

IMAGIRE GOWNS

“The Art of transposing a flat piece of material into a beautiful, awe inspiring and praise worthy garment..”



Sunao and Shizuko Imagire

For women born in Japan during the Meiji era*, the tradition of walking three steps behind their husbands was falling out of favor.

In 1920, one of those women arrived in San Francisco, CA. Her ship, the S.S. Korea Maru, steamed passed what would later become the Golden Gate Bridge.

Her name was Shizuko Tahara Imagire, she was an Issei, and she had no intention of walking behind Sunao Imagire, the man she married circa 1919.

“She was quite a person, I always thought she was ahead of her time,” said Gloria Imagire, Shizuko’s granddaughter in law. “She did things that I don’t think most Issei women of her time did. Leaving the husband to watch the kids while she goes to night school (in Oakland) to learn English.” Role reversal indeed.

Shizu used her knowledge of English and a burgeoning ambition to start her own storefront business, a nearly unheard of venture for a newly arrived Japanese woman in America. It appears that Sunao was not opposed to his wife taking on a role normally reserved for a man. It’s likely he financed Shizu’s first forays as a businesswoman, as he had come to America in 1906, successfully working and living in the Palo Alto area before settling in Alameda, CA.

Japan’s economy was growing fast when Shizu was born. Silk and cotton industries needed cheap labor. Underpaid and obedient, the Meiji woman often filled that need. Perhaps Shizu saw textiles, and America, as way to rise further than her station in life would normally allow.

There was no stopping Shizuko Imagire now.

