

# The Japanese in B.C.: Lost Opportunity?

## *Some Aspects of the Education of Minorities*

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We live in a time of dissent, an age characterized by challenges to many of the assumptions of our values, traditions, and cultural heritage. Educators have not remained immune from critical scrutiny and currently we are witnessing thought-provoking and trenchant criticism of public education on a wide front. Calls for total reconstruction, for competitive schools, for decentralization, independence, and autonomy — whatever the demands they point to disenchantment with much of the present system.<sup>1</sup> Dissent in this specific context is linked to and has stimulated a new historiography of the public education story, some of it frankly revisionist, and much of it valuable in providing a sounding board for an important dissenting voice — that of the ethnic, religious, economic, or social minority group which has often been ignored. One thinks first of Timothy Smith and his recent effort to bring about a needed revision of Oscar Handlin's thesis on the immigrant, and many scholars have followed his lead.<sup>2</sup> Professor Smith's research indicates that much of what we have taken for granted concerning the crusade for public education needs to be re-evaluated in the light of new discoveries about the contributions of minority groups.<sup>3</sup> The time is propitious for historians to pursue

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Theodore Sizer, "Education in the Ghetto: The Case For a Free Market," *Saturday Review* (January 11, 1969) 34, 36, 38, 42, 93; Frank MacKinnon, *The Politics of Education* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1960); Henry Resnik, "High School With No Walls — It's a Happening in Philadelphia," *The B.C. Teacher* (April, 1970), pp. 272-277.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy L. Smith, "New Approaches to the History of Immigration in Twentieth Century America," *American Historical Review* LXXI (July, 1966) 1265-1279. Other works that should be consulted include Moses Rischin, "Beyond the Great Divide: Immigration and the Last Frontier," *Journal of American History* LV (June, 1968), pp. 42-53; Andrew F. Rolle, *The Immigrant Upraised: Italian Adventurers and Colonists in an Expanding America*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), especially the introduction; and Robert H. Wiebe, "The Social Functions of Public Education," *American Quarterly* XXI (Summer, 1969), pp. 147-164.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy L. Smith, "Immigrant Social Aspirations and American Education," *American Quarterly* XXI (Fall, 1969); pp. 523-543.

this line of inquiry, not merely to underwrite a new thesis, but to check its validity whenever feasible.

We have begun to re-discover that British Columbia, despite its name, has a rich admixture of minorities and that immigration is a vital factor in its history.<sup>4</sup> As we continue to look at the history of education in the province it is of more than passing interest to find out how certain minority groups have fared.<sup>5</sup> Some questions which have yet to be answered should include the following: What impetus for education did the minorities furnish? How did they react to value systems sanctioned by the controlling majority group? What were some of the individual and community attitudes as revealed in ethnic publications and through specific "inside" views? And, finally, what educational opportunities were lost — and who lost the most? In following the fortunes of the Japanese in B.C. I intend to give at least tentative answers to these questions. I wish also to indicate that much research remains to be done and to suggest ways in which scholars can continue these investigations.

Although the Japanese have been associated with the province for almost a century, (the first Issei or Japanese-born woman arrived in 1887 and the first Nisei — second generation Japanese-Canadian was born the same year)<sup>6</sup> the history of the education of the Japanese belongs more properly to the twentieth century. And one can define four periods when the Japanese themselves were considerably agitated by issue of education: the 1920's, a period of hesitation on their part and distrust and suspicion by the white community; the 1930's, characterized by both growing self-confidence and introspection; the dispersal and relocation following Pearl Harbour; and post-World War II to the present.

This is not to deny Japanese interest in education well before this time. Harry Kitano, a student of Japanese immigration, has pointed out that most of the Issei who came to North America had at least eight years education in Japan, four of which were compulsory and four optional.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Ormsby's *British Columbia: A History* (Vancouver: MacMillan, 1958) is the standard reference for the province.

<sup>5</sup> See especially F. Henry Johnson's article, "The Doukhobors of British Columbia: The History of a Sectarian Problem in Education," *Queen's Quarterly* LXX No. 4 (Winter, 1964), pp. 528-541. W. E. Willmott's "Approaches to the Study of the Chinese in British Columbia," *BC Studies* No. 4 (Spring, 1970), pp. 38-52, has valuable suggestions for study of a minority group.

