

# Bridges Across the Pacific: A Review Essay

**Pat Ryan**

University of Trondheim

Sucheng Chan. *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910*.

Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987. xxv + 503 pp. \$40.00.

Joan M. Jensen. *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants to North America*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1988. x + 350 pp. \$32.50.

*South Asians in North America: An Annotated and Selected Bibliography*, ed. Jane Singh, et al. Berkeley Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California, 1988. viii + 179 PP. \$12.00; institutions \$18.00.

Harry H. L. Kitano & Roger Daniels. *Asian Americans: Emerging Minorities*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1988. ix + 214 pp.

Roger Daniels. *Asian America Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850*. Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1988. xviii + 394 pp. \$24.95.

Ronald Takaki. *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1989. ix + 571. \$24.95.

Shanghai-born Sucheng Chan realized that the earliest Asian immigrant groups—Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, and Asian Indians—had all played key roles in the development of California agriculture, and had helped to shape the pattern of the state's race relations. Prior studies of the Chinese had viewed these men in the context of a "cheap" farm labor supply, or else as miners, railroad builders, and seasonal harvest hands, or as merchants and grocers, laundrymen, mill- and factory-workers, servants, and waiters, situated in urban "Chinatowns." Chan's quest for Chinese-language farming sources first yielded meager returns. But her off-chance discovery of Chinese agricultural land leases, supplemented by mortgages, business records, and census lists, opened a hitherto untapped treasure trove.

During a three-year search in the official archives of 41 California counties, she burrowed through more than 3,000 volumes, spanning 80 years, and took notes on some 30,000 documents, one-third of which were about mining (yet contained scattered information about mining-camp truck gardens). "For fresh

food, the Chinese began to grow vegetables and to raise hogs and poultry from the 1850s on. Truck gardening ... in turn [led to] larger-scale commercial farming." From this abundant, unconventional evidence she demonstrated that not all Chinese who came to America had been "sojourners;" neither could uniform migration motives be imputed to an entire diaspora (as though homogeneous); moreover, "Chinese immigrants...and their descendants [despite discriminatory laws, boycotts, and sporadic racist violence] have nevertheless been active makers of their own history."

The Chinese, she found, had "played multiple roles" in intensive California agriculture, and "were by no means only providers of 'cheap labor.'" This *Bittersweet Soil's* meticulous quantification and illuminating narrative reveal a legacy of steady, diverse, and integral Chinese participation in West Coast agriculture between 1860 (when 34,933 Chinese lived in California) and 1910 (when their roles had become institutionalized within agribusiness): "Working as truck gardeners, vegetable peddlers, commission merchants, farm cooks, tenant farmers, and owner-operators," Chan writes, "thousands of Chinese brought new land under cultivation, experimented with various crops, and provided much of the labor needed to plant, harvest, pack, preserve, and sell the crops in almost every major agricultural region of California." Her path-breaking book is plentifully provided with remarkable period photographs, essential maps, and statistical tables, and contains a bibliography and index.

Joan M. Jensen's *Passage from India* evolved from a modest history of one small group of Asian immigrants to encompass several Indian groups migrating to North America; multi-archival political intricacies of the so-called "Hindu conspiracy;" and the people and governments of West Coast states and provinces through decades of turbulent clashes over immigration/exclusion, settlement, employment, intermarriage, and naturalization.

Her amply documented, 23-page Prologue places Indian emigration from 1830 to within its broader global context. The massive Sikh exodus from the Punjab to North America in the first quarter of this century is clearly portrayed here as "part of a larger Indian diaspora that accompanied the development of British colonialism in India."

When thousands of Indians returned from America in 1914 to support Ghadar (the student independence movement), the British responded with surveillance, espionage, shoot-outs, and mass arrests in Canada and the U. S. A.—silencing the press and subverting the Canadian and U. S. postal, justice, and immigration authorities and university officials—and arrests, trials, executions, and limited reforms in India. Jensen refreshingly retells this familiar story from a thoroughgoing Indian (non-British) perspective; and her ensuing chapters are prefixed by fragments of militant Ghadar protest songs.