**Shizuko Tahara
Imagire’s Timeline**

**Sept 13, 1901
or 1904
born in
Kagoshima, Japan**

**circa 1919
Marries
Sunao Imagire**

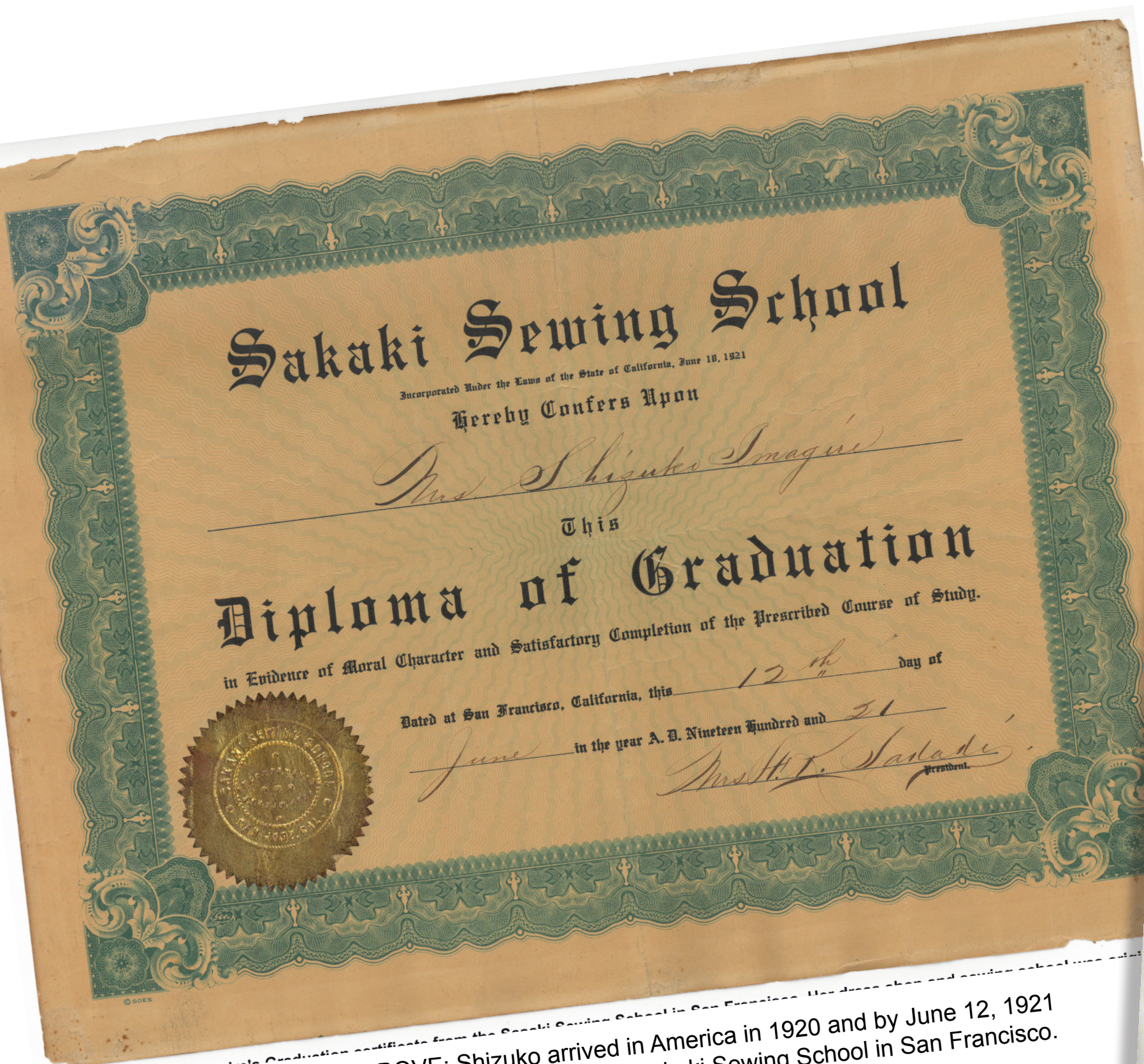
**1920
Arrives in America**

**1922
Incorporates her
business & opens
her sewing school &
dress shop at 1618
Park Street in Alameda,
CA**

**circa 1928-30
Closes Alameda
store, reopens at
7th and Market in
Oakland, CA**

**1942 • WWII
Closes Oakland
store, avoids the internment/incarceration
camps, reopens
in Reno, NV**

*1868-1912



Sakaki Sewing School

Incorporated Under the Laws of the State of California, June 18, 1921

Hereby Confers Upon

Mrs. Shizuko Imagire

This

Diploma of Graduation

in Evidence of Moral Character and Satisfactory Completion of the Prescribed Course of Study.

