

A Transborder Japanese Community in U.S.-Mexican California: A Preliminary Study of Borderland Nikkei Experience

Eiichiro Azuma

A *Nikkei* history, as existent studies attest, is usually concerned with the past doings of a people of Japanese ancestry in the context of a specific national experience and development in the Americas. Seldom does one envision their experience as something larger than a single national history. Recent studies of Nikkei diasporas, too, tend to privilege the established bounds of nationalized Nikkei identities. Focused on the negotiation between Nikkei *dekasegi* workers and dominant society in contemporary Japan, the emergent paradigm in Nikkei research still neglects their transnational linkage and mutual intercourse *within* the Western Hemisphere, thereby reinforcing a nation-centered orientation in the field.¹⁾ National divides in the Nikkei population, which current scholarship generally takes for granted, nonetheless did not develop naturally as a result of assimilation or simple generational shift. Nor did Nikkei nationalization take place separately and independently in each nation-state. What decisively precipitated that process was the Pacific War, which brought not only the United States and Canada but also other nations of the Americas at war with Japan in a real or symbolic manner. While illuminating national differences among Nikkei residents, this global conflict turned Japan and the Japanese into polar opposites of things “American,” forcing peoples of Japanese ancestry, in varying degree, to choose their country of domicile or the land of ancestry. Nikkei nationalization was part of a larger international process that transpired throughout the countries of the Western Hemisphere during the first half of the 1940s, wherein popular mobilization and politico-ideological consolidation synchronically climaxed against the Japanese enemy.

One notable casualty of this global process was the dissolution of a Japanese community that lay over two Californias across the United States-Mexican border. Reflecting the lasting imprint of wartime nationalization in popular consciousness and practice, English-language

¹⁾ See, for example, Joshua Hotaka Roth, *Brokered Homeland: Japanese Brazilian Migrants in Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, Akemi Kikumura-Yano, and James A. Hirabayashi, *New Worlds, New Lives: Globalization and People of Japanese Descent in the Americas and from Latin America in Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Takeyuki Tsuda, *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). Likewise, nation-based narratives structure Akemi Kikumura-Yano, ed., *Encyclopedia of Japanese Descendants in the Americas: An Illustrated History of the Nikkei* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002); and Daniel M. Masterson with Sayaka Funada-Classen, *The Japanese in Latin America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

works on Japanese Americans rarely examine the transnational nature of their community formation and ethnic life in Southern California, which actually extended to Baja California Norte (Mexico) prior to 1942. Such a U.S.-centered perspective has produced the kind of stories that shore up and cement a single national identity of Japanese immigrants (Issei) and their American-born children (Nisei) in the postwar era. While the narratives of mono-national ethnic experience and contribution have benefited the redefining of the United States as a diverse, multicultural nation, existing studies generally fail to capture the entirety of the prewar Nikkei community experience in a transnational context—a historiographical void that forms a sharp contrast to studies of Chinese diasporas, for example.²⁾

Before the Pacific War, the Japanese of Southern California and Baja California constituted what can be termed a “transborder” community. Being “transborder” nonetheless does not suggest homogeneity in the lives of the people there; such a community could ironically sustain its transnationality because of the politico-legal differences between the two Californias and the advantages with which both sides supplemented each other’s inadequacies. Southern California and the northern Baja peninsula constituted a “borderland,” which entailed the fluid movements of capital and persons, the intermingling of ideas and cultures, and the clashes of national powers and hegemonies. The organization of distinctive, often conflicting state structures in the United States and Mexico created numerous points of divergence between the Japanese on the two sides, but many prewar Nikkei residents frequently traveled back and forth or moved their economic resources across the loosely-policed border to develop a varied but integrated community life in the borderland.

The transborder community nevertheless could not have held itself without the intervention of another hegemonic power. The multiple linkages that brought together the

²⁾ On representative works with an almost exclusively U.S. domestic focus, see Bill Hosokawa, *Nisei: The Quiet Americans* (New York: William Morrow, 1969); Robert A. Wilson and Bill Hosokawa, *East to America: A History of the Japanese in the United States* (New York: William Morrow, 1980); Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988); and Paul Spickard, *Japanese Americans: The Formation and Transformation of an Ethnic Group* (Boston: Twayne, 1996). The only exception is Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of the First-Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885–1924* (New York: Free Press, 1988), which has several references to transborder linkages and Japanese migration flows between the United States and Mexico. Most prewar Japanese immigrant publications were not restricted by a U.S.-centered perspective or paradigm. It is for this reason that this study relies heavily on Japanese-language sources. English-language studies of Chinese diasporas in U.S.-Mexican borderlands include: Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “The Chinese of Baja California Norte, 1910–1934,” *Baja California & North Mexican Frontier, Proceedings of the Pacific Coast Council on Latin American Studies* 12 (1985–86): 9–30; Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “Immigrants to a Developing Society: The Chinese in Northern Mexico, 1875–1932,” *Journal of Arizona History* 21 (1980): 275–312; Robert Chao Romero, “Transnational Chinese Immigrant Smuggling to the United States and Cuba, 1882–1916,” *Amerasia Journal* 30, no. 3 (2005): 1–16; and Grace Peña Delgado, “At Exclusion’s Southern Gate: Changing Categories of Race and Class among Chinese Fronterizos, 1882–1904,” in *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexican Borderlands History*, ed. Samuel Truett and Elliott Young (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 183–207.

Japanese of Southern California and the Baja peninsula were engendered partly by Japan's restrictive emigration policy, as well as its persistent attempt to control overseas residents from across the Pacific. While the United States and Mexico presented the contexts in which transborder Nikkei populations found it desirable to remain mutually connected and to live in tandem, the Japanese state played a crucial role in providing institutional needs and infrastructures for the ethnic community that overarched the two Californias.³⁾ In the context of such triangular state entanglements, this article outlines the ways in which Japanese residents of Southern California and Baja California forged and maintained multifarious ties until the Pacific War.

In the earlier history of the Nikkei in the United States, Southern California occupied only a minor place. The birth of a sizable Japanese community in the greater Los Angeles area is traced to a large-scale population movement that resulted from effects of anti-Japanese agitation in Northern California, a devastating earthquake in San Francisco, and most importantly, the development of agricultural infrastructure throughout the region, during the first decade of the 20th century. The completion of irrigation canals from the Colorado River in 1907, for example, transformed the Imperial Valley from a vast desert into a fertile agricultural land, which subsequently attracted hundreds of Japanese farmers and workers.⁴⁾ And two decades later, by the 1930s, Southern California had become a center of Japanese America on the continental United States with 47 percent of the aggregate state ethnic population, major vernacular newspapers, and perhaps the most organized ethnic agricultural economy based on what John Modell calls the "vertical and horizontal integration" of farm production, wholesale, and retailing.⁵⁾ Not only did Los Angeles have an ethnic produce market, which Issei established in cooperation with Chinese and Italian merchants, but the city also served as a major center of U.S.-Japan trade.

