

Mataicchi's



circa 1912

World

Mataichi Ozeki was unlike most people with a camera. He documented his existence in ways that few of us would consider.

More than 100 years later, his pictures give us rare insights into the high-tone lifestyle of an Issei.

He was a professional photographer after all, and pros are paid to shoot what the average person *never* sees.

Like *this* photo.

His living room indicates how quickly he adapted to America. No shoji screens, not a trace of Japanese decor can be found.



Instead, a framed photo of a Caucasian woman hangs on the wall. A two-horn 78rpm “talking machine” made by the Duplex Phonograph Company sits below it.* An animal skin resides on the floor.

The many wood chairs suggest a place that was suited for entertaining.

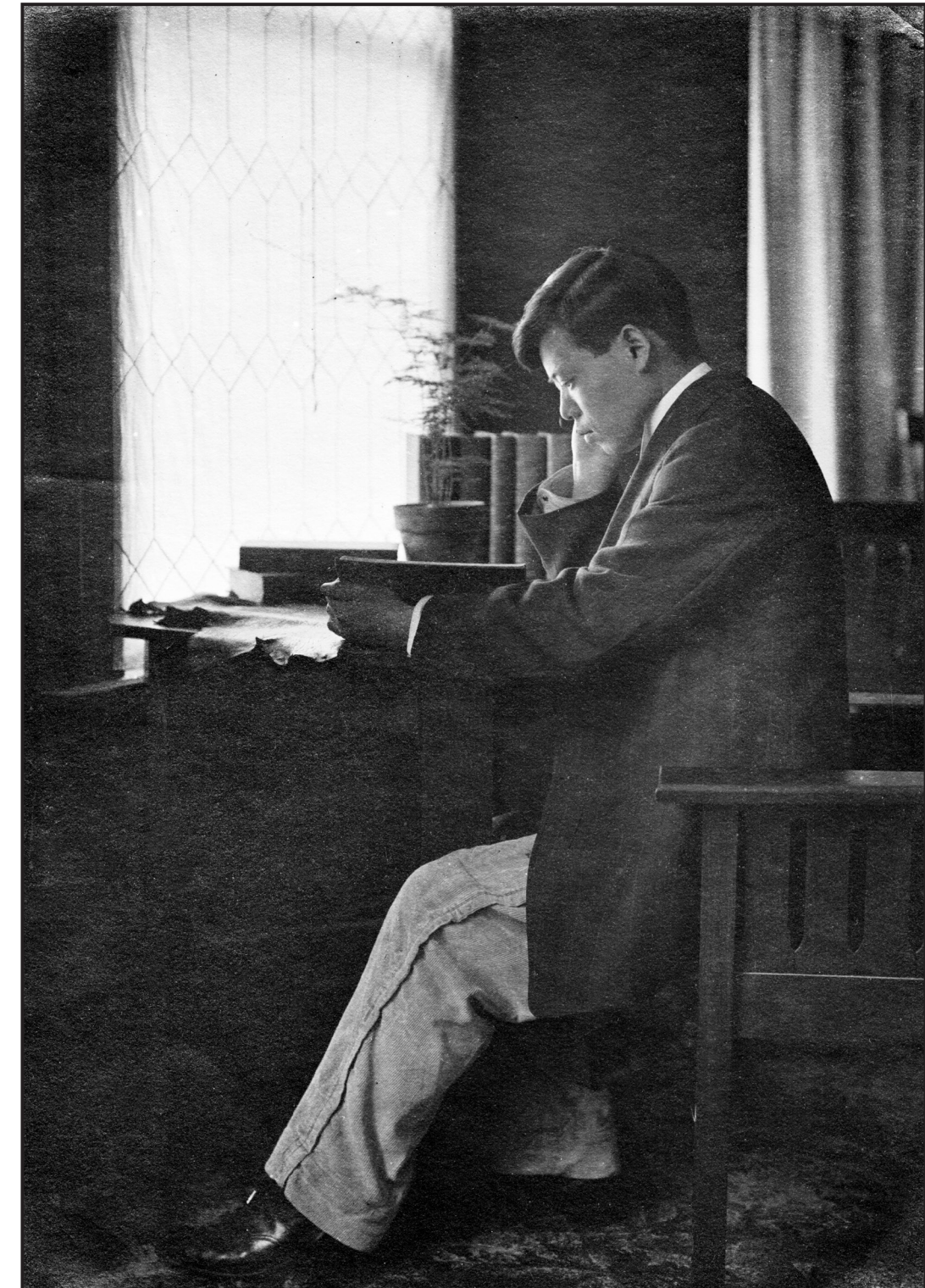
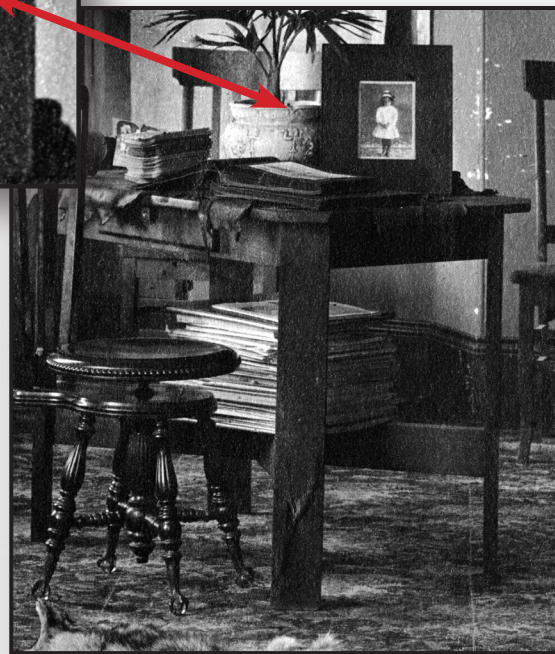
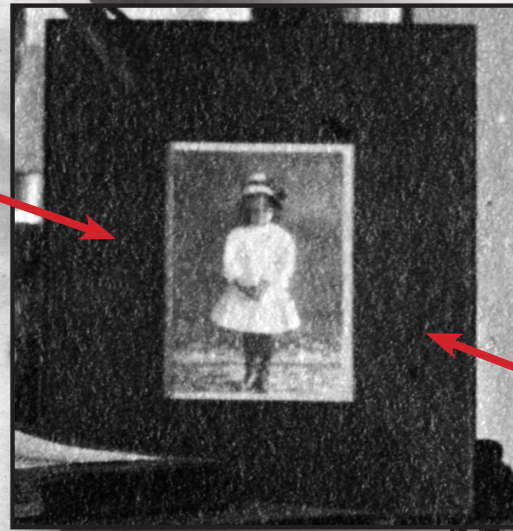
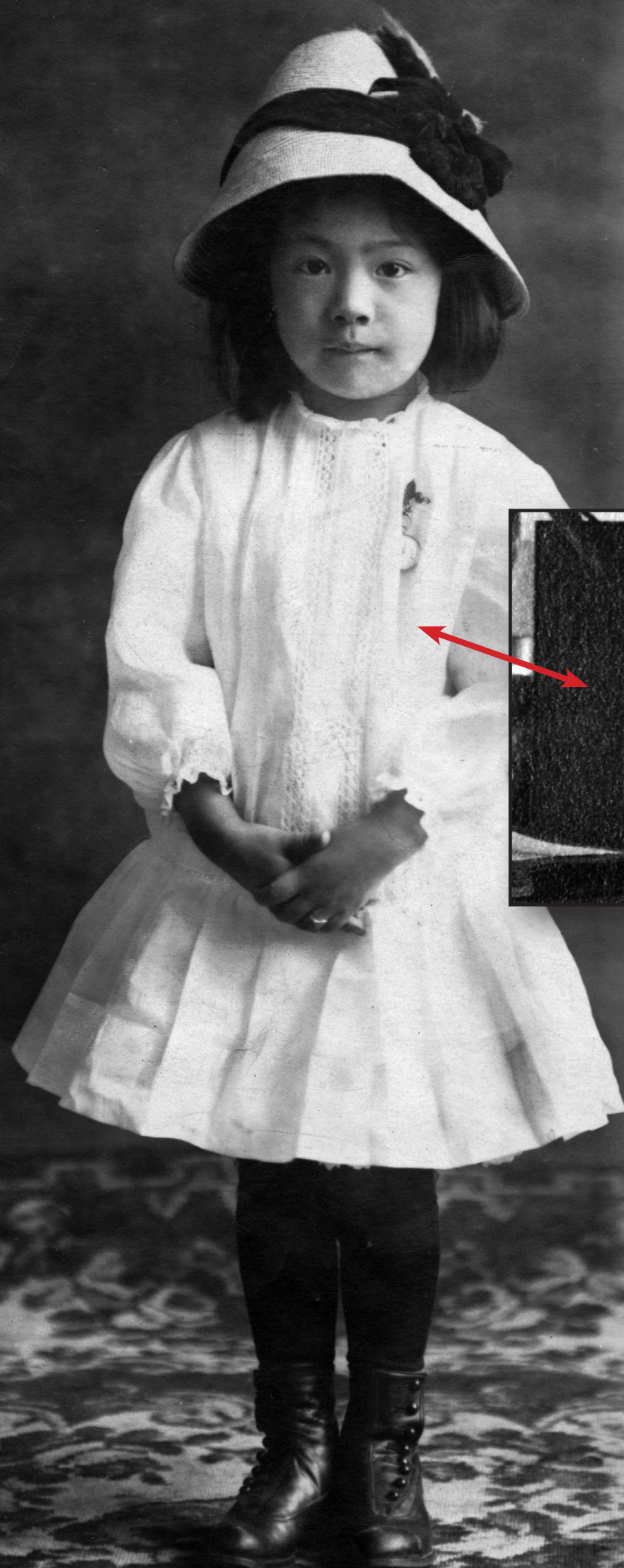
Mataichi found himself sitting in those same chairs, in photographs he shot of *himself*. A century before iPhones and selfies, he was quite fond of self-portraits (see next page).

