

BITTERSWEET MEMORIES:

Narratives of Japanese Canadian Children's Experiences before the Second World War and the Politics of Redress

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INTRODUCTION

THE YEAR 1977 MARKED a turning point in the collective history of Japanese Canadians. Through a number of festivals, exhibits, and various other projects, they celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first Japanese in Canada. This was the occasion to reflect on the hardships that they had endured and to try to piece together the communities that the forced exodus of the Second World War had seemingly broken forever. But as committees throughout the nation made plans for the events in the years prior to the Centennial, a number of activists emerged from their ranks and spearheaded a distinct project: to have the federal government apologize for its wartime wrongdoings and provide some form of reparations. This resulted in a series of concerted efforts to produce a Japanese Canadian narrative – that is, a narrative in which Japanese Canadians were not bodies to be relocated but victims of systematic, racially motivated discrimination – upon which these activists could draw to justify their demands.¹

The crafting of this politically charged narrative entailed, of course, the careful selection of those elements that would most effectively carry its authors' point across – something that anyone who has ever dabbled in politics will understand. This narrative distillate has left us, however,

* Japanese names follow the usual Japanese custom (family name first, given name after), unless the individual usually wrote his or her name differently. All translations are mine.

¹ I do not ignore the fact that the Japanese Canadian community was far from united with regard to the issue of redress as some people within this community objected to the very idea of demanding individual monetary compensation on the grounds that this would be tantamount to opening a Pandora's box; they feared a backlash that would further undermine the Japanese Canadians' place within society. See Roy Miki, *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2004), 174-75. Since the overall outcome has shown that these fears were mostly misplaced, and with space concerns in mind, I choose to focus on the perspective of the campaign's supporters only.

with a somewhat distorted view of the early history of the Japanese Canadian presence in pre-Second World War Canada. This article begins by examining how, in a bid to present the issue of redress as a civil rights problem, Japanese Canadian activists and sympathizers framed their political discourse in a way that downplayed the “Japanese factor” in the education of second-generation children. This includes touching upon a number of recollections of life in British Columbia before, and during, the Second World War, and how these retellings – most of them committed to paper decades after the events they depict – have found resonance in the collective memories of discrimination and victimhood that have come to define many Japanese Canadians’ sense of identity.

This is followed by an analysis of archival documents that reveals many more facets of the lives of *nikkei* (literally, “of Japanese descent”) children, mostly second generation, than previously encountered in the literature, including their activities at school and at home, and their reflections on contemporary events and on their place within Canadian society, including during times of armed conflict in Asia. These testimonies, taken out of the context of the redress campaign, thus give us a glimpse of the Japanese Canadian community prior to its dismantlement, at a time when *nikkei* children could live lives not completely unlike those of non-Japanese children in Canada. Deconstructing the discourses that redress activists and supporters crafted in the years preceding the successful conclusion of the campaign, it becomes evident how the politics of redress obfuscated important aspects of the experiences of Japanese Canadian children living in British Columbia in the first half of the twentieth century.

(RE)COLLECTING MEMORIES

The Centennial celebrations were an occasion for Japanese Canadians to remember their roots and their cultural specificity. Art exhibits, publications, and meetings served as forums in which the idea of a Japanese Canadian identity was discussed, shared, and experienced.² As local *nikkei* associations facilitated these exchanges between their members, an organization called the Japanese Canadian Centennial Project (JCCP) channelled all of these energies into a photo-history exhibit entitled

² Indeed, what it meant to be Japanese Canadian varied notably across generational lines, but it also depended on whether individuals had immigrated to Canada before, or after, the Second World War. See Yuko Shibata, “Cultural Sharing: A Perspective of a Shin-Issei,” in *Re-Shaping Memory, Owning History: Through the Lens of Japanese Canadian Redress*, ed. Grace Eiko Thomson (Burnaby, BC: Japanese Canadian National Museum, 2002), 38–42.

A Dream of Riches: Japanese Canadians, 1877-1977. While there had been a number of occasions for individuals to share their memories in a public setting – for example, the Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association of Toronto held a history contest in 1958 – the Vancouver-based JCCP became both (1) a space to share memories and stories about the *nikkei* experience and (2) a meeting place that brought together the more politicized Japanese Canadians.³

In his account of the events that led to the redress settlement, Roy Miki describes how the activists who would eventually lead the campaign emerged from the JCCP and formed a redress committee in the early 1980s. Very early on, activists realized that the history of the internment needed “to be told through the eyes of those directly affected.” The activists hoped that, as Japanese Canadians reclaimed their history and finally began to heal the wounds caused by the traumatic wartime events, they could make the federal government acknowledge the injustice and provide some form of compensation.⁴ But it rapidly became clear that any large-scale movement centred upon the idea of redress would have to be preceded by comprehensive efforts to bring the general *nikkei* population up to speed on the major issues. Indeed, many people completely rejected the idea of redress because they feared that, among other things, the government would retaliate by cutting access to old-age security benefits; activists thus had to start by explaining the issue of redress to the members of the community and to convince them of its legitimacy.⁵ These efforts first took the form of pamphlets, newsletters, and other publications, but they eventually included “house meetings,” small-scale, semi-private events during which attendees were encouraged to discuss the issue and to bring more Japanese Canadians into the conversation.⁶ Miki argues that the language of redress, once disseminated, led to the creation of a new collective identity, a “redress identity,” that liberated Japanese Canadians from a traumatic, irresolute past and allowed them to reinscribe themselves within the nation on their own terms – not as an oppressed racial minority but, rather, as Canadian citizens whose civil liberties had been wrongfully taken away.⁷ This redress identity gave them access to a narrative that appealed to a larger proportion of

³ A conference entitled “Back to the Future,” held in May 1987, is another event organized by the National Association of Japanese Canadians at which the issues of identity and redress were discussed in a politicized setting. See Cassandra Kobayashi and Roy Miki, *Spirit of Redress: Japanese Canadians in Conference* (Vancouver: JC Publications, 1989).

⁴ Kobayashi and Miki, *Spirit of Redress*, 146.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 146–47.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 252–53.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 260–64.

the Canadian public who would see redress as “a Canadian issue,” as a legitimate quest for justice rather than as a simple claim motivated by greed.⁸ In order to do this, however, the *nikkeijin* had to demonstrate how they had always been upstanding, loyal Canadian citizens and, consequently, why the federal government had no choice other than to acknowledge the injustice of its wartime actions.

In the wake of the Centennial celebrations, a number of publications by *nikkei* authors gave shape to the tragic history of the Japanese immigrants and their children in Canada. Published before the redress agreement was finalized and characterized by feelings of injustice, melancholy, and the memory of innocence lost forever, most of these books and pamphlets read as tales of hardship and betrayed hopes that were doomed from the start. The most influential is arguably *The Enemy That Never Was* (1976) by Ken Adachi, a book that almost single-handedly defined the historical narrative of the Japanese Canadian history for two decades after its publication. That Adachi’s work was explicitly meant to become a major instrument in the Japanese Canadians’ redress campaign is, of course, a major reason for its political stance and lasting influence.⁹ But, at a time when very few official documents regarding the internment were available, and with Ottawa’s reluctance to meddle with the country’s ethnic balance (among other factors, memories of the October Crisis were still fresh),¹⁰ this work’s undeniable importance stems from the fact that it was the first English-language book to offer a Japanese Canadian perspective on the development of a *nikkei* presence in Canada. Throughout the book, Adachi shows how the odds were stacked against the Japanese immigrants and their children, as racist attitudes compounded by the language barrier worked to prevent their access to good jobs, advanced education, and political representation. This certainly wasn’t a situation unique to Japanese immigrants, as, throughout history, numerous ethnic groups have found themselves excluded from mainstream Canadian society at one point or another. In the second half of the nineteenth century, for example, Chinese immigrants had to contend with poor access to the education system and lack of political clout; their responses to these challenges are the subject of a number of

⁸ Maryka Omatsu, *Bittersweet Passage: Redress and the Japanese Canadian Experience* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1992), 106-8.

⁹ For a full discussion of the formation of a Japanese Canadian historical narrative that revolved around the representation of Japanese Canadians as victimized citizens loyal to Canada, see Daniel Lachapelle Lemire, “Historiography of the Japanese Canadians in the Context of the Japanese Diaspora” (MA thesis, McGill University, 2010).

¹⁰ Kobayashi and Miki, *Spirit of Redress*, 306.

studies.¹¹ Within the narrative of the redress movement, however, these restrictions are represented as the first salvos of the institutionalized assault that would ultimately lead to the uprooting and the shattering of the *nikkei* community.

A few years later, Ann Gomer Sunahara published another important book, *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War* (1981), that would go on to have a significant impact on the redress movement. Indeed, she was the first author to make full use of documents recently declassified by the federal government, and, as such, the book provided activists with easily accessible facts with which to build their case against Ottawa. In her introduction, Sunahara uses powerful imagery and expressions to describe the Japanese Canadian experience during the war. Most notably, she compares the trauma of the Japanese Canadians to that of a rape victim. “Like rape victims, [the Japanese Canadians] responded with silence, with an aversion to discussing their experiences.”¹² Portraying the Japanese Canadians as victims, and showing how the government was directly responsible, Sunahara undoubtedly helped the political process gain traction. But while the parallel between the *nikkeijin* and rape victims is striking, it could be argued that the line that follows (“Fortunately, time heals most wounds”) does a disservice to the immense labour of psychological rehabilitation that was undertaken in the 1980s.

