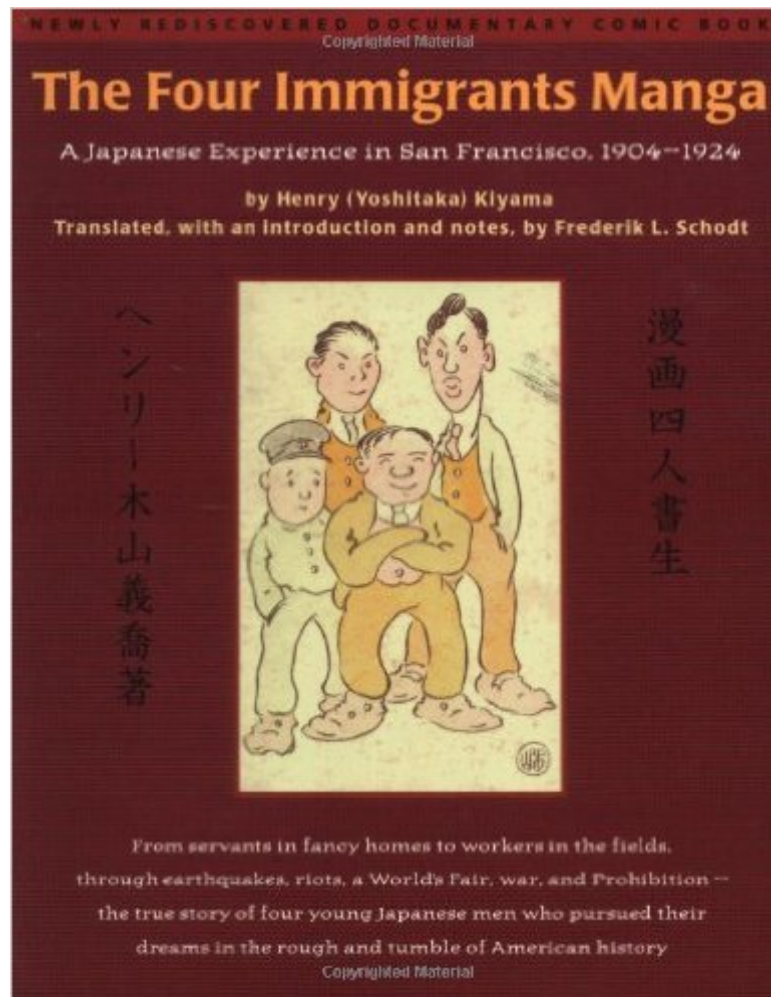


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The Four Immigrants Manga : A Japanese Experience In San Francisco, 1904-1924



Synopsis

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

Book Information

Paperback: 152 pages

Publisher: Stone Bridge Press; Gph edition (June 1, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1880656337

ISBN-13: 978-1880656334

Product Dimensions: 7 x 0.4 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

Henry Kiyama created this terrific book in the 1930's, chronicling the lives of four young Japanese immigrants and their struggle to find work and acceptance in San Francisco at the turn of the century. It was unearthed and translated into English, giving us all the rare privilege of a glimpse into the immigrant experience of that era. Drawn in a simple and lighthearted style and told with insight and depth, Kiyama, along with the rising popularity of Japanese Anime and Manga, reinforces the notion that comics are not just for kids anymore. A great read for a comic lover, a hyphenated-American or anyone interested in the multihued experience of our country.

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the notes after each two-page "chapters" in the back of the book, which added depth to what was happening and provided historical content as well as further describing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.

If you're not used to reading comics, this will seem rough and not particularly funny. Readers more familiar with the form will recognize that this book is more subtle and better crafted than your typical comic. It's of special interest to Japanese Americans and others interested in the immigrant experience in the USA.

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.

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