



# Japanese Canadian Historic Places

## Historical Context

## Thematic Framework



clockwise from top left: Japanese Canadian fisherman working with nets on a boat in Steveston, 1960 (City of Richmond Archives 1985-5-1), Kimono from Asian Costumes, Japanese Art, Culture collection (Museum of Anthropology, UBC), Miss Ruth Akaquawa, Port Essington nurse, c.1930 (BCAR b-07117), Nikkei Centre, New Denver (Village of New Denver)



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submitted by:  
Denise Cook Design  
Birmingham & Wood Architects and Planners

## Japanese Canadian Historic Places **Historical Context Thematic Framework**

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**Historical contexts:**

- *Identify and explain the major themes, factors and processes that have influenced the history of an area*
- *Their objective is to provide a framework to investigate and identify historic places*



Train leaving Slocan City with community members returning to Japan, 1946. (Nikkei National Museum 1996-176-1-37)

Japanese Canadian Historic Places  
**Historical Context Thematic Framework**

**Introduction**

This document is a historical context study of the experience of Japanese Canadians and Canadians of Japanese descent in British Columbia. The context study is written as a thematic framework, identifying six themes adapted from Parks Canada's National Historic Sites system plan. While its overall purpose is to guide the evaluation of publicly-nominated Japanese Canadian historic places in the province, the study seeks to provide a succinct but comprehensive view of Japanese Canadian heritage values that can encompass any potential Japanese Canadian historic place.

The six themes identify major aspects of the historical, social and cultural experience of Japanese Canadians in B.C., and the impact Japanese Canadians have had on the province. Each section includes a theme statement that includes a series of related sub-themes. The themes were presented at a one-day public workshop held by B.C. Heritage Branch and Heritage BC to collect information, values and stories related to Japanese Canadian historic places in B.C. Input from the workshop and information contained in the nominations has informed the context study, making it in part a community-based document. This information has been interpreted circumspectly, because some of it is personal recollection which may or may not necessarily apply to Japanese Canadians as a whole.

Concurrently, a nomination process was undertaken during which anyone could nominate a Japanese Canadian historic place for potential commemoration at the provincial level. Those not selected are recognized through a publicly accessible interactive map. A table listing all of the nominated historic places and the theme(s) they embody can be found in Appendix B.

People of Japanese descent began to arrive in B.C. in 1877, in many ways an early history that is typical for newcomers, arriving with hope for greater opportunities than were possible in their homeland. Initial employment in B.C.'s expanding resource extraction and production economy, in mining, the fishery,

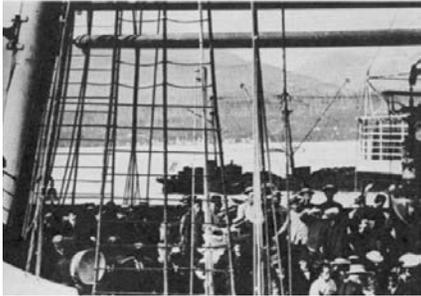
cannery work, sawmills and farming, developed into successful professional and business opportunities. Festivals and annual celebrations, the building of halls, churches and temples and schooling in both English and the Japanese language were a part of the experience of Japanese Canadians making a place in B.C.

Key aspects of the themes include:

- Journeying to and settling in B.C. during all phases of the province's history
- The economic, cultural and social contributions of Japanese Canadians to the province
- Hardships caused by racist treatment and discrimination before, during, and for some time after World War II
- Rebuilding after full rights were restored in 1949

The themes cover the continuing contribution of Japanese Canadians to the developing culture of post-contact society in B.C. While the nominated historic places recognize the full heritage of Japanese Canadians, they are in part a record of the racist history of the British-dominant provincial culture. These include places such as segregated enclaves within camps, canneries, towns and other settlements that were populated largely by people of non-British ancestry, and from 1942 to 1949, work camps and internment camps.

While the first-generation Issei said to the second-generation Nisei, *shikata ga nai*, or "nothing to be done," the historical context embodies the outlook of Japanese Canadians who intensely remember the past, and while proud of their Japanese heritage, see themselves as Canadian citizens first.



## Theme 1 Arriving from Japan

The focus of this theme is on the movement of people into and within British Columbia. It encompasses the stories of arrival to B.C. by people of Japanese descent, the laws used to regulate Japanese immigration, and the removal of basic rights and forced relocation away from the Pacific coast following Canada's declaration of war on Japan.

Late 19th and early 20th century immigration from Japan to B.C. can be understood as part of a larger movement of Japanese people out of Japan to find work and/or a new life. Japanese men, predominantly from the islands of Kyushu and southern Honshu. Around half came from four prefectures, Hiroshima, Shiga, Wakayama and Kagoshima, seeking overseas economic opportunities for establishing themselves and raising families.

But B.C.'s society placed increasing restrictions on the immigration of people of non-British lineage, particularly on Asians, including people of Japanese descent. A long series of enactments in Canadian law made immigration to Canada by people of Japanese origin more and more difficult. The restrictive 1908 Hayashi-Lemieux Agreement with Japan and the War Measures Act enacted at the time Canada entered the war against Japan in 1941 led to the abrogation of basic rights for people of Japanese origin in Canada, whether they were Canadian citizens or not.

Prior to World War II, the movement of Japanese Canadians in B.C., to B.C. communities for work influenced the population and culture in B.C.'s small towns, many of which were still primarily white.

The forced relocation of Japanese Canadians away from their homes on the Pacific coast to internment and work camps in the B.C. Interior and beyond during World War II is another chapter in the story of the movement of Japanese Canadians after their arrival in the province. The 1942 Order-in-Council that created the 100 mile "protected area" saw Japanese Canadians exiled from the coast to the east of the 100 mile limit, to isolated, segregated camps, or in a minority of cases, farms. With the exception of New Denver, after the 1940s, very few Japanese Canadians stayed to influence the populations of interior towns, and many communities were active in keeping them out.

### Journey from Japan

Immigration from Japan to British Columbia began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, mostly single men from economically depressed farming and fishing villages who traveled to B.C. in hopes of making their fortunes and returning to Japan. The most common places of early arrival including the areas around Victoria, New Westminster, Richmond, Vancouver and Tofino.