Indeed, the house meetings that many Japanese Canadians attended on the road to redress were the perfect venue for healing: they allowed participants to exchange memories and to rebuild themselves around commonly shared recollections. As numerous trauma specialists will attest, one of the most effective cures for trauma isn’t the “excision” but, rather, the “recollection and narration of the traumatic memory.”¹³ Since shell-shocked individuals cannot process the traumatic event without damaging themselves – they literally cannot go beyond it and keep reliving it constantly – discussing memories and seeing how one’s sense of self can be made to “fit” around them allows victims to bypass

¹¹ See, for example, Timothy J. Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy: School Segregation, Anti-Racism, and the Making of Chinese Canadians* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011); and Lisa Rose Mar, *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada’s Exclusion Era, 1885–1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

¹² Ann Gomer Sunahara, “Introduction,” in *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War* (Ottawa: self-published, 2000), <http://www.japanese-canadianhistory.ca>.

¹³ Ruth Leys, “Traumatic Cures: Shell Shock, Janet, and the Question of Memory,” in *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (New York: Routledge, 1996), 126.

the event, effectively finding a way to live beyond the trauma, which becomes a thing of the past.¹⁴ This entails, however, the construction of a “new” past, one that doesn’t make much sense to those who haven’t participated in the exercise. (Ironically, this is why, according to some Japanese American and Japanese Canadian leaders, the internment experience isn’t a central part of the collective identity of third or later generations: the trauma has effectively been bypassed.)¹⁵

In addition to their purely therapeutic effect, the house meetings played a fundamental role in the shaping of a redress identity – more so since a large proportion of individuals who had experienced the wartime internment and subsequent exile from the west coast had never really discussed these events before and, thus, lacked the proper vocabulary to reinscribe themselves within the community. Many found these memories of loss and trauma too uncomfortable to share even with their children, who were left with huge gaps in their family history.¹⁶ And since very few people committed to paper their memories of life in British Columbia before or during the Second World War in the years prior to the redress settlement, first-hand accounts are few and far between. Among them, Takeo Ujo Nakano’s *Within the Barbed Wire Fence* (1980) is a retelling of the time he spent in the prison camp at Angler, Ontario. In his memoir, Nakano describes how, having lost most if not all sense of his own agency, he was taken from his family and sent to the prison camp as soon as the bombs fell on Pearl Harbor. He writes:

In retrospect, I am somewhat thankful for my experience of jail. There I was able to make contact with something previously unknown to me – the human being stripped of all that determines his positive self-image. I myself had a taste of the lowest point of human existence, the powerlessness and the shame. For a man to experience this is not an easy thing. But the lesson is an important one. I was able, for the first time, to empathize with people who live life at the rock bottom.¹⁷

As Nakano was an educated man from a relatively well-off family, the fact that he could lose so much through no real fault of his own illustrates the unfair predicament of the Japanese Canadians: no measure of economic or

¹⁴ Ibid., 116–18.

¹⁵ John Torpey, *Making Whole What Has Been Smashed: On Reparations Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 95.

¹⁶ Tomoko Makabe, *The Canadian Sansei* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 77–78.

¹⁷ Takeo Ujo Nakano, *Within the Barbed Wire Fence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 48.

social success could shield them from the “white” exclusionists’ attacks.¹⁸ This is undoubtedly the kind of book Keibo Oiwa had in mind when he described Japanese Canadian history as “a history in passive voice,” where people are “the objects of other people’s action and thought.”¹⁹

In the realm of fiction, Joy Kogawa’s masterpiece *Obasan* brings another perspective to the victimization of the *nikkeijin*, with an emphasis on the way families were torn apart by shame, survivor’s guilt, and silence.²⁰ Of course, the characters and situations represented in the novel are not real, as such, but there is no question that many Japanese Canadian individuals must have gone through ordeals similar to those faced by the book’s heroine. The silences that pervade the story surely resonate with the children of Japanese Canadians who had experienced the internment but who had never shared with them their memories of those experiences. In this way, *Obasan* is an allegory for the whole *nikkei* community’s traumatic journey, a series of events that left profound scars that have not yet healed. Meanwhile, the book’s powerful depictions of the heroine’s deep anger, suffering, and loneliness are meant to draw the reader’s sympathy and, perhaps, outrage – reactions that could only help to raise awareness of and support for the redress movement.²¹ Another book worthy of mention is Shizuye Takashima’s *A Child in Prison Camp*, first published in 1971.²² It tells a decidedly more optimistic story than does *Obasan* – which is fitting since the perspective is a child’s. Interestingly, the titular child (Shichan Takashima) is portrayed attending school in an internment camp, playing outside, and so on, in direct contrast to the adults, who are portrayed expressing indecision, anxiety, anger, and a general sense of helplessness.

¹⁸ While “race” has been increasingly invalidated as a category in academia, this article uses – cautiously – the concept as it was understood by contemporary actors during the time period under study. Lack of space precludes a full exposition of the many reasons behind this decision, but a major one is the fact that this is an analysis of the discourses that were in play at the language schools. This approach is similar to Timothy J. Stanley’s in his recent study of the Chinese Canadians. See Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy*, 16–17. Besides, it should also be noted that, no matter how scholars attempted to definitively terminate race as a category, this concept was (and, in many ways, still is) powerfully, undeniably meaningful to a large segment of the population.

¹⁹ Keibo Oiwa, ed., *Stone Voices: Wartime Writings of Japanese Canadian Issei* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1991), 15.

²⁰ Joy Kogawa, *Obasan* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1981). This work has been the subject of multiple studies, many of which treat “silence” as a central element of the story.

²¹ In the words of A. Lynne Magnusson, “Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* has rightly been celebrated for its power as a political speech act, as a strong protest against the treatment of Japanese Canadians in the years of and following the Second World War.” See A. Lynne Magnusson, “Language and Longing in Joy Kogawa’s ‘Obasan,’” *Canadian Literature* 116 (Spring 1988): 58.

²² Shizuye Takashima, *A Child in Prison Camp* (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1971).

All of these books are significant because of their contribution to the formation of a collective “redress identity.” Through their themes and tones, these stories epitomize the hardships that had befallen the community. The narrative that they support easily lends itself to the characterization of Japanese Canadians as victims deprived of agency, individuals whose fate was ultimately determined by agents motivated by fear and racial prejudice and whose rights were unilaterally taken away. Reading these books, one would be hard pressed to imagine the years before and during the Second World War as anything other than a long period of persecution and suffering, as though Japanese Canadians had come to be defined exclusively by their internment and the exile that followed. Records suggest, however, that Japanese immigrants and their children living in British Columbia before the Second World War actually led far richer lives than the pre-redress narrative would have us believe. This is not to say that racially motivated discrimination was not an issue – of that there is no doubt – but we need to be willing to complicate the narrative if we are to develop a more complete picture of the history of Japanese immigration to Canada.

COMPLICATING HISTORY: THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE SCHOOLS

The standard narrative of emigration from Japan to Canada is a relatively simple one. It describes emigration as an increasingly popular choice for alleviating the difficulties of life in a rapidly modernizing Japan and attempting to take advantage of the well-publicized economic opportunities in North America.²³ Initially, the Japanese were accepted by the white majority of British Columbia as a better alternative to Chinese immigrants, whom they contemptuously dismissed as “coolies” or “Chinamen” and whom they prevented from engaging in the creation of a viable community. Nevertheless, the Japanese were eventually targeted for exclusion on the dubious grounds of their so-called inability to assimilate and a perceived unfair economic advantage. Still, because of their resilience, and because they were partially shielded from the worst exclusionary measures by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902,

²³ In the English-language literature, it can be argued that no single work has had the same degree of influence in the shaping of the Japanese Canadians’ history as Ken Adachi’s *The Enemy That Never Was*. Other works of note are Patricia Roy, *A White Man’s Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989); and William Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978).

Japanese immigrants, mostly men, did manage to lay the foundations of more or less stable social institutions.²⁴ However, it is not until the 1908 Gentlemen's Agreement, which severely limited the entry of new immigrants but provided for family reunification, that women started to immigrate in large numbers, thus enabling the creation of a sustainable, self-replicating community.²⁵

Of course, with the birth of many children came very specific problems, not the least being that of education. While the province's public schools were, in theory, open to *nisei* children, not many parents opted to entrust their offspring to them, at least not initially. One of the major reasons for this was that a large proportion – although by no means all – of the first Japanese immigrants did not intend to stay in Canada: their children needed to be educated in Japanese about their parents' culture and customs until the time came when they would go back to Japan.²⁶ Overseas communities were officially encouraged to follow Tokyo's educational guidelines as it was deemed crucial to “foster the characteristics as Japanese” of subjects living abroad and to “prevent their loss of spirit as Japanese citizens.”²⁷ Indeed, the power of public schools as tools of

²⁴ On the relative protection offered by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance to Japanese immigrants, see Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 71–72. See also Charles H. Young and Helen R.Y. Reid, *The Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1938), 7–11.

²⁵ On the terms of the Gentlemen's Agreement, see Masako Iino, *Nikkei Kanadajin no rekishi* [History of Canadians of Japanese origins] (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan-kai, 1997), 47. On the decline of male immigrants and the influx of female ones, see Michiko Midge Ayukawa, *Hiroshima Immigrants in Canada, 1891–1941* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 37–41.