From the outset, the development of the Southern California Japanese community rested on its geographic identity as borderland. While the 1906 San Francisco earthquake triggered a massive remigration of Issei from Northern California, Japan's restriction on labor emigration

³⁾ On the intervention of state policies in migration and migrant lives, see Evelyn Hu-DeHart, "Concluding Commentary: On Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism in Asian American History," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8, no. 3 (Oct. 2005); 312.

⁴⁾ Zaibei Nihonjinkai, *Zaibei Nihonjinshi* (San Francisco: Zaibei Nihonjinkai, 1940), 880-883.

⁵⁾ John Modell, *The Economic and Politics of Racial Accommodation: The Japanese of Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 115-118. On Japanese population statistics in California, see Zaibei Nihonjinkai, *Zaibei Nihonjinshi*, 588. According to this source, the percentage of the residents in Southern California to the total state ethnic population jumped from 7 percent to 33 percent between 1900 and 1910. The percentage of Northern California Japanese, on the other hand, dropped from 37 percent to 21 percent while their Central California counterparts maintained an above 40 percent mark. By 1930, the Japanese of Northern California constituted only 16 percent (15,412) of the total 97,456, and those of Central California 37 percent, or 36,557. In the same year, the Southern California figure accounted for 47 percent, or 45,487.

to the United States rendered the U.S.-Mexican border as a southern entry point for new laborers from Japan. Starting in 1900, Tokyo adopted a policy of issuing U.S.-bound passports to only “students” and “merchants,” as well as onetime residents there, in response to the rise of California’s exclusionist agitation.⁶⁾ This created two groups of working-class Japanese, who still attempted to come to the continental United States for work. One group successfully received legitimate passports as either “students” or “merchants” often by furnishing forged documents and borrowing by “show money.”⁷⁾ These lucky emigrants departed straight for San Francisco, Los Angeles, Portland, or Seattle.

Another group still held onto the dream of quick riches in America by carrying passports intended for Mexico, Hawaii or Canada, and once they arrived, the laborers used these places as transit points to the continental United States.⁸⁾ As Japanese emigration statistics shows, over 1,200 Japanese left for Mexico in 1904, when the Russo-Japanese War gave young men of draftable age an additional incentive to leaving Japan for work in the land of riches. After a brief control of draft evasions by Tokyo, the postwar years of 1906 and 1907 saw the figures of Mexico-bound Japanese skyrocketing to over 5,000 and nearly 4,000. (See Table 1.) As the Mexican authorities reported the admissions of only 4, 20, 100, and 329 Japanese “immigrants” annually between 1904 and 1907, the vast majorities of the Mexico-bound Japanese did not declare that country as their final destination, which got them likely to be treated statistically as transients of sort.⁹⁾ In the northern Baja peninsula, the pool of such transient Issei border crossers grew even larger during the first two decades of the twentieth century, since hundreds of former Nikkei plantation workers from Peru concurrently rushed to the Mexican border region in pursuit of quick riches in the United States.¹⁰⁾

The bilateral Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907-1908 made it illegal for Japanese laborers to migrate from Japan to the United States, directly or indirectly, and Canada followed suit with a similar scheme of Japanese exclusion. While the Hawaiian and Canadian options became out of question, the use of Mexico as a stepping-stone offered working-class Japanese one of the few realistic ways to evade the bilateral state restrictions. Later, Ōyama Ujirō, Los Angeles Consul, estimated that smuggled Japanese had amounted to 350 per year and that an aggregated total of such individuals had reached as many as 3,700 in Southern California by

⁶⁾ Ichioka, *The Issei*, 52.

⁷⁾ See Eiichiro Azuma, “Interstitial Lives: Race, Community, and History among Japanese Immigrants Caught Between Japan and the United States, 1885-1941” (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 2000), 72-75.

⁸⁾ *Ibid.*; Mizutani Bangaku, *Hokubei Aichi Kenjinshi* (Sacramento: Hokubei Aichi Kenjinkai, 1920), 254-255; and Hokubei Okinawa Club, *Hokubei Okinawajin-shi* (Los Angeles: Hokubei Okinawa Club, 1981), 56-58.

⁹⁾ María Elena Ota Mishima, *Destino México: un estudio de las migraciones asiáticas a México, siglos XIX y XX* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1997), 86.

¹⁰⁾ Nichiboku Kyōkai, *Nichiboku Kōryūshi* (Tokyo: PMC Shuppan, 1990), 342-348.

¹¹⁾ Ōyama Ujirō, “Honpōjin Mitsunyūkokuisha ni kanshi torishirabe no ken,” March 26, 1923, Fusei Tokōsha oyobi Dō-Hōjōsha Torishimari Kankei Zakken (3.8.8.21), Diplomatic Records Office, Tokyo, Japan.

Table 1: Direct Migration of Japanese to the United States and Mexico

Year	U.S.	Mexico
1900	7585	1
1901	32	95
1902	70	83
1903	318	281
1904	640	1,261
1905	714	346
1906	1715	5068
1907	2712	3822
1922	3558	77
1923	2617	68
1924	4064	76
1925	289	160
1926	344	326
1927	370	319
1928	306	353
1929	236	249
1930		434
1931		283

Source: Gaimushō Ryōji Ijūbu, *Waga Kokumin no Kaigai Hatten: Ijū Hyakunen no Ayumi, Shiryōhen* (Tokyo: Gaimushō, 1971), 140, 144.

June 1922.¹¹⁾ A U.S. military intelligence officer, too, reported on “Japanese illegally in America,” albeit with calculated exaggerations to incite the fear of Japanese “invasion.” Surmising unrealistically that “most” of estimated 130,000 Japanese “stowaways” worldwide had ended up “here in California” between 1916 and 1922, he still provided a glimpse into the prevalence of illegal Japanese immigration through Mexico, as well as the price of being undocumented immigrants.