<sup>6</sup> *The New Canadian*, March 22, 1950. Some early indications of Anti-Oriental prejudice can be seen in petitions to the legislature in the late nineteenth century. See *Sessional Papers Third Session, Third Parliament* (1880) p. 406 and *ibid. Second Session Sixth Parliament* (1892) pp. 465-475.

<sup>7</sup> Harry H. L. Kitano, *Japanese Americans: The Evolution of a Subculture* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969) p. 23.

It is worth noting that one of the prime concerns of the Japanese Fisherman's Benevolent Society incorporated in Steveston in 1900 was "to build, equip, and maintain a school for Japanese" as well as to promote the fishing industry and good relationships with the cannery operators.<sup>8</sup> When *The New Canadian*, English-language voice of the Nisei began publication in 1938, it too reached back early in this century for its first Nisei "sketch." The heroine of the story was Chitose Uchida, who graduated in 1916 from the University of British Columbia, the first Nisei to do so.<sup>9</sup> The rest of her story might now be read as an omen of the future destiny of many of her countrymen. After completing normal school training she was compelled to take a teaching position in Alberta for several years. On her return to her native province in 1931 she was still denied the opportunity to teach and opened a school of her own. Here is how a Nisei writer viewed her determination:

... she has had the enterprise to go out and build for herself a whole school. Here again is an example of public spiritedness. Single-handed, she is contributing to the general welfare of the country of her birth. In the abetting of the assimilation of these new arrivals from Japan she is indirectly contributing to the cultural future of Canada.<sup>10</sup>

It was during the 1920's that the Japanese began to come face-to-face with some of the more complex issues of adjustment in an alien culture. Because of their record of service and cooperation during World War I, many were disturbed by public prejudice and they pleaded for fair play for the Japanese community.<sup>11</sup> They cited their accomplishments, especially in the fishing industry, where they had pioneered new methods and ventures. But they emphasized even more their cultural contributions: "They have opened ten missions for religious and educational purposes and organized and opened many private schools where their children might receive the advantages of English education. They also have several publications for self-education, including daily newspapers and many periodicals."<sup>12</sup> Evidence that the mood of the province was changing in this period was attested to by the legislature's *Report on Oriental Activi-*

<sup>8</sup> Kitawaga Kobayashi, *The Japanese in British Columbia* (Tokyo Printers, 1935) no page. This account is in Japanese except for the item cited.

<sup>9</sup> *The New Canadian* November 24, 1938.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> W. A. Barnes and R. F. Cook, eds., *City of Vancouver, B.C. Police Department* (Vancouver: R. F. Cook, 1921).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

*ties Within the Province*.<sup>13</sup> For the first time the government expressed official concern about the number of Japanese in public schools. In a survey of the period from 1922 to 1926 the *Report* noted that "in three years the number of Japanese children in the public schools has increased 74 per cent while in the same time the number of which children has increased by 6 per cent."<sup>14</sup> The Oriental population in 1927 consisted of 46,000 — 23,532 Chinese and 15,006 Japanese or 1 in 12 throughout the province. Yet another reading of the school figures gives little basis for alarm. Total white student enrolment in 1922-23 was 92,120 against 1,422 Japanese and 1,346 Chinese. By 1926 the white total had increased to almost 100,000 with the Japanese figure reaching 2,477 — hardly a "threat" to the public system. In this same period Japanese immigration had dwindled to just over three hundred a year.<sup>15</sup>

It should be noted that Japanese immigrants were permitted to bring wives to Canada (the Chinese were not) and this appears to be linked to the alarm and prejudice directed against them.<sup>16</sup> This may also explain why a revised statute in the province was enacted in 1924 with specific application to the Japanese.<sup>17</sup> Section 5 (a) of this statute disqualified all Japanese, naturalized or otherwise, from voting in any election, from election to the legislature, nomination for municipal office or for school trustees, and from serving on juries. In addition, Japanese were explicitly excluded from the legal and pharmaceutical professions, and suffered de facto exclusion from the civil service. Many years later the *New Canadian* headlined a story on the first ever Japanese-Canadian vote on a school board plebiscite in Greenwood. The date was June 30, 1948.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile education did continue for the Japanese, in public and private schools, and concurrently in the forty or so Japanese-language

<sup>13</sup> Province of British Columbia, *Report on Oriental Activities Within the Province* (Victoria King's Printer, 1927).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Tom MacInnes, *Oriental Occupation of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Sun Publishing Company, 1927), p. 19. This book is a compendium of many articles written for the *Vancouver Province* and *Morning Star*, all of which were anti-Oriental in tone. MacInnes' views were not ambiguous: "Canada, of course, is rightly intended for the Scotch and French who made it. The French who originally came here were Nordic French, and such they remain, most of them having been confirmed in early days with a touch of the best Indian blood to fortify them against the frost and fit them for the woods." (p. 82).