*Duplex talking machines were made between 1905 and 1910 and initially cost \$29.85. They played shellac records, not vinyl.

How do we know this is his living room?

At right: In a self-portrait, Mataichi sits in a chair of the same Mission-style furniture as in his living room. *Mission* refers to the Spanish missions that dotted California. Most Mission-style furniture does not resemble the furnishings of the missions, however. It is characterized by vertical and horizontal lines that emphasize the wood grain.

At left: Mataichi shot this portrait of his first daughter, Hatsuyo. He shot many studio portraits of her. Born in April 1907, she moved to Japan around 1912, wearing a similar outfit (next page), and one wonders if the photo at left was shot right before she left her American family behind. That dates the photo of the living room to around 1912 or after.





Mataichi & wife Akino

Kakunojo Nakayama, his wife, Tane, (at far right) and children

Akiko Nakayama

Hatsuyo Ozeki

Yutaka Nakayama

Wearing a similar if not the same outfit, a pensive Hatsuyo, 5, is aboard a vessel bound for Japan, where she will live until she is 17 years and 2 months old. Some American-born Japanese were sent back for a Japanese education.

No one looks happy in this photo, other than the unknown man at far left.

Perhaps this is why Mataichi shot so many pictures of his daughter. Once she went to Hiroshima, she would not return to Alameda for 12 years, in 1924.

Aboard what is possibly the Chiyo Maru, the Ozekis and Nakayamas pose for a photo. The Nakayamas were close friends and appear in other photos in the Ozeki albums. The two Nakayama children were also being sent to Japan on this voyage.

Mataichi may have moved objects in and out of his photos. Note the porcelain bust of a young reader on the top shelf. It also appears in the living room photo (front page) on the right side.

In yet *another* self-portrait (this page), Mataichi is found seated under *another* of his photographs of Hatsuyo. Inside the cabinet are books with Japanese language titles. Open books of photographs, likely filled with his own work, appear on the table atop the white cloth.

Note the Caucasian woman in the frame on the wall. He may have been quite comfortable with Caucasians as he was hired to photograph them in the Mt. Eden-Hayward area, some 13 miles south of his home in Alameda.



Mataichi's pictures

often reveal as much about him as those he photographed.

Here is his 1907 born daughter, Hatsuyo, in the arms of Alfreda Mohr. Alfreda's husband, William, stands in the back row with the dark hat. The others are unknown.

Mataichi and the Mohr's must have felt comfortable with each other for this turn of the century picture to have been made. So comfortable that the Mohrs would also travel all the way to his Alameda photo studio for formal portraits.

And why not? He may have been a cook for the family and could have lived on their property.



The Mohr's were and still are a well-known family of farmers, who originated in the Mt. Eden-Hayward vicinity of the San Francisco Bay Area. Their business is currently located in Lodi, CA.

They employed and sometimes housed Japanese farmers on their property. The photo at left shows Mataichi standing at a stove, but it is unclear where this photo was made. He had previously worked in Hawaii as a cook, too.

During WWII, the Mohrs kept the belongings of those Japanese safe when they were incarcerated in the camps in 1942. This image, like every other in this document, came from Mataichi's own photo albums.

Ever seen a photograph like this?



William Mohr

Alfreda Mohr
& baby Hatsuyo
circa 1907

Mataichi and Hatsuyo appear to be on the Mohr property again, perhaps a year or two later. At right is Alfreda Mohr (see previous page). Did Mataichi farm for the Mohrs? His clothing doesn't seem to indicated that. Regardless, he appears to have a relationship with the family that goes beyond portraits or housework.



A first-generation (Issei) Japanese man works the Mohr property in this photo by Mataichi Ozeki.

The building in the left background is on the William Mohr property along Hesperian Blvd in Mt. Eden (Hayward today). As of 2021, it borders the Chabot College parking lot and is still standing.

This land belonged to the Mohr family from roughly 1855 until Chabot College was built in 1964-1965.

After the business incorporated, it has been known as Mohr-Fry (In 1935, Jeryl R. Fry had married Marian Mohr, William's daughter).

The crates with the initials of ALG might stand for "Abraham L. Graham," who was a tomato grower in Mt. Eden area until his death in about 1929.

