"An Immigrant's Haiku Records Great Dreams"

This haiku records the nearly universal hope of immigrants to the United States. The majority of Japanese immigrants to the U.S. between 1884 and 1908 were men and women from rural areas who had been displaced because of high land prices and rents. They were recruited by American sugar growers in Hawaii to work 36-month contracts at a rate of about $4 a month. (Half the worker’s wages were withheld until the end of his contract.) Many Japanese workers in Hawaii were later recruited to work in California agriculture.

Huge dreams of fortune
Go with me to foreign lands,
Across the ocean.

Workers on a sugar plantation in Hawaii [Courtesy of Hawaii State Archives]

Japanese American chili farmers in Orange County. c. 1920. [Japanese American Photograph Collection]