The goal of the Japanese stowaway is California. They are here, tens of thousands of them, hiding among their countrymen, afraid to come into the open for fear of deportation, afraid to revisit Japan for fear of being denied return passports. Many of them have been here long enough to acquire domicile under our laws and could not be deported, but they still dread the possible consequences of exposure. That the number of these smugglers is very large is evident from the frequent references to them in the Japanese local press.¹²⁾

Behind this steady flow of Japanese “stowaways” lay the development of ethnic businesses

¹²⁾ Edward P. Morse, “Political: Japanese Illegally in America,” June 10, 1922, pp. 31–32, in box 563, Military Intelligence Division Correspondence, 1917–1941 (RG 165), National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

overarching the U.S.-Mexican border, which catered specifically to their needs. At first, a majority of Japanese border crossers chose Texas towns along the Rio Grande as entry points, but as the Mexican Revolution (1910–1919) ravaged the region and U.S. authorities tightened control at Texas border checkpoints, more and more people opted for a challenging but less policed California route.¹³⁾ In Southern California bordertowns, like Calexico and San Diego, Issei merchants provided the newcomers with shelter, job referral, and transportation to local Japanese farms and the ethnic labor market in Los Angeles. As Issei labor-contracting business in general suffered from the diminishing of direct labor immigration during the 1910s, border town Issei merchants benefited by the increase of the roundabout Japanese migration via Mexico, thereby fattening themselves with commissions from both helpless newcomers and needy employers. On the Mexican side, too, Mexicali, Tijuana, and Ensenada witnessed the emergence of Japanese stores, inns, and immigration brokerage, which usually worked hand in hand with American Issei merchants in coordinating the smuggling of new laborers. Oftentimes, U.S. Japanese interests ran these businesses, creating transborder enterprises that combined legal and illegal activities.¹⁴⁾ Illuminating the close contact such businesses clandestinely maintained across the border, some Japanese immigrants testified their perplexity in encountering unknown U.S. Issei brokers, who conveniently waited on automobiles, just when they sneaked in from the Mexican side.¹⁵⁾

Many merchants in Southern California bordertowns appeared to have owed their economic prosperity to the continuous supply of Japanese transmigrants from Baja California. Kawakita Yasaburō of Calexico/Mexicali was a case in point. Los Angeles Issei journalist Fujioka Shirō recalls how Kawakita built a one-million-dollar business empire, which included general merchandise stores and large agricultural concerns on both sides of the border. “Mr. Kawakita Yasaburo used to stretch a net all over under cover of midnight darkness, and you may ask what kind of game he was after,” Fujioka writes. “Put frankly, he was awaiting ‘customers’ from Mexico in the dead of the night. His role was to guide those customers [safely into the United States across the border]. He also sold them goods from his stores and earned fees by exchanging Mexican pesos for U.S. dollars—a smart business method that brought him huge profits.”¹⁶⁾ In San Diego, some Issei boardinghouse owners were known to have routinely assisted newcomers from Tijuana, while area Issei farmers offered temporary shelter and food in exchange of fieldwork.¹⁷⁾ Through the agency of Kawakita and other borderland Issei entrepreneurs, Southern California and Northern Baja California established close economic

¹³⁾ Nichiboku Kyōkai, *Nichiboku Kōryūshi*, 339–340.

¹⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, 424–426; and Gaimushō Tsūshōkyoku, “Bokkoku ‘Ensenada’ hōmen ni okeru Honpōjin no Hatten Jōkyō” (May 1932), p. 6, Diplomatic Records Office, Tokyo.

¹⁵⁾ Kitamura Takao, *Issei toshite Amerika ni Ikite* (Tokyo: Sōshisha, 1992), 55–56.

¹⁶⁾ Fujioka Shirō, *Ayumi no Ato* (Los Angeles: Ayumi no Ato Kankō Kōenkai, 1957), 545; and Nihonjin Mekishiko Ijūshi Hensan Inkaï, *Nihonjin Mekishiko Ijūshi* (Mexico City: Nihonjin Mekishiko Ijūshi Hensan Inkaï, 1971), 205.

¹⁷⁾ Nichiboku Kyōkai, *Nichiboku Kōryūshi*, 360.

ties, which allowed the continuous influx of Japanese transmigrants.

The legal vulnerability of undocumented Issei, which the U.S. intelligence agent also noted, seemed to have given some unscrupulous Issei brokers an incentive to taking advantage of them for personal gains. In an oral history, a former Issei border crosser reports how he and his friends were placed in a Japanese cantaloupe farm in the Imperial Valley, where they were forced to work for free both weekdays and weekends under the summer heat of nearly 40 degrees Celsius. When the man “requested” that they be paid for his work, the Issei farmer brushed it off with a veiled threat of turning him over to the authorities, reminding the immigrant that he had no papers to show. Until his acquaintance from Los Angeles came to his rescue, the border crosser had to resign to exploitations and living conditions—the unbearable life that he disdainfully compares to a prison labor camp. As the man bitterly recalls, a number of borderland Issei farmers apparently enjoyed the economic advantage of illegal Japanese immigration, habitually preying on border crossers, whose supply was endless during the 1910s.¹⁸⁾

Apart from the economic interests embedded in the practice of border crossing, stories of intraethnic exploitation shed light on political ramifications of illegal immigration. One’s legal status, or the lack thereof, in the United States emerged as a factor in organizing power relations among the borderland Japanese. In 1930, several Issei leaders of Los Angeles were accused of using the issue of illegal immigration as a means to manipulate and discipline community members. In separate occasions, some Japanese association officials and journalists extorted a large sum of money from undocumented residents, “offering” to help them buy off the law enforcement to avoid deportation. When their demands were rejected, the extorters punished the victims by informing to a U.S. immigration agent—their accomplice in crime. Apparently, these Japanese leaders had periodically collaborated with the crooked white official in exploiting the meek or expelling the defiant, and local vernacular newspapers were said to have turned a blind eye to such egregious corruptions and abhorrent abuses. While many ordinary residents were said to have lived in fear, a few Issei elders, including Fujii Sei, decided to organize protest rallies against the nefarious immigrant elite and the complicit ethnic press. A maverick who had earlier lost in power struggle with many of the current association leaders, Fujii tried to capitalize on the community crisis by attacking the “betrayal” and “treachery” of his adversaries.¹⁹⁾ This incident allowed the maverick leader to rise once again as a major figure in borderland ethnic politics, as Fujii received enough grassroots support to launch the *Kashū Mainichi*, an “alternative” populist newspaper which he claimed represented the true

¹⁸⁾ Kitamura, *Issei toshite Amerika ni Ikite*, 56–57.

¹⁹⁾ See Fujii Sei-shi Kōenkai, ed., *Fujii Sei-shi Sakebu* (Los Angeles: Fujii Sei-shi Kōenkai, 1931). Central figures in the controversy included Momii Kizaemon, Kasai Jisaburō, and Akahori Masaru. *The Rafu Shimpō* and the *Rafu Nichibei* were said to have been sympathetic to these individuals.