Subsequent destinations in B.C. for Japanese immigrants who gained a foothold in society in the resource extraction industries included mill towns, fishery centres, canneries, and farming communities on Vancouver Island, B.C.'s north coast, the Fraser Valley and the Okanagan Valley.

Once the men were established, marriages were typically arranged with Japanese women, who voyaged to B.C. to join them. These *omial kekkon*, or picture marriages, which took place after the 1908 Hayashi-Lemieux Agreement, are seen by some as an integral part of the story of building the Japanese Canadian population and society in B.C.

Subsequent immigration later in the 20th century build upon the foundation and legacy of the first wave of Japanese Canadian arrivals. Post-World War II immigrants are similar to the first arrivals in that they are predominantly young adults who have families after they come to Canada, but are highly skilled professionals and workers from Japan's industrialized, urban middle class

### **Regulating Japanese immigration and residency**

Since the earliest arrival of Japanese Canadians in B.C., there has been an ongoing list of legislation that has governed how, when and if they could immigrate. The key regulations included:

- 1869 Immigration Act that focused on ensuring the safety of immigrants during their passage to Canada and protecting them from exploitation upon their arrival, as Prime Minister John A. Macdonald set an open immigration policy to encourage the settlement of the West
- 1906 Immigration Act that introduced powers to make arbitrary judgments on admissions, opening the ability of the federal government to apply racist restrictions that were exercised against people of Japanese descent
- 1908 Gentlemen's (Hayashi-Lemieux) Agreement with Japan that restricted the number of Japanese passports issued to male labourers and domestic servants bound for Canada to a maximum of 400 a year following a recent influx of Japanese labourers in British Columbia and a surge of anti-Asian sentiment in the province
- 1908 Continuous Journey Regulation, a regulation that required prospective immigrants to travel to Canada by continuous journey from the country of which they were natives or citizens on a through ticket purchased in that country; this effectively closed the primary Japanese immigration route that required a stopover in Hawaii
- 1910 Immigration Act which added the further barrier of requiring prospective Japanese immigrants to have \$200 per person in their possession upon arrival in Canada
- 1923 expansion of the Hayashi-Lemieux Agreement that reduced the

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Evacuees awaiting transportation to the B.C. interior, 1942. (Directorate of History, Department of National Defence)



number of male immigrants allowed to 150 per year

- 1928 expansion of the Hayashi-Lemieux Agreement that included wives and children in the 150 per year quota
- 1941 War Measures Act / Enemy Alien Act that opened the way for property confiscation and internment of Japanese Canadians, including the following enactments:
  - 17 December 1941  
Persons of Japanese descent required to register with the RCMP
  - 29 January 1942  
A protected area is declared by Government Notice on the B.C. coast, known as the 100 Mile Zone
  - 24 February 1942  
Defence of Canada Regulations amended to restrict Japanese Canadians from owning land or growing crops
  - 26 February 1942  
Notice issued instituting curfews on Japanese Canadians in the protected area of British Columbia, and restricting them from possessing motor vehicles, cameras, radios, firearms, ammunition or explosives
  - 04 March 1942  
Regulations under the Act adopted to evacuate Japanese Canadians from the protected area with 12,000 interned in interior camps, 2,000 sent to road camps and another 2,000 forced to work on sugar beet farms in Saskatchewan and Manitoba
  - June 1942  
Order-in-Council PC 5523 gave the Director of Soldier Settlement authority to purchase or lease farms owned by Japanese Canadians
  - January, 1943  
Order-in-Council PC 469 allowed the government, through the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property to sell Japanese-Canadian property held in custody without owners' consent, effectively stripping Japanese Canadians of any tangible connections to the west coast
  - February 1943  
Order-in-Council PC 496 required that Japanese Canadians had to apply for a license to purchase property
  - April 1943  
Order-in-Council PC 469 ordered the deportation of Japanese Canadians to Japan or their removal to eastern Canada

**Post-war legislative changes**

The end of the war and increased intolerance by the general public in B.C. toward racial discrimination gradually resulted in legislative changes with



regard to Japanese Canadians.

- 1947 Citizenship Act allowed Canadians of Chinese and South Asian origin to apply for citizenship after five years of residency in Canada but excluded Japanese and Indigenous Canadians
- In 1949 the last restrictions on Japanese Canadians were removed and they were given full rights of citizenship and freedom to move anywhere in Canada
- 1950 Order-in-Council PC 4364 revoked an order prohibiting immigration of “enemy aliens,” and provided for some of those deported to re-immigrate to Canada, with about one quarter of those who left for Japan returning
- 1967 Immigration Regulation included the introduction of a point system for evaluating immigrants education, occupational skills, employment prospects, age, proficiency in English and French and personal character regardless of their race, ethnicity or national origin
- 1988 Multiculturalism Act required the federal government to recognize the multi-cultural nature of Canada in its legislation and policies and encouraged the implementation of multicultural programs on the part of the government as a way of seeking the protection of the cultural heritage of all Canadians

### **Internment and dispersal**

During and after World War II, government regulations forced the removal of Japanese Canadians from their communities and their property was confiscated by the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property. It is important to understand that Japanese Canadians who came to Canada in the early years rebuilt their lives three times: first, when they came to Canada with nothing, in 1942 when their lives and livelihood were taken away, and again during the 1940s when most of them were forced to relocate east of the Rocky Mountains or back to Japan with basically nothing. A very small percentage of those exiled returned to B.C.

Many suffered in holding sites such as Hastings Park while they waited to be sent to work camps for provincial highway building projects, to internment camps in the B.C. interior, or to the prairies to work on farms. Men were often separated from their families. After 1949, some Japanese Canadians did return to the B.C. coast, once the final restrictions on citizenship and movement were removed.

