Any discussion of “Asian American literature” must address the inadequacy of the term to describe the array of writings that spring from a multiplicity of cultures and experiences. Ultimately, the ... More
Mainstream American taste for Asian American literature turned sour when Younghill Kang’s second novel, East Goes West (1937), looked critically at European American society from an educated Korean American immigrant’s point of view. Decades later, however, the work was considered an early Asian American classic. World War II and the 1950’s. Japan’s attack on the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor on Usually, Asian American literature has been assessed by reviewers and critics from the single perspective of race. In other words, the literature is read as centered on the identity position of Americans of Asian descent and within the context of Asian American immigration histories and legislative struggles against unjust policies and racial violence. The truth is that different immigration histories of national-origin communities give rise to writings reflective of cross-generational concerns and styles. Personally, I think Asian American literature is defined as anything written by APIA writers. I know there are those who say that the subject matter must also be APIA-centric. But then how do you characterize Chang-rae Lee, who wrote A Gesture Life and Native Speaker alongside Aloft? I mean, Aloft has one Asian American character, but the book isn’t about APIA life. Karissa Chen: This is a question I agonized over a lot.