²⁰⁾ Fujii’s *Kashū Mainichi* began operation in January 1931 with Issei writers who had been fired by the *Rafu Nichibei* for their opposition to the corrupt leaders. After this controversy, Akahori Masaru moved to Seattle.

voices of the Issei masses, including voiceless undocumented residents. In the meantime, some implicated Issei leaders were banished from the Japanese Association of Los Angeles while others went into hiding. In order to escape public censure, one person had to actually close up his insurance business and moved to Seattle in disgrace.²⁰⁾

Intraethnic exploitations and struggles surrounding illegal immigration aside, it is also tempting to idealize what the American intelligence agent called the “easy conscience of the Japanese [border crossers] in breaking our ... laws” as a form of Issei “resistance” to white racism or as a manifestation of their cosmopolitan consciousness that derogated state rules and boundaries.²¹⁾ To many transmigrants, a pursuit of personal goals and gains took precedence over the virtue of being antiracist fighters, postmodernesque cosmopolitans, or even law-abiding citizen-subjects. Yet, more importantly, an expansionistic ideology of prewar Japan helped rationalize their illegal migration across the border. The so-called discourse on overseas development (*kaigai hattenron*) led many Issei to assume defiant posture when they felt that the imperative of the “expansive” Japanese nation/race was slighted, whether by their home state or by another government.²²⁾ Popularized in the late 1880s, this school of thought engaged many social leaders of Japan and migrant intellectuals abroad in the discussion of their “manifest destiny” as a civilized people and superior race in the age of global imperialist competitions. The “frontiers” these pundits envisioned as their own ranged from Micronesia to Korea, and from Manchuria to Hawaii, but the Americas always ranked high on the list of potential sites for “Japanese development.” In light of this discourse, U.S. immigration laws and Tokyo’s passport regulations appeared to have unjustly trampled down their rights to expand into a new frontier. Breaking such unfair rules was justified not so much in the name of antiracist protest as on grounds of seeking a “second Japan” in the New World.²³⁾ And it is for the same reason that Fujii could garner mass support for his lambasting of the “traitors,” who had “trampled upon the ideal of racial mutual aid” for the ultimate goal of Japanese development.²⁴⁾ Instead of simple resistance to domestic white oppression, expansionistic nationalism buoyed transborder practices of Issei smugglers and undocumented immigrants.

²¹⁾ Morse, “Political: Japanese Illegally in America,” 31.

²²⁾ Looking at race relations primarily from a domestic perspective, American scholars tend to interpret immigrant practice in terms of an “oppression-resistance” paradigm. In the recent rise of transnational perspectives, on the other hand, some students of diaspora attempt to downplay or underestimate the clutches of nation-states on the immigrant minds by illuminating their “denationalized” consciousness and practice. It is my contention that Issei did not necessarily “resist” white racism, insofar as they embraced some fundamental ideological underpinnings of white supremacy. Likewise, as much as they accepted the legitimacy of nation-states, Japanese immigrants were never free from, nor did they seek to overcome, the basic politico-ideological categories of the hegemonic powers. In order to defend and promote what they considered the best interests of nation/race/community, however, they often confronted their own government/state, not to mention governments of other nations and races.

²³⁾ See Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 22–24, 91–92.

²⁴⁾ Fujii Sei-shi Kōenkai, ed., *Fujii Sei-shi Sakebu*, 38.

The ideology of Japanese development rendered the political boundaries between the United States and Mexico only artificial, and hence inconsequential to their objectives, collective or individual. During the late nineteenth century, many Japanese immigrant leaders believed that the “American” frontier was not limited to within the United States, but was extended to Mexico (and sometimes to the rest of Latin America). In their eyes, the two Californias were integral and indivisible. Others regarded the U.S. Pacific Coast to be primarily a point of entry into the main site for their development down south. Founded in 1891, the Expedition Society (Enseisha) of San Francisco published a biweekly vernacular newspaper, emphasizing the advantage that the Mexican side of the North American frontier would offer to the Japanese. The Issei members argued that California was no longer suitable for Japanese colonization, since it was already “occupied by [white] Americans, who detest[ed] seeing foreigners acquiring land, let alone their attempt to build a colony of their own.”²⁵⁾ On the contrary, Mexicans would be “easy to dominate,” and thus their land easy to master. Around the same time, another Japanese immigrant expansionist group, named the Society for the Promotion of Colonization (Shokumin Shōreisha), defined California as an ideal “training ground” and “colonization base” for Japanese transmigrants, who should eventually “advance into Mexico, Canada, South America, and other parts of the Pacific Coast [in the Western Hemisphere].”²⁶⁾

Strains of such expansionist thought remained strong in prewar Japanese America, and the escalation of anti-Japanese racism further reinforced the Issei’s perception of the two Californias as a coterminous frontier despite formal state boundaries. In the context of U.S. race relations, “Japaneseness” forced the bearers of that mark to come under the yoke of white racial regime, no matter how the Issei took pride in their racial strength.²⁷⁾ Under such constraints, the Issei’s struggle for survival against white Americans appeared to be doomed, whereas their another racial rival—Mexicans—would be “easy to dominate” if they resettled south of the border. Japanese, many Issei believed, would be able to exert their “superior” racial power without legal hindrance outside white supremacist political economy of the United States. “Japaneseness,” as a symbol of a subordinate position, was a product of U.S. race relations, but insofar as it was also a social construct bound to a particular national context, it could obtain a different racial meaning in another. And hence, just as the idea of frontier was inseparable from the notion of white supremacy in Anglo-American thought, many Issei

²⁵⁾ “Shokuminchi ni taisuru Honkai no iken,” *Ensei* 5 (September 1, 1891). See also Azuma, “Interstitial Lives,” 43–44; and Ariyama Teruo, “Zasshi ‘Ensei’ no Genron katsudō,” in Tamura Norio and Shiramizu Shigehiko, eds., *Beikoku Shoki no Nihongo Shinbun* (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 1986), 257–278.

²⁶⁾ *Shokumin Kyōkai Hōkoku*, 23 (March 22, 1895), 99–106.

²⁷⁾ On the changing meaning of Japaneseness relative to whiteness, see Azuma, *Between Two Empires*, 38–39, 60–62, 78–83.