²⁶ Indeed, the vast majority of authors simply describe Japanese immigrants as “birds of passage” eager to make a quick fortune and return home. Ken Adachi thus writes: “One of the most striking aspects of the early immigration of the Japanese, then, was that nearly all of them came to Canada with no other thought than to make enough money to return to the ancestral village.” See Adachi, *Enemy That Never Was*, 17. This stereotypical representation almost completely obfuscates the fact that many Japanese people actually meant to settle permanently abroad from the outset. In her groundbreaking book, Andrea Geiger dismantles this representation and argues that a significant proportion of Japanese immigrants established themselves abroad in order to escape systemic exclusion. See Andrea Geiger, *Subverting Exclusion: Transpacific Encounters with Race, Caste, and Borders, 1885–1928* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011). For a discussion of the Japanese immigrants' stereotypical representation as “economic refugees,” see Daniel L. Lemire, “Shattered Spaces, Re(Constructed) Identities: The Reimaginings of the Collective Identity of Japanese Immigrants to Canada, 1877–1941,” *History in the Making Review* 1, 1 (2012). <http://artsciweb.concordia.ca/ojs/index.php/hitmr/article/view/313>. Indeed, racist discourses served to portray both the Japanese and the Chinese as different from other (“white”) immigrants, and these stereotypical views still persist. However, Timothy J. Stanley reminds us that, in most significant ways, Chinese immigrants – and, one would venture to say, the Japanese as well – were very similar to immigrants from Europe and North America. See Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy*, 3–4.

²⁷ Mitsuhiro Sakaguchi, *Nihonjin Amerika Imin-sbi* [History of Japanese immigration to America] (Tokyo: Fuji Shuppan, 2001), 171.

assimilation was well known, and feared, by Japanese elites who believed that they would surely come to greatly regret it (大に反省を要すべき) if they entrusted their children to *gaijin* (i.e., “non-Japanese”), with their “different human sensibilities,” language, and customs.²⁸ Another factor was the economic conditions in which the *nikkeijin* found themselves, including the restrictions that exclusionary measures put on their career choices: since a majority of *nisei* (second-generation Japanese Canadians) would have no choice but to seek employment within the Japanese-language-speaking community, they simply had to speak Japanese or risk greatly jeopardizing their future.²⁹ Finally, many parents were worried that, if their children received an education in English only, the resulting language gap would seriously compromise their family relationships. The solution to their problem was the creation of Japanese language schools, the first of which was the *Nippon Kyōritsu Go-Gakkō* (日本共立語学校), or Japanese School of Languages. This was founded in 1906 on Alexander Street in Vancouver, where the Vancouver Japanese Language School is now located. New schools were opened almost annually after that, reaching an impressive total of fifty-one schools in the greater Vancouver and Vancouver Island area in 1941.³⁰ Initially, these schools dispensed courses that followed the regular Japanese curriculum, with the notable addition of some English courses. By the 1920s, when most immigrants began to think of Canada as their permanent home, the schools were restructured as institutions that only provided education in the Japanese language after regular public school hours.

In British Columbia, the Japanese language schools played an important role in the development of Japanese Canadian communities prior to the Second World War, especially with regard to the education of the *nisei* and the formation of their collective identity. Moreover, the schools were sites of contention between the forces of Japanese imperialist expansion, white exclusionists, and the *nisei*'s drive towards

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁹ Shinpō Mitsuru, *Nihon no imin: Nikkei Kanadajin ni mirareta haiseki to tekiō* [Japanese immigrants: Discrimination against Canadians of Japanese origin and their adaptation] (Tokyo: Hyōronsha, 1977), 102–07. While individual employers could prevent some *nisei* from obtaining certain jobs, a more fundamental barrier was the fact that some occupations were off-limits to the disenfranchised. The *nikkeijin* were denied the franchise in British Columbia in 1895 (*Statutes of British Columbia* 1895 c. 20) on racial grounds. See Elections British Columbia, *Electoral History of British Columbia, 1871–1986* (Victoria: Queen's Printer for British Columbia, 1988), 530.

³⁰ Toshiji Sasaki, *Nihonjin Kanada imin-shi* [History of Japanese immigration to Canada] (Tokyo: Fuji shuppan, 1999), 146. For his part, Sakaguchi arrives at thirty-seven schools in 1935 (according to the official figures of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs). See Sakaguchi, *Nihonjin Amerika imin-shi*, 187–96.

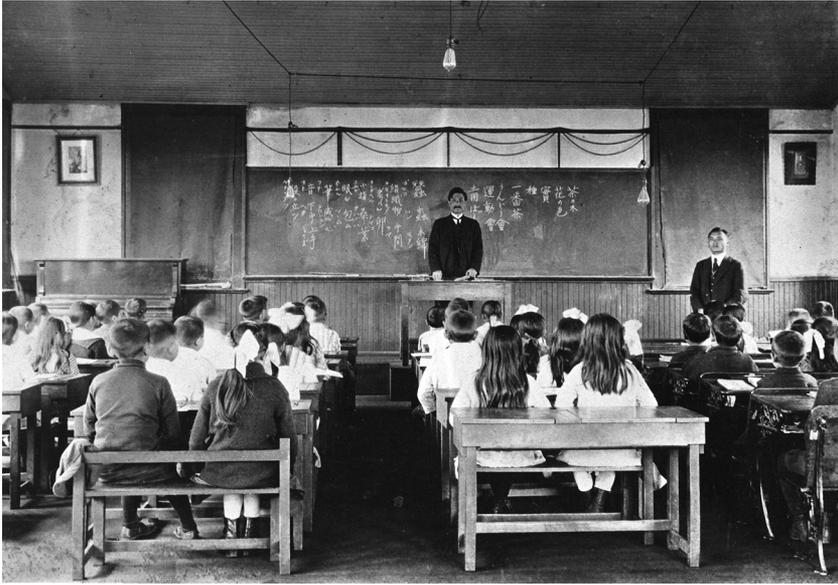


Figure 1. Classroom of the Vancouver Japanese Language School, circa 1918. Courtesy of the National Nikkei Museum (NNM. 2010.23.2.4.257).

assimilation. This is an important issue, as any references to the schools' more "harmful" or "controversial" influence (most notably, they were accused of turning their students into loyal subjects of the Japanese emperor) have been summarily dismissed until now.³¹ This is not to say, as I make clear later, that the language schools deliberately tried to raise a generation of "fifth columnists" from young, impressionable children. However, it is critical to recognize that the various discourses to which students were exposed were definitely not apolitical and that it is legitimate to raise the question of the appropriateness of the schools' curriculum. At the centre of this study are essays written by students of the Japanese School of Languages and the newsletters in which they appeared. Another element under scrutiny is the textbooks that were in use at various points by most of the schools in British Columbia: anti-Japanese exclusionists frequently decried these textbooks as instruments of dangerous propaganda – accusations that the schools were quick to dismiss.³²

³¹ Adachi, for example, flatly states that the "schools were not 'subversive,' nor were they actually nurturers of Japanese nationalism." See Adachi, *Enemy That Never Was*, 129.

³² For example, see Satō Tsutae and Satō Hanako, *Nikkei Kanadajin no nihongo kyōiku: Zoku-Kodomo to tomo ni gojūnen* [The Japanese education of the Canadians of Japanese origin: Sequel to "with the children for 50 years"] (Tokyo: Nichibō Shuppansha, 1976), 63–65.

History, however, has not been very kind to these schools. Generally speaking, they are portrayed as mostly ineffective, and their students are depicted as having failed to retain a functional knowledge of the Japanese language, choosing, instead, the path of full assimilation into Canadian society. According to Ken Adachi, the schools were “an admitted failure” not worth the considerable expense required to maintain them. Adachi does not mince words when he adds:

Most of the children took to the task of learning Japanese without enthusiasm, looked upon it as a punitive task imposed on them by their parents, and resented the restriction upon their time which otherwise could have been indulged in sports and other activities taking place after regular school hours. Only a minimal fluency in the Japanese language was achieved in any case. The majority of the Nisei, a few of whom were full graduates of the schools, seldom read Japanese literature and were unable to read even the simple prose of the vernacular press.³³

Adachi also cites the children’s lack of interest in Japanese language and history as a major reason that the schools could not be qualified as “subversive,” adding that the *nisei* preferred the stories of European explorers to the myths of Japanese gods.³⁴ Be that as it may, from these arguments it becomes clear that one of Adachi’s objectives is to firmly put to rest claims that the schools prevented the assimilation of the *nisei* and that they somehow diminished the children’s loyalty to Canada. In direct contrast to this, Japanese authors generally describe the language schools as crucial social institutions that were instrumental in the creation of a lasting community. According to historian Sasaki Toshiji, many of the most powerful members of the Japanese community, including successive consuls, religious leaders, and grassroots-level organizations, pooled their resources to build the first schools throughout the province. Foremost among the reasons for their involvement is the need to raise the next generation as Japanese (as opposed to raising them as second-

³³ Adachi, *Enemy That Never Was*, 129. Japanese language schools in the United States are also portrayed harshly in the historiography. For example, prominent historian Yuji Ichioka says that, “as a whole, Japanese-language institutes were unsuccessful in educating Nisei youngsters. They failed miserably to teach the Nisei to speak, read, and write fluent Japanese or to be well-informed of Japan and Far Eastern political affairs. In contrast, American public schools exercised a powerful and lasting influence. They so successfully socialized the Nisei to American values that the Nisei became largely acculturated to American culture and society.” See Yuji Ichioka, *Before Internment: Essays in Prewar Japanese American History*, ed. Gordon H. Chang and Eiichiro Azuma (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 45-46.

