

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Foreword by David Reimers</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Preface and Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xvii</i>
Introduction	3
PART I. SOCIAL AND SPATIAL STRATIFICATION	
1. The Rising Sun and the Oceanic Group	15
2. A Divided and Scattered People: The Dominant Tier, 1885–1930s	33
3. A Divided and Scattered People: The In-Between Second Tier	85
4. A Divided and Scattered People: Spatial Separation and Lower Tiers	138
5. The Floating Student Sphere	189
PART II. "COMMUNITY" ROLE OF ETHNIC-BASED ORGANIZATIONS	
6. Social Adaptation of Japanese Buddhism	215
7. The Unifying Ethnic and Cultural Force of Issei Protestant Churches	230
<i>Notes</i>	<i>281</i>
<i>Selected Bibliography</i>	<i>333</i>
<i>About the Author</i>	<i>345</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>347</i>

Introduction

This is the first of a projected three-book project about the ethnic Japanese community in New York City between the late nineteenth century and the 1950s. The planned second book, tentatively titled *Cosmopolitan Rights*, examines race and agency, focusing on racially discriminatory laws and social movements between 1900 and 1930, and the inchoate third book examines the Pacific War and post-war years.¹ This first book challenges accepted and accredited notions that race, ethnicity, and culture are the predominant paradigms for drawing meaningful historical inferences and generalized assumptions about Japanese Americans. Proponents of this position assert that a shared ethnic and cultural identity, combined with pervasive anti-Japanese discrimination, forged cohesive ethnic Japanese communities in North America between the 1890s and 1941.² There is also a second position that attaches materiality to class in social relations within Japanese American communities. Proponents of the minority view focus on the ethnic-based labor economy.³

The present book is aligned with proponents of a third position that situates status and a broader conception of class on an equal plane with ethnicity and culture. This book contends that status was as salient as race, ethnicity, class, and culture in the shaping of Japanese American, nikkei,⁴ and Japanese social relations in New York City, the commercial, financial, literary, architectural, and arts capital of the United States and the Western Hemisphere. New York City had the

fifth-largest ethnic Japanese population on the US mainland—and the largest east of the Rocky Mountains—during the years between the two world wars of the twentieth century.

Many issei (Japanese immigrants; lit., “the first generation”) who settled in New York City were qualitatively different from issei who settled in Hawai‘i and in the Pacific Coast states. Unlike out west, New York City, as historian Mitziko Sawada has found, attracted issei who were generally from urban areas such as Tokyo, had more formal education, were older, and were more likely to emigrate as individuals rather than in groups. A sizable percentage of ethnic Japanese residents of New York City were *hi-imin* (nonemigrant or non-laborer), a Japanese government classification initiated in 1908. The *hi-imin* consisted largely of transitory *kaishain* (Japanese businessmen), *ryūgakusei* (Japanese overseas students), merchants, bankers, professionals, and members of the Japanese diplomatic corps. In the Pacific coast states, *imin* (emigrant or laborer)—farmers, free laborers, and former artisans—predominated. It is also noteworthy that many of the New York nisei whom I interviewed emphasized their familial ties to *shizoku* (former samurai and descendants of samurai) and *kazoku* (Japanese peerage class).

With regard to issei, sociologist T. Scott Miyakawa has stated: “Class and status differences existed among the Western states issei, but in comparison with the East Coast, they seemed somewhat less openly manifest and the range was smaller. . . . The subsequent emergence in the Eastern states of outstanding issei professional men, including a number well known among their American associates, as well as scholars and artists, may have accentuated this ‘vertical’ differential.”⁵

Despite these distinguishing factors, there have been no comprehensive academic studies of the Japanese American community in New York City. During the 1960s and 1970s, Scott Miyakawa attempted to write this history, but his work went largely unpublished. His only publication on the New York community is an essay on a small group of issei who helped establish commercial relations between the US and Japan during the late nineteenth century. Mitziko Sawada undertook a similar effort during the 1980s and 1990s, but ultimately wrote a book, *Tokyo Life, New York Dreams: Urban Japanese Visions of America, 1890–1924*, that focuses on perceptions that urban Japanese in Japan had of life in America. Her book contains only one chapter on the Japanese American community in New York City.⁶

While the ethnic Japanese community in New York was comparatively much smaller than a few communities in the Pacific Coast states, recent scholarship has demonstrated that class and status considerations also divided ethnic Japanese communities in Los Angeles and in the North American West. The present book contends that status and class dynamics countered the cohesive roles of ethnicity and culture in the New York community, advancing the work of historians

