

# Life Histories of Japanese Canadian ‘Deportees’: A Father and Son Case Study

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## アブストラクト

この論文は第二次大戦中にカナダ政府による日系カナダ人の強制移住と強制収容、戦後に4千人の日系カナダ人を日本に送った「送還」を体験した日系カナダ人第一世代の男性とその息子のライフヒストリー のケーススタディである。第一章で強制移住、強制収容、強制送還の歴史的背景と送還された日系カナダ人が直面した日本での状況を述べ、第二章では父の、第三章ではその息子のライフヒストリーを述べる。最後の第四章で、いくつかある父と息子の生活史上の重要事件を、同じく強制収容と強制送還、戦後日本の廃墟と絶望的状况の中から新しい生活を始める苦労を体験した他の日系カナダ人の体験談と比較し、今後の研究方向を示唆する。

## Abstract

*This paper is a life history case study about a first generation Japanese Canadian and his son who experienced the uprooting and internment of Japanese Canadians by the Canadian government during World War 2 and then experienced the subsequent ‘deportation’ of almost 4000 Japanese Canadians to Japan at the end of the war. The first chapter gives some relevant historical background about the uprooting, internment, the ‘deportation’ and the situation the Japanese Canadian ‘deportees’ faced upon arriving and settling in Japan. The second chapter tells the life history of the father, and the third chapter focuses on the life history of the son. Finally, the fourth chapter compares some of the key events from these two life histories with the reported experiences of other Japanese Canadians who also experienced internment, ‘deportation’ and trying to start a new life in the ruins and desperate conditions of post-war Japan, and also suggests future directions this research could take.*

**Key Words:** deportation, dispersal, internment, Japanese Canadian, life history

## Introduction

On September 22 of 1988, the prime minister of Canada, Brian Mulroney, issued a formal public apology to Japanese Canadians for the unjust treatment they had received from the Canadian government in the period just before, during and following World War 2. He additionally offered financial compensation to the community and to surviving individuals who had suffered through that sad period of Canadian history. This belated formal redress of the injustices committed against Japanese Canadians marked an important milestone in Canada's continuing development from a racist white society to the more tolerant and culturally diverse society that it is known for today.

Over the last 40 years there has been an increasing amount of scholarship about Japanese Canadian history, especially regarding their uprooting, dispossession and internment during the war, their dispersal following the war, and related human rights issues. However, although the events leading up to the 'deportation'<sup>1</sup> of almost 4000 Japanese Canadian citizens to Japan after the war are often discussed in the literature, there has been less research about what became of the 'deportees', especially those who did not end up returning to Canada.

Tatsuo Kage, who participated in delegations that went to Japan during the late 1980s to contact and assist Japanese Canadians in Japan with their individual applications for redress compensation from the Canadian government, later interviewed several of them and summarized the interviews in his book, *Nikkei Kanadajin no Tsuiho* [The Banishment of Japanese Canadians]. This book was more recently translated into English and titled, *Uprooted Again*.

This paper, largely inspired and influenced by Kage's book, is a case study of the life histories of a first generation Japanese Canadian named Suejiro Ibuki and his son Mikio Ibuki (names used with permission), who were uprooted from Vancouver, interned in the camp at Slocan City, and then 'deported' to Japan after the war. First, for the sake of readers unfamiliar with Japanese Canadian history, relevant historical background to the case study is presented. Next Suejiro Ibuki's life history is presented, followed by the life history of his son Mikio Ibuki.

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1 I use the word 'deport' and its derivatives in quotation marks because of the inherent contradiction of a country deporting someone who is a citizen of that country. While some of the 'deportees' still held Japanese citizenship, most were either naturalized Canadian citizens or born-in-Canada citizens. Hence the phrase 'forced exile' has also often been used to describe their situation. Likewise, the title of the original Japanese version of Kage's book uses the word 'tsuiho' (which can be translated as 'banishment').

Finally, the life histories of both Suejiro and Mikio Ibuki are briefly compared with those of other Japanese Canadians (mainly interviewed and reported by Kage) who likewise experienced internment and 'deportation' to Japan.

The paper is largely based on Mikio Ibuki's written responses to an interview questionnaire and a set of follow-up written questions, two subsequent follow-up oral interviews and several ad hoc email correspondences between him and the writer. Although Mikio's parents have already passed away, and although Mikio himself was still a very small child when many of the events happened, he still has vivid memories of this period and also possesses a large number of documents, photos and mementos related to his parents' time in Canada, his own childhood in an internment camp, the trip to Japan, and the years following their move to Japan. These materials were also used in the process of gathering data for this life history case study.

## **Chapter 1: Relevant Historical Background**

### **Japanese Canadians before World War 2**

The first recorded Japanese immigrant to Canada, Manzo Nagano, arrived alone in 1877. Although significant numbers of Japanese did not start to arrive until the late 1880s, once the flow started, their numbers increased rapidly. Most of these early immigrants worked on the west coast of British Columbia (hereafter referred to as BC) as laborers in the forestry, fishing, mining and agricultural industries, but as their communities began to take shape, many also established small businesses such as export-import companies, various types of stores and restaurants, barbershops, tailors, translation services and so on. Eventually there were small Japanese communities in almost every region of the west coast of BC, but the vast majority settled in the Vancouver area. Most were concentrated in two main settlements, one located in the area around Powell Street in Vancouver, and the other in the nearby fishing town of Steveston.