These undaunted pioneers to North America (some 10,000 Indians, predominantly male Punjabi Sikhs) were sweepingly dubbed "Hindoos" by hostile journalists; relentlessly hounded by the San Francisco-based Asiatic Exclusion

League (i. e., Andrew Furuseh, O. A. Tveitmoe); vilified by prolabor politicians ("United States for Caucasians!"); and attacked—with impunity—by mobs of Euro-Americans (e. g., the Bellingham riot of September 4, 1907). Their legislative and judicial misadventures in British Columbia and the land of liberty" are also exhaustively, affectingly reviewed in these pages: the exclusionist "White Canada" continuous voyage order-in-council (1908), California's restrictionist Alien Land Laws ("to exclude [from landholding] aliens ineligible to citizenship"), the literacy test and decisive "barred zone" clause of the 1917 Immigration Act, and the Supreme Court's crushing denial of naturalization rights—"Asian-Indians are not 'white'"—in the Bhagat Singh Thind decision (1923).

Jensen's narrative also notices West Coast Indian student life, reveals cultural survivals, and documents mainstream political support. Tuition was only \$15 a semester at the University of California, where "... a student could get by on \$250 a year; for \$350 he could live in luxury." Yet most public restaurants, including the student-operated one at Berkeley, refused to serve Indians. Sikhs established their first Gurdwara (worker/student hostel) at Stockton in 1912. The Vedanta temple in San Francisco housed the Vedanta Society and also became a home for new students. "Euro-American women who attended [temple] services often helped students find jobs and lodging, and Unitarian ministers...invited [Indian students from Berkeley] to speak out against British rule." Jensen identifies literary, editorial, political, academic, and even labor notables among supporters of the Home Rule League, Friends of Freedom for India (FFI), and other independence initiatives.

Asian Indians in California typically married younger Mexican women and formed families on the edge of the Mexican migrant community. Husbands, mostly Punjabis, "were tolerant of their wives' [Catholic] religion but attempted to reassert their patriarchal traditions of family control." Indians in the Imperial Valley, like the Japanese, evaded the Alien Land Laws and by the mid-1930s widely managed to control land.

Other men remained in all-male living groups. The majority farmed or performed manual labor and maintained their old Indian immigrant networks. Many worked for India's independence and for Indians' rights in North America. A small minority, mostly former students, entered professions or became merchants. Most children of "Mexican-Hindu" unions married Anglos or Hispanics, Jensen reports, "moving from these transitional families into the cultural mainstream." Her definitive chronicle is complemented by several striking illustrations, a 10-page multidisciplinary bibliography, and an index.

South Asians in North America, by Jane Singh, Emily Hodges, Bruce La Brack, Kenneth R. Logan, N. Gerald Barrier, and Mark Juergensmeyer, is surpassingly the most comprehensive and authoritative bibliography on its focused topic yet to appear. It logs a total of 788 items—books, articles, reports, MSS., bibliographies, and historic periodicals. (By contrast, the 292-

page *Asians in America* list, published in 1983 by the University of California at Davis, contains barely over 50 South Asian references.)

The annotated contents are topically arranged under two main headings. The Immigrant Experience, 1900-1946, and The Immigrant Experience, 1947-1986, each embracing six identical sub-groups: "Immigration and Discrimination," "Social and Economic Life," "Religion," "Students and Education," "Political Life," and "India and North America." The book's sections on social and economic life, religion, and students and education significantly expand dimensions of "South Asian" and "Asian Indian" beyond the familiar problem/conflict limits of racial discrimination, exclusion efforts, and political activism. Correspondingly, the political life segments (42 pages) encompass general histories, the Gadar Party, other nationalist organizations, and the work and writings of such activist leaders as Ram Chandra, Tarak Nath Das, Har Dayal, and Lala Lajpat Rai.

These materials are preceded by Jane Singh's Preface and four brief bibliographic essays. Singh whose father Puna Singh's U. S. citizenship had been cancelled in the wake of the *Thind* decision) describes the stages of this project's evolution: the South/Southeast Asia Library's acquisition of Gadar Party publications in the late 1960s; the library search and bibliography project (1972-74, *et seq.*); the Ethnic Identity and Public Policy Symposium (1979); and the coordinated compilation and editing of this volume. Co-editor Kenneth R. Logan contributed the Introduction ("Many ... authors refer to 'East Indians,' a term that we have usually retained as 'Indian', [i. e.], all those people who immigrated to America from modern-day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh before 1947"). In his "South Asians in North America," Bruce La Brack delineates five easily distinguishable periods: "1. The original movement to Canada and the west coast of the U. S. ... from 1904 to 1923; 2. Covert immigration ... between 1923 and the early 1930s; 3. Negligible immigration ... from the mid-1930s to ... the passing of the Luce-Celler bill in 1946; 4. The 'quota period' ... from 1946 to 1964 in the U. S. and 1951 to 1962 in Canada; and 5. [Post-removal] of racial and national immigration restrictions in 1962 [Canada]/1965 [U. S. A.]." Mark Juergensmeyer discusses the voluminous, multi-archival scope of "Scholarly Interest in the Gadar Movement;" and N. Gerald Barrier categorizes and examines English-language and Panjabi magazines and newspapers in "Periodicals Relevant to the Study of South Asians in North America."

