experience of a Berkeley family evacuated from the West Coast to a Japanese internment camp in 1942 with breathtaking restraint. It draws from family history. Her grandfather was arrested as a suspected Japanese spy the day after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and Otsuka’s mother, uncle, and grandmother spent three years in an internment camp in Topaz, Utah.

Her exquisitely crafted and resonant new novel is much less autobiographical, she says. [The Buddha in the Attic](#) follows a group of Japanese “picture brides” who sail to San Francisco in 1919 to marry men they only know through exchanging photographs. “There were no picture brides in my family, but it’s a very common first generation story. It’s how thousands of Japanese women came to this country before Asians were excluded altogether in 1924.”

This second novel, she says, entailed “tons of research.”

“I read a lot of oral histories and history books, and old newspapers. I had to learn about two worlds: the old Japan from which the picture brides came, and the America of the 1920s and 1930s which they immigrated to. I kept many notebooks filled with detailed notes about *everything*.”

Many of the picture brides end up doing agricultural work. “I made these crazy crop charts, showing when things ripened, and where, geographically, certain crops were grown. Also, as a child I spent some time in Oakdale (Central Valley, east of Modesto), where our neighbors’ grandparents had an almond ranch. As a kid, we’d go out there in the summer, it was great fun: lizards, frogs, snakes, irrigation ditches, bugs...”

Otsuka says she struggled for months to find the right voice to tell the story. “I had run across so many interesting stories during my research—stories of women whose husbands had sent photographs of themselves taken 20 years earlier, of women who had sailed to America expecting to live lives of leisure only to find themselves working as field hands and laundresses within days of their arrival, of women who had run away from their husbands and drifted into lives of prostitution, of women who had always wanted to come to America and were willing to marry a man, any man, to get there—that I wanted to tell them all.

“One day, while reading over my notes for the book, I found, buried in the middle of a paragraph several pages in, a sentence I had written months earlier: ‘On the boat we were mostly virgins.’ I knew at once that this would be the first line of my novel. There would be no main character. I would tell the story from the point of view of a group of young picture brides who sail together from Japan to America.”

Over time, many Japanese immigrants were so effective as farmers that they encountered a backlash in some communities. “The Japanese were extremely successful farmers,” says Otsuka. “They came from a very small island, remember, where you had to make use of every inch of space, and they knew how to make things grow. So when they arrived in California and saw this vast expanse of unplanted land, it was like catching a glimpse of paradise. They basically took wasteland that no one else would touch—rocky soil, hardpan, swamps, desert land—and turned it into fertile farmland. And their produce was better than anyone else’s, and their success was much envied.”

## **A Sikh Temple's Century**

By BHIRA BACKHAUS – August 7, 2012

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/08/opinion/a-sikh-temples-proud-history.html>

THE [Stockton Gurdwara](#) in California — the first Sikh temple in the United States — is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. Immigrants from Punjab, India, purchased the lot on Grant Street in early 1912.

Once in a while, I bring out a black and white photograph of the gurdwara taken a few decades later. The members of the early families fan out on the steps leading up to its main entrance. I scan the faces, picking out my mother, my sister, brothers, cousins, aunts and finally, myself. In the front row, the girls stand in their fancy dresses. Boys in buttoned shirts look restlessly away from the camera. Behind us loom those who had the brave vision to build this temple, to cross the vast Pacific in the first place.

They settled in a place that looked much like their beloved but impoverished homeland, planting the broad sun-drenched valleys with the same crops they had grown in Punjab. The community was small in those years. When immigration laws loosened, many of the men brought brides from India. Those young families, my own among them, attended services at the gurdwara for ordinary and major celebrations, like the births of the gurus who established Sikhism beginning in the 15th century. Whenever we arrived, I would stand at the entrance, just inside the wall that surrounded the complex, looking up at the arch that soared above the doors. Looking back now, I imagine that wall must have made our comings and goings even more mysterious to the white residents along Grant Street.

In Oak Creek, Wis., this past Sunday, a gunman with ties to the white power movement entered a gurdwara and shot to death six Sikh worshipers. We know little about his motives, but presumably he saw the temple as a frightening symbol of otherness. But as I watched the images of the shooting on television, I saw the faces of my own brothers and sisters, aunties and uncles, contorted with terror. It was the children who first spread the word of the attack, running into the kitchen, where women were preparing langar — the communal vegetarian meal of dal, yogurt and roti that is a staple of Sikh services.

At the Stockton Gurdwara, services began in the morning and resumed after a break for langar. The meal always made us children groggy and impatient, and soon we'd head outside, down the steps to the small playground amid the chinaberry trees. When it was time to head home, it was the children who tugged at the kameezes of our mothers, who were reluctant to leave the lively company of friends.

In the mid-60s, when America's immigration quotas were raised, a new wave of Punjabi immigrants flooded into California. My family had moved to a small town north of Sacramento by then. We traveled in caravans to the San Francisco airport to collect relatives weary from the long flight, bewildered by this fast new world. I gave up my bed

for weeks at a time to cousins whom I'd never met. And new gurdwaras were built, their onion domes floating improbably in the skyline.

On Saturday nights, when my white girlfriends were off to the movies on dates, I drove my mother to the nearby gurdwara for quiet evening services. I would roll my eyes as I changed out of my jeans into a salwar kameez outfit that I prayed no one but my Indian friends would witness me wearing. But I can recall very clearly the comfort of having my mother sitting beside me during the service, her bowed head draped in a white veil, the feeling of peace that washed over me when the hymns and chanting began.

Eventually I left, in pursuit of an education and in hopes of shoring up my sense of who I was and wanted to be. I dove eagerly into an outside world that told me my possibilities were limitless. And I married outside the Sikh community, causing a painful breach with my parents that had just begun to heal when they passed away. But when they reached out to me at last, I understood that I still belonged to the community, always had.

The Sikh communities in California have flourished over the years. When I visit home now I am impressed by how comfortable the new generation seems in this country, whether they are developing advanced medical therapies for patients or dancing late into the night to bhangra beats. They have chosen to preserve their heritage while moving forward in the world.

But people still sometimes ask me, why can't they assimilate more? Dress like us. Talk like us. Perhaps, some seem to believe, that would prevent the sort of tragedy that happened in Wisconsin. I never have an easy answer. But I do know this: to wipe away what has come before, who we have been over the centuries, also means to forget who our own mothers and fathers were. It means that how they conducted their lives — the families they raised, the homes they built — didn't matter. It denies us that basic human impulse, to remember their stories, the unique timbre of their voices. It would be as if they had never existed at all.

*[Bhira Backhaus](#) is the author of the novel "Under the Lemon Trees."*