Lon Kurashige and Andrea Geiger. Kurashige has written that “class cleavage” or “different degrees of . . . economic and cultural capital” characterized Japanese American communities.⁷ In a similar vein, Geiger has found that caste and *mibun* (social status categories) in Japan became intertwined with class in the United States. As Geiger explains, “The persistent conflation of economic class and *mibun* meant that the qualities associated with one came to be associated with the other.”⁸

The present book further contends that geographic separation hindered community solidarity. Ethnic Japanese communities in New York City shared an invisibility with South Asian communities that formed in the city during the 1930s and 1940s. Vivek Bald, an American studies and digital media scholar, has described the South Asian community in Harlem of the 1930s and 1940s as “not legible” in the sense that South Asians had not “become a clear and visible presence among all the other groups” in the city. While both ethnic Japanese and South Asian communities in New York had small populations and were not concentrated on any particular block, South Asian communities were more homogenous in terms of regional origins, residential location in New York, religion, and past and current occupations. South Asians generally resided in either Harlem or on the Lower East Side. They mostly came from “a few specific areas in East Bengal, almost all were Muslim, and they shared a set of experiences as former maritime laborers, as global migrants, and as industrial and service workers.”⁹

In 1944, journalist, editor, and attorney Carey McWilliams described the ethnic Japanese community in New York City as follows: “A small colony of Japanese has existed in New York since the turn of the century, but it has never possessed the internal solidarity of the West Coast settlements; in fact, it has been referred to as a community which exists ‘merely on paper.’” Eleanor Walther Gluck, a Columbia University graduate student in sociology, similarly concluded in 1940: “By and large the Japanese in this city do not know each other, except for their own immediate groups. They know there are other Japanese here and the locations of small clusters of fellow countrymen, but that is as far as they seem to be interested.”¹⁰

Social structures in Japanese American communities more closely resembled those in German American communities.¹¹ Historian Russell A. Kazal examined the ethnic German community in Philadelphia between 1900 and the early 1930s in his book *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity*. Kazal found that “German-American identity fell victim not only to a particular set of events, but also to an extraordinarily high level of internal diversity. All ethnic groups have internal divides, whether of class, religion, gender, politics, or homeland region. What distinguished German America was that it incorporated not just some but *all* of these divisions.” Despite this internal diversity, ethnic

German communities formed in Philadelphia and in many other cities and towns across the nation between the 1830s and 1880s. The last large wave of German immigration to the United States occurred during the early 1880s. By the early 1890s, however, there was “a growing awareness of decline among the German communities,” according to historian James M. Bergquist. As Kazal has explained, “the German Philadelphia of 1900 was distinguished by its heterogeneity. It was in actuality a collection of largely separate worlds loosely linked by a sense of common Germanness.”¹²

The research of Geiger and Kurashige as well as the data contained in the present book demonstrate that ethnic Japanese communities in Los Angeles, the North American West, and New York experienced divisions similar to German American communities. As was the case with much larger German American communities in Milwaukee, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Buffalo, New York City (Lower East Side, Williamsburg, and Yorkville), Chicago, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, the divisions did not prevent the formation of ethnic Japanese communities in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Vancouver, San Jose, Gardena, Sacramento, Oakland, Hood River, Portland, Salt Lake City, and Denver.

An ethnic Japanese enclave did not, however, form in New York City. Why was this the case? Between the 1870s and mid-1930s, anti-Japanese racism was subtle and individualized in New York because the ethnic Japanese population was small and transient. Japanese New Yorkers were also divided along status, class, religious, and spatial lines. These cleavages were more pronounced among ethnic Japanese in New York than in other communities. The cleavages separated and segregated a nonwhite ethnic group in New York City into stratified and isolated social groups.

These divisive dynamics explain why there was no single, identifiable nikkei community in New York City during the years between the two world wars. The book details and traces the origins of five class- and status-based nikkei micro communities or groups that existed in New York, largely separate from one another, during the interwar years. This book consequently contributes to the existing social stratification discourse as exemplified in the previously mentioned historical studies of Geiger, Kurashige, and Kazal.