*Asian Americans: Emerging Minorities* is a skilfully wrought interdisciplinary textbook intended to "... provide a guide to the bewildering proliferation of Asian American groups. [It uses] the insights of both history and social sciences, [and] it tries to portray the experience of each group not only as individuals but as part of ... the Asian American experience."

This book should also serve as an introductory bibliographic guide to the best of current Asian American scholarship, across a vibrant spectrum of

compatible fields. Harry H. L. Kitano and Roger Daniels engagingly speak through their secondary sources—to teachers, students, and librarians. "Myrdal in 1944 ... Gordon in 1964 ... Gleason in 1980 ... Cheng and Bonavich in 1983 viewed race and ethnic relations in the context of the world economy." In that respect, it signals salutary cross-disciplinary innovation.

In an introductory chapter, the authors contrast the "European model" or "straight line" theory of voluntary immigration, acculturation, integration, assimilation, and eventual absorption ("... given sufficient time anyone can (blend) into the mainstream") with the former fate of non-Caucasian immigrants ("until after World War II ... many ... from Asia were kept ... in the detention barracks on Angel Island"). Nowadays, thousands annually simply walk across the border, while others arrive from across the Pacific in jet aircraft at major air terminals. "Some Asians came as contract laborers .... Many came for economic and educational opportunities .... Others fled for personal reasons ... forced to flee at a moment's notice ... as refugees." Kitano and Daniels perceive "a relationship between the motivations for migration, the reactions of the host society, and the adaptive patterns of the migrants."

Chapter Two addresses immigration laws and their effects from 1882 to the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. "Although there have been changes in recent years... 'Asian bashing' ... has never fully disappeared." Chapters Three and Four are devoted to the Chinese, and Chapters Five and Six to the Japanese, both representing "the 'old' immigrants." Chapter Seven focuses on the Filipinos, now America's most populous Asian subgroup; and the preferred ethnonym "Pilipino" is explained ("Many older terms, used by colonial powers, have been replaced throughout the third world"). Chapter Eight deals with Asian Indians ("As of 1985, there were more than half a million persons in the United States of Indian birth, [and] a few thousand from both Pakistan and Bangladesh"). Chapter Nine discusses the also rapidly growing Koreans, whose families, though born in Korea, may include infants, adolescents, and young adults—along with the father and mother: "Intergenerational differences in terms of acculturation, identity, language facility [etc.] have an immediacy that was delayed for the older Asian groups." Chapter 10 is concerned with a "hidden minority," the Pacific Islanders—Samnoans, Guamanians, and native Hawaiians—who do not readily fit as "Asian Americans" (but have been so classified by federal authorities). Chapter 11 describes newcomers, largely refugees, from Southeast Asia—Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians; and Chapter 12 presents descriptive and demographic information on the current socioeconomic status of Asian Americans, together with "model" for analyzing their adaptation to the U. S. A. and Canada.

A predilection for contemporaneity (population projections are correct to 1990, and some attention is focused on most U. S. regions), however, may have deflected the authors from an adequate delineation of Asian historical

backgrounds, e. g., "push factors" in nineteenth-century Japan. One also senses at times an almost studied avoidance of expected immigration history usages. When Kitano and Daniels report systematic clustering of Laotian refugees in the San Joaquin Valley in the early 1980s ("Many Hmong relocated to the Fresno area"), the reader must independently recognize this occurrence as "chain migration." Yet they predictably chronicle every important restrictionist and exclusionist landmark for Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans; their quiet, intermittent revisionism (e. g., commentary on West Coast Japanese Associations, on page 57) is commendable; and they powerfully, memorably portray Japanese exile and incarceration during World War II.