### **Post-war growth of the Japanese Canadian community**

In the 1940s, Japanese Canadians scattered across Canada struggled to rebuild their lives and communities. For Japanese Canadians, the legacy of discriminatory legislation resulted in concern with ensuring that doubts about their Canadian loyalty were eradicated so that they would never again

be victims of public insecurity. For most citizens of British Columbia, a period of government racist policies resulted in widespread discrimination in the province. Ultimately, citizens rose up against racist legislation. Neither the RCMP nor the military viewed the Japanese Canadians on the west coast as a military threat, rather, their uprooting was a political move to accommodate racist politicians. This understanding led to renewed interest in Japanese Canadian heritage and helped break the silence surrounding internment.

The third generation grew up in white-dominated communities and married predominantly into white Canadian culture pre-war traditional, Japanese Canadian community changed, creating a mixed but nonetheless strong community. Japanese Canadians were thriving in all occupations, including the service sector, manufacturing, business, teaching, the arts, academia and the professions. Values expressed by Japanese Canadians during the nomination process include their ability to endure and triumph over the repressive regulations of their government.

Japanese houses, Richmond BC, 1913.  
(BC Archives 1-50621)



Main and Powell Street, Vancouver.  
(BC Archives e-02172)



## Theme 2 Settling in B.C. and Establishing Communities

British Columbia has supported a human population for many thousands of years, and over time, people from all parts of the globe have arrived and settled here. This theme celebrates the imprints and expressions of Japanese Canadians as they helped shape the province.

It describes the cultural and physical ties within the Japanese Canadian population, and the relationship to other Canadians with whom they shared communities. The resettlement of Japanese Canadians and Canadians of Japanese descent from one place to another, and the impact this had on their lives, is part of this theme.

Many Japanese Canadians immigrated for increased economic opportunity and upward social mobility. People listed adventure, building fortunes, avoiding famine and evading conscription into the Japanese military as other reasons for Japanese Canadians' early arrival in B.C. Others had great-grandparents who arrived in the 1900s having heard stories of good fishing and the opportunity to make a good living and have a better life.

The Japanese Canadian experience of internment and expulsion during and after World War II was a key part of the settlement theme. Japanese Canadian citizens were forced to create or adapt to new communities in B.C.'s interior during their relocation to internment and work camps, such as those in Kaslo, Greenwood, Slocan and Tashme, and further east to many places across Canada following their forced postwar dispersal. Displaced citizens built Japanese bathhouses, baseball diamonds, vegetable gardens and rock gardens, as a way of creating familiarity and home.

### Japanese Canadian community enclaves

Nihonmachi, or Poweru gai (Vancouver's Powell Street) and Steveston are noted as two of most populous and identifiable communities of Japanese Canadians in the time leading up to World War II and were places where people of Japanese descent were a majority of the local population. Other Lower Mainland neighbourhoods with a large Japanese Canadian population include Fairview, Marpole, Kitsilano and Burnaby, along with farming communities in the Fraser Valley such as Mission and Maple Ridge. Japanese Canadian communities grew around work opportunities. For example, places such as Steveston, the mouth of the Capilano River in North Vancouver where a Japanese Canadian sawmill was located, and the Celtic Cannery on Marine Drive in Marpole had large Japanese Canadian populations.

Communities with a strong Japanese Canadian presence developed along the west coast of B.C. where work was readily available. Sizable Japanese Canadian communities were located in Prince Rupert, Royston, Cumberland, Ocean Falls, Tofino, among others. In the early years, these communities took



Slocan City, 1942.  
(BC Archives I-60941)



Tashme, 1942.  
(Nikkei Voice)



Train leaving Slocan City with community members returning to Japan, 1946.  
(Nikkei National Museum 1996-178-1-37)

the form of racially segregated workers' housing or enclaves within mining, logging and pulp mill towns, cannery compounds, and fishing communities, cities and towns. As with most workers, Japanese Canadian men in resource communities often lived in *gashikujo*, or bunkhouses. In the communities and camps, there would be a cook for the Japanese Canadian workers, and a Japanese-style bath.

The growing communities were influenced by changing demographics. For example, in communities such as Steveston, by the mid-1920s, the second generation Japanese Canadians known as *Nisei* began to outnumber *Issei*, the original immigrants from Japan.

### Internment settlements and work camps

During interment, Japanese Canadians were forced to adapt in new communities away from their homes, such as camps outside of Slocan, Kaslo, and New Denver, often in places such as re-purposed buildings in Greenwood and Sandon.

A common aspect of the Japanese Canadian story in B.C. is of continual movement. Travel to communities throughout the province for work opportunities or by government decree meant that people were not able to stay in one place for long. Stories of voluntary and forced movement were varied, for example, someone born in B.C., moving to a small town for work, then uprooted and forcibly removed to an interior camp, and possibly to another. A few skilled labourers may have settled in the region of their internment. Others moved to reconnect with family.

Particularly in the early period of forced relocation, men were not authorized to live in internment camps, but were separated from their families and sent to work camps. The choice to be removed to sugar beet farms in the Prairie provinces and Ontario was made by some because families were permitted to move together.

Other Japanese Canadians were put on trains from B.C. to Alberta, where they were assigned to a particular sugar beet or other farm to work. Life was often brutal on the farms, the housing poor and the children had to work to support the family so they were not able to attend school. Children were generally shielded from the realities of these experiences, and often had different memories of this time than those of their parents. After the war, already-established Japanese Canadian communities in places such as Lethbridge and Raymond grew as those from the sugar beet farms joined the community.

### Post-war dispersal and rebuilding

The post-war period was one of upheaval. During the federal government's so-called post-war "voluntary repatriation" policy, actually exile, Japanese

Canadians were given the choice to return to Japan or move to Canadian communities east of the Rocky Mountains. Some families who chose to return to Japan found that life was too hard there after the devastation of war, and returned to the west coast.

A few Japanese Canadians were able re-establish themselves on the Pacific Coast after restrictions were lifted in 1949, but their pre-war homes had been confiscated and sold by the government, with the profits put towards the cost of their internment. The majority re-located east of the Rockies, with the largest destination being Toronto. A few others chose to stay in the communities near which they had been interned, and they and their descendants remain there today.