Dated at San Francisco, California, this 12th day of

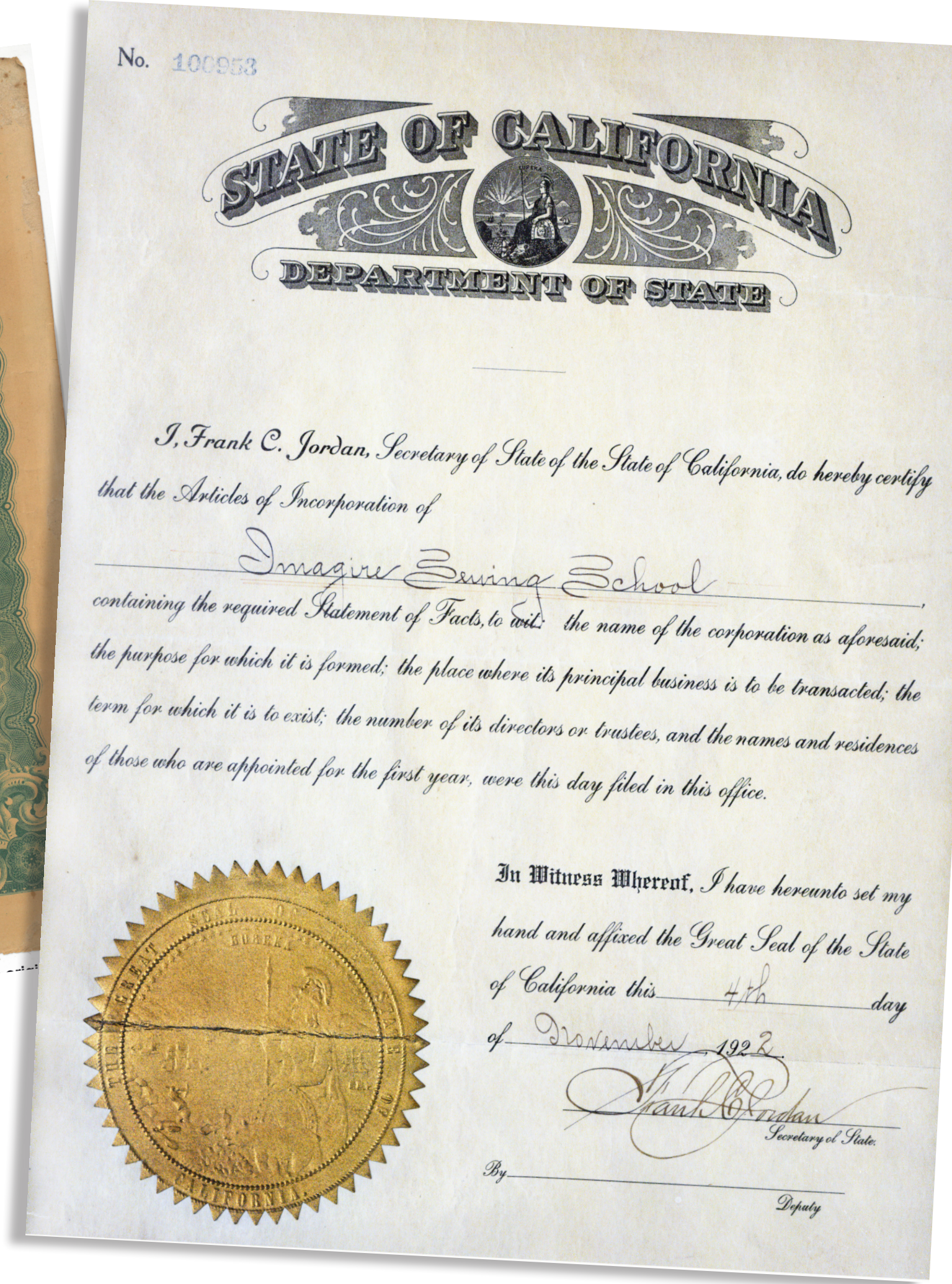
June in the year A. D. Nineteen Hundred and 21

Mrs. H. I. Sadashi
President



Shizuko Imagire's Graduation certificate from the Sakaki Sewing School in San Francisco. She had arrived in America in 1920 and by June 12, 1921 had graduated from the Sakaki Sewing School in San Francisco.

RIGHT: She would quickly incorporate her business on November 4, 1922 and open the Imagire Sewing School on 1618 Park Street in Alameda, CA., that same year.



No. 100953

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

I, Frank C. Jordan, Secretary of State of the State of California, do hereby certify that the Articles of Incorporation of Imagire Sewing School, containing the required Statement of Facts, to wit: the name of the corporation as aforesaid; the purpose for which it is formed; the place where its principal business is to be transacted; the term for which it is to exist; the number of its directors or trustees, and the names and residences of those who are appointed for the first year, were this day filed in this office.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Great Seal of the State of California this 4th day of November, 1922.



Frank C. Jordan
Secretary of State.
By _____
Deputy

Translation of sign:
*California Certified: Imagire
Women's Sewing School*



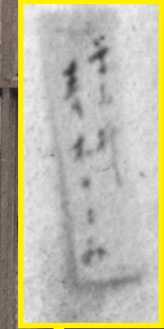
Imagire Women's Sewing School Class of 3rd year graduation memorial

Incorporated in 1922, it is likely that this is 1925, as this is the 3rd year graduation class

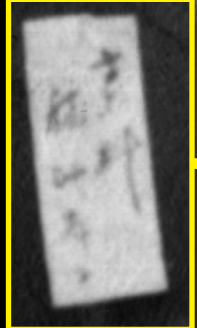
Born in Alameda, Hatsuyo Ozeki was educated in Japan and after 12 years she returned to Alameda in 1924. By 1929 she contracted tuberculosis and lived in a Livermore sanitarium until 1932.

General class Hatsuyo Ozeki.

Kiyomi Aoki



Minako Hayashi



Sunao Imagire

Hatsuyo Ozeki

D10

D12

D6

D7

D8

D9

D1

D2

Shizuko Tahara Imagire

D4

D5

Shizuko is the owner and operator of this business.