³⁴ Adachi, *Enemy That Never Was*, 130.

generation Canadian citizens) “along the principles of the empire’s national education” (帝国国民教育の主義).³⁵ Another distinct advantage of the language schools is that they offered an opportunity for all family members to live together in Canada without worrying about having to send school-age children back to Japan. Also of note is the fact that children could be entrusted to the schools while both parents were busy working long hours away from home; Japanese language schools offered various activities (such as camping, mountain climbing, sports, and games) that arguably contributed to keeping rates of delinquency and youth crime within the Japanese Canadian community at very low levels.³⁶ Unburdened by the need to take a stand on the overall merits of the Japanese language schools, I contend that describing the schools as harmless failures does not provide an accurate picture of the situation as there are clear indications not only of the students’ capacity to use Japanese in a school setting but also of their ability to articulate ideas within a variety of frameworks, including discourses promoting the Japanese empire.

Over a period of close to twenty years, the *Nippon Kyōritsu Go-Gakkō* produced some forty newsletters known as *Gakkō Katei Tsūshin* (学校家庭通信, literally “School and Home Correspondence”) that were intended for its students’ families. In the words of Principal Satō Tsutae, these newsletters were meant to “ensure the full communication and cooperation of those actors which form the students’ environment – the home, the school, and society – and to make sure that their heaven-given talents are used to the fullest.”³⁷ The newsletters were a tool for disseminating practical information regarding the school’s operations, including changes in the schedules and the staff roster, and the activities of various committees; editorial essays that discussed contemporary preoccupations, such as the escalation of hostilities between Japan and China in 1937; and essays and poems by the school’s students. Many essays are retellings of some special event or seasonal activity and are similar to what children today would write to a friend or in a diary. Others reflect the students’ attempts to understand their situation as members of an ethnic minority living in Canada and, thus, provide us with rare contemporary testimonies of *nikkei* life in pre-war British Columbia. Since the wartime internment, forced exile, and the sale of Japanese Canadian property led

³⁵ Sasaki, *Nihonjin Kanada imin-shi*, 142–45.

³⁶ Shinpo, *Nihon no imin*, 106–7.

³⁷ *Nippon Kyōritsu Go-Gakkō, Gakkō katei tsūshin* [School and home correspondence], no. 1 (December 1921), preface, MS 106, Tsutae and Hanako Sato Fonds, National Nikkei Museum (hereafter NNM).

to the loss of a great many documents, these Japanese-language essays represent an extraordinary source of information regarding *nikkei* society before the Second World War. The following analysis of these essays demonstrates to what extent the *Nippon Kyōritsu Go-Gakkō* was a site of competing cultures and ideologies.

THE JAPANESE SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES AS A SITE OF CULTURAL CONTENTION

In addition to their sheer value as records of *nisei* daily activities, one of the most interesting features of these essays is the fact that they contain depictions of children whose lives were clearly caught between two powerful cultural currents. On the one hand, many children wrote of the Japanese foods that they ate, of family members travelling to and from Japan, and of the feats of famous samurai; on the other hand, they wrote of games they played with non-*nikkei* children, of Canadian/Western holidays (e.g., many wrote of the presents that they hoped to receive on Christmas Day), and seasonal activities such as picnics. In fact, picnics were so incredibly popular with the children that Principal Satō felt the need to write an essay extolling the “educational and moral virtues” of picnics.³⁸ While this intervention can be understood as an introduction to some aspects of child psychology and development, it also suggests that parents may have been little inclined to allow their children to participate in this most alien activity. The language school thus acted as a bridge to mediate cultural encounters and to help parents raise their children in a different environment. Another fascinating indication of cross-cultural pollination is found in the way that younger students retold conversations that had taken place at home. Indeed, students would often pepper their essays with “loan words”: They would replace days of the week with their English equivalents; say “me” in English instead of “I” in Japanese (giving something akin to “Mother, *moi* am hungry”); answer questions with the ubiquitous “oh-rai” (オーライ for “all right”); say “guddo bai” (グッドバイ, for “good bye”) instead of “sayonara”; and so on. The result is a collection of nominally Japanese-language texts that sometimes deviate from standard Japanese patterns. This widespread use of loan words in daily conversations at home – and the fact that they were printed as such in the newsletters – suggests that both parents and teachers understood that language “creolization” was an ineluctable consequence of life in

³⁸ *Nippon Kyōritsu Go-Gakkō*, *Gakkō katei tsūshin*, no. 2 (May 1922), preface, MS 106, Tsutae and Hanako Sato Fonds, NNM.



Figure 2. Students of the Vancouver Japanese Language School eating ice cream with Mr. Tsutae Satō (top right) (1920). Courtesy of the National Nikkei Museum (NNM. 2010.23.2.4.220).

a different country. In a very real sense, the Japanese language schools thus offered a space wherein children and their parents could undergo a gradual and controlled form of cultural integration within the wider Canadian society.

There is, of course, another dimension to *nisei* students' being located between two worlds. Many showed an awareness of their status as an ethnic minority and distinguished their school – that is, the Japanese

language school – from the “white people’s school,” even if, by 1923, almost all of them attended public schools. For these children, “society” really was “white people’s society,” the arena in which they would have to fight for acceptance and opportunities. In their essays, friends, if they are *nikkeijin*, are always referred to by name, whereas “white kids” are just that: 白人の子 (*bakujin no ko*, literally “white kids”). Moreover, some children were keenly aware of the discrimination and racist discourse directed against their community. Indeed, a number of students wrote essays in which they attempted to articulate the underlying causes of their exclusion and suggested possible ways to improve their situation. Here is part of an essay written by a Grade 6 boy:

此頃日本人は排斥をくひます。それではどうして防げばよいのでせう。第一に白人のいやがることをしてはなりません。ですから僕等は白人の学校に行く前に、よく手や顔をあらひ、くびや耳などをきれいにしなければなりません。そしてご飯の時にあまりつけ物をたべると先生にお話する時くさいいきが出るといやがられる。あかのついた着物を着て行くのはたいへんいけない。そんなにきれいでなくとも、さっぱりとした物を着て行くがよい。

学校の運動場にはいったらよく白人の子と遊ぶがよい。僕はいつもこうして居ます。そうすると白人の子にもすかれ、先生にもすかれ英語もよくおぼへられます。学校にはいったら先生のいふことを聞いて白人の子よりもよく出来ると先生にもすかれ、他の白人の子にもすかれます。

These days, the Japanese suffer from exclusion. How can we prevent this? First of all, we mustn’t do things that will aggravate white people. So, before we go to the white people’s school, we have to wash our hands and face, and be sure that our neck, ears, etc. are clean. Also, when we eat lots of *tsukemono* [a kind of pickled dish] and talk to the teacher, we may have bad breath and aggravate him ...

When we go to the school grounds, we should play a lot with white children. That’s what I always do. This way, the white children will like us, the teachers will like us, and we will learn English better. When we go to school, if we listen to what the teacher says and do everything better than white children, the teacher will like us and so will the white children.³⁹

³⁹ Nippon Kyōritsu Go-Gakkō, Gakkō katei tsūshin, no. 1 (December 1921), 12, MS 106, Tsutae and Hanako Sato Fonds, NNM. All of the children’s essays within the Gakkō katei tsūshin are clearly signed, but I choose to withhold their names.

This student goes on to describe how the Japanese should dress so as to not embarrass themselves and their families, how they should clean their home so that passing white people will not think it looks dirty, and so on. A slightly older student (he was enrolled in the “preparatory course,” suggesting that he was perhaps considering continuing his studies in Japan) pointed to the fact that many (presumably “ethnic”) Japanese did not know the politics and customs of their adopted land and that their knowledge of hygiene and English was deficient. He gave the example of a Japanese woman breastfeeding her child in public, of municipal health inspectors finding many Japanese people’s homes to be in poor condition, and so on. His prescription for these ills was for the *nisei* to attend public school and learn the “Canadian spirit.”⁴⁰ Clearly, these *nisei* children and others like them were aware of the attacks that were levelled against the *nikkeijin*, and their response was to rationalize exclusionist criticism and think of different ways to counter it. These children were not in a position to deconstruct the language of these attacks; therefore, they internalized various elements of this racist discourse. The point here is not, of course, that the Japanese language schools were somehow responsible for this discourse; rather, it is that the schools offered a space in which a vast array of ideas – some of which sustained the discourse of exclusion – could be discussed and, as may be seen here, to a certain extent integrated into some of the students’ intellectual frameworks. It does appear that members of the school’s staff did not – or perhaps could not – help their students neutralize this racist discourse by carefully unpacking it and discussing its fallacies, thus contributing to the stigmatization of Japanese values and cultural practices.⁴¹ In all fairness, it must be remembered that this was a time when racial categories were believed to be meaningful and “race” carried a wide range of prescriptive behaviours and values. This was also a time when Japan’s own dominant racial discourse placed the “Yamato race” at the very top of the human order. The fact that some *nisei* inscribed themselves within the white exclusionist discourse speaks volumes about the competing pressures, from Japan on one side and Canada on the other, to assimilate. This internalization of the white-dominated racial discourse undoubtedly played a major role in the formation of the *nisei*’s

⁴⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁴¹ In some respects, this is similar to how unequal power relations allowed the dominant “Western” elites to direct and shape the construction of “Chinatown” as an imagined ethnic space. In this case, the Japanese Canadians who reproduced the exclusionists’ discourse actually contributed to their own ethnocultural marginalization. See Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995).

collective identity and, most notably, in the way that they actively pursued dispersal and assimilation after their forced exile from the west coast of British Columbia.