<sup>17</sup> Committee for the Survey of the Second Generation Japanese in British Columbia, *Report . . . Columbia*, (Vancouver: The Canadian Japanese Association, 1935) p. 18. Hereafter cited as *Survey*.

<sup>18</sup> *The New Canadian*, June 30, 1948.

schools in the province. Most Issei attended private night schools to learn English while their children, with parental pressure, reluctantly attended the Japanese-language institution, in addition to the regular public school. Accounts of the night schools stress the thoroughness of the teaching method.<sup>19</sup> For many Issei, the road to advanced education was a difficult one. Many lived in English households as "school boys" as did one Issei destined to become a doctor. Born in Japan, Dr. M. Miyazaki received his first schooling in this country through the Catholic Mission on Vancouver's Cordova Street. This was followed by five years as a "school boy" and eventually high school. After graduation from U.B.C. he was denied entrance to Queens University because of his race, and he earned his degree in 1929 from the medical school at Kirksville, Missouri.<sup>20</sup>

Most Japanese favoured and supported the Japanese-language schools, although some opposition was voiced, particularly by those Nisei who would have liked an easier course of studies for those who wanted only to speak Japanese. They believed that the Japanese might have been better advised to set up a "special academy" open to the gifted of all races who wished to study the culture of Japan.<sup>21</sup> But the majority undoubtedly shared the view of the long-time principal Tsutae Sato of the Japanese-language school. He spoke on the occasion of the thirty-third annual graduation ceremonies in 1939:

Sometimes I am accused of teaching my students things that are inimical to Canadian thoughts and ideals. I always strive for one goal and that — that the Nisei might become good Canadian citizens, and that this citizenship will be a broad and tolerant one, one that has a breadth of vision, a certain cosmopolitanism. . . . I think that the work I am doing is a great work and I believe in it. . . . In the fifty odd years that I am destined to live I intend to leave as wide an influence as possible.<sup>22</sup>

Sato, who was educated in the Aoyama Normal School in Tokyo, was principal of the Vancouver Japanese Language School from 1919-1941 and returned in 1954 when the Japanese re-settled in B.C. From then until his retirement in 1969, he continued to emphasize the same philosophy and to strive for the same objectives, even though his students now

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 24, 1938. See *ibid.*, Dec. 12, 1941 for account of jubilation of Nisei when the language schools were closed.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, March 15, 1939. See also *The Japanese Contribution To Canada* (Vancouver: The Canadian Japanese Association, 1940), p. 28 for additional information on school experiences.

<sup>21</sup> *The New Canadian*, April 1, 1939.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, April 15, 1939.

were likely to be high school and university age rather than elementary pupils.<sup>23</sup>

For the Japanese, facility in two languages became practically an economic imperative.<sup>24</sup> Excluded from many lines of work and from the professions, educated Nisei found most of their employment in the Japanese community, either as independent entrepreneurs or working for other Japanese establishments.<sup>25</sup> One Nisei educator tried to impress on his people that in time the demand for highly trained bilingual Nisei would be extremely good:

The kind of training required is an arduous one, involving a complete competence in the usual Occidental requirements . . . *plus* some competence in Oriental matters. For example, in my own field, if in addition to my Ph.D. in English and American literature, I could also read Japanese and had some knowledge of the Japanese classics, I would be all set for first-class jobs at great universities like Chicago, Harvard, Yale, etc. Unfortunately, I've got to get along now on a single set of accomplishments such as all my colleagues have, anyway — so that I have no advantage whatever . . .<sup>26</sup>

The time was 1938, the speaker, S. I. Hayakawa, who needs no introduction to educators.