²⁸⁾ On the racial basis of the Manifest Destiny ideology, see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 272–97.

coupled a belief in Japanese superiority with their idea of a transborder frontier, envisaging a unrestricted space for their continuous racial development in the northern Baja peninsula.²⁸⁾ Thus, as hundreds of illegal border crossers entered Southern California from Mexico, a number of Issei transmigrants—or self-proclaimed “colonialists”—moved to Baja California. Mexican authorities reported that the numbers of Japanese admitted into that country via Mexicali and Tijuana constituted 10.3 percent (374) and 9.5 percent (345), respectively, of the aggregate total of Japanese immigrants (3,626) between 1890 and 1949.²⁹⁾ Although the recorded Mexican figures must have been substantially smaller than the actual size of immigration, the data still underscore the significance of Issei transmigration.

Because Southern California Issei were faced with aggravating exclusionist attacks on their key interests and rights in farming, Mexico looked more attractive than ever during the 1910s and the 1920s. In 1917, Los Angeles Issei leader Hasegawa Shin'ichirō authored a comprehensive guide to agricultural colonization in Mexico, which favorably depicted racial dynamics and power relations in Mexico.³⁰⁾ Highlighting the idea of an integrated frontier, he also contended that while the Issei who had already put down roots or those who had a clear blueprint for success should stay in California, others might as well head down south to start an autonomous enterprise there without the threat of institutionalized white oppositions.³¹⁾ Mexico, Hasegawa added, was currently a site of colonialist competition among Britons, Americans, Germans, French, and Spaniards, and the Japanese should jump right into that racial struggle, for, in his opinion, the country was “an ideal frontier for Japanese development that would not be easily obtainable again.”³²⁾

Buoyed by such entrepreneurial expansionism, the booming wartime economy of the late 1910s induced many Southern California Japanese to engage in large-scale cotton production in the Mexicali area. In 1916, as Ota Mishima's study of Japanese Mexican demography reveals, the number of Japanese immigrants who made Mexicali their new home jumped from an yearly total of one or two in the previous years to that of 16, and the figures remained as high as 13, 28, and 17 annually between 1917 and 1919.³³⁾ Although the numbers of Japanese immigrants and residents were considerably undercounted in Mexican official statistics, Ota Mishima's data still suggest a marked growth of the Japanese farm settlement in Mexicali during the First World War. Especially well represented in this group of borderland Issei cotton growers were

²⁹⁾ Ota Mishima, *Destino México*, 96.

³⁰⁾ Hasegawa Shin'ichirō, *Bokkoku Ichiran* (Tokyo: Nipponsha, 1917), 12–23.

³¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 279.

³²⁾ *Ibid.*, 3.

³³⁾ Ota Mishima, *Destino México*, 111.

³⁴⁾ Yoshiyama Kitoku, *Chūmoku subeki Mekishiko* (San Francisco: Nichiboku Kenkyūsha, 1928), 301. Under the Mexican law, foreigners were not allowed to own land within 50 kilo meters along the border, but many got around the restriction by setting up a land company or becoming a naturalized Mexican citizen

³⁵⁾ Nichiboku Kyōkai, *Nichiboku Kōryūshi*, 438–439; and Fukuoka, “Shimo Kariforunia Hantō Nanboku Ryōshū Jijō Shisatsu Hōkokusho,” September 1926, 127–128, in Honpōjin Imin Kankei Zakken: Bokkoku no bu, vol. 2 (J.2.0.J2-0), Diplomatic Records Office, Tokyo.

transmigrants of Wakayama origin from the Imperial Valley, including Shintani Kusujirō, who reportedly controlled over 9,000 acres and ran an irrigation firm of his own.³⁴⁾ While some large proprietors, like Shintani and Kawakita, maintained their residences in U.S. California by leaving day-to-day farm operation to their Japanese employees on the Mexican side, other individuals settled down in Mexicali and worked as tenant farmers for the American-owned California-Mexico Land and Cattle Company, a major landowner in the region.³⁵⁾ Exempt from the restrictions placed by American immigration laws, these borderland *settlers* could go back and forth between Mexico and the United States almost freely so long as they possessed border-crossing cards.³⁶⁾

After the enactment of the 1920 California Alien Land Law, the enforcement of total ban on Issei land ownership and tenancy further strengthened agricultural ties across the U.S.-Mexican border. In particular, notable southward Japanese movements from the Golden State took place as a result of the 1923 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that upheld the constitutionality of the alien land laws—the decision that damned most West Coast Issei to the perpetual working-class status, at least theoretically.³⁷⁾ No longer able to sustain an independent economic life, many Japanese residents in Southern California took a keen interest in moving their farming operations south of the border by acquiring land in the northern Baja peninsula. On their behalf, the Central Japanese Association of Southern California studied economic conditions and race relations in Mexico in 1923 and 1924. Immigrant leaders and journalists discussed the subject extensively in the vernacular press, and the *Rafu Shimpō* of Los Angeles emerged as a chief advocate of Mexican agricultural colonization.³⁸⁾

Its editor Fujioka Shirō personally traveled to Mexico to investigate the feasibility of Issei remigration, and he not only editorialized on his favorable impressions in the paper but also published two books, which characterized the land south of the border as an extension of the Southern California Issei world.³⁹⁾ His arguments resembled what Hasegawa and other advocates of Japanese development had earlier constructed and propagated. Mexico was free from the ideology of white supremacy with no law prohibiting the Japanese from buying land, Fujioka emphasized. Baja California was still a largely undeveloped frontier similar to the Southern California of the early 20th century, which Issei had steadfastly developed into fertile farmland. If Southern California residents with capital and farming expertise started agricultural ventures as landowners there, Fujioka believed they would be able to build self-sufficient Japanese colonies connected to the existing ethnic farm interests in Los Angeles.

³⁶⁾ Many Mexicali residents almost daily went to the U.S. side for shopping and other errands, including picking up vernacular newspapers delivered from Los Angeles. See Nichiboku Kyōkai, *Nichiboku Kōryūshi*, 563.

³⁷⁾ Ichioka, *The Issei*, 230–232.

³⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, 241–242.

³⁹⁾ Fujioka Shirō, *Minzoku Hatten no Senkusha* (Tokyo: Dōbunsha, 1927), 167–297. The same book was published as *Hokubei Mekishiko Imin no Shiori* in 1931.

⁴⁰⁾ *Rafu Shimpō*, April 10, 22, 1924.