Design class Katsuye Obata

An Issei woman starts a business at 1618 Park Street, Alameda, CA - circa 1925



1618

紀念
三週年
週年紀念



Graduate class
Tomiko Kikuoka

Rapid course
Naoko Nakata

Sunao
Imagire

E10

E11

Saki Matsuura

E13

Ineko
Takano

E7

Takeno
Nakata*

E9

Takashi Robert
Imagire

Toyo
Miyamoto Morita

E2

Shizuko
Tahara Imagire

Hatsuyo Ozeki

E5

Born March 22, 1922, Takashi appears about 3-years-old here.

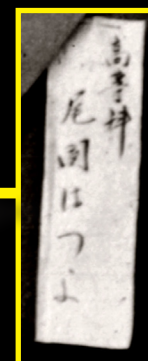
Married in 1924 to Takuritsu Morita, they lived at 2324 Clement Avenue where five of their children were born. By 1933 the family moved south to Mountain View, CA.

**Ineko Takano's daughter, Cookie Takano Takeshita, recalled that "I asked my mother aren't you good at sewing, she said she didn't like it. So our clothes were mostly bought."

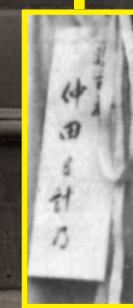
*Takeno Nakata arrived in America already versed in the production of clothing. She raised silkworms and spun their silk into the thread that became a fabric... that became her furisode kimono.



Imagire
Women's
Sewing School
Class of 4th
year graduation
memorial



Upper
class
Hatsuyo
Ozeki



Rapid class:
Takeno Nakata



加州
公立
今給黎裁縫

1618

女子縫裁學會
紀念
第四屆年會

Shizu returns from a Japan trip, back to Alameda

24996/19-7

Family name IMAGIRE		Given name SHIZU		Accompanied by 24996/19-8	
Place of birth (town, country, etc.) <i>Born in Kagoshima, not Hiroshima</i> HIROSHIMAKEN, JAPAN		Age 21 Yrs. 7 Mos.	Sex. F	M. S. W. M. D.	Occupation H. WIFE
Read YES		Write YES		<i>She can read & write in English</i>	
Race JAPANESE	Nationality JAPAN	Last permanent residence (town, country, etc.) ALAMEDA, CALIF.			
Name and address of nearest relative or friend in country whence alien came (B. BRO.) J. TAKIHO, 178 MAKURASAKIMACHI, KANANABEGUN, KAGOSHIMAKEN					
Ever in U. S. YES	From <i>First arrives in America</i> 1920	To 1926	Where ALAMEDA OAKLAND &	Passage paid by HUSBAND	
Destination, and name and address of relative or friend to join there <i>Sunao Imagire</i> ALAMEDA, CALIF. (HUSBAND) S. IMAGIRE, 1618 PARK ST. ALAMEDA, CALIF.					
Money shown \$50.00	Ever arrested and deported or excluded from admission NO		Head tax status TAX		
Height <i>Short of stature, but long on ambition!</i> 4 Ft. 10 in.	Complexion DARK	Hair BLACK	Eyes BROWN	Distinguishing marks - NONE	
Seaport and date of landing and name of steamship <i>Returns to America from Japan 1926</i> S.F. CALIF. APRIL 30, 1926 SS KOREA MARU					

Form 549-B.

This April 30, 1926 record of Shizu's voyage aboard the Korea Maru from Japan back to America shows her "last permanent address" and her destination to be 1618 Park Street in Alameda.

Oddly, her "occupation" is listed as a housewife. Her ability to read and write in English explains much about her success, which did not take long after her 1920 arrival.



Shizu in Japan
as a child

Her streak of independence began as a child in Kagoshima, Japan. She would sneak away from her grandmother to Bible class, where missionaries converted her to Christianity.

Shizu opened her business at 1618 Park Street in 1922, in the heart of Alameda's Nihonmachi. Like many Japanese businesses, the family resided there. She closed it before the end of the decade, perhaps because husband Sunao was living at 733 Market Street in Oakland, running a dry cleaning business by 1928, perhaps earlier.