In the public schools, the Japanese not only tried to accept this experience as a regular part of their life, but took some steps to counter the adverse impression created by the provincial government *Report* and the inflammatory attacks in the major metropolitan newspapers.<sup>27</sup> The Canadian-Japanese Association canvassed the reports of principals and others who had had occasion to work closely with the Japanese community, and published the excerpts under the title *A Few Facts About Japanese School Children in Canada*.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps most pertinent in this collection were some remarks by the principal of Strathcona School in Vancouver. This institution enrolled sixteen classes, over 1,100 students of whom some 366 were Japanese: "There is, . . ." said the principal, "by no means a racial problem arising in the matter of education. I feel that the children of Japanese origin are a little inferior in their knowledge of English at the beginning, but I must say they improve quickly. . . ." He went

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, January 29, 1955.

<sup>24</sup> *Survey*, *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> *Survey*, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> *The New Canadian*, Dec. 29, 1938.

<sup>27</sup> MacInnes, *passim*.

<sup>28</sup> *A Few Facts About Japanese School Children in Canada* (Vancouver: Canadian Japanese Association, 1927).

on to speak favourably of their conduct and achievement — they ranked first in seven of sixteen classes. He allowed that the girls were extremely shy in contrast to the boys, but added: "It may be said . . . that they are better than flappers."<sup>29</sup>

Whether the Strathcona School was typical for the Japanese cannot be documented at this point, but there is no compelling reason to believe otherwise. The Japanese themselves make no mention of discrimination but it should be emphasized that some 80 percent of all Nisei enrolled in schools in 1935, were in the elementary divisions. The rest were equally divided between secondary and kindergarten.<sup>30</sup> The small high school attendance figures reflected economic realities. A survey by the Canadian Japanese association linked the higher attendance figures in lumbering and fishing areas to the fact that "there are no fields [there] in which premature school-age children can be gainfully employed."<sup>31</sup>

On the surface, then, it would appear that the Japanese were being satisfactorily served by the public system. A small but growing number were advancing to and through the university, but there are indications that those most highly motivated for higher education were not the B.C. educated. About 15 per cent of the Nisei had received some education in Japan (more than eight years in some instances) and a survey reveals that these were found to be most persistent in continuing their studies at the technical, commercial, and university institutions.<sup>32</sup> Other developments in this decade seem also to indicate that not all Japanese were of the same opinion about the school system. The division between first and second-generation seems to be more pronounced, with the Nisei asserting more confidence in education as a means to success although, as I shall point out, they too, were critical of the lack of opportunity. The Nisei, especially the bright university-trained writers who initiated *The New Canadian* and undertook the survey of the second-generation, reflected some good-natured arrogance and high-spirited independence for which there is no parallel among the Issei.<sup>33</sup>

The survey of the second-generation was prepared under the supervision of two university graduates — Koji Tasaka of Waseda University, Tokyo, and Nobuichi Yamaoka, University of Alberta, with the assistance of a number of U.B.C. students. Their findings, especially those dealing

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> *Survey*, p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10 and *The New Canadian*, passim.

with Nisei aspirations, are a revealing commentary on education and economics in the province in the '30's. It confirmed, first of all, that the urban Nisei found knowledge of Japanese indispensable, since, inevitably, they had little choice but to work in the ethnic community. For the rural Nisei this was true to a lesser degree and for the province as a whole, less than 70 per cent attended the Japanese-language schools.

Perhaps the most significant information in the survey dealt with occupations of the Nisei as contrasted with their preferences. The report cannot be regarded as conclusive since many did not participate. However, of those checked, over 90 per cent were then (1935) in unskilled or semi-skilled categories — chiefly labourers in fish canneries, on farms, and in the logging industry. Professional and skilled categories amounted to .9 and 1.3 per cent respectively. And most of these were such positions as kindergarten and Japanese-language teaching positions with but at best a small honorarium. But when asked to express their preference, almost one-third wanted professional or highly skilled occupations. Men wished to be engineers, machinists, and entrepreneurs, while a surprisingly large number of the women wanted to be nurses, musicians, stenographers, and teachers.<sup>34</sup> There is a good deal of historic irony in the investigators' statement that "this table [Table 12 — Occupational Preferences] . . . portends an era when the Second Generation will take an active part in the welfare of this Province."<sup>35</sup> The irony was underscored in those hectic August days when the order had been given to relocate the Japanese in B.C.'s interior, and teachers were desperately needed:

Over fifty young Nisei, nearly all of whom are girls, will tackle the problem of how to become a teacher in five days next week. A short concentrated course will be held . . . from next Monday to Friday at Hastings Park. From nine in the morning to three in the afternoon, the teacher-trainees will take voluminous notes on subjects such as "Organization of Class Routine, Supplies, etc." "Teaching English and Its Difficulties" "Psychology of Handling Children and Classroom Presentation."<sup>36</sup>

I will focus for a moment on other incidents in the education of the Japanese before looking again at certain occurrences from the unfortunate war-time period. There are a number of events connected with the language schools and private ventures which help to give a better appreciation of this minority group's activities in the province.