Although remigration was not recommended for working-class immigrants, Issei with financial resource should seriously consider the option.⁴⁰⁾ While Fujioka did not relocate to Mexico, many Issei actually heeded his advice and moved to or invested in the northern Baja peninsula during the 1920s. Between 1924 and 1931, Ota Mishima notes that 274 and 275 Japanese “immigrated” into Mexico through Mexicali and Tijuana, respectively, which register a huge increase in number compared to the years before and after this eight-year period.⁴¹⁾

Japanese consular reports collaborate with the official Mexican data. According to a Los Angeles diplomat, two-dozen Issei from Southern California had purchased barren land near Ensenada for agricultural development by 1927. Many of them had already turned their transborder farming endeavors into profitable economic ventures, shipping chili peppers, beans, and other crops to the Los Angeles market and bringing over 200 laborers directly from Japan to their “colonies.”⁴²⁾ After the 1924 ban on Japanese immigration into the United States, Ensenada also witnessed the influx of new workers from Japan, who could almost freely traveled between Baja California and Southern California as fishermen. Typically contracted by California-based Japanese firms, these men engaged in coastal and deep-sea fishing, landing at San Diego and San Pedro (near Los Angeles) periodically to drop off their catch of tuna and bonito.⁴³⁾ Although they were “residents of Mexico” on paper, those Southern California cities were as much their home as Ensenada was.

Meanwhile, after a few years of a postwar slump in the cotton market, Mexicali, too, added more transborder Issei farmers to its ethnic settlement, increasing the total population from 400 to more than 800 by 1925. Replacing Chinese growers, who had been hard hit by the postwar recession and the rise of Mexican nativism, about 180 Mexicali Issei, as well as many more “commuter” farmers from Calexico, cultivated on several thousand acres of cotton fields—well-nigh 70 percent of such land in the border area under the control of the Colorado River Land Company (formerly California-Mexico Land and Cattle Company).⁴⁴⁾ These developments swelled the demand for Japanese labor on the Mexican side, which provided a background for

⁴¹⁾ Ota Mishima, *Destino México*, 107. The Mexicali and Tijuana data provided for the period of 1924 to 1931 account for as high as 73.3 percent and 79.5 percent of the total Japanese entries via the two Mexican border checking points between 1890 and 1949.

⁴²⁾ Kuga Narumi to Tanaka Giichi, “Bokkoku Shucchōkata Risei no ken,” May 21, 1927, in Honshō narabi Zaigai Kōkan’in Shucchō Kankei Zakken: Zaibei kakkan (M.2.2.0.1-3-2), Diplomatic Records Office, Tokyo.

⁴³⁾ “Japanese Activities in Southern California,” no date, 1-2, in box 226, Security Classified Administrative Correspondence, 1942-1946, Office of Naval Intelligence, (RG38), National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD; Gaimushō Tsūshōkyoku, “Bokkoku ‘Ensenada’ Hōmen ni okeru Honpōjin no Hatten Jōkyō,” 19-26; Nichiboku Kyōkai, *Nichiboku Kōryūshi*, 428-437.

⁴⁴⁾ Fukuoka, “Shimo Karifornia Hantō Nanboku Ryōshū Jijō Shisatsu Hōkokusho,” September 1926, 127, in Honpō Imin Kankei Zakken: Bokkoku no bu, v. 2; Japanese Consulate of Los Angeles, “Rafu Jijō” (November 1925), 40-41, Diplomatic Records Office, Tokyo; and Nichiboku Kyōkai, *Nichiboku Kōryūshi*, 440. On the prominence of Chinese cotton growers before the early 1920s, see Hu-DeHart, “The Chinese of Baja California Norte, 1910-1934,” 11-12.

⁴⁵⁾ Ota Mishima, *Destino México*, 111.

the notable growth of Japanese emigration figures from less than 100 to over 300 per year during the latter half of the 1920s. (See Table 1.) Mexican statistics of the 1924–1931 period correspondingly reveal that a total of 221 Japanese immigrants chose to settle down in Mexicali, while additional 102 and 190 declared Tijuana and Ensenada the new places of domicile, respectively.⁴⁶⁾ Even though the United States did not physically absorb these newcomers from Japan or elsewhere, the immigrant workers still belonged to the ethnic economy and social world connected to Japanese America of Southern California.

Thus, because many Issei saw the two California as a continuous frontier, white American racism only gave a catalyst to the emergence of “satellite settlements” in the northern Baja peninsula, which subsequently became woven into the Southern California Japanese community. Although it is important to recognize that dissimilarities in legal systems and race relations between Mexico and the United States made certain qualitative differences in the lives of Japanese residents there, their transborder community emerged and remained integral, because Baja California offered what Southern California lacked, and vice versa. Whereas the dearth of institutionalized racism in Mexico accounted for a favorable environment that allowed of transplanted Issei farming and uninterrupted labor migration for the benefit of Southern California Japanese, the presence of a larger consumer market and ethnic capital base in Los Angeles encouraged socioeconomic developments in the satellite settlements south of the border. And as Issei expansionists of the 1890s, Hasegawa Shin’ichirō of the 1910s, and Fujioka Shirō of the 1920s had all discussed in a similar expansionist terms, many ordinary immigrants considered border crossing to be a necessary step toward “erecting a second homeland” in the U.S.-Mexican frontier.

While Issei frontier expansionism, their entrepreneurial racial ideology, and interlocked ethnic economies formed pillars of the transborder Japanese community, the ordering of Issei settlement boundaries by the Japanese government provided another context, in which the immigrant populations of Baja California and Southern California became further integrated in terms of their community consciousness, regional identity, and political practice. In the Issei eyes, an ethnic community was organized geographically by the lines of demarcation drawn by the local Japanese association, which worked as an administrative hand of the Japanese consulate. Under the Gentlemen’s Agreement, the Japanese government assumed the responsibility to prevent laborers from leaving for the United States, while still letting family members of bona fide U.S. Issei residents travel across the Pacific with valid passports. To ensure and enforce this critical legal distinction, Tokyo required the Japanese consuls to issue an official proof of American residency to each Issei, whose family member would apply for a passport with that document in Japan. The diplomats, however, were too understaffed to verify the status and personal information of every single U.S. resident. In 1908, as a solution, the San Francisco consul devised a new system by which to delegate the administrative function of certificate issuance to the local Japanese associations (Nihonjinkai), from which Issei

⁴⁶⁾ Ichioka, *The Issei*, 159–162.

residents in their jurisdictions could request necessary papers rather than from the consulate office.⁴⁶⁾ As every immigrant had to theoretically register at the nearest Japanese association to use its service under this system, his/her perception of community membership came to revolve around the formal jurisdiction of a given Japanese association, which might not correspond to an American municipality.