There was a community-based effort to help re-establish lives after the war. By 1947 Japanese associations across Canada had come to realize that the postwar battles for equal rights would require a unified effort. The movement to cancel the so-called “voluntary repatriation” included the Lemon Creek Action Group in the Slocan Valley, the Tashme *Shinwa-kai* (Tashme Friendship Society), Manitoba Japanese Joint Committee for Democracy, the Winnipeg Civil Rights Defense, *The New Canadian* in Toronto, the Rosebery Japanese Canadian Association, Slocan District Standing Committee, and the Greenwood Japanese Canadian Committee and its Citizenship Defense Committee.

Re-establishing communities meant starting again from almost nothing in the post-war expansion of the B.C. economy. The loss of property greatly restricted the ability to rebuild. Bank loans were not available because there was no property, fishing boat or savings to use as collateral. Further complications included the resettlement of those who could not easily start again because of age, infirmity or lack of family. Those who returned to coastal communities found themselves in new circumstances. While the Japanese Hall and Japanese Language School in the Powell Street area of Vancouver was one of the few examples of continued ownership by Japanese Canadians after the war, few of the original residents returned to Powell Street and it remained derelict for many years. A few others returned to the Steveston area, but Moncton Street remained derelict into the 1970s.

The effects of internment are still evident in living memory in the Japanese Canadian population. Many people who survived these events in B.C. history are still alive and it has shaped their lives, including where they live, how they made a living, and how they raised their families.

### Theme 3 Contributing to B.C.'s Economy

Throughout the province's history, British Columbians have worked in a wide variety of ways to sustain themselves. This theme looks at the historical legacies of Japanese Canadians in early economies; commercial pursuits in fishing, farming, forestry and mining; services industries and manufacturing processes.

An important theme in the history of B.C. is the role and contribution that Japanese Canadian labourers, farmers, skilled craftsmen, fishermen, boatbuilders, entrepreneurs and others played in the development of the province's economy before, during and after the Second World War. Japanese Canadians value their involvement in and contribution to the development of B.C.'s early economy in the sawmilling, fishing, boat-building, agriculture and coal mining sectors. From the early 20th century until the 1950s, Japanese Canadian women were highly valued workers in the fish canneries.

Post-war, Japanese Canadians have participated in all aspects of the B.C. economy. Japanese Canadians work in a wide variety of jobs, professions and businesses, their success a symbol of spirit, endurance and resilience.

#### Early economic ventures

The history of the development of Japanese Canadian communities and economies prior to World War II is considered very important in the understanding of historic places relating to that period. Many pre-war Japanese Canadian commercial businesses had high economic value, including buildings, factories, farms, boat-building shops, logging operations and mining camps.

Despite restrictions, Japanese Canadian workers had a presence throughout the province, working in a diversity of occupations. Poweru gai (Vancouver's Powell Street) and the Vancouver waterfront was an important area for fishing, canning, and milling industries on Burrard Inlet. Working in sawmills in New Westminster, boatbuilding at the Japanese-owned Nanaimo Shipyards on Newcastle Island, the fishing, saltery, canning, and boat-building industries in Steveston and skilled carpentry and construction jobs were all held by Japanese Canadians. Further afield, Japanese Canadians participated in mining and mill town industries and canneries and fisheries up and down the B.C. coast. They also participated in early property development and business ventures.

Some Japanese Canadians consider their ultimate economic prosperity as a triumph over discrimination, a demonstration of success from the margins.

#### Sawmills

The single largest source of labour and employment for Japanese Canadians was sawmilling. The B.C. sawmill industry, from its inception in the mid-



Japanese miner at the Horsefly hydraulic mine, 1896.  
(BC Archives d-07743)



Japanese-Canadian logger,  
Cameron Lake Logging Co., 1937.  
(BC Archives b-07875)



nineteenth century until its full development in the early twentieth century, relied upon substantial numbers of Asian labourers. As well as being a massive financial and economic resource for Japanese Canadians, sawmills helped create communities. The prosperity provided by the lumber companies, thriving Japanese communities developed that included homes, a schools, churches, and community halls. The Hastings Mill, established at the foot of Dunlevy Avenue in Vancouver in 1865 provided employment for the Powell Street population. At the Royston sawmill on Vancouver Island, the owner was Japanese Canadian, while Japanese Canadian labourers lived and worked at the McLean Sawmill on Vancouver Island.

### **Developing agriculture**

Farming and agriculture was an important source of employment and land ownership for Japanese Canadians. Traditionally a high-status occupation in Japan, the ownership of a farm in B.C. was sought after. Many Japanese Canadians worked as labourers in sawmills or fish canneries until they were able to establish themselves as farmers, but others could not afford to make the transition to farming. As a result, many of those who could not afford to purchase a farm returned to Japan to buy land and practice agriculture there.

Successful farms were located in the Fraser Valley, in places such as Surrey, Mission, Haney, Whonnock, Abbotsford, Bradner, Matsqui and Aldergrove, as well as in the Okanagan Valley. Japanese Canadians were considered essential in clearing and draining land for agriculture. Places such as Strawberry Hill in Surrey recognize the importance of Japanese-Canadian farmers in B.C.

Among the Euro-Canadian population there was a widespread fear of agricultural competition from Japanese Canadians. In 1918, the United Farmers Organization stated their position that the provincial government undertake measures to prevent Japanese Canadians from acquiring control of agricultural lands. The use of Japanese Canadian labour for harvesting crops was tolerated, provided they were escorted to their point of employment and back to their current addresses as soon as harvesting was completed.

### **Fishing for a living**

Japanese Canadians were active in the fishing industry, often owning fish plants and herring salteries, and coming to dominate the industry particularly on the Fraser River. Japanese Canadian fishermen took part almost exclusively in the gillnet and troller salmon fishery. They value their industriousness, cleanliness and attention to quality. Other water-based farming activities included oyster farming in places such as Fanny Bay. In northern communities, often both parents would work in the fish packing plants which were dominated by the

BC Packers Fishing Company for much of the 20th century.

The success of Japanese Canadians in the fishing industry was always tempered by discriminatory practices. In 1928, regulations were passed to permit white and Indigenous fishermen to use motorized boats, while Japanese Canadians were not. Just prior to the war, regulations were brought in that restricted Japanese Canadians from obtaining fishing licences.