In 1940 the provincial government changed the School Act to place all

<sup>34</sup> *Survey*, p. 26.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *The New Canadian*, August 22, 1942.



language schools directly under the control of the Department of Education.<sup>37</sup> This change was ostensibly directed at keeping a record of such diverse programs as the Punjabi school at Hillcrest and the Russian-language one at Brilliant in the East Kootenays. But the provision followed a running series of encounters between the B.C. Japanese Language School Association and Vancouver city council.<sup>38</sup> Association members and Principal Sato had to periodically deny allegations that the schools were subversive. Sato pointed out that attendance was voluntary and that all costs were borne by the Japanese in B.C. It seems that few people — educators among them — realized the cultural and symbolic values attached to the Gakuyukai, or annual assemblies of Japanese-language graduates and the graduation ceremonies. One such Gakuyukai was attended by 1,100 graduates to hear an address from the principal of Strathcona.<sup>39</sup> The teachers in the schools also held periodic conferences, which were both professional and social occasions dedicated to cultural and education matters.<sup>40</sup>

In a more practical way such specialized private schools as the Girls' College of Practical Arts and the Academy of Domestic Arts, were responses of the Japanese community to the restrictions placed on girls proceeding to university and or to certain professions. The Girls' College was founded in Vancouver (in the Powell Street area) in 1937 and offered up to three years of general, advanced, and specialized courses in dress making, sewing, and the like. Students were enrolled from interior and up-coast centres including Prince Rupert, Salmon Arm, and Summerland, but the majority were graduates of the Vancouver elementary schools.<sup>41</sup>

It should be noted here that for the Japanese, as for any group in society, informal associations of many kinds played an influential role in education. However, the Japanese were unusually avid "joiners" and one ethnic association mentions that there were at least 250 secular and religious organizations of the Japanese in Canada.<sup>42</sup> These included benevolent societies, unions, school associations, and such notable organizations as the Japanese Canadian Citizens League, which one writer cited as a

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, March 7, 1941.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 17, 1941, Jan. 24, 1941, Nov. 29, 1940, and Dec. 6, 1940.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 6, 1940.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, April 24, 1940.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, May 1, 1939, Aug. 22, 1941.

<sup>42</sup> *Japanese Canadian Contribution to Canada*, p. 33.

"tremendous educational force among Vancouver Nisei."<sup>43</sup> Nisei were faithful church supporters as well, with Buddhists predictably having most adherents. But some 44 per cent belonged to Christian churches with the United, Anglican, Baptist, and Catholic, in that order of preference. The Nisei emphasized how much their social life centred around religious institutions.<sup>44</sup>

University education was the rare exception for the Nisei, but, those who managed to clear the hurdles soon took an active part in traditional university activities. Annual debates between Nisei students at U.B.C. and those from Seattle's University of Washington had already become a tradition before the war.<sup>45</sup> Nisei formed their own alumni association, a University Japanese Student Club, and marked the graduation ceremonies with banquets and celebration, but, nonetheless, reacted strongly to discrimination, as they had occasion to when Nisei were dismissed from the military training program at U.B.C.:

... for the first time . . . , the editor of this paper is ashamed of the institution which once commanded all his honour and respect. One can forgive the aged Galileo, in fear of torture and eternal damnation, bending low in his recantation. But can one forgive the University, symbol of truth and enlightenment, thus cravenly prostrating itself before the fear of an untested "downtown" criticism.<sup>46</sup>

Of course this was following Pearl Harbour and the aftermath of that attack caused a catastrophic upheaval in the Japanese community. I do not intend to retell the familiar, if distasteful story, of the usurpation of the rights of Canadian citizens. This history has been largely written, and so has a part of the history of the educational experience of the Japanese in the relocation centres of eastern British Columbia.<sup>47</sup> In some ways this aspect of the education of a minority goes beyond the provincial

<sup>43</sup> *The New Canadian*, Nov. 24, 1938.