Imagine Sunao clo clnr 733 Market
1928 Polk directory

Shizu would re-open her sewing school there. It was likely a larger space than she had in Alameda, serving as both the cleaning business and the sewing school. Their residence was at the same address.

Sunao did not run Shizu's business behind the scenes. Once she started her first business in Alameda, she handled her own finances, according to her son, Art Imagine.

"He was always second place to my mother, because my mother was so strong." Art said. "She was a pretty aggressive lady. She was the matriarch of the family, she was the boss."

THE IMAGIRE SEWING SCHOOL REGULATIONS

(officially recognized by the State of California)

Phone: Hlgate 3647

LOCATION

The school is located at 733 MARKET Street. A special classroom is prepared for individual instruction through small group plan, which provides intensive training under direct supervision.

TUITION

DAY CLASSES (Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.)

	BEGINNERS	ADVANCED	
→ 1—3 hour period	\$.75	\$1.00	(Inc. designing, drafting and sewing)
5—3 hour periods	\$3.00	\$4.00	

EVENING CLASSES (Monday and Thursday, 7:30 to 10:30 p.m.)

	BEGINNERS	ADVANCED
a 3 hour period	\$.75	\$1.00

Upon request transportation will be provided for evening classes, if not too far.

→ OUTLINE OF THE COURSES

BEGINNERS

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Blouse | 11. Junior Miss's Dress |
| 2. Skirt | 12. Lingerie |
| 3. House Dress | 13. Junior Miss's Smocking Dress |
| 4. Sport Dress | 14. Junior Miss's Sailor Suit |
| 5. Middy Blouse | 15. Boy's Shirt |
| 6. Street Dress | 16. Boy's Trousers |
| 7. Culotte | 17. Boy's Sailor Suit |
| 8. Pajama | 18. Boy's Sport Shirt |
| 9. Baby's Dress | 19. Boy's Woolen Jacket |
| 10. Romper | 20. Also other apparel upon request |

ADVANCED

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Women's Jacket | 8. Boy's Suit |
| 2. Overcoat | 9. Women's Slacks |
| 3. Tailored Suit | 10. Men's Slacks |
| 4. Junior Miss's Coat | 11. Overshirt |
| 5. Junior Miss's Cape | 12. Dress Shirt |
| 6. Boy's Overcoat | 13. Boy's Sport Coat |
| 7. Raglan Sleeved Dress | 14. Other Apparel upon request |

TRAINING

Through twenty years of experience and experiments, special teaching methods have been perfected.

1. A variety of patterns is made possible with a few changes from a fundamental draft.
2. A perfect fit to one's own figure is made possible through this modern method of drafting.

DIPLOMA

of graduation will be awarded to the student who has completed either the Beginners or Advanced classes.

1. After completion of the advanced courses, thorough knowledge and ability to teach, or operate one's own shop is insured.
2. Upon request graduates have been accepted as assistant instructors for this school.

The Art of transposing a flat piece of material — into a beautiful, awe inspiring, and praise worthy garment has been and is one of the greatest pleasures and obligations of womanhood.



Shizuko Imagire

Nellie Itahara
of Alameda

今給黎裁縫學校
第九回卒業式記念 一九三八年七月

TSUJI STUDIO
OAKLAND

Sewing School To Sponsor Exhibit

OAKLAND, March 8— The Imagire Sewing School will sponsor its 11th annual exhibit this Sunday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. at the Wanto Gakuen hall, 310 Jackson St., Oakland.

Garments are being exhibited by both students and graduates. They are: students—Mmes. Ogi, Miyazaki, Kuwashige, Tsuchi and Ninomiya; and Misses Amy Kajiwara, Helen Okada, Yasuko Tani, Yoshi Ioka, and Toshi Kato; graduates—Nobuye Tani, Sakaye Adachi, Sumi Kido, Masuye Kido, Hiroko Baba, Sachi Nakashima, Miyoko Kubota, and Chiyeko Yamada.

The New World Sun
October 3, 1940

This 9th graduation photo is from the Oakland location of Shizuko's sewing school business.