Through the loss of most of its work force, the dispossession of fishing boats and the organization of labour, the expulsion of Japanese Canadians from the B.C. coast had a profound impact on the fishing industry.

#### **Other work**

Japanese Canadians consider themselves entrepreneurial, engaging in work in many areas of the economy. Some Japanese Canadian nurses and a few doctors were practicing in small towns and later in the internment camps. Those that were able to keep their licences during the war often continued to practice post-war in or near the places they were assigned to during internment.

Japanese Canadian-owned commercial, industrial, mining and forestry businesses, such as Kagetsu and Royston Lumber on Vancouver Island. Many small businesses were located in cities, such as a ladies' wear store on Granville Street, small businesses on Robson Street, taxi services, dry-cleaning shops in Vancouver and Victoria (with the wives doing the alterations), and manufacturing resources such as ethnic food items including soy sauce and tofu.

Gardening was another profession that Japanese Canadians were involved in maintaining city parks, large gardens and estates. Their characteristic tree and shrub pruning practice can still be seen today.

#### **Conscripted work**

Pre-World War II Japanese Canadian contributions to the economy were followed by wartime labouring work on highway infrastructure projects in the B.C. Interior. Projects included the construction of the Hope-Princeton highway, the TransCanada Highway and the Yellowhead Highway as a part of their forced internment away from the B.C. coast. The workers were housed in road camps near their worksites, in places such as Eagle Pass near Revelstoke, camps between Hope and Princeton in today's Manning Park, and in communities along the Yellowhead Highway from the interior or B.C. into the province of Alberta. Other conscripted work included labouring in the sugar beet fields on farms in Manitoba.

#### **Exclusion from mainstream business, professions, industry**

Legislated labour restrictions often ensured that Japanese Canadians would

be employed in certain types of labour. For example, with the Hayashi-Lemieux Agreement in 1908, Japan agreed to restrict the number of passports it issued to male labourers and domestic servants to 400 each year. While returning residents and their wives, children and parents were permitted, new immigrants were restricted to men employed by Japanese Canadians in Canada for personal and domestic service, labourers approved by the Canadian government, and agricultural labourers contracted by Japanese land holders.

Generally excluded from the professions until 1949, Japanese Canadians were seen to have waged a long battle for equal pay for equal work and the standard 40-hour work week. In 1948, the Canadian public protested the re-institution of a regulation prohibiting the use of Japanese labour in the logging industry, a regulation that had been suspended during the war in the interests of wartime production. Its re-institution meant that 800 Japanese Canadian forest workers faced unemployment, and the companies employing them, mostly small companies in the labour-short Interior, faced bankruptcy.

#### **Forming workers' organizations**

Throughout their history in B.C., Japanese Canadians have understood the need for labour organizations to protect their economic rights. The Japanese Fishermen's Association was organized in Steveston, B.C. as early as 1897. The Japanese Labour Union, later the Camp and Millworkers Union, formed in 1920 under Etsu Suzuki, and the Tofino Fishermen's Cooperative were created just before World War II when restrictions were being placed on fishing licenses for Japanese Canadians. The Richmond Berry Growers' Association represented over 55 Japanese Canadian farmers.

#### **Post-war post-industrial expansion**

Post-war contributions to the provincial economy meant starting from nothing after the confiscation and sale of Japanese Canadian assets. It also meant re-entry into a provincial economy that had changed from its pre-war resource-extraction focus to a rapidly expanding, diversified economy.

The future for Japanese Canadians remaining in B.C. lay less in the traditional lumber mills, canning and fishing industries than in the services sector and entrepreneurial business opportunities that catered to the diversification of the economy, expansion of the population and new consumer consumption.

Post-secondary education is seen as key to future professional, technical and business practices. Japanese Canadians were able to overcome the setbacks of the war and through hard work, rebuild their lives in the postwar economy, entering the workforce as academics, professionals, technicians and business owners as well as continuation in the trades, marketing and retailing.



## Theme 4 Facing Racism and Seeking Justice

From the origins of British Columbia, systems of government have evolved in Canada. This theme focuses on government institutions including legislatures and government-sponsored actions and services as they relate to the Japanese Canadian experience in B.C.

The long struggle against societal racism and racist government policies, the abrogation of basic rights based on those policies, and the long and ongoing struggle of seeking justice and making broadly known the past wrongs, is central to understanding the Japanese Canadian experience in the province.

From the time of their first arrival, Japanese Canadians faced racist Canadian government policy and racism in a colonial society that identified itself as British. In a succession of Canadian regulations and acts, Japanese Canadians, along with other people of non-British origins, faced increasing barriers to immigration, settlement and equality.

The forced relocation of Japanese Canadians away from their coastal home communities and the selling of their property by the Canadian Custodian of Enemy Property are central events in the history of Japanese Canadians in the province. Historical distrust, dispossession of property and the obliteration of livelihoods has occurred since the first Japanese immigrant, Manzo Nagano, arrived in B.C. in 1877.

These events are considered significant because the story and impact of what happened to Japanese Canadians is still evident in living memory among the earlier generations of Japanese Canadians in B.C. and Canada. It often seems as though the younger generations do not know and appreciate the history, in part perhaps because the first and second generation *Issei* and *Nisei* were reluctant to discuss the situation. There is concern within the Japanese Canadian community that such things could happen again to other communities and groups, and for this reason, this history should not be forgotten.

Seeking justice for the suspension of their rights with the War Measures Act resulted in the Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement in 1988. Internment and displacement remain within the memory of many Japanese Canadians, with a legacy of ongoing interpretation of that history.

### Segregation and discrimination

Discriminatory and exclusionary race-based legislation and other regulations can be understood in the historical context of the provincial and federal governments' distrust of Japanese Canadians up until the late 1940s. This distrust is seen in the prevalence of Anti-Asian leagues and the discriminatory relationship between Japanese Canadians and the provincial and federal governments.