To examine the sociological structure of the ethnic Japanese community in New York, this book applies a hybrid methodology that incorporates many of the divisions that Kazal found in the German American community in Philadelphia, the class and status theory of German social theorist Max Weber,¹³ and *mibunsei*, the status system in Japan during the Tokugawa or Edo period (1603–1868). The Tokugawa status system consisted of a societal order, from highest to lowest, of *shi* (samurai), *no* (landed farmers and *hyakusei* [tax-paying commoners]), *ko* (artisans), and *sho* (merchants). This was an idealized ordering that ignored many

groups, including priests, *kuge* (imperial court nobility and high-ranking government administrators), *daimyō* (feudal lords), *komae byakushō* (tenant farmers and peasants), Ainu (indigenous Japanese), ethnic Koreans, Okinawans, *ebune* (migrant fishermen who live on boats; lit., “houseboat” people), and outcastes known as *burakumin* (“hamlet people”) or *buraku jūmin* (“hamlet residents”). Outcastes included *eta* and *hinin*. *Eta* were persons who held occupations perceived as “filthy,” such as coal miners, butchers, leather workers, sandal repairers, and mortuary workers. *Hinin* included beggars, criminals, prostitutes, and itinerant peddlers. Prior to 1908, Japan had also classified emigrants, for passport purposes, according to their occupations and *mibun*.¹⁴

My synthesized methodology delineates or quantifies the ethnic Japanese community in New York in terms of a four-tiered class and status hierarchy and a separate, nontiered student sphere.¹⁵ There was not one holistic community, but rather five micro communities.¹⁶ While class and status are closely interrelated, they are not the same.¹⁷ Status and status systems regard subjective human agency as central to the formation and stratification of groups and communities.

Status is a two-part factor that includes prestige (or reputation) and lifestyle.¹⁸ Considerations involved in determining the level of prestige accorded to a group or individual include occupation, institutional affiliations, and the ranking order of institutions, family lineage, professional achievements, and community service.¹⁹ Lifestyle considerations include material consumption, recreational activities, vacations or holidays, and deportment.²⁰

By contrast, material or economic capital is the overarching determinant of class.²¹ Class theory places a greater emphasis on objective ordered structures and processes that constrain human conduct, engendering economic exploitation and stratification of the working class and wider social inequality. As historian E. P. Thompson has clarified, however, “I do not see class as a ‘structure,’ nor even as a ‘category,’ but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships.”²² The present book prioritizes human interactions to explain how both class and status influenced the formation and development of the ethnic Japanese community in New York.

The community blended status and class factors to form a community hierarchy and groups that were palpably Japanese American. The first tier or elites included *kaishain* who worked at the New York City offices of large Japanese *sōgō shōsha* (general trading companies) such as Mitsui, Sumitomo, and Mitsubishi, along with Japanese consular officials. These businessmen were predominantly Japanese nationals who resided temporarily in the United States, most for between five and seven years.²³ Other elites included a few college-educated immigrant professionals and highly profitable commercial importers.

Immigrant mid-sized merchants—who catered to *kaishain*, issei professionals, and working-class and wealthy Europeans—composed the second tier. A lower-middle level (the third tier) consisted of working-class families, small business owners, and a few physicians who primarily served the local nikkei community and other working-class populations. At the bottom of the hierarchy were middle-aged immigrant bachelors and some married couples who worked as menial laborers. Approximately 60–65 percent of the ethnic Japanese population in New York City was engaged either in domestic labor, restaurant work, or non-domestic manual labor during the interwar period. Students, both *ryūgakusei* and nikkei, operated in a sphere that was separate from and yet also intersected with the four-tiered community hierarchy. Students were not part of the community hierarchy because their destinies were not yet known.

Part I of the book examines the social and spatial stratification of the community. Chapter 1 traces the origins of the hierarchy, explores the development of commercial trade between the United States and Japan between the mid-nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, and examines the crucial role that New York issei had in the evolution of the silk and porcelain ware trades. The chapter relates the experiences of Manjirō Nakahama, the first Japanese who lived in America, to explain how diplomatic and commercial relations between the United States and Japan began. Chapter 1 focuses on the role of the Oceanic Group, and particularly members Rioichiro Arai and Yasukata Murai, in the start of the raw silk and porcelain ware trade.

Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 articulate the class and status divisions in terms of a four-tiered community hierarchy and a separate student sphere. I apply class and status factors—economic capital, education, prestige (which includes occupation, family lineage, institutional affiliations and ranking order, professional achievements, and community service), and lifestyle (which includes material consumption, recreational activities, vacations, and deportment)—to representative cases to illustrate how community members differentiated among and between themselves.²⁴

Chapter 2 examines community elites, focusing on issei commercial importers and professionals and their families. The chapter details the lives of the immediate families of Drs. Jokichi Takamine and Toyohiko Campbell Takami. The Takamine discussion examines how the flaunting of financial wealth reinforced the high status of the family and further examines race and class issues in connection with an affluent biracial family, particularly the two Eurasian sons of Dr. and Mrs. Takamine. The Takami discussion focuses on the ethnic- and status-related difficulties that issei parents had in finding an “appropriate” husband for their nisei (native-born children of Japanese immigrants; lit., “the second generation”) daughter in a community that had few “eligible” ethnic Japanese bachelors.

Chapter 3 examines the second tier of mid-size merchants and entrepreneurs, focusing principally on the business acumen and ingenuity of Senzo Kuwayama and Kyūjirō Fuchigami. The chapter situates Kuwayama's businesses between the larger and more lavish Yamanaka and Company art store and smaller neighborhood restaurants and novelty stores. A central contention of the chapter is that the in-between position of mid-size merchants on the community hierarchy encouraged them to emphasize their superiority to working-class nikkei and smaller businesses on the third tier. An example of this power relationship involves Fuchigami, a nursery operator. Although Fuchigami had the financial wealth equivalent to that of many elites, both elites and second-tier merchants believed that their occupations were superior to that of Fuchigami, whom they perceived as a "farmer." As the chapter illustrates, financial wealth alone did not determine placement on the hierarchy. Status was not necessarily tied to income and savings.

Chapter 3 also contends that the community applied class and status factors to differentiate among medical researchers and physicians, and to situate persons who had characteristics of more than one tier. Physicians such as Kanzo Oguri and Kinichi Iwamoto, who primarily served working-class patients, ranked lower on the hierarchy, while medical researchers, specialists, and physicians who served wealthier patients and had professional affiliations with major hospitals in New York City ranked higher. The large percentage of *kaishain*, former Tokyo residents, and highly educated nikkei in New York City helped reinforce class and status barriers within the community.

Chapter 4 examines the spatial dimensions of the community, contending that residents formed several micro residential and commercial communities along ethnic, class, and status lines. These scattered micro communities, combined with a small ethnic Japanese population, contributed to the absence of an identifiable Japantown in New York City. Chapter 4 then concludes the discussion of the community hierarchy. The chapter canvasses working-class families situated on the third tier and bachelor menial laborers on the bottom tier. To illustrate this tier, the chapter sketches the lives of several small merchants and laborers, devoting particular attention to the life of small coffee merchant Riuzo Yamasaki.

Chapter 5 explains why university students were not part of the community hierarchy. Students held an indeterminate position that placed them temporarily outside the hierarchy in a separate sphere. As a consequence of their nebulous position and their youthful naiveté, *ryūgakusei*, issei, and nisei students were occasionally the beneficiaries of the benevolence of elites. On a daily basis, however, *ryūgakusei*—the predominant student group in New York—generally dwelled in social isolation. The chapter also reveals for the first time in published

scholarship the tragic connection between the five young girls who accompanied the 1871–73 Iwakura Mission for educational studies in the United States and the birth of the first nisei east of the Mississippi River.

Part II of the book explains how ethnic Japanese in New York City were able to retain a semblance of a collective ethnic and cultural identity during the first four decades of the twentieth century. They retained this identity despite the stratified nikkei community hierarchy—which chapter 7 asserts was fully formed by the 1920s—in New York City. Chapters 6 and 7 contend that ethnic and cultural functions of the four nikkei churches, especially the three Protestant churches, were chiefly responsible for weakening class and status barriers during the interwar years, creating the *appearance* of a cohesive Japanese American community in New York City.

Chapter 6 examines the origins and establishment of Japanese Mahayana Buddhism in New York City. The chapter utilizes the life experiences of Zen priest Sokei-an to explain the disconnection between Buddhism and social welfare services to build community solidarity. Buddhism concentrates on the inner consciousness and the attainment of *satori* (state of enlightenment or emptiness of mind). Providing social welfare services is inconsistent with Buddhist teaching and practice. Aware of this incongruity, Jōdo Shinshū priest Hozen Seki nevertheless incorporated social services and activities into the New York Buddhist Church to address community needs.