Why the 3rd graduation class was in 1925 (photo page 4), but the 10th (this page) was in 1939 is a mystery. Perhaps it took a few years to re-open her business after moving the school from Alameda to Oakland. Or perhaps the Great Depression temporarily closed her business a few years. The GD began in 1929 and ended in 1939. Perhaps it was both.



IMAGIRE SEWING CLASS.
TENTH EXHIBIT

7-2-1939

Tsuyi PHOTO

Even World War II would not stand in her way.

“When the war started, they had Executive Order 9066,” recalled Art. “Rather than go to the camps, she found a way to... I call it ‘escape to Nevada.’”

*“I have made the statement here that enemy aliens would be accepted in the State of Nevada under proper supervision,” said Governor Edward Carville.** “This would apply to concentration camps as well as to those who might be allowed to farm or do such other things as they could do in helping out. This is the attitude that I am going to maintain in this State and I do not desire that Nevada be made a dumping ground for enemy aliens to be going anywhere they might see fit for travel.”*

Regardless of his statement, no internment camps were built in Carville’s Nevada. Japanese in his state would face new restrictions, camps or no camps.

“So in 1942 we packed our car and moved to Reno,” said Art.

Shizu had an Oakland neighbor dispose of all their business wares, with the exception of one sewing machine and a piano.

“She had a customer who was moving to Reno and in order to make that move you had to have a place to stay, someone to speak for you and a job,” Art said.

First Japanese To Be Inducted As Citizens

When naturalization proceedings are held on May 13, two Japanese natives will take their oath of citizenship, the first one to do so in Washoe county, according to Harry K. Brown, Washoe county clerk.

→ Silizu Tahara Imagire of 450 Capitol Hill Ave. and Sam Masaichi Nishiguchi, 621 Quincy St., are the two potential citizens.

County Clerk Brown said that the McCarran-Walters immigration act made the naturalization of native-born Japanese residents possible.

As far as the county official knows, it has never before been legally permissible for a Japanese alien to become a citizen of the United States.

Imagire and Nishiguchi are among 26 persons who have already qualified for citizenship in tests given by the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service authorities. Two or three more may qualify, according to Brown.

District Judge A. J. Maestretti is scheduled to conduct a trial at that time. He was also to officiate at the naturalization proceedings, but the conflict may cause it to be shifted to another court. The program will be handled by the Women’s Relief Corps, Grand Army of the Republic, League of Women Voters and Knights of Columbus.

Clerk Brown said that there was another oddity in the list of candidates. Lilly Margith Siewers of North Sierra St. and Norway will celebrate both citizenship and her birthday on the same day.

Clerk Brown prudently avoided asking the lady her age.

Reno Gazette Journal
May 11, 1953

That customer was a Mrs. Norton, who had a cabin for the family to stay in. A Mrs. Robinet sold Shizu the dressmaking shop, which did not make the other tenants in the building happy.

Sewing. Dressmaking 29
S. **IMAGIRE** dressmaking-alterations.
Best workmanship. Reasonable prices.
300 Clay Peters Bldg. Phone 8622.
Ap10-f

Reno Gazette Journal • April 10, 1942

Somehow, Shizu remained true to herself. She found a way to take over a dress shop, pursue her business goals and avoid the incarceration of the Japanese.

Regardless of any difficulties the Imagires faced, Shizu quickly garnered quite a reputation for fine dressmaking, with plenty of well-to-do Caucasian clients. “She wasn’t the run of the mill,” said Gloria. “Her clothing was really stylish and up to date. I think the Hakujuin people loved it.”

In 1953, she set another precedent. Shizu was one of the first two Reno Japanese to become a United States citizen.

She was also sought after for knowledge of dressmaking, kimonos and the Japanese arts. The Nevada Art Gallery in Reno recruited her to speak on those subjects in 1959.