In Southern California, the regional boundary of the ethnic community was firmly set after the establishment of the Japanese Consulate of Los Angeles in 1916, which oversaw the affairs of the Japanese in Baja California as well, due to their physical distance from the Embassy in Mexico City. Just as in the case of its counterparts in San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle, the Los Angeles consulate steered local Issei elite into setting up the regional Japanese association headquarters as the umbrella organization for all local affiliates in Southern California, as well as those in Mexicali (1917), Tijuana (1922), and Ensenada (1926).⁴⁷⁾ Therefore, by virtue of coming under the control of the Los Angeles consulate, the Japanese residents of Baja California came to comprise of the Issei political network centered on the Central Japanese Association of Southern California in Little Tokyo. Later, the Japanese Foreign Ministry placed one diplomat each in Tijuana and Mexicali, but they played an unusually eclectic role, which symbolized a borderland nature of the Japanese in the region. When they dealt with legal and political matters relating to Mexico, the officials reported to the new consulate office in Mazatlan, Sinaloa; yet, the general welfare of Japanese residents and their economic affairs in the Mexican bordertowns continued to fall into the concerns of the Los Angeles consulate, with which the officials continued to be affiliated.⁴⁸⁾

Aside from formal political ties, Southern California relief efforts for Mexicali residents in the early 1930s exemplify how the Japanese of the borderland had nurtured a sense of comradeship on grounds of racial bonds beyond state boundaries. During the Great Depression, a drastic plunge in cotton price sent Japanese growers of Mexicali into heavy debts, and the situation worsened to the extent that many families were hard up even for daily meal during the spring of 1932. The Japanese Association of Mexicali formed an emergency relief committee, but no bank agreed to lend money due to decimal market conditions. While a Japanese official was compelled to hand out \$1,000 to distressed cotton growers from his own pocket, the Central Japanese Association of Southern California came forward to take primary responsibility to safeguard the interests and welfare of its “Mexicali brethren”—a show of empathy and community spirit it customarily exhibited when members of its own were in

⁴⁷⁾ Gaimushō, “Nihonjinkai narabi Hōjin Jitsugyō Dantai Chōsa,” (1939), Diplomatic Records Office, Tokyo. When the local association secretary in Mexicali was murdered in 1926, the Central Japanese Association swiftly dispatched its representatives for family support and investigation. See Fujioka Shirō, ed., *Beikoku Chūō Nihonjinkaishi* (Los Angeles: Beikoku Chūō Nihonjinkai, 1940), 172–173, 191.

⁴⁸⁾ See Shidehara to Satō, “Zai-'Chiwana' Shucchōin no Jimu Toriatsukaikata tō ni kansuru ken,” June 11, 1931, in Honpōjin Imin Kankei Zakken: Bokkoku no bu, vol. 3.

⁴⁹⁾ Fujioka ed., *Beikoku Chūō Nihonjinkaishi*, 237, 244–245.

⁵⁰⁾ *Rafu Shimpō*, May 5, 1932.

trouble.⁴⁹⁾ Wasting no time, local Issei residents launched a grassroots relief campaign with the backing of the vernacular press. According to a *Rafu Shimpō* report, an anonymous person promptly made an offer of \$1,000 to the Japanese Association of Los Angeles, which also received smaller but sincere donations from many ordinary residents.⁵⁰⁾ Within one month, the Los Angeles association alone collected more than \$2,000, to which other local affiliates and individuals added more, including \$220 from Long Beach residents and \$150 from Imperial Valley leader Kawakita Yasaburō.⁵¹⁾ This expression of community bonds prolonged a life of the satellite ethnic settlement in Mexicali until the expropriation in 1938 of foreign-controlled farms by Mexican *agrarista* activists.⁵²⁾

Based on such emotional ties and a sense of communal kinship, it was not then surprising that the two Californias also constituted a single sociocultural sphere for the area Japanese before the Pacific War. Religiously, the Japanese of the northern Baja peninsula were inseparable from Japanese American institutions and practices. For example, the Japanese Independent Christian Church of Calexico had many members from Mexicali worshipping shoulder to shoulder every Sunday, and for those without border crossing passes, the Issei minister regularly visited the Mexican town to hold special service.⁵³⁾ The El Centro Buddhist Church, too, “served ... at times as far as Mexico,” conducting funeral and other religious rites for Japanese residents there.⁵⁴⁾ Oftentimes, borderland Nisei youths—both American-born and Mexican-born—played baseball and other sports, while attending same Japanese-language schools and Sunday schools. In addition to the constant mingling of residents across the border, there emerged a common regionalized space of public discourse and popular culture within the transborder community. Major vernacular newspapers of Los Angeles, like the *Rafu Shimpō*, the *Rafu Nichibei*, and the *Kashū Mainichi*, had significant pools of subscribers south of the border. Alongside various regional columns in these papers was the “Lower California” (Tei-Kashū) section, where correspondents in Mexicali, Ensenada, and/or Tijuana periodically

⁴⁹⁾ Zaibei Nihonjinkai, *Zaibei Nihonjinshi*, 854, 892–893; and Fukushima Shigekichi, “Ochi Nōen Kōsaku Seiseki Hōkoku no ken,” May 6, 1933, in Honpōjin Imin Kankei Zakken: Bokkoku no bu, vol. 3.

⁵⁰⁾ On the *agrarista* movement in Baja California during the decade, see Nichiboku Kyōkai, *Nichiboku Kōryūshi*, 443–444.

⁵¹⁾ See “Teikoku Heigen Dokuritsu Kyōkai, Calexico Gakuen Kiroku,” 1930–1939, 1940–1941, in Kay Kokubun Collection, Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles.

⁵²⁾ Buddhist Churches of America, *Buddhist Churches of America, Volume 1: 75 Year History, 1899–1974* (Chicago: Nobart, 1974), 298; and Terakawa Hōkō, *Hokubei Kaikyō Enkakushi* (San Francisco: Hongwanji Hokubei Kaikyō Honbu, 1936), 318.

⁵³⁾ Prewar Japanese directories, which the *Rafu Shimpō* and the *Kashū Mainichi* published periodically during the 1930s, reveal the Issei’s perceived linkages between Baja California and Southern California. The directories of Japanese residents and businesses in Mexicali, Tijuana, and Ensenada were usually placed right after the Imperial Valley section and/or the San Diego section, whereas lists of other Mexican towns and cities were either not included at all or categorized into an appended “overseas” section. See, for example, *Rafu Shimpōsha, Rafu Nenkan: The Year Book and Directory, 1937–1938* (Los Angeles: Rafu Shimpōsha, 1937); and *Kashū Mainichi Shimbunsha, Kamai Nenkan: The Year Book and Directory, 1939–1940* (Los Angeles: Kashū Mainichi Shimbunsha, 1940).

sent in reports of local news and interests.⁵⁵⁾ The Los Angeles Japanese newspapers also carried many advertisements from Mexican Issei merchants, who operated bars, cabarets, casinos, pool halls, and other service-oriented establishments in the bordertowns. Since the Prohibition, these stores had attracted Southern California Japanese, who sought alcohols and female companionship without fear of prosecution. Dominating the ethnic entertainment industry, legitimate or otherwise, the Tokyo Club of Los Angeles periodically sponsored plays and recitals with professional entertainers from Japan, held *sumō* tournaments, and showed imported Japanese films at its movie theater in El Centro.⁵⁶⁾ Through these outlets and venues, the borderland Japanese enjoyed a loosely-unified ethnic culture, until the border became literally insurmountable in December 1941.