Roger Daniels' *Asian America* is an ambitious, uneven performance by a veteran teacher, historian, historiographer, and rights advocate. After a quarter century of dealing with the Asian American experience, "more concerned with conflict and with ethnic and racial relations," he announces his aspiration here to "a different kind of book, [about] self-conscious, residentially concentrated communities of individuals, much of whose daily business was conducted in the language of the homeland and whose chief cultural impulses came from the society the elders had left behind." As Chinese/Japanese exemplars Daniels specially commends the "brilliant" and "superior" in-group, multi-archival methodologies of Sucheng Chan, Frank Miyamoto, and John Modell, all of whom had utilized non-English sources in their 1970s and 1980s books and articles. My verdict on Daniels' resultant effort in this respect is negative.

In a provocative Introduction, this author berates immigration and ethnic historians like Edith Abbott, Carl Wittke, and Andrew Creeley, whose respective surveys had excluded "the 'Orientals'" as "confusing", stunted their history as "a brief and strange interlude," and underestimated their incidence "by some 350 percent," and impugns a "'Eurocentric' bias" to the *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*. For his own part Daniels assumes that "Most Chinese and Japanese were motivated by the same goal that brought the overwhelming majority of immigrants to America: economic betterment." Whereas other groups have been celebrated for what they have accomplished, moreover, "Asians were important for what had been done to them." In an Epilogue, Daniels points out that the "misleading catchword 'model minority'" (initially applied only to Japanese Americans) was recently, erroneously "used to describe successful, upwardly mobile Asian Americans of any ethnicity."

This book's three-chapter, synoptic history of Chinese Americans reduces Sucheng Chan's recent work ("on the economics of nineteenth-century Chinese America") to a perfunctory, prefatory allusion; and it is oblivious of New York City's Chinatown, the largest Chinese community outside of China, deferring instead to those of San Francisco and Butte. Daniels achieves an able synthesis of three secondary sources on so-called "paper sons" (male would-be immigrants fraudulently claiming U. S. birth); while his one-page exploration

of "Chinese criminal elements known as 'tongs'"—a quoted secondary source—ends in dubious, avuncular reassurance: "The tongs and tong wars must be seen as merely one aspect of the social organization of Chinese America, (analogous to) ethnically oriented churches" (pace Stanford Lyman). Charlie Chan cultural stereotypes, Pearl Buck's long suffering, sturdy peasants, and Chinese actors Keye Luke and Victor Sen Yung are all noticed here, but not Anna May Wong, who in 1935 spumed the only unsympathetic role in MGM's *The Good Earth*, whose leading Chinese roles were played by Caucasian stars. Interethnic conflict is pervasive in Asian America; English-language sources prevail; and "self-conscious... concentrated communities" are seldom glimpsed.

This study's two Japanese-American chapters are compellingly told, by contrast, avoiding where possible mere recapitulation from Daniels' *The Politics of Prejudice* (1962). The author incorporates translated March 1891 consular documents, but curtly dismisses, as "uncritical", Yasuo Wakatsuki's useful emigration monograph (1979); and he freshly explicates the San Francisco school crisis and legal and diplomatic ramifications of the Gentlemen's Agreement. He crucially misreports the labor context of Eugene E. Schmitz's first mayoral election; he reiterates his claim (from 1962) that the 1920 Alien Land Law "was more of a nuisance than an inhibition," despite Yuji Ichioka's well-argued rebuttal (1984); and he misidentifies the plaintiff in *Takao Ozawa v. United States*. WRA evacuation and "relocation" of Japanese Americans and the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)'s accommodationist tactics dominate his embattled World War II chapter, which might profitably have noted ethnocultural aspects of Paul R. Spickard's 1986 monograph about Amerasian evacuees. (This reviewer also regrets that Daniels had not independently accessed Japanese-American newspapers and related documents, instead of so persistently citing at second hand from Miyamoto and Modell.) His Cold War chapter marks mostly sweeping gains for Asian Americans, notably the "flawed" Japanese American Claims Act of 1948 ("symbol of the improved [group] image") and naturalization provisions of the McCarran-Walter Immigration Act of 1952 ("turning of the tide of restriction"). In his upbeat Epilogue the author affirms the JACL's tireless redress campaign, describes demographic changes and "the problems of the 1980s," and asks: "Model minorities or scapegoats? Obviously neither stereotype can be accurate."