Discriminatory policies created by governments were adopted by, and became the sentiment of, much of the public, resulting in segregation and discrimination towards Japanese Canadians on a day-to-day basis, as well as in the history of anti-Asian violence in B.C. Protests of fear against Asian workers appropriating jobs resulted in events such as the 1907 anti-Asian riots in Vancouver Chinatown and Powell Street. Discrimination meant not having the right to vote or to work for government.

Segregation was seen in places such as *Poweru gai* (Vancouver's Powell Street) and separate enclaves outside of small communities such as Lillooet and No.1 Japan Town in Cumberland. Canneries maintained segregated living quarters in places such as Steveston and the north coast canneries in Prince Rupert and elsewhere, with Japanese Canadians working on their own floats and net racks and maintaining their own housing arrangements.

Economic discrimination and exclusion was primarily related to fear of Japanese Canadian success, and came in the form of regulations forbidding the ownership of land and farms, the reduction of fishing licences and other acts designed to keep Japanese Canadians from becoming too prosperous economically. There also existed discrimination connected to language and customs, and assumptions based on appearance.

### **Internment and dispossession**

Racist policy against Japanese Canadians culminated in the War Measures Act enacted by the federal government in 1941 resulting in the dispossession of Japanese Canadian property, the confiscation and renaming of boats and boatworks and the loss of ownership of businesses. In 1942, almost 22,000 men, women and children of Japanese descent, 75 per cent of whom were Canadian citizens, were removed from their homes, farms and businesses. Many were incarcerated temporarily at Hastings Park in Vancouver before dispersal to various internment sites 100 miles inland from the coast outside the "Protected Area." Japanese Canadians were not permitted entry into this area until 1949.

By 1943 all seized assets and properties of interned Japanese Canadians were liquidated by the federal government, with proceeds from sales applied to cover the cost of their internment. The forced sale of property abrogated their human rights, with profits going to others from land seizures and the confiscation of property.

A program was established by the BC Security Commission through which family groups who had the financial means could remain together and live in selected "self-support" internment sites, where men were allowed to live in the camp as long as they could financially support themselves. Such camps were located at places such as Christina Lake, Bridge River, Lillooet, McGillivray Falls, and Minto City. The numbers who could afford to live in the

self-supporting camps was very small.

The “self-support” contrasted with the experience of the majority of families who were sent to the interior internment camps where the men were removed from their families because of the need to support themselves through work outside of the incarceration site.<sup>1</sup> Women, children and the elderly went to the internment camps while the men were sent to isolated road camps where they were required to build their own bunkhouses.

Internment camps established in B.C., most of them in the B.C. Interior, are considered by Japanese Canadians to be some of the most significant historic sites in the province. Most of them were in isolated or rural areas of the Kootenays, some were abandoned ghost towns such as Sandon, others such as Tashme recognized for being the largest camp in B.C. Most of the camps have been dismantled or destroyed.

Proposed “voluntary repatriation” did not offer a truly voluntary choice between Japan and Canada. Rather, the choice was between repatriation to Japan at some unspecified future date, and immediate resettlement east of the Rocky Mountains. It was a choice that may have been calculated to convince those in detention camps to choose Japan.<sup>2</sup> But the Canadian public did not support the federal government regarding “repatriation.” A coalition of Japanese Canadian civil rights groups, the Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians, supported by the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, churches and the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, protested that the proposed repatriation policy was a violation of civil rights.

### **Defending B.C. and Canada**

Japanese Canadians have always expressed their loyalty to Canada. Despite discrimination, 200 Japanese Canadians volunteered for service with the Canadian army in France during World War I. Despite citizenship, Japanese Canadians were excluded from military service in World War II, and while they were deemed to be disloyal and a threat to the nation, at the same time their labour was critical to the success of Canada’s war effort.

### **Seeking a political voice**

Japanese Canadians have always sought a political voice to defend themselves against discrimination and gain their rights as Canadian citizens. Organizations such as the Japanese Canadian Citizens’ League galvanized efforts to win the right to vote in 1936. This was finally achieved in 1949, giving Japanese Canadians full rights of citizenship. Although free to return to B.C., very few Japanese Canadians who had been sent to other parts of Canada had the means or the inclination to move back to British Columbia.

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1 Oikawa, Mona. Cartographies of Violence p. 216

2 Sunahara, Ann Gomer. The Politics of Racism p. 105

Following the war, the Cooperative Committee on Japanese Canadians was established in Toronto in June 1943 to look after the resettlement problems and needs of Japanese Canadians who were arriving in Toronto from relocation centres in British Columbia

It is significant to people when a person of Japanese descent is elected into office or achieves public recognition. This reflects in part the way in which some in the community Japanese community see their participation in wider society as part of the healing process.

**Ongoing struggles for justice and understanding**

In the years following the war, racism gradually became something the public wouldn't tolerate from their government. An acknowledgement, apology and compensation by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in 1988 came with a compensation package of \$21,000 to each Japanese Canadian who had been in Canada at the end of March 1949, and the re-instatement of Canadian citizenship to those who were deported to Japan. Powell Street and the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver continues to be a place for ongoing discussion about issues of dispossession, as well as the interpretation of Japanese Canadian history and historical museum curation related to internment.

- *Issei*, The first generation of immigrants, born in Japan before moving to Canada
- *Nisei*, The second generation, born in Canada to Issei parents not born in Canada
- *Sansei*, The third generation, born in Canada to Nisei parents born in Canada
- *Yonsei*, The fourth generation, born in Canada to Sansei parents born in Canada
- *Gosei*, The fifth generation, born in Canada to Yonsei parents born in Canada

Japanese Hall in Mission, 1930.  
(BC Archives b-01064)



## Theme 5 Building Japanese Canadian Society

Japanese Canadians have established a variety of clubs and organizations to enrich community life and assist those in need. This theme focuses on the structure of Japanese Canadian society and the variety of social constructs, temporary and long-lasting, formal and informal, independent and allied with the government, that have influenced the community.

Japanese Canadian society in B.C. is considered to be not a reproduction of cultural and social structures from their country of origin, but one of innovation and adaptation within the context of B.C.'s development. The size and location of Japanese Canadian settlements in B.C. convey widespread participation in the provincial economy, while physical buildings, structures and works help illustrate Japanese Canadian society life in B.C.

