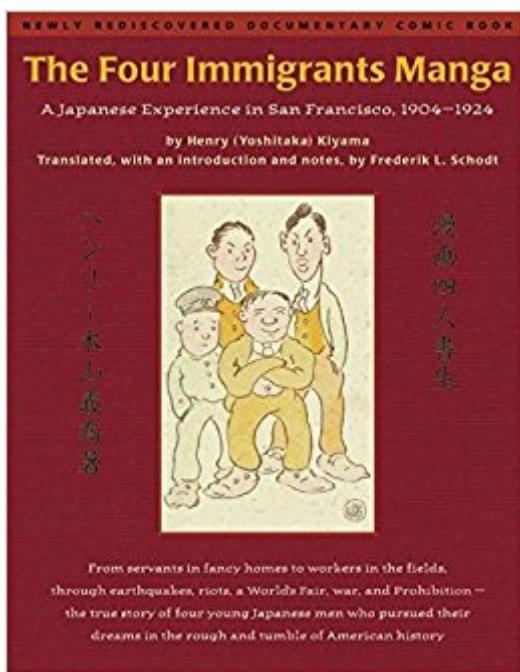


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# The Four Immigrants Manga : A Japanese Experience In San Francisco, 1904-1924



## **Synopsis**

A "documentary comic book" from 1931, depicting the true adventures of four young Japanese men in America.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

These poignant tales of four immigrants in turn-of-the-century San Francisco try for irony in depicting the protagonists' attempts to understand the convoluted whims of their American employers. But the humor hovers near slapstick, and the pie is always in the face of the Caucasians. The illustrations are direct and effective; we see how hard it is for Japanese immigrants to reach the top shelf of an American cupboard. The story is bookended by the dates 1904 and 1924, as in 1924 the immigration laws stiffened and some of the protagonists elected to return to Japan. After 18 years of preparation, this book includes extensive notes historically pinpointing several of the cartoons and an introduction providing an overview of the author/illustrator. Though not quite the first "graphic novel" ever, as it is being touted, this book does have historical significance and belongs in libraries specializing in comics, cartoons, and graphic novels, as well as those focusing on California history, immigrant studies, and the Japanese American experience. Stephen Weiner, Maynard P.L., MACopyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

While researching a book on Japanese comics, Schodt turned up this comic-strip account of the experiences of Japanese immigrants in early-twentieth-century San Francisco. Now, 75 years after

its original publication, this unique record of issei life, newly translated, is made available to a wider audience (the original edition contained dialogue in both Japanese and English, making it unreadable to either Americans or native Japanese). Kiyama's autobiographical story follows four young friends who hit U.S. shores in 1904 and work as houseboys and farmers. They live through the great earthquake, World War I, and the influenza epidemic; suffer prejudice and misunderstanding; acquire businesses and picture brides; and turn from youths into men. The work is a fascinating cultural document of an era of great interest to scholars of Asian American culture. Since it is apparently the first U.S. comic book consisting of original material instead of reprinted newspaper strips, it is also of interest to students of American comics. Gordon Flagg

It's an interesting and insightful book to learn about the perspective of relatively elite early Japanese-American immigrants and their experiences with racialization, gender, and survival in America. It reads quickly and the introduction and conclusions provide good explanations and context.

From the language barriers, to the body

I thought this story of four young Japanese immigrants fresh off the boat from Japan gave me insight into the life of Asian immigrants as they first arrived in the United States. This graphic novel goes into detail about the struggles the four young men encountered as they learned to adjust to the American lifestyle. The many stories in this book are often comical as the young immigrant adults stumble across cultural differences, as well as the common miscommunication between the themselves and their employers. These young immigrants are in the United States as students- each with their own specific visions; such as dreams of becoming a rice farmer, studying the democratic systems of the United States, etc. As they begin their new life in a new country, they run into many problems- however, these tenacious immigrants continue to adapt and learn from their experiences, allowing them to overcome the prejudice and hostility often from white Americans towards them. In addition to the immigrants' experiences, I absolutely loved that the book included history on San Francisco's earthquake in 1906. I have been always been intrigued by the 7.8 earthquake, and its major effects on the city, so the fact that this graphic novel includes historical content that described the aftermath of the earthquake in addition to the conditions in San Francisco during that time period made me even more fascinated by the story. Throughout the book, the four friends remain having a positive attitude and feeling towards the United States despite the problems

they are faced with including their troubles fitting in, their search for cultural identity, their troubles obtaining citizenship, etc. I would highly suggest this graphic novel as it tells a true story of immigrants' experiences in the United States in the 1900s in a funny, yet serious manner.

This is a charming autobiographical story of four young Japanese men who came to San Francisco in 1904, drawn in the 1920s. It's not the typical Japanese manga style, which hadn't evolved yet. Rather, the artist, Henry Kiyama seems to have closely studied "Bringing Up Father", and the art style closely follows that of the early George McManus. The story was originally bilingual. This edition has translated the Japanese word balloons into printed English and left the original English hand-lettered speech balloons when the characters are speaking English. It's a fascinating look at American culture about a hundred years ago, with some pretty unflattering looks at racism and bigotry, along with earnestness and hope. It also covers the time of the Great San Francisco Earthquake and its aftermath in a uniquely firsthand way. The jokes may not come across as particularly funny -- humor is a delicate thing, especially when in another time and culture -- but the story is warm and humane.

This translation by Frederick Schodt, an outstanding translator and writer of all things Japan, is extremely entertaining and intellectually rewarding. Through these manga the reader gains an understanding of Japanese-American life in the early 20th century that would be difficult to obtain from a mere essay. Schodt is superb at providing background and end notes on the manga that provide the necessary historical background. All in all, it's a fast read, but a particularly enjoyable one that will give most readers new insight into the Japanese-American experience of the 1904-1924 period.

This was a very interesting read, although the jokes themselves were rarely funny due to the difficulty of translating puns. It stands out mostly as a sort of documentary about Japanese immigrants in San Francisco, specifically worker-students. We watch them struggle to find jobs in strange American homes, a social commentary about gambling and the evils thereof, a six to eight page story of the San Francisco Earthquake, and building their families. I found it especially interesting to read the notes after each two-page "chapters" in the back of the book, which added depth to what was happening and provided historical content as well as further describing conditions in San Francisco at that time. Comments were made at the beginning of the book that the cartoonist had limited his market because he was writing strictly for fellow immigrants, who would

best understand the mixture of Japanese and English that he used in his writing. This is denoted throughout the book with shaky letters for English, which immigrants had difficulty following and plain type-set for regular Japanese, their birth tongue. As for the artwork, think more old-school Japanese and American comics than the manga that is popular today-- don't be expecting tick marks or sweatdrops for example! For me especially this had a lot of fond memories. I am not Japanese, but my family moved to San Francisco in the early 1905 from Italy, so a lot of this made me remember stories about my great grandfather and my great grandmother--my great-grandfather built a shoe-store that was destroyed by the San Francisco earthquake. Even if you don't buy this book for the humor, at least consider the purchase to read about immigrants to America in the 1900's.

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