The crates appear to be full of tomatoes. They appear nearly black in this photo, as it is highly likely that the

picture was shot on orthochromatic film. Ortho film is insensitive to red and renders black in the resulting printed photo.

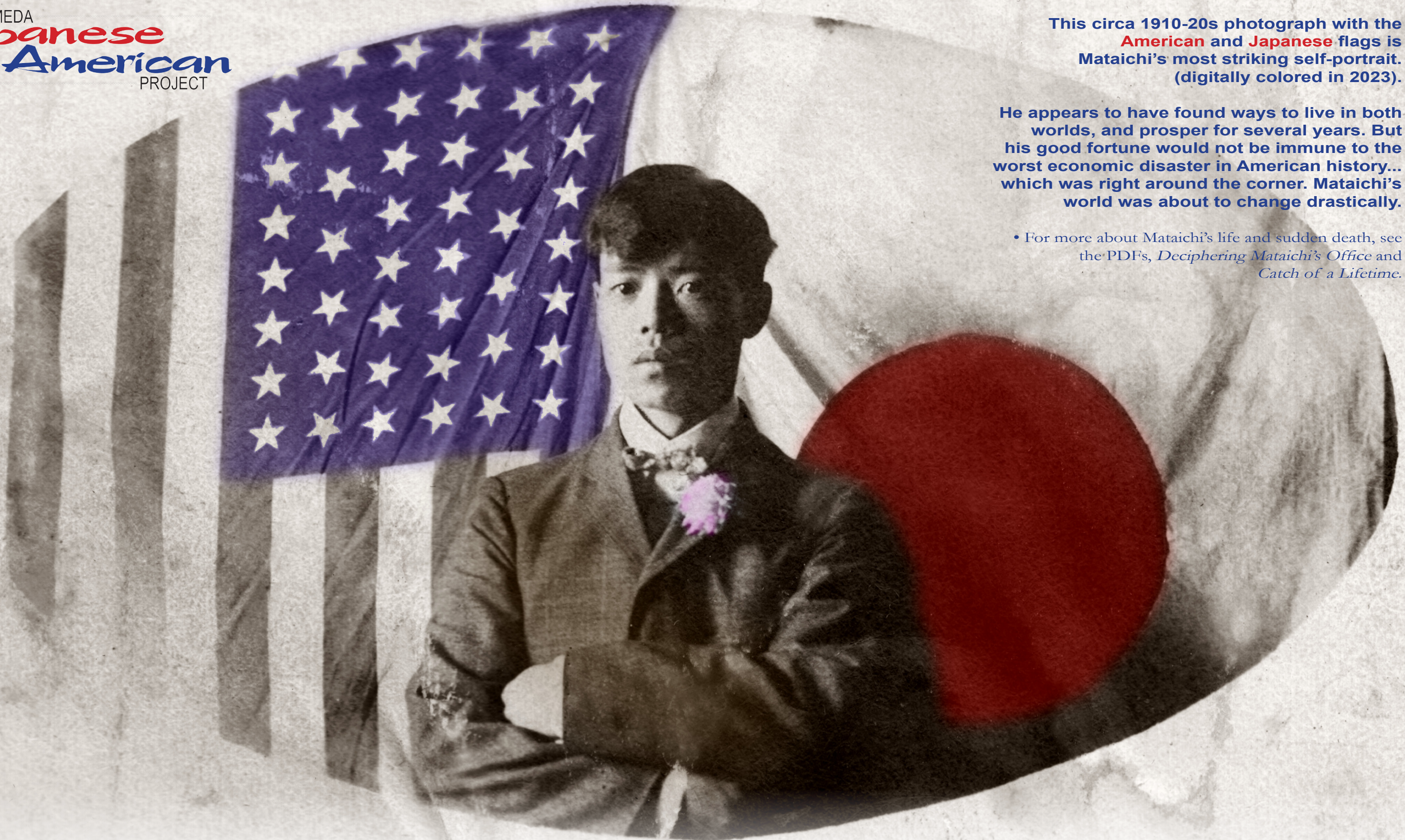
Ortho film was slowly replaced by black and white film that perceived all the colors shortly after 1900 (called panchromatic film). This fact lends additional credence to the 1907-1930s date of this photo.



This circa 1910-20s photograph with the
American and **Japanese** flags is
Mataichi's most striking self-portrait.
(digitally colored in 2023).

He appears to have found ways to live in both
worlds, and prosper for several years. But
his good fortune would not be immune to the
worst economic disaster in American history...
which was right around the corner. Mataichi's
world was about to change drastically.

- For more about Mataichi's life and sudden death, see
the PDFs, *Deciphering Mataichi's Office* and
Catch of a Lifetime.





ALAMEDA
Japanese
American
HISTORY PROJECT