Places associated with Japanese Canadian society include sophisticated stores and accommodation on Powell Street and elsewhere in Vancouver, living and working quarters in coastal settlements and cannery dormitories, internment and work camps, hospitals, temples, and the many language schools across the province.

As a society, most Japanese Canadians consider themselves to be respectful and law-abiding. For example, in Steveston in the early part of the twentieth century, police were not needed because of the large population of upstanding Japanese Canadian citizens.

### Integration through generations

Integration is very important to Japanese Canadians, with so much effort made by people to blend into Canadian society. It was felt to be a significant and symbolic step for governments to recognize the citizenship of Japanese Canadians. It is considered to be honouring family history through the sacrifices made to remain in B.C. following the war.

Many of the older generations of Japanese Canadians, the Issei and Nisei, prefer not to talk about the war years because *shikata ga nai*, "there is nothing to do," preferring to look to the future and the success of the next generations. This is considered symbolic of cultural commitment and integration, with the Japanese Canadian community becoming more and more integrated into other communities with each generation.

The Sansei are the third generation of Japanese Canadians. While for some there was no need to focus attention on traditional Japanese culture, others in communities across the province upheld Japanese culture and customs, resulting in a strong sense of community and cultural identity.

The post-war third generation pattern of Japanese Canadian Inter-racial marriage is another aspect of integration. Rare before World War II, today

Japanese Canadians are found to have, at between 80 and 95%, the highest rate of inter-marriage of any ethnic group in the country.

### **Invisibility and erasure**

Part of Canadian society but excluded from many of its institutions, Japanese Canadians often formed their own close-knit communities and developed their own social, religious and economic institutions, including community halls, schools, hospitals, Christian churches and Buddhist temples.

Any consideration of Japanese Canadian society or community must be understood within the devastating and far-reaching impact of internment, uprooting, dispossession, forced relocation and exile to Japan. The pre-1950 history of Japanese Canadians in terms of historic places is often an invisible history, as land and property such as businesses, homes, farms and boats were confiscated and sold. Wartime internment camps and accommodation were mostly abandoned and dismantled, or put to other uses after 1949. The Japanese Canadian legacy is partly a remembrance of disappeared places of historical significance, such as:

- Former locations of houses and commercial properties, language schools, temples and settlements
- Former locations of boatworks buildings
- Former locations of gardens and domestic landscapes

### **Institutions and service to community**

Without the idea of service to community, rebuilding Japanese Canadian lives after the war would have been even more difficult. Individuals and organizations were key to the re-building of Japanese Canadian culture and supporting Japanese Canadian communities.

The Womens' Missionary Society workers, individuals and social agencies assisted Japanese Canadians in the camps and upon resettlement. Other organizations included those such as the Lillooet Miyazaki House, the Haney Nokai, the Japanese Fishermen's Hospital in Steveston, the Lookout Society's Sakura-so and Tamura House on Powell Street, the Nanaimo Seven Potatoes Society (Central Vancouver Island Japanese-Canadian Cultural Society) and the Tashme Shinwa-kai or Tashme Friendship Centre are some of the institutions that assisted in re-establishing the important values of literacy, education, service and the sense of community that was lost with the forced removal from the coast.

Tonari Gumi, the Japanese Community Volunteers' Society, was founded in 1974 with the goal of improving the lives of Vancouver's Issei population and assisting the new immigrant population. Some Issei in the Powell Street area were able to take advantage of housing established on Powell Street in the 1970s. The move of Tonari Gumi to Burnaby was facilitated by the much

larger population of Japanese Canadians there.

Temples and Christian churches with Japanese Canadian congregations are considered important to the Japanese Canadian community. Buddhist temples are often the cultural centres of the community, and while the majority were traditionally Japanese Canadian, since the 1960s and 70s, inter-racial marriages brought other groups in.

Japanese Canadians note the importance of education for getting ahead economically, although in the past education was fraught with discrimination. Public schools were often only available to those who owned land. Post-secondary education was halted due to relocation during the war, although higher education became possible after the return to B.C. In 2010, UBC held a special graduation ceremony for those degrees never awarded.

Japanese Canadians in B.C. are known for their very early medicare system for fishermen and their families, for which fishermen paid \$8.00 per year. The system's significance was such that when Tommy Douglas of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation was studying medicare systems he visited the Japanese Hospital in Steveston. Historical developments such as these are an example of ways in which Japanese Canadian culture is a source of pride and how it helped shape the development of B.C. and the country.

#### **Landmarks, works and landscapes**

A significant number of historic places represent values associated with landmarks, infrastructure works, landscapes and structures related to Japanese Canadian history and society. One identifiable neighbourhood is Poweru gai (Vancouver's Powell Street) with its buildings and landmarks.

Surviving houses in Japanese Canadian enclaves in towns and the locations of bunkhouses and dormitories in mining communities, and sawmilling sites and canneries are part of the social economic history of Japanese Canadians. Internment and work camp sites and buildings have their own poignant legacy.

Commemorative gardens are found to be significant, particularly those that include references to the former presence of Japanese Canadians before their forced removal, including Sakura in Oppenheimer Park. Representative Japanese gardens planted as commemorations to communities are valued for their ability to give people a peaceful and meaningful place to spend time.

Japanese Canadian cemeteries are highly significant landscapes, particularly those in places such as Port Alberni and Cumberland, and those that were destroyed during the war. Cairns and monuments that commemorate the Japanese Canadian experience have been erected across the province, while infrastructure works, such as highways built with Japanese Canadian labour, are reminders of past wrongs.

### **Redress settlement**

Redress for internment and dispossession during the war was undertaken by the National Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association, later the National Association of Japanese Canadians formed in 1947 as the voice of Japanese Canadians across the country. They pressed for compensation from the Royal Commission under Justice Henry Bird. The Bird Commission gave very small settlements for property loss, but the loss of income, disruption of education and emotional and psychological trauma were not considered.<sup>1</sup> The 1988 Redress Settlement did take these issues into consideration. The eventual agreement was for a symbolic settlement of \$21,000.00 because it was not possible to quantify the extent of loss.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this, Japanese Canadians, by their determined loyalty to Canada regardless of the harsh treatment inflicted on them, proved that they are full, contributing members of Canadian society.