THE STUDENTS AS BRIDGES OF UNDERSTANDING

In the second half of the nineteenth century, having barely escaped the fate of non-European territories that fell under the more or less direct control of foreign powers, Japan undertook a campaign to obtain its own colonies. As a latecomer in the scramble for colonies that had been taking place in East Asia, Japan was able to secure for itself both Taiwan and the Korean peninsula, and it tried through various means to obtain some form of control over parts of China. In 1931, Japan's growing appetite for colonies and the relative weakness of China's central government led to the invasion of the Manchurian region and, eventually, to the establishment of the puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932. Members of the Chinese diaspora reacted with protests and calls for boycotts of Japanese goods (including those produced by the *nikkeijin* abroad), and a growing sense of threat rose, especially on the North American west coast. Tensions escalated drastically after the Marco Polo Bridge incident of 1937 (known as the "*Shina Jihen*" 支那事変 in Japanese), which signalled the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War.⁴² Throughout this period, Japanese immigrants abroad were under intense pressure to support and defend the actions of their homeland. In a "nationalistic frenzy" that left virtually no *nikkei* community untouched, patriotic associations organized fundraising drives, women's associations asked their members to prepare care packages for soldiers, and individuals – indeed, whole communities – vied for recognition through demonstrations of their patriotism.⁴³ Of course, the same conditions applied to Japanese immigrants in Canada, and their children, the *nisei*, felt the same pressure to defend their parents' land of origin.

In addition to sending money and goods to Japan, members of the Japanese diaspora were thus tasked with defending the homeland on the ideological front. Indeed, Chinese propaganda and the anti-Japanese discourse of exclusionists combined to erode most of the international

⁴² One of the most informative English-language books on the home front side of the Sino-Japanese War remains Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁴³ Eiiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 264–68. Although Azuma is especially interested in the case of the Japanese American experience, reactions on the Canadian side of the border were largely similar.

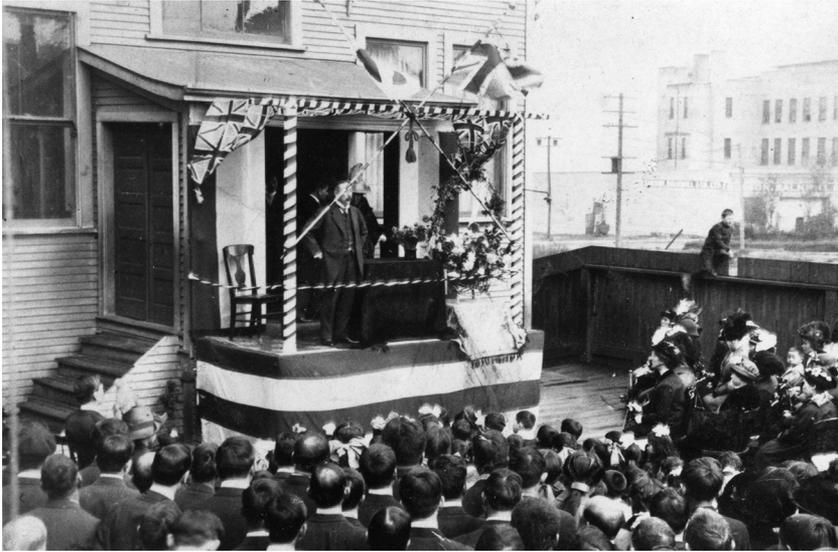


Figure 3. Ceremony at the Vancouver Japanese Language School (n.d.). Courtesy of the National Nikkei Museum (NNM. 1994.70.24.a-b).

support that Japan had enjoyed until then and directly threatened the livelihood of members of its diaspora. In response, Japanese immigrant leaders devised counter-arguments, which they promptly disseminated through various means, including the distribution of pro-Japanese pamphlets and the promotion of *nisei* involvement as “bridges of understanding.” The rationale behind this was simple: the *nisei* were perfect ambassadors of goodwill because they were born abroad, they had received a Canadian education from the public school system, and they spoke fluent English. All that was needed was a campaign to teach the *nisei* about the riches of Japan’s culture, the glory of its history, and the importance of their mission in North America. Consequently, some teachers at Japanese language schools were tasked with the training of “cultural interpreters” and, as the conflict escalated, of “Japan’s defense attorneys.”⁴⁴ Evidence suggests that such a shift in the education program also took place at the Alexander Street language school and that some students were indeed able to make theirs the discourse of Japanese empire. Although it is admittedly difficult to ascertain the degree to which the school’s teachers actually encouraged students to engage with the ideas sustaining this discourse, we can at least find some clues in the *Gakkō Katei Tsūshin* newsletters.

⁴⁴ Azuma, *Between Two Empires*, 171–74.

There is very little indication that the war and the invasion of Manchuria were discussed in class in the early 1930s. Generally speaking, editorials dealt with questions of pedagogy and language acquisition, and children wrote of games, insects, seasons, and so on. Here and there, a student might write of the brave soldier who endures the coldest temperatures for the homeland or of brothers going to Japan to become soldiers, but, as far as we can assess from the newsletters, the conflict was not an issue for most children. This changed dramatically after the *Shina Jihen*, however, as there then occurred a sudden increase in the number of pieces related to the war. Essays by school staff and other leading figures urged the *nikkeijin* to use their privileged position to explain the Japanese point of view to the Canadian public and thus prevent undue escalations of ill will towards Japan: after all, China and Japan were of “the same race and the same script,” and Japan only desired to facilitate the “co-existence and co-prosperity” of Asia’s two greatest countries.⁴⁵ How could non-Asians possibly understand? Reports in English-language newspapers regarding thousands of Japanese soldiers being captured or the mass murder of Chinese civilians were, of course, false and groundless: “If they only knew of the facts and [the Japanese] spirit, the peoples of the world would understand Japan’s recent actions. They would also be able to know the falsehood of China’s claims.”⁴⁶ And so some *nisei* students took it upon themselves to bridge the gap of understanding and convey to the rest of Canadian society the righteousness of Japan’s actions.

Some students did, in fact, answer the call. In many cases, students wrote essays expressing sympathy towards the war’s casualties (both Japanese and Chinese), gratitude towards Japanese soldiers, and hope that the conflict would end soon. None of the essays openly called for continued military actions, but nor did they clearly disapprove of Japan’s encroachment in China. The following, which is representative of such essays, was written by a Grade 5 boy:

八月頃に始まった日支事變は支那軍が北支那に居る日本人や日本の兵隊さんを殺したから始まった戦争です。悪い支那の人が居るから少しも悪いことをしない支那人が荷物を持って子供を連れながら逃げて行く活動寫眞等をみると、泣きたい程かなしくなります。日本のために働いて居る兵隊さんが居るから私達はらくに暮らせるのです。おとうさんの内には四人男が居るのに一人も兵隊に行つてみないと言って、おかあさんが千人針を作ってみもん袋の中に入れてやりました。[...] 此の戦争が

⁴⁵ Nippon Kyōritsu Go-Gakkō, Gakkō katei tsūshin, no. 33 (December 1937), 2, MS 106, Tsutae and Hanako Sato Fonds, NNM.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

早く終ると日本の兵隊さんや支那の人もなくなるから早くすんでほしいと祈っております。

The *Shina Jihen*, which began sometime in August [*sic*], is a war which began because the Chinese army killed Japanese people and soldiers who were in the north of China. Whenever I see motion pictures with innocent Chinese people fleeing from bad Chinese people with luggage and children in tow, I feel so sad that I cry. We can live the easy life because Japanese soldiers work for the good of Japan. There are four men in my father's house, but since none has joined the army, Mother has sewn 1000-stitch belts [a kind of charm] and included them in care packages ... If the war ends soon, Japanese soldiers and Chinese people will stop dying, so I pray that this war will end soon.⁴⁷

Despite this essay's overall naïveté (the boy doesn't question the presence of Japanese troops in Manchuria, without which this particular narrative would simply fall apart), the overall message is clear: the Japanese army's actions are righteous, and its soldiers must be supported. In an essay following similar lines, an older girl (preparatory course, level 2) reflected: "we who live in this land suffer constantly from white people's anti-Japanese slights, but if we compare ourselves to those who went to the Chinese front, our lives seem wasteful to me." She lamented that, being a woman, she could not become a soldier, nor could she work on the home front because she lived abroad. To compensate for her "failings," she diligently listened for news of the war on the radio and knitted some warm scarves for the troops. She did stress, however, that she took no joy from this "deplorable affair" and prayed for peace.⁴⁸ A year after the *Shina Jihen*, the consequences of the war – and the best course of action for the *nisei* – were discussed by another student in a "comfort letter" to soldiers fighting in China. This boy writes:

事變勃發以来排日の聲が盛になって日本品をボイコットするとか日本人の營業範圍を縮めようとかしてゐます。併し有難い事に教育方面だけは事變の問題にか々はらず私共は西洋人も支那人も同じ机を並べて毎日平穩に教育を受けて居りますから何卒この點は御安心下さい。多くの西洋人は弱い支那に同情するばかりで眞の日本の立場即ち東洋平和招來の爲に苦しんでゐるのだといふことを理解しません。私達はかうした人々に一人でも多く日本の聖戰の意義を傳へなければならぬといふ使命を感じて居ります。

⁴⁷ For example, see Nippon Kyōritsu Go-Gakkō, Gakkō katei tsūshin, no. 33 (December 1937), 12, MS 106, Tsutae and Hanako Sato Fonds, NNM.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 21–22.