Chapter 7 traces the origins of Protestantism in the ethnic Japanese community in New York City. To illustrate the philosophy and contributions of the Protestant churches, the chapter focuses on the lives of Reformed Church in America pastors Earnst Atsushi Ohori and Fumio Matsunaga. The chapter paints a complex portrait of Ohori, examining his early life, his role in fostering ethnic community solidarity, and his troubled personal life.

The chapter further examines the role of three ethnic Japanese Protestant churches in the partial bridging of status and class divisions and spatial separation within the New York nikkei community. During the interwar years, Protestant churches were more effective than the Buddhist church in bridging differences among ethnic Japanese because Japanese Methodist and Reformed missions and churches had a considerable head start. Japanese Christian churches had existed in New York City for more than forty years before the founding of the New York Buddhist Church in 1938.

And unlike Buddhism, there is a close affinity between the Christian faith and social responsibility. Along with providing low-cost social services such as dormitory housing, the churches emphasized a common ethnic identity and culture through various activities. These activities included Japanese-language worship

services for issei, the serving of Japanese foods following Sunday worship services and on a twice-daily basis for boarders, annual bazaars, Sunday school, Japanese language and arts and crafts classes for nisei children, and various children's festivals where nisei children acted in plays, danced, gave recitations, sang, and played musical instruments.

Church-related activities emphasized the value of common ethnicity to social relations and interactions, strengthened cultural capital, and helped maintain the appearance of a single ethnic Japanese community.²⁵ The churches were nevertheless unable to overcome the rigid class, status, political, and geographic chasms that separated New York nikkei into micro communities. This failing is reflected most patently in the fact that the churches themselves were divided along class and status lines.

Status barriers that divided the community into isolated micro communities were pitted against the resolve that some Meiji men and women had in cultivating an inclusive ethnic community. There were no visible physical barriers or defined rules that prohibited movement between the several tiers of the hierarchy. Both the impulse for separation and the opposing need for Japanese ethnic and cultural interactions existed simultaneously in the mindsets of individual Japanese and Japanese Americans and in the social constructs of the nikkei community in New York City. New Yorkers generally were not even aware that the city had an ethnic Japanese community, much less knowledgeable about divisions within the inconspicuous community. These divisions were, however, palpable among issei, *kaishain*, and *ryūgakusei*. They retained separate status identities but, with the assistance of ethnic-based organizations, also were able to forge the semblance of a community based on their shared ethnic and cultural identity. Unlike in the Pacific Coast states, however, there was no organized anti-Japanese movement in New York to weaken status barriers among ethnic Japanese residents. As a consequence, Japanese New Yorkers had little necessity to unite along ethnic or racial lines during the first three decades of the twentieth century.²⁶

The title of this book, *Distant Islands*, refers to Manhattan Island and Long Island. The ethnic Japanese micro communities in New York City were largely situated in the borough of Manhattan and in the borough of Brooklyn, which is on Long Island. *Distant Islands* also connotes the status, class, spatial, and religious separations within the communities.

To relate the origins and early history of the Japanese American community in New York, this book employs storytelling narratives that examine the lives of individuals and families who were members of the micro communities that coexisted within the larger ethnic community. The purpose of these narratives is not purely descriptive. Detailed individual and family narratives are essential to

telling this story because class and status tensions existed largely in the attitudes, mannerisms, tones of voice, and facial expressions of tier members. Because these tensions were typically subtle, rarely overt or directly verbalized, and generally not quantifiable, the book focuses upon description and narratives of key individuals and families to articulate the tiers in the New York ethnic Japanese community. The social interactions and priorities of tier members reveal how status, class, and spatial factors inhibited the formation of a Japantown in New York City and became integrated into the community structure alongside ethnicity and culture.

The storytelling narratives—both individually and taken together—also serve another purpose. This book is not a historical monograph directed at a narrow audience of academics and graduate students who specialize in Asian American studies. *Distant Islands* is a modern narrative history—a mode of analytical storytelling that relates the history of a group excluded or marginalized in traditional narrative history. Traditional narratives include subjects such as wars, economic depressions, national politics, biographies of public figures, or natural and other disasters. By contrast, the narrative of *Distant Islands* examines the history and reveals the common humanity of members of an urban ethnic community. In interpreting what philosopher Paul Ricoeur wrote in *Temps et récit* (Time and Narrative), historian and cultural theorist Hans Kellner has written that “it is the human experience of time itself that is deepened by narrativity. . . . What history and the novel share is the ability to configure heterogeneity in a unified form.”²⁷