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1 Miki, Roy & Kobayashi, Cassandra. *Justice in our Time: The Japanese Canadian Redress Settlement* p.76.

2 Audrey Kobayashi, personal communication.



Powell Street Festival.  
(Japanese Canadian Language School)



Spring Bazaar.  
(Japanese Canadian Language School)

## Theme 6 Expressing a Cultural Legacy

This theme addresses Japanese Canadians' contributions to British Columbia's intellectual and cultural wealth and includes commemorations of their intellectual pursuits, artistic expression and athletic achievement.

The cultural legacy of Japanese Canadians in B.C. is found in part in what remains of what they built, created, produced, and fought for despite community disruption and alienation. It also lies in the cultural practices that arose as adaptations of Japanese culture to the reality of life in British Columbia beginning more than a century ago. Today, these cultural practices are maintained and reinterpreted as a reflection of innovation and adaptation rather than a full-scale importation of typical Japanese conventions.

Some Japanese Canadians believe that racism, dispossession and the abrogation of human rights is one of the most powerful cultural legacies of the community. The ongoing work to interpret the history of Japanese Canadians to British Columbian and Canadian society in the province and country is part of the community's contemporary culture.

While the newer generations may not completely embrace traditional Japanese arts and culture, Japanese culture has been integrated to some degree into Japanese Canadian life. Immigrants and their descendants have retained and adapted various unique skills and art forms from Japan, from martial arts and ikebana, (flower arranging) to a more contemporary interpretation of arts such as manga and taiko drumming.

Japanese Canadian art and culture are considered valuable for their contribution to the economy.

### Cultural centres, festivals and leisure

Festivals and cultural centres are an important part of Japanese culture. The Powell Street Festival is an on-going engagement with the Powell Street community, while the Burnaby's Matsuri festival is a ceremony to commemorate gods, ancestors, and Buddha. Japanese language schools and halls continue to provide education and cultural programming, while places such as the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre provide interpretation, culture and research.

Participation in sports was one way Japanese Canadians could excel, and there was a post-war effort to reconstitute community groups through sport. There is a strong legacy related to the Asahi baseball team which played in the Powell Street Grounds in the 1930s, part of a tradition of baseball carried into cannery towns and other Japanese communities. Prominent people of Japanese descent who have done well in the Canadian sports context post-1950s include Shige Sasaki, the father of Canadian Judo, Steve Kamino of the Asahi baseball team and Joe Yamauchi, the first Japanese

New Denver May Day float, date unknown. (Silver Stocan Historical Society)



Nikkei Matsuri festival. (Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre)



Canadian BC Lion.

Martial arts such as Judo and Kendo were introduced to B.C. by Japanese immigrants. There are now clubs practicing these arts all over Canada. In addition to physical activity, the practice is valued for its ability to teach young people responsibility and mental discipline. Cultural activities were also part of resource communities and in internment camps.

Japanese Canadian restaurants and cafes are part of life in B.C. cities and many small towns. In Vancouver, Akio Takeuchi's Aki restaurant on Powell Street was one of the first Japanese restaurants in Vancouver, an affordable place where many discovered sushi and other Japanese foods in the early 1970s. Today, Vancouver is known for its sushi, and izakaya restaurants are popular.

### **Media, arts, cinema and literature**

Japanese language newspapers such as Vancouver Shinpo, Nikkei Voice and others are important to the Japanese Canadian community. The New Canadian, an English-only newspaper then known as the voice of the Nisei, began publishing in 1938 in Vancouver

Significant Japanese Canadian writers and artists are creating experimental art and literature that is critical of racism. Artists and writers from within the Japanese Canadian community are considered special in their ability to articulate the story and contribute to the healing process, opening a dialogue between generations. In one instance, first and second generation Japanese Canadians were reluctant to talk about their experiences until they read Obasan by Joy Kogawa. Contemporary films by Masuda Media, including "The Spirit of Nihonmachi," "Children of Redress" and "The Right to Remain." Haiku poetry is vital and contemporary.

TV JAPAN, offered by Shaw, broadcasts many of its live news programs with English translation as a secondary audio service. An additional few select programs are provided in English or with English subtitles.

There is a legacy, particularly in the Lower Mainland, of Japanese Canadian gardeners' landscape aesthetic of clipped shrubbery. This is a legacy from the 1940s and later when gardening and landscaping, maintaining parks, gardens and estates and tree and shrub pruning practice was undertaken by Japanese Canadians.

### **Traditional cultural practices**

Some Japanese traditional cultural practice has been carried on through generations, sometimes interpreted through contemporary works. Examples include flower arranging called Ikebana and bonsai that occurs

in many communities. Tea ceremonies Japanese calligraphy (Shodo), Noh style structured, formal, ritualistic, traditional theatre, Kabuki and Shibai, or traditional plays, are some traditional Japanese Canadian cultural experiences.

#### **Japanese Canadians in science**

The sciences, and particularly environmentalism, is an area where a number of Japanese Canadians figure prominently. Well known names include Santa J. Ono, biologist and president of the University of British Columbia, Juhn Atsushi Wada, neuroscientist, professor at University of British Columbia and Officer of the Order of Canada and David Suzuki, biologist, environmentalist and Companion of the Order of Canada.

#### **Commemoration and interpretation**

Ongoing research, commemoration and interpretation of Japanese Canadian history and heritage is recognized as being important. Some of these activities include Landscapes of Injustice research and outreach activities, the creation of memorials to internment camps and the forced removal of Japanese Canadians, the on-going education of B.C. and Canadian society about the history of Japanese Canadians, and significant and accurate public schools programs related to the history of Japanese Canadians.

## **Coda**

Japanese Canadians have had enormous influence in the development of the province of B.C. They have established lives and homes across British Columbia, in small towns and urban areas, contributing the economic growth of the province, and have brought a new and enriching cultural understanding. The nominated historic places represent a diverse presence and multiple stories of Japanese Canadians and their contributions to the formation of the province.

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