Ever since the [Marco Polo Bridge] incident occurred, anti-Japanese voices have increased in number, calling for the boycott of Japanese goods and the restriction of our business opportunities. However, in spite of the incident-related problem, our education has not suffered: Every day, we study side by side with Occidentals and the Chinese in perfect tranquility, so please do not worry about that. Many Occidentals sympathize with weak China, and do not understand Japan's position or the fact that it strives to bring peace to the Orient. I feel that it is our mission to explain the righteousness of Japan's holy war to as many such people as possible.⁴⁹

It is clear that some *nisei* chose to take an active part in the conflict – ideologically, at least – and were committed to certain political views. Of course, to say that the schools turned the *nisei* children into unthinking supporters of Japan or that the children were complicit in the diffusion of state-approved propaganda would be a case of gross misrepresentation. In spite of appearances, the number of essays and poems directly related to the war is relatively low. Indeed, in the December 1937 newsletter, only twelve of ninety-one student entries dealt with the war, while only three in each of the two issues published in 1938 and only one published in 1939 did so. And yet, we should not surmise from these numbers that students simply lost interest in the war. At the same time as Japan was stepping up its efforts in response to China's stubborn resistance, a renewed ideological offensive was launched to harness the energies of Japanese subjects at home and those of the *nikkeijin* abroad.⁵⁰

NIKKEI STUDENTS AND THE LANGUAGE OF EMPIRE

In 1940, the Japanese celebrated the twenty-six-hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the imperial line. At the centre of the commemorations was the mythical first emperor Jimmu, reputed to be a direct descendant of the supreme *kami* (Shintō divinity), Amaterasu. Much more than a potent wartime ideological tool, this alleged connection between the

⁴⁹ Nippon Kyōritsu Go-Gakkō, Gakkō katei tsūshin, no. 35 (December 1938), 24, MS 106, Tsutae and Hanako Sato Fonds, NNM.

⁵⁰ In Japan, the 1930s saw a plethora of government initiatives designed to increase awareness of the Empire's prestige, initiatives that also rationalized gradual encroachment in East Asia. These propaganda efforts included glowing reports of the activities of Japanese immigrants in the Americas and culminated in a five-day commemorative event, the Congress of Overseas Brethren, in 1940. Representatives of all Japanese "colonies" took part in the patriotic event, which included a large-scale parade in Tokyo. See Kenneth J. Ruoff, *Imperial Japan at Its Zenith: The Wartime Celebration of the Empire's 2,600th Anniversary* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

emperor and the gods also became a metaphor for Japanese expansionism: Japanese colonists abroad were portrayed as actually following in the footsteps of Jimmu as he conquered the whole of Japan.⁵¹ Japanese immigrants were exposed to this propaganda through official channels and the vernacular press, while Japanese language schools were instrumental in introducing the discourse of empire to the *nisei*. Accordingly, in the second half of the 1930s, and especially from 1937 onwards, the language of the *Gakkō Katei Tsūshin* newsletters radically changed as both teachers and students made increasingly frequent use of symbols and phrases taken directly from Japan's nationalist, imperialist discourse. In a clean break from years of extolling such virtues as patience and *gaman* (perseverance in the face of adversity), editorial essays took a triumphalist tone and announced the coming of a new era. The following is an excerpt taken from such an essay, either written or vetted by someone in a position of authority at the Japanese School of Languages in 1940:

かくて、その昔神武の大帝が宣はせられた肇國の大精神が益々顕揚され、大和民族の大理想が發揮されつつある。

しかも亦一億の大和民族は困苦欠乏に堪へつつ堅忍持久、奮迅の活動を續けてゐるが、恐らく、本年こそは、未で曾て無き一大飛躍を遂げ、世界歴史に劃期的、燦然たる記録を残すであらう。吾らはこの榮ゆる御代に逢ひたることの欣びと幸福とを痛切に感ずる。[...]

且つは海外發展の第一線に立ちつつあることの自覺を堅くし各自の職務に精勵し、精神力と經濟力の充實強化に力め以て民族的使命達成の爲に應分の力を盡すべきことを誓ふ。

And so, the great spirit of the founding of our state by the Great Emperor Jimmu so long ago is now extolled [by everyone in the world], and the Ideal of the Yamato race is right before us.

And yet, the one hundred millions of the Yamato race still endure hardships and privations with dogged perseverance, untiring patience, and impetuous actions. Still, this is probably the year when we will leave an epoch-making bright mark in world history. We acutely feel the happiness and joy of having lived to see this imperial reign ...

And so, through the hardening of our self-awareness, the diligent completion of our duties, and the realization of our full spiritual and

⁵¹ Ruoff, *Imperial Japan at Its Zenith*, 154-56.

economic strength, we who stand on the front line of overseas expansion swear to do everything in our power to accomplish our racial mission.⁵²

Of course, the relationship between the anniversary of the founding of the imperial line and the war in China was made in the most evident way. Just as Jimmu had conquered every pretender in his path, so would Japan triumph over its enemies: “Recently, our fatherland has entered the third year of its holy war against China, and because of the great victories of the imperial army, China’s major cities have fallen into our hands; we have completely cut off support routes from Hong Kong, India, and Burma; and the regime of Chiang Kai-shek is certain to fall very soon.”⁵³ *Seisen* (聖戰, Holy War) was just one of the many expressions and symbols that became commonplace in the newsletters. In fact, the cover of the September 1940 issue featured a prominent picture of a golden kite (a bird that represents the Emperor Jimmu), a map of Asia, and the caption “2600th anniversary of the founding” of the imperial line (Figure 4). According to the historian Kenneth J. Ruoff, the golden kite, which is an unmistakable symbol of Emperor Jimmu’s trek across the Japanese archipelago, is a central element of the iconography of Japanese expansionism, especially in Manchuria.⁵⁴ The meaning of placing this symbol on the language school’s newsletter was clear: Japanese immigrants in Canada were part of the same sacred enterprise as were the colonists in Asia, and the ultimate result of this process was the predominance of the *Yamato minzoku* (大和民族, Yamato race) over the same territories.⁵⁵

The September 1940 newsletter was a special, two-part commemorative issue. The first twenty-nine pages were dedicated to the celebration of the anniversary and included messages from the teaching staff of the Japanese School of Languages, a series of photographs and calligraphy, and students’ essays that were written specifically for the occasion and

⁵² Nippon Kyōritsu Go-Gakkō, Gakkō katei tsūshin, no. 37 (February 1940), 3, MS 106, Tsutae and Hanako Satō Fonds, NNM. While the essay itself isn’t signed, Satō Tsutae is named as editor of the newsletter.

⁵³ Nippon Kyōritsu Go-Gakkō, Gakkō katei tsūshin, no. 38 (September 1940), preface, MS 106, Tsutae and Hanako Sato Fonds, NNM.

⁵⁴ Ruoff, *Imperial Japan at Its Zenith*, 154.

⁵⁵ On the predominance of the concept of race within the Japanese colonial discourse, including a discussion on the specific use of the term “*Yamato minzoku*,” see Young, *Total Empire*, 362–36. Jun Uchida notes, however, that the concept of *Yamato minzoku* was somewhat malleable as Japanese wartime rhetoric discursively included Koreans (who had been under direct Japanese rule since 1910) within the nation. See Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1875–1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center), 363–65.



Figure 4. Front cover of the September 1940 issue of the *Gakkō Katei Tsūshin* newsletter. Photograph by the author. Courtesy of the National Nikkei Museum (NNM.1996.170.12).

that filled eighteen of these pages. The school's principal, Satō Tsutae, had specifically requested these pictures from the Ministry of the Imperial Household. The ministry sent him the specified photographs (including a picture of the Imperial Palace in Tokyo and another of the grave of Emperor Jimmu) and a handwritten message of congratulations from the brush of Matsudaira Tsuneo, the minister of the imperial household.⁵⁶ *Nikkei* families associated with the language school were

⁵⁶ Kakei Motohiko to Satō Tsutae, 18 October 1940, MS 92, Tsutae and Hanako Sato Fonds, NNM. According to this letter, the original request was made on 20 December 1939.

arguably meant to assimilate these symbols and to articulate them in their own words within the discourse of Japanese expansionism. Many *nisei* children did, in fact, get the message, and, with various degrees of sophistication, they wrote essays about the event. The difference is often striking. While younger students simply described the ceremonies that took place at school, older ones wrote essays that borrowed expressions from the imperialist discourse. Here, for example, is part of an essay written by a Grade 2 boy:

The name for the day on which Emperor Jimmu founded Japan and held the first ceremony is *Kigensetsu*. On 11 February of this year we celebrated the 2600th anniversary of the event, and so a ceremony was held. In the morning of *Kigensetsu*, I woke up early, put on nice clothes and left [for school] ... When I entered the hall, everyone was silently standing in lines. Then, Mr. Akiyama shouted "Attention!" and we all formed very straight lines ... And then, the Principal said many things like "The strongest country in the world is Japan. The oldest country in the world is Japan." When the speech was over, we all sang *Kimi ga yo* and the *Kigensetsu 2600 years* song. On my way home I received a red and white *omochi* [a type of rice cake]. When I arrived home, I showed it to Mother, Father, Grandfather and Grandmother. At three o'clock, we all shared the *omochi* and ate it.⁵⁷

In a different essay, a Grade 5 girl discussed the same ceremony in more detail and, of course, with a better grasp of the intricacies of the Japanese language. She also included her own reflections on the meaning of the anniversary, saying that Japan was blessed with an august imperial line that stretched back all the way to the first emperor, Jimmu. That was why, according to her, no other country enjoyed such a long history, nor could any other country rival Japan's splendour.⁵⁸ But it is in looking at how this student used the language of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere discourse (without ever precisely naming this concept) to tie the anniversary of the founding of the imperial line to the war in China that we can fully appreciate the thoroughness of the ideological training that took place at the Japanese School of Languages. Here are her words: "The fact that Japan is fighting a war with China's Chiang Kai-shek isn't because it wants to simply take over the country, or because it wants lots of money. Japan simply wants to stand with China as brothers and

⁵⁷ Nippon Kyōritsu Gō-Gakkō, Gakkō katei tsūshin, no. 38 (September 1940), 2, MS 106, Tsutae and Hanako Sato Fonds, NNM.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

work to ensure a long-lasting peace in all of the Orient.”⁵⁹ Evidently, the contribution of the Japanese School of Languages to the education of the *nisei* children was not limited to the teaching of the Japanese language: it also offered a space for active dissemination and internalization of the discourse of Japanese imperialist expansion.