** MANZANAR, a Historic Resource Study/Special History Study: https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/manz/hrs3c.htm

Also: Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nevada_during_World_War_II

Also: <https://www.aclu.org/blog/smart-justice/mass-incarceration/border-crisis-prompting-new-xenophobic-drumbeat-old-disgrace>. By Carl Takei, Senior Staff Attorney, ACLU’s Trone Center for Justice and Equality, August 6, 2014

Average Child's Measurements

Add three or
four inches
to the "Bust"
measurement
before drafting
Pattern

Age	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	11-12
Bust	18	20	22	24	26	28	30
Back depth	4 ¹ / ₈	4 ³ / ₈	5 ¹ / ₈	5 ³ / ₈	5 ³ / ₄	6 ¹ / ₄	6 ³ / ₄
Back length	7	8	9	9 ¹ / ₂	10	11	12
¹ / ₂ Back width	3 ¹ / ₂	4	4 ¹ / ₂	4 ³ / ₄	5	5 ³ / ₈	6
Shoulder	2 ¹ / ₂	3	3 ¹ / ₂	3 ³ / ₄	4	4 ¹ / ₄	4 ¹ / ₂
¹ / ₂ Front width	3 ¹ / ₂	4	4 ¹ / ₂	4 ³ / ₄	5	5 ³ / ₈	6
Front length	6	7	8	8 ¹ / ₂	9	10	11
Waist	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Neck	9	9 ¹ / ₂	10	10 ¹ / ₂	11	11 ¹ / ₂	11 ³ / ₄
Hip	21	23	25	27	29	31	33
Armhole	10 ¹ / ₂	11	12	13	13 ¹ / ₄	14 ¹ / ₄	14 ¹ / ₂
Sleeve length	4	5 ¹ / ₂	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13	13 ¹ / ₂
Full length	27	19	19	21-23	25-26	28-29	31-32

Surviving artifacts
from the sewing
business.

Add three or
four inches
to the "Bust"
measurement
before drafting
Pattern

Size	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28
Bust	32	34	36	38	40	42	44	46
Back depth	6 ¹ / ₈	7	7 ¹ / ₄	7 ¹ / ₂	7 ³ / ₄	7 ⁷ / ₈	8	8 ¹ / ₄
Back length	12 ¹ / ₂	13	13 ¹ / ₂	14	14 ¹ / ₂	15	15 ¹ / ₂	16
Back width	6 ¹ / ₄	6 ¹ / ₂	6 ³ / ₄	7	7 ¹ / ₄	7 ¹ / ₂	8	8 ¹ / ₄
Shoulder	4 ³ / ₄	5	5	5 ¹ / ₄	5 ¹ / ₂	5 ³ / ₄	6	6 ¹ / ₄
front length	12 ¹ / ₂	13	13 ¹ / ₂	14	14 ¹ / ₂	15	16	17
front width	6	6 ¹ / ₂	6 ³ / ₄	7 ¹ / ₄	7 ¹ / ₂	7 ³ / ₄	8	8 ¹ / ₄
Waist	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	32
Neck	13	13 ¹ / ₄	13 ¹ / ₂	14	15	15 ¹ / ₂	16	16 ¹ / ₂
Hip	36	37	38	40	42	44	46	49
Armhole	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	22
Sleeve length	14 ¹ / ₂	15	15 ¹ / ₂	16	16	17	17 ¹ / ₂	18
Full length	40	42	42	44	44	46	46	47

Average Adult's Measurements

Surviving artifacts
from the sewing
business.



While living in Reno, Sunao's fortunes would take a turn for the worse. "My father was on the roof, cleaning off some branches," Art said. "He fell off, broke several bones and was in the hospital for quite awhile. On the way to x-ray he had a massive stroke. He was about 60 at that time." Sunao would remain an invalid for the rest of his life, with Shizu providing his care.

Sunao "John" Imagire died May 23, 1967. By 1972, Shizu would retire to Sacramento, where her son, Art, and his wife, Gloria lived. Her days as a businesswoman done, Shizu would enjoy the rest of her days there, finally passing on February 2, 1987.

Looking back, Shizuko's ambitions were the one constant that led her to the next place in her life, and her family would follow. While some Issei women ran the family business, they weren't the norm. Her son, Art, said it best.

"She's always been self employed."



The last photo of a still stylish Shizuko, taken in late 1986.