<sup>44</sup> *Survey*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>45</sup> *The New Canadian*, Dec. 29, 1939.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 7, 1942. See *ibid.* Dec. 22, 1939 and Jan. 12, 1940 for accounts of the favourable reception of students at the universities in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

<sup>47</sup> See particularly F. E. LaViolette, *The Canadian Japanese and World War II: A Sociological and Psychological Account* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948) but also valuable are Daisuke Kitagawa, *Issei and Nisei: The Internment Years* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1967); Bill Hosokawa, *Nisei The Quiet Americans* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1969); and Kitano, *op. cit.* For details of the education of Japanese in B.C. refer to Jorgen Dahlie and J. Donald Wilson, "Characteristics in British Columbia," *Papers: 1969: Communications*, The Comparative and International Education Society of Canada, pp. 28-37.

boundary; it will be sufficient here to summarize the salient points of this episode.

When the decision was made to remove the Japanese from B.C.'s coastal area the British Columbia Security Commission handled the arrangements. They moved approximately 17,500 of the 23,000 residents to interior locations (and other provinces) including some 4,000 children of elementary school age. Since the decision to move the Japanese was a federal one, provincial authorities were quick to disavow any responsibility for education. The Security Commission, with limited federal funds, instituted a segregated system for the Japanese at the elementary level. Schools were staffed by volunteers and marginally-trained teachers, mostly women or young girls.<sup>48</sup> High school education was by correspondence or made possible by the assistance of Roman Catholic, Anglican and United churches. Many students were set adrift after completing elementary school; we may never know what happened to the education of thousands of individuals, many of whom moved eastward, sometimes to better opportunities. For most, it meant a moratorium on education as students became victims of bureaucratic squabbling between two governments.

One or two additional comments need to be recorded concerning the reaction of professional educators and provincial officials to this travesty of the educational rights of the Japanese. In B.C. it was not until the Easter convention of the B.C. Teachers' Federation in 1945 that the teachers found it advisable or politic to protest the injustice to the Japanese. Several resolutions demanded an end to discrimination in the matter of fees, and called for the Department of Education to reassume full responsibility for the education of the Japanese.<sup>49</sup> Three years previously the *B.C. Teacher* had reproduced a pamphlet issued by a group comprised mainly of United Church clergy and laymen known as The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, without comment. It is doubtful if educators were aware of the special irony of its argument which said that forced employment of the Japanese in work camps in the interior would "with the attendant long hours of leisure in the evenings offer an opportunity never before available to inject new urges into the process of assimilation through small study groups . . . designed to prepare the Nisei to be consciously and cooperatively members of our common society."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Margaret Shiozaki, one of the top students graduating in secondary education from the University of B.C. in 1970, reports that her mother was one of the volunteer teachers who helped to keep the kindergarten going through the difficult years at New Denver. Interview May 4, 1970 at Prince George, B.C.

<sup>49</sup> *B.C. Teacher* XXIV No. 5 (February 1945), p. 159.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, XXI No. 2 (May 1942), pp. 410-13 and *ibid.*, (June 1942), p. 460.

In fairness, it should be stated that some teachers, especially those at the Vancouver Normal School, made wholehearted efforts to staff and manage the summer school sessions which were held at New Denver for some of the war years.<sup>51</sup>

The Department of Education, on the other hand, studiously managed to avoid any but the most meagre comment during this period of relocation. One finds a cryptic reference to the 1942 school enrollment in Vancouver as a "very irregular figure" since some 2,000 children had withdrawn.<sup>52</sup> The *Annual Report* for 1941 carried an item by the chief inspector purporting to show that Japanese children were, in reality, somewhat inferior to "white" children in reading ability. This remarkable statement was based on a sampling of 99 Nisei and 237 "whites" from two unnamed inspectorates and indicated that the Nisei were two to three years behind the others in school achievement.<sup>53</sup> The only other significant recognition of difficulties brought about by the Japanese issue came in the *Annual Report* for 1947-48 concerning School District No. 8 in Slocan. This was two years after the B.C. Security Commission had withdrawn support from the Japanese and the inspector for the district conceded an *administrative* problem existed, since enrollment had doubled in Slocan City and New Denver. Apparently no effort had been made to anticipate this difficulty.<sup>54</sup>