THE *GAKKŌ KATEI TSŪSHIN* NEWSLETTERS
AS PRIMARY SOURCE MATERIAL

The very nature of these newsletters and the essays that they contain raise certain questions that need to be addressed. In addition to educating *nisei* children, Japanese language schools, as social institutions, served numerous functions, such as providing information to the students’ parents; providing, through various committees, a place for parents to socialize; and facilitating communication between public schools and parents. A few pages of every issue of the *Gakkō Katei Tsūshin* newsletter were devoted to reporting the activities of committees, to reminding parents of significant events that would occur in the coming weeks and months, and to explaining some aspects of life in British Columbia and its schools that could potentially confuse parents – many of whom had received only a modicum of formal instruction and could not converse freely in English. In a similar fashion, the publication of the students’ essays was obviously meant to involve parents in the educational development of their children and to help the former assess the progress of the latter’s language acquisition (which was also a good business strategy on the school’s part).

At this point, the critical reader will surely ask whether the children’s essays were edited in part or in whole by the school staff. The answer is no doubt “yes.” To begin with, aside from the very rare typographical errors, the essays are virtually flawless: a teacher obviously copy-edited the texts. Everything indicates, however, that children were relatively free to choose the theme or subject of their essays. For example, many wrote of very personal events in their family, such as a birth, a death, an illness, and so on. It is arguably safe to assume that an essay on the recent passing of a family member simply could not have been fictional, nor would it have been required or assigned by a teacher. Another recurring theme is the “embarrassing moment,” which involved a student’s writing of some shameful thing that he or she did. Most of the time, these are relatively harmless accounts of the time a student arrived late to school

⁵⁹ Ibid., 7-8.

or was scolded for some mistake, but some children found very creative ways to get into trouble:

僕はハローウキンのぼんにごはんをたべて、皆とやくそくをしたところへ、あつまりました。僕がそこへ行った時は、もう岡田君やほかの二三のものが居りました。それから、岡田君などが出かけたので、僕もついて行きました。白人と花火げんくわなどをして、そのかへりに、パウエル、ストリートの店のウインドーに、ろうそくをぬっていたづらをして、かけ出しました。

On the evening of Halloween, after eating dinner, I went out to the place where we had agreed to meet. When I got there, Okada and 23 others were already there. Then, Okada and the others left, so I went with them. We did things like playing with firecrackers with whites. On our way back, we smeared wax on the windows of Powell Street stores, we pulled some pranks, and then we ran for it.⁶⁰

This text is very useful because of the wealth of information it contains, especially regarding the habits of *nikkei* kids and the way parents supervised (or, indeed, failed to supervise) their children. However, it is difficult to imagine that a boy would knowingly write such an honest account of his mischievous activities – implicating at least one of his friends in passing – for publication in a school newsletter if he expected some kind of repercussion for doing so. We can imagine that the boy had already been punished, and writing this essay was a public act of contrition, or perhaps the whole incident was dismissed by forgiving shop owners. The boy and his friends could therefore feel safe to laugh and write an account of their escapade for all to read. In any case, we can confidently assume that, even though students did receive their teachers' help with grammar and syntax, they were relatively free to choose their subjects and how they would write about them. Also important to bear in mind is the fact that, aside from some relatively few moments of high international tension or the occasional extraordinary event, the vast majority of children wrote quite inoffensive essays and poems on such themes as fishing, playing with pets, butterflies, sunsets, and so on. It would therefore be wrong to suggest that the teachers at the *Nippon Kyōritsu Go-Gakkō* regularly forced their students to write about war, empire, and blood ties to the “Yamato race.” Regarding the question of the special essays in the September 1940 commemorative issue, it should

⁶⁰ Nippon Kyōritsu Go-Gakkō, Gakkō katei tsūshin, no. 1 (December 1921), 8-9, MS 106, Tsutae and Hanako Sato Fonds, NNM.

also be stressed that the Japanese School of Languages was not the only institution at which students were tasked with the writing of texts on a predetermined subject. Indeed, many Japanese language schools in California urged their students to enter compositions in contests organized by the Japanese consulate. As the historian Eiichiro Azuma explains, while there is little doubt that the compositions of the prizewinners were of far better quality than were those of the majority of the participants, they do indicate that at least some of the *nisei* were absolutely capable of manipulating the language of empire and making it their own.⁶¹ What remains to be explored, then, is the question of exactly how such momentous events as the *Shina Jihen* were dealt with in the classroom.

THE JAPANESE CONNECTION CONTROVERSY REVISITED

The Japanese language schools were not, of course, the only possible sources of ideological indoctrination with regard to the ideas of Japanese imperial expansion. There were a large number of clubs and associations into which *nisei* could potentially have gained entry, and some of these associations were particularly active on the ideological front. For example, kendo clubs on the North American west coast, and especially in the United States, maintained more or less strong links with such organizations as the *Dai Nippon Butoku Kai*, a martial arts society whose leadership (composed in part of military men) and relationship to the Imperial Household made it very easy to disseminate the ideas sustaining the discourse of Japanese imperialism.⁶² *Nisei* children who would have taken part in these clubs' activities would have been repeatedly exposed to the symbols and language of empire. For example, a commemorative picture taken on the occasion of the promotion of kendo instructor Matsushita Motoo to the rank of *shihan* contains a handwritten caption that reads:

起源二千六百年
松下師範昇格
祝賀剣道大会（於日本人ホール）
昭和十五年十一月三十日 主催養神館□父兄会
（□ stands for one illegible character）

⁶¹ Azuma, *Between Two Empires*, 175-76.

⁶² A full discussion of the role and impact of such organizations as the *Dai Nippon Butoku Kai* in the ideological indoctrination of the North American *nisei* would require a separate article (or, indeed, a different book). For a brief introduction to the subject with respect to the Japanese Canadians, see Daniel L. Lemire, "Nikkei Kenshi and the *Dai Nippon Butoku Kai* before the Second World War," *Nikkei Voice*, June 2013, <http://nikkeivoice.ca/2013/08/06/nikkei-kenshi-and-the-dai-nippon-butoku-kai-before-the-second-world-war>.

2600th Anniversary of the Founding [of the Imperial Line]
 Promotion of Matsushita to the Rank of Shihan
 Celebratory Kendo Meet (at the Japanese Hall)
 November 30, 1940 Hosted by the Fathers and Brothers'
 Association of the Yoshinkai [dojo]⁶³

Since the caption already contains the date when the photograph was taken, the reference to the twenty-six-hundredth anniversary in the context of armed conflict between Japan and China enhances the meaning and importance of the event: as a living reminder of the samurai's martial values, with loyalty being first among them, Matsushita is discursively inscribed within the imperial tradition.

Of course, we cannot rule out the very real likelihood that a number of students may have brought some of these ideas with them from home and that their teachers may actually have had to dilute, to relativize, such ideas in order to diffuse potentially explosive situations before they could lead to open confrontation with the white majority. It has been widely noted how anti-Asian exclusionists, such as Vancouver alderman Halford Wilson, were adamantly against Japanese language schools since, they argued, these schools were instruments of propaganda that fostered disloyalty towards Canada.⁶⁴ If the discourse of Japan's glorious destiny, as discussed in the newsletters or perhaps in class, had been made more widely known, we could expect that arguments for the exclusion of the Japanese from British Columbia would have garnered much more traction than they did. At the very least, then, teachers at the Japanese language schools had to make sure that these topics did not leave the school. After all, the official educational and ideological position of the Japanese School of Languages was threefold: "1) The education of the *nisei* aims at the nurturing of good Canadians, 2) at the centre of the *nisei*'s education are the [provincial] public schools, and 3) at the Japanese language school, [we] will teach Japanese and enlighten through knowledge and morals."⁶⁵ The apparent contradiction between the desire to raise upstanding Canadian citizens and the indoctrination of the *nikkeijin* through a pro-Japan nationalist discourse is resolved by the possibility of working towards the achievement of Japan's objectives through the nurturing of Canadians whose moral standing and mastery of "Western civilization" would reflect favourably upon the rest of the

⁶³ Celebration of Mr. Matsushita's Promotion to Master in the Kendo Club, Vancouver, BC, 30 November 1940, Haruo Ichikawa Collection, 1994.52.43, NNM, photograph. The NNM lists this picture as "restricted," meaning that it cannot be reproduced here.

⁶⁴ For example, see Adachi, *Enemy That Never Was*, 186.

⁶⁵ Satō and Satō, *Nikkei Kanadajin no nihongo kyōiku*, 34–35.

Japanese people.⁶⁶ But the fact remains that the schools were not completely free of Japanese influence – a fact that anti-Japanese exclusionists made a point of repeating over and over again. For example, following his return from a short trip to Japan in 1938, during which he also toured the Japanese-controlled zones on the continent, Principal Satō wrote in the newsletter of his meetings with prominent actors such as Tokyo mayor and president of the Imperial Education Society Nagata Hidejirō and Minister of Education Araki Sadao. The former was in charge of the education of Japanese colonists in Asia, and the latter was a right-wing political leader and future class-A war criminal.⁶⁷ While Satō does not suggest that either of them called for the *nisei*'s open support of Japan's imperial ambitions, both of them reminded the readers that the *nisei* were tied to the "Japanese race" through blood and that their moral compass should be based on Japanese values (which Satō himself also did, in a way, by writing about his encounters with these people).⁶⁸ In an age when people commonly believed that "character," a sense of morality and loyalty, was a racially inherited trait, and because miscegenation was unthinkable for most people, such a reminder of the nature of the blood in the *nisei*'s veins could, in the eyes of the exclusionists, only negate *nisei* claims of loyalty to Canada.