*Strangers from a Different Shore*, intermittently, congenially autobiographical, is Ronald Takaki's fifth book. His first, *Iron Cages* (1979), was a vigorous study of nineteenth-century discrimination and exploitation; and his autobiographical *Pau Hana* (1983) was a lyrical blend of contained anger and wry humor, activism, and nostalgia, archive materials and choice secondary works, at once an account of Hawaiian plantation life and labor, 1835-1920, and a personal history of his Maui ancestors. In the latter book, he had employed only

English-language sources; but in the book under review he mines documents and interviews in several Asian tongues—with telling impact. As in Pau Hana, he abundantly incorporates oral history, scraps of poetry and fiction (past and present), and multiethnic memoirs, and he utilizes Asian-language phrases for chapter titles (with parenthetical explanations). From the firm basis of personal and family experience, Takaki authoritatively surveys the immigrant odysseys and American fates—for good and ill—of Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Asian Indians, Filipinos, and not least "the refugees from Southeast Asia." Takaki's study is a splendid achievement, eminently readable, solidly scholarly, compellingly human; and it is enhanced by 16 pages of fine illustrations.

His new book inevitably retraces much familiar ground, although freshly and selectively, not exhaustively. Essential periodization and ethnic and topical matrices are all intact. "We need to 're-vision' history to include Asians in the history of America, and to do so in a broad and comparative way," the author declares. "How and why ... were the experiences of the various Asian groups ... similar to and different from one another ...? They were 'pushed' by hardships in the homelands and 'pulled' here by America's demand for their labor. But what were their own fierce dreams ...? Not primarily in terms of statistics and what was done to them. They are entitled to be viewed as subjects—as men and women with minds, wills, and voices." Takaki faithfully adheres to this brave manifesto.

One of the *gam saan haak* ("travellers to Gold Mountain") was a Chinese girl, Sing Kum, who left a letter from January 4, 1876: "My father sold me when I was seven years old, my mother cried. He seemed very sad, and when he went away he gave me a few cash, and wished me prosperity." (She would be resold—into prostitution—four times.) A Japanese newcomer, Ichiyo, is commemorated in this somber Haiku:

Day of spacious dreams!  
I sailed for America,  
Overblown with hope.

Filipino immigrant/activist Carlos Bulosan, who published a personal history, had come searching "for a door into America" and seeking "to build a new life with untried materials." A former Punjabi farmer, Dalip Singh Saund, wrote: "I had married an American girl, and was the father of three American children.... It was only natural that I felt uncomfortable not being able to become a citizen." (Saund was later to be the first Asian American elected to Congress.) A second-generation Chinese student inveighed against job bias: "Go Further West, Young Man ... yes, across the Pacific and to China!"

When news came of the attack on Pearl Harbor, some refugee Koreans in Los Angeles exploded with joy. "Taehan Toknip Manse!—Long Live Korean



Independence!" Bong-Yuon Choy recalled. Mainland Japanese internees experienced despair and humiliation. "Henry went to the Control Station to register the family," Monica Sone remembered. "He came home with twenty tags, all numbered '10710,' tags to be attached to each piece of baggage, and one to hang from our coat lapels." Gordon Hirabayashi, in Washington, had refused to report to the evacuation center. "As an American citizen, I wanted to uphold the principles of the Constitution...." (He was arrested, convicted, and sent to prison; and the Supreme Court upheld his sentence as a "military necessity.")

Chinese Americans had actively supported the war effort, meanwhile, and Congress in 1943 repealed the exclusion acts and provided an annual immigration quota. Jade Snow Wong's seventy-plus father embraced his citizen status wholeheartedly. "Henceforth [my birthday] will be on the fourth of July." Once denied suitable employment because of her race, she became a typist clerk in a Marin County shipyard. Actress Anna May Wong signed up as an air-raid warden in Santa Monica. Sociologist Rose Hurn Lee reported: "[Chinese] have gone into the army and navy, into shipbuilding and aircraft plants." After the war, former WRA internees were greeted with hostile signs: "No Japs Allowed, No Japs Welcome." Onetime South Korean Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky had said in 1983 that Vietnamese refugees were training to retake their homeland: "Give me the guns, and we'll kick [the Communists] out." Other such Asian-American "voices" speak out in these pages from the post-Vietnam diaspora.

*Strangers from a Different Shore* is the only one of the six books under review to give substantive rebuttal to the stubborn "myth of the 'model minority.'" Takaki explains: "The pundits and the politicians have exaggerated Asian-American 'success' and have created a new myth.... In terms of personal incomes, Asian Americans have not reached equality. In 1980 Asian-American men were still behind Caucasian men."