



# Songs My Mother Taught Me: Stories, Plays, and Memoir

*Wakako Yamauchi*

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*Songs My Mother Taught Me* is the first collection of literature by this mature and accomplished writer. In her eloquent prose, Yamauchi, a Nisei (second-generation Japanese American) illuminates the neglected social and emotional history of two generations of Japanese in the United States, recalling the harsh lives of rural immigrants, tenant farmers, and itinerant laborers. Informed by her own family history, her stories and plays recreate the wartime relocation of Japanese Americans and their postwar return to urban centers. She captures their ambivalent longings for the prewar family and culture of Japan. She also writes more recently of very young Mexican immigrants hired in as cheap labor in southern California who view a middle-aged Japanese woman as "the American", and ask her for advice. The irony is almost too daunting for her to bear, as she thinks about the past.

Without bitterness, and often with quiet humor, Yamauchi's human-sized dramas open into larger social histories and the great narrative myths of culture. Like Toshio Mori and Hisaye Yamamoto, Yamauchi is a pioneer of Asian-American literature.



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