And, of course, there was the question of the language schools' textbooks. Anti-Japanese activists such as Halford Wilson famously brought them under scrutiny, claiming that they were instruments of propagandism.⁶⁹ The textbooks that were allegedly the most suspicious were the Japanese language and *shūshin* (修身, ethics) textbooks. Principal Satō and others summarily dismissed the allegations, and, as far as Japanese Canadian historiography is concerned, this interpretation has remained the standard. The fact is, however, that all the Japanese language schools in British Columbia, with the notable exception of the one in

⁶⁶ For a similar argument in the case of the Japanese American *nisei*, see Azuma, *Between Two Empires*, 130–33.

⁶⁷ For an example of the propagandism activities led by Nagata Hidejirō, see Ruoff, *Imperial Japan at Its Zenith*, 56 and 164. Araki Sadao was one of the leaders of the *Kōdō Ha* (皇道派, Imperial Way Faction), which attempted a coup against Emperor Hirohito on 26 February 1936. The Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal found Araki Sadao guilty of two of the main charges (i.e., to have taken part in the overall conspiracy and to have waged war against China). He was sentenced to life imprisonment. See Richard H. Minear, *Victor's Justice: The Tokyo War Crimes Trial* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 200–03. For Araki Sadao's involvement in undermining Emperor Hirohito and escalating the war effort, see Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).

⁶⁸ Nippon Kyōritsu Gō-Gakkō, Gakkō katei tsūshin, no. 35 (December 1938), 2–3, MS 106, Tsutae and Hanako Sato Fonds, NNM.

⁶⁹ Patricia Roy, *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man's Province, 1914–41* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 214.

Haney, used Japanese textbooks officially sanctioned by Japan's Ministry of Education.⁷⁰ While it would be an exaggeration to describe them as pure instruments of propaganda, it is fair to say that certain passages in the textbooks that were published starting in the late 1930s could indeed be interpreted as problematic. For example, in various Japanese language textbooks, some writings praised military values and famous figures, such as Nogi Maresuke, a hero of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 and a symbol of loyalty to the emperor. One text in particular describes a series of trials that Nogi overcame during his childhood through hard work, patience, and sheer force of will.⁷¹ It is of course implied that any child who would do the same had the potential to become a national hero. Another text romanticized life on the Japanese navy's ships and portrayed the sailors as hard-working, stalwart role models.⁷² While these language textbooks are not exactly subversive, more troubling is the fact that some of the same historical figures featured heavily in wartime propaganda. For example, Nogi Maresuke was better known (and is still celebrated) for committing ritual suicide on the day of Emperor Meiji's funeral. This act, which contemporaries referred to as *junshi* (殉死 "following one's lord in death"), was transformed into an expression of ultimate loyalty to the emperor.⁷³ While Nogi's so-called self-sacrifice is never directly referenced in the language texts, it is highly probable that the children's reading about him in their own books only reinforced his standing in their minds.⁷⁴

In the case of the ethics textbooks, while most passages simply extolled traditional values such as politeness and punctuality, some would have caused concern for even the most sympathetic of Japan's supporters. For example, a number of texts directly called for loyalty to the emperor, and others encouraged personal sacrifice for the state. The famous case

⁷⁰ Tamura Norio, *Kanada ni hyōchaku shita Nihonjin: Ritoru Tōkyō fūsetsusho* [The Japanese who drifted to Canada: Rumours from Little Tokyo] (Tokyo: Huyō shobō shuppan, 2002), 75-76.

⁷¹ Monbushō [Japanese Ministry of Education], *Shōgaku kokugo dokubon jinsōka-yō maki nana* [Elementary school national language reader, regular curriculum, book 7] (Tokyo: Monbushō, 1936), 142-48.

⁷² Monbushō, *Shōgaku kokugo dokubon jinsōka-yō maki kyū* [Elementary school national language reader, regular curriculum, book 9] (Tokyo: Monbushō, 1937), 32-39.

⁷³ A short and very informative account of Nogi Maresuke's suicide, and its transformation into an act of loyalty, can be found in Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 221-25. A fuller account can be found in Doris G. Barga, *Suicidal Honor: General Nogi and the Writings of Mori Ogai and Natsume Soseki* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006). Studies in Japanese, even recent ones, tend to lionize Nogi – if they don't deify him outright. One book that makes an effort to represent him as a (flawed) human being is Kazuya Fukuda, *Nogi Maresuke* (Tokyo: Bungei shunshū, 2004).

⁷⁴ Wartime propaganda directed at children often used Nogi Maresuke as a heroic figure in songs, plays, and so on. See Young, *Total Empire*, 90.

of Hirose Takeo, a navy officer who died in 1904 during the Russo-Japanese War, is a case in point: as his ship was sinking and people were fleeing for their lives, Hirose realized that one of his subordinates was missing. He went to look for him but was caught by a stray bullet and died. Hirose was eventually revered for his bravery and elevated to the rank of *gunshin* (軍神), which means “god of war.” The title of this story is *chūgi* (忠義) – that is, “loyalty” to a superior.⁷⁵ The implication is clear: Hirose became a model of loyalty because he died while trying to fulfill his duty towards the emperor, and any person who wishes to be recognized as loyal should emulate Hirose’s example. Meanwhile, in a text aptly entitled “Development of the National Destiny,” the reader is led through a whirlwind of questionable logic that improbably links the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate and the so-called opening of Japan, the beginning of conscription in 1874, and increasing demographic pressure into a teleological narrative that, in the end, justifies Japan’s colonial expansion.⁷⁶ The author evidently wrote this text to represent this “fortunate” development as the result of the visions of successive emperors since Meiji (r. 1867–1912), thus underscoring how important it is that the people put their trust in the government.

The fact that Japan’s Ministry of Education tightly controlled the production of textbooks guaranteed that they all shared the same themes, symbols, and expressions.⁷⁷

Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine exactly how these textbooks were used on a daily basis at the Alexander Street school, but the fact that some students reproduced the same discourse in their essays suggests that these books did play a role in the construction of the children’s intellectual framework. Principal Satō was obviously aware of the problem, and he was working towards developing a series of textbooks designed specifically for Japanese Canadians before the outbreak of the Pacific war put a stop to his efforts.⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

With the Japanese language schools facing periodic attacks from anti-Japanese activists up until the forced wartime evacuation, *nikkei* elites, in front of non-Japanese audiences, smartly downplayed the Japanese

⁷⁵ Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku shūshin sho maki ni* [Regular elementary school ethics reader, book 2] (Tokyo: Monbushō, 1936), 60–67.

⁷⁶ Monbushō, *Jinjō shōgaku shūshin sho maki roku* [Regular elementary school ethics reader, book 6] (Tokyo: Monbushō, 1939), 98–102.

⁷⁷ Kaigo Tokiomi, ed., *Nihon kyōkasho taikei kindai-ben dai-ichi maki: Shūshin ichi* [Compendium of Japanese textbooks, modern era, vol. 1: Ethics (book 1)] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1961), 30–32.

⁷⁸ Satō and Satō, *Nikkei Kanadajin no nihongo kyōiku*, 54–55.

connection. As they ramped up their efforts to obtain redress, Japanese Canadian activists also diminished the influence of the schools and textbooks in the shaping of their collective identity. *Nikkei* activists did this, as we have seen, because they wished to represent the issue of redress as a civil rights question. In doing so, however, they left us with an inaccurate representation of the Japanese language schools' role in the education of the *nisei*. This article shows that, contrary to what has been claimed until now, these schools did succeed in more ways than one. On the one hand, many *nisei* did learn how to write essays of very high quality, a fact that remains unchanged even if many of them eventually lost this skill (of course, the fact that their Japanese education was brutally interrupted when they were scattered all across Canada played a role in this loss of proficiency in Japanese); on the other hand, the schools were capable of transmitting powerful ideas that took root in some of the students' minds. In other words, the schools did in fact play a role in forming some of the *nisei* children's intellectual frameworks as they learned the Japanese discourse of imperial expansion. That these children grew up to become upstanding Canadians is not in question. However, we must acknowledge that the schools were far more successful and far more complex – in every way – than has been suggested until now. Thus, the pre-redress narrative that portrays the *nikkeijin* only as passive victims and as “uncomplicated” Canadian citizens whose civil rights were violated needs to be put to rest. They negotiated the terms of their integration within Canadian society to the extent that they were able, and made conscious, informed decisions with regard to their children's education, their politics, and so on. Of course, nothing changes the fact that the Japanese Canadians were unfairly targeted by racially motivated measures well before the Second World War; they were entirely justified in campaigning for, and obtaining, redress for their mistreatment at the time of their internment and for their later exile. Nevertheless, we have reached a point at which we need to look beyond the narrative that was crafted at a very specific juncture for the purpose of gathering support inside, and outside, the *nikkei* community. As more and more scholars begin using the Japanese-language primary sources that are available, previously understudied areas, such as inter-group social dynamics and the rapport (or lack thereof) between the elites and the “governed,” will surely disclose a wealth of valuable information. We should then be able to ascertain that the history of Japanese Canadians is much more refreshingly complicated and interesting than the standard narrative would lead us to believe.