Shizuko's husband, Sunao Imagire, immigrated to America in 1906. By 1910 he lived and worked on the Leland Stanford Junior University campus in Madrona Hall.

He could have been a cook or cleaner there. Many Issei men lived and worked at Stanford at that time but most were not students. Stanford did have an active Japanese Club on campus back then, frequented by the President of the University, David Starr Jordan.

When the Imagires immigrated to the United States, their last name somehow changed from Imagire to Imakire. All Palo Alto documents list Sunao and his brother, Jun, as Imakire. When Sunao moved to Alameda, he reverted his name to Imagire. Jun never did change his last name back.

By 1910, Sunao's brother, Jun Imakire, lived and worked at 827 Ramona Street in Palo Alto, not far from Stanford. 827 was the University Hotel, a Japanese owned boarding house that was likely the largest home on the block.

It also housed a pool hall, run by Jun, and a Japanese Employment Agency, which was run by Jun and Sunao. Ramona Street was the center of the Japanese neighborhood at the time, where many Issei families, grocery stores, laundries, the Buddhist Temple and a tofu-ya were located.

827 was also where 13 Japanese men met for the first time in 1909, to begin the Japanese Methodist Episcopal Church, which became Aldersgate UMC decades later. Jun's family is buried at the Alta Mesa Cemetery in Palo Alto, not far from where Aldersgate is located today.



Sunao Imagire with son, Takeshi "Robert," in Alameda, circa 1924-1925

18976/22-7

Family name IMAGIRE		Given name SUNAO		Accompanied by 18976/22-8	
Place of birth (town, country, etc.) HIGASHIMINAMIKATAMURA KAGOSHIMAKEN		Age 32 Yrs. 5 Mos.	Sex M	M. S. W. M. D.	Occupation HOTEL PROP.
Race JAPANESE	Nationality JAPAN	Last permanent residence (town, country, etc.) PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA			
Name and address of nearest relative or friend in country whence alien came (BROTHER-IN-LAW) MR. SOSUKE IMAGIRE, 198 HIGASHIMINAMIKATAMURA, /					KAGOSHIMAKEN
Ever in U. S.	From Arrives America	To NOV. 1918	Where SAN FRANCISCO	Passage paid by SELF	
Destination, and name and address of relative or friend to join there He & brother Jun live at the University Hotel in Palo Alto					
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA (BROTHER) JUN IMAGIRE, 827 RAMONA ST. PALO ALTO, CA					
Money shown \$200.00	Ever arrested and deported or excluded from admission NO			Head tax status TAX	
Height 5 Ft. 5 In.	Complexion DARK	Hair BLACK	Eyes BROWN	Distinguishing marks SCAR ON RIGHT CHEEK	
Seaport and date of landing and name of steamship S.F. CALIF. MAR. 21, 1920. S.S. KOREA, MARU					

3-22-20

Form 518-B.

Sunao Imagire's 1920 trip from Japan back to Palo Alto show him and his brother, Jun, at 827 Ramona Street. This is also the trip where he brings his wife, Shizuko, to America for the first time. Note Sunao's occupation is listed as Hotel Proprietor. He probably helped run the University Hotel boarding house with the owners, the Okazawas.

Note that shortly after this, Shizuko graduates from the Sakaki Sewing School in San Francisco.

Imakire Bros (I & S) emp office 827 Ramona
Imakire I (Imakire Bros) 827 Ramona
Imakire S (Imakire Bros) r 827 Ramona

As often was the case, this 1912-1913 Polk Address directory misspelled names (the initial for Jun, listing it as "I" instead of "J."). The brothers would live and work at this location. "r 827" stands for residence.

The license of J. Imakira, a Japanese conducting a poolroom at 827 Ramona street, which was temporarily suspended by Police Chief Noble on Tuesday, was definitely suspended by the Board of Safety this afternoon for the balance of the quarter ending September 30th.

Note misspelling of Jun's last name.

August 5, 1918, Palo Alto Daily Times



**Produced by Brad Shirakawa
Updated February 5, 2025**

**Special thanks to Art and Gloria Imagire, Dorothy Imagire
and Judy Furuichi for their kind assistance with this story and Pam Hashimoto for copy editing.**