The Pacific War put an end to the transnational practices of Japanese along the U.S.-Mexican border. Because the political dimension of Issei ties between the two Californias rested largely on Japan's intervention, the war propelled the governments of the United States and Mexico to exercise their state power to the fullest, purging from the transborder ethnic community the existing structures and ties of Japanese origin—real or perceived. On the American side, the Japanese associations were dismantled overnight, and Japanese border crossing prohibited completely. Meanwhile, even before the U.S. Army removed the Japanese population from its California, the Mexican government forced all Japanese residents in Baja California to move to Mexico City and Guadalajara.⁵⁷⁾ On both sides, their Japanese heritage was projected as an antithesis of Americanness and Mexicanness, ushering in officially-imposed and self-induced Americanization and Mexicanization among the respective Nikkei populations. When the Japanese communities were restored in the two Californias after the war, most residents had already become ethnic Americans and ethnic Mexicans in consciousness, who were so nationalized that they hardly could or wanted to remember their prewar ties, common racial visions, or shared histories. Thus, in 1990, Japanese Mexican historians explain:

The U.S.-Japan war was a period of great sufferings for all Japanese on the American

⁵⁶⁾ Nichiboku Kyōkai, *Nichiboku Kōryūshi*, 425–426, 472–477. See also advertisements in Rafu Shimpōsha, *Nambu Kashū Gaikan: Japanese Guide to Southern California* (Los Angeles: Rafu Shimpōsha, 1926). One of them (p. 101), for example, is the Palais-Royal Bar and Cabaret in Tijuana, which asks readers to “stop by at Tijuana, an entertainment capital at the border, when you visit San Diego, because this only Japanese-owned dancehall can offer a variety of entertainments.” This establishment was actually a brothel located in the red-light district. In Mexicali, the Tokyo Club was said to have smuggled Japanese women for prostitution with the support of some local Japanese association leaders. The association secretary, who opposed this practice in cooperation with the Japanese consul in Los Angeles, was allegedly murdered by Tokyo Club members in 1926.

⁵⁷⁾ Jesus K. Akachi, et al., “Japanese Méxican Historical Overview,” in Kikumura-Yano, ed., *Encyclopedia of Japanese Descendants in the Americas*, 213–214. Brian Hayashi discusses how forced Japanese removal in the U.S. Pacific Coast was intertwined with the mass relocation from the Baja peninsula. See Brian Masaru Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 82–83.

⁵⁸⁾ Nichiboku Kyōkai, *Nichiboku Kōryūshi*, 629.

continents, but viewed from a different perspective, it had a “contrary [positive] effect”; the war compelled the people to cast away their *dekasegi* [sojourner] mentality and awakened them to a true settler ideal, that is, the need to sink their roots in Mexico as Japanese Mexicans. Similar transformations were manifest among Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians [in their respective countries], ... as well as those in South America.⁵⁸⁾

What most symbolically elucidates the domestication of popular consciousness and memory is the omission of transborder Issei experience in postwar Nikkei historical narratives and historiographies. In prewar Japanese America, a committee of Issei writers and community leaders compiled a 1,300-page masterpiece called *Zaibei Nihonjinshi* in 1940. This official community history contains sections on “Lower California” settlements, like Mexicali and Tijuana, as a part and parcel of a “History of Japanese in the United States.”⁵⁹⁾ On the contrary, published in 1960 and 1961, the postwar renditions of comprehensive Japanese “American” history, though drawing extensively on the 1940 master narrative, have virtually no reference to the Mexican connections.⁶⁰⁾ Likewise, as noted, postwar English-language histories—both popular and academic—have offered no place for Japanese residents of Baja California. Available Spanish-language studies of Japanese in Mexico take a nation-centered approach as well, treating their history as a story of a domestic ethnic group in that Latin American country.⁶¹⁾

Since the 1980s, Nikkei in the Americas have rebuilt international linkage and resumed mutual intercourse, but generally without acknowledging prior examples of such relationships. When Nisei leaders and immigrant elders from various nations in the Western Hemisphere gathered at the newly-organized Pan-American Nikkei Association (PANA) convention in 1981, they met as the national Other—albeit of common racial ancestry—swapping stories of their *separate and distinctive* experiences as if they encounter for the first time in history.⁶²⁾ Whereas prewar Issei tended to valorize the ties of the “expansive” blood over national political differences in a conterminous frontier, most postwar Nikkei, including the first generation, take for granted the precedence of their national belonging and identities over racial commonalities. In one sense, it reflects a desirable change, because the tradition of racialist expansionism

⁵⁹⁾ Zaibei Nihonjinkai, *Zaibei Nihonjinshi*, 896–898. On the production process of this official community history, see Azuma, “Interstitial Lives,” 210–211, 470.

⁶⁰⁾ See Nanka Nikkeijin Shōgyō Kaigisho, ed., *Minami Kashū Nihonjin Nanajūnenshi* (Los Angeles: Nanka Nikkeijin Shōgyō Kaigisho, 1960); and Katō Shin'ichi, ed., *Beikoku Nikkeijin Hyakunenshi* (Los Angeles: Shin Nichibei Shimbunsha, 1961).

⁶¹⁾ See Ota Mishima, *Destino México*, 55–121; and María Elena Ota Mishima, *Siete migraciones japonesas en México: 1890–1978* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1982). According to Jesus K. Akachi, et al., “Annotated Bibliography of Japanese Mexicans,” in *Encyclopedia of Japanese Descendants in the Americas*, ed. Kikumura-Yano, 224, Ota Mishima’s works tend to focus on the demography of Japanese in Mexico.

⁶²⁾ Nichiboku Kyōkai, *Nichiboku Kōryūshi*, 694–700.

appears to have lost its grip on the postwar Nikkei. In another sense, however, the change also represents disregard for the complexities of Nikkei interactions and entanglements that unfolded in a transborder context during the prewar years. Despite the PANA and similar developments, the legacy of wartime nationalization still divides the Nikkei, obfuscating a transnational dimension of their pasts, including the instance of Japanese community formation that overarched the two Californias before 1941.



Map 1. Southern California and northern Baja peninsula