By the time of the Security Commission decision the exodus eastward was in full swing. *The New Canadian* shifted its editorial office from Kaslo in the Kootenays to Winnipeg in July 1945. That same year one Henry Sugiyama, winner of a university scholarship in Kamloops, was denied entrance to U.B.C. because of his race and registered instead at the University of Manitoba. By next year fully one-half of B.C.'s Japanese had left the province and in the spring of 1947, Ontario could claim a larger Japanese population than the Pacific province. As if to underline the demographic shift, *The New Canadian* followed the Nisei to Toronto for an extended stay.<sup>55</sup>

The movement back to the coast was a hesitant, halting journey, a series of fitful individual testings of the climate of opinion. It was, in fact, ten to fifteen years before any appreciable numbers returned to the old

<sup>51</sup> *The New Canadian*, June 5, 1943; August 14, 1943.

<sup>52</sup> *Annual Report of the Public Schools of the Province of British Columbia* (1942-43) p. 60.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, (1941-42) p. 40.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, (1947-48), p. 81.

<sup>55</sup> *The New Canadian*, July 19, 1945; Oct. 24, 1945; Feb. 22, 1947; May 14, 1948.

haunts in Steveston and Powell Street in Vancouver.<sup>56</sup> Through an absurd twist of fate, the first Nisei to return were army volunteers sent to Vancouver for advanced training. The trepidation and ambivalence that Private Dave Watanabe expressed was perhaps an indication that the wider experiences of war, travel, dislocation and re-settlement would insure that there would not be a “Japanese problem” in British Columbia again. “Powell Street has certainly changed!” he wrote. “Half the stores are vacant and the other half are occupied by the Chinese people . . . I feel that the East is where I really belong and I’m sure a lot of others do, too. [But] my years in the East have dulled my memory of two things — the beauty of Stanley Park and the softness of Capilano water.”<sup>57</sup>

When the Japanese did return, they found that the war-time passions had subsided and the pre-war prejudice abated. The Nisei were soon absorbed back in the schools, their own Japanese-language schools took on new life, enrollment at the universities in a single year was almost double the total in the quarter-century before Pearl Harbour.<sup>58</sup> Because the Japanese had found it possible (particularly in Ontario) to take part in politics and union activity, and had worked as lawyers, teachers, artists, and engineers, they were not now prepared to accept second-class status as they had been forced to do in British Columbia before the war in spite of their education.

What, then, can we conclude from the experiences of this minority group insofar as the history of education is concerned? It seems evident that the Japanese were in the forefront of everyone who saw education and training as indispensable to success — and this in the face of failure. It also appears that they were able to insist on the special significance and value of their own cultural and ethnic traditions in a climate which often seemed insensitive and unreceptive to alien forms and ideas. The losers? Undoubtedly many of the individuals who were forced to suffer humiliation and abrogation of their rights, but some Nisei conceded that out of the dispersal and re-settlement there were distinct benefits. For the province, the loss is harder to calculate. Some educators who were fortunate enough to take part in the pageants in New Denver, or in the unique student “demonstrations” — the Gakuyukai — with their elaborate dramatic performances, would say that the school system was deprived of the

<sup>56</sup> *Nisei Affairs*, No. 2 (August 28, 1945), p. 4; *The New Canadian*, Nov. 18, 1950 and Jan. 12, 1955.

<sup>57</sup> *Nisei Affairs*, No. 2 (August 28, 1945), p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> *The New Canadian*, Jan. 12, 1955.

kind of experience which we now attempt to bring in with sophisticated media.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps the Powell Street poet summed it up as well as anyone:

powell st knows  
 and loves the light skip  
 of children as they trip  
 to school and their studies  
 a lovely age  
 when yellow and white are buddies  
 powell st knows

powell st knows  
 it is fifth avenue  
 main street wall street and park avenue  
 serves  
 as a centre of a social scheme  
 longs to be the nucleus of a  
                   grander dream

and yet  
 yoshio and yaeko's fanciful feet  
 truck on down a wondering street  
 light fantastic  
 to a jitterbug beat<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *The New Canadian*, August 17, 1944 and Jan. 29, 1955.

<sup>60</sup> *Nisei Affairs*, vol. 2 No. 1 (January 1947), p. 3.