Despite facing racial discrimination from white British Columbians which manifest itself as disenfranchisement, exclusion from numerous professions, increasingly stringent immigration restrictions and in some cases open hostility, their numbers continued to grow. As they increased in number and became successful in the limited economic sectors in which they were permitted to participate, resentment and prejudice against them also increased.

As Japanese military expansionism grew bolder during the 1930s and news of

Japanese atrocities in China spread, many Canadians became increasingly alarmed and started to wonder if Canada would also become a direct military target of Japan. Prejudice against Japanese Canadians was further stoked by rumors that they were primarily loyal to the Japanese emperor and military government, and indeed were preparing to act as spies for Japan and help facilitate a future Japanese attack on Canada's west coast. As a result, demands for their expulsion from Canada intensified.

### **Uprooting and Internment during World War 2**

In 1941 there were about 23,000 people of Japanese descent in Canada, of whom about 8000 lived in the Vancouver area. The bombing of Pearl harbor on December 7, 1941, as well as attacks against British colonies such as Hong Kong and British Malaya, triggered a series of extraordinary measures by the Canadian government against them. Invoking the *War Measures Act*, the government moved quickly to arrest and detain 38 Japanese Canadians who, based on files previously compiled by the RCMP, were particularly suspected of posing a security threat to Canada and detained them in a camp in a eastern Canada (Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was*, 199). The government also immediately declared a 160 kilometer wide 'security zone' along the BC coast and ordered all Japanese Canadians within this zone to be forcibly uprooted and moved eastward. In addition, the government confiscated all their property including homes, businesses, fishing boats, land, bank accounts and so on, promising to hold them in trust until the war ended, but in fact selling them off later for a fraction of their market value. While a few families with sufficient financial means were allowed to move on their own to approved locations east of the security zone, the vast majority were forcibly moved to internment camps in remote mountain areas in the interior of BC. Many of the men who were of working age were initially assigned to road construction crews in various locations in the BC interior and the province of Ontario, while the elderly, the infirm, the women and the children were moved to the internment camps. By October 1942, about 12,500 Japanese Canadians had been moved to the internment camps, 3600 had moved to the prairie provinces to work on sugar beet farms, 2150 (young men)<sup>2</sup> had been sent to road construction camps and 750

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<sup>2</sup> Kage points out (personal communication) that by October, 1942, the number of young men sent to the road construction camps was reduced to 945. Many of these men were married and the enforced separation from their families resulted in protests such as sit-down strikes. Consequently, some of these protesters, labelled as "malcontents", were interned by the government (Removal of Japanese from

had been sent to POW camps (Timmons 12).

Living conditions in the camps varied but generally were harsh, especially at the beginning. Unlike the BC coast, winters were extremely cold and the buildings lacked proper insulation and heating. In some camps, nutrition was also poor. However, the Japanese Canadians in these camps resiliently labored together to repair and upgrade their housing and environment. They even got help from some sympathetic non-Japanese Canadians, and their living conditions gradually became somewhat more bearable.

While the adults were deeply traumatized by their forced uprooting and severe new situation in the camps, they did their best to shelter the children from this harsh reality, and, as much as possible, provide them with a near-normal childhood. One very difficult problem facing them almost immediately concerned the children's education. While the BC government reluctantly agreed to provide primary education, it refused to provide kindergarten and high school education. Fortunately, teachers from several mainstream church groups stepped in to help fill the gap, particularly the United Church, the Anglican Church, the Catholic Church and the Buddhist Church. These churches consulted together and decided which camps each church would be in charge of. The Greenwood camp was assigned to the Catholic Church, the Kaslo camp to the United Church, the Sandon camp to the Buddhist Church, and the camps around Slocan to the Anglican Church (Nakayama 12). Then each church sent teachers into the camps to start kindergarten and high school education programs.

The teaching staff of these kindergartens consisted of missionaries who had returned from Japan just prior to the war, professional teachers who had previously been teaching in the church-run kindergartens in and around Vancouver, and some dedicated Japanese Canadians who served as assistants. In the case of the Slocan area camps, the main driving force in the founding and continuation of the kindergartens was a very enthusiastic and energetic lady named Margaret Foster, who had previously been teaching in Anglican kindergartens for Japanese Canadian children in Vancouver. When the internment began, she and Alice Cox, a missionary returnee from Japan, went along with the first trainload of Japanese Canadians to Slocan and set about establishing kindergartens in the camps<sup>3</sup>. One

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Protected Areas: Report Issued by British Columbia Security Commission, March 4, 1942 to October 31, 1942, p. 8 [cited by Kage].

3 For an interesting description and discussion in Japanese about the Anglican Church's educational activities in the camps, see Ogawa, Yo. "Nikkeijin wo Tasuketa Kanadajin to-kanada seikokai no katsudo wo chushin ni" [Canadian People Who Helped Japanese Canadians: focusing on activities by the Anglican

of her Japanese assistants later wrote about her devotion and interaction with the children as follows:

She had the ability to bring out the best in every child. I can still recall the expression on each child's face as she talked with him or her. She made each of them feel so special. Those were happy days for the children, in spite of the unsettling times for the Japanese Canadians. How fortunate they were to have received so much love and nurturing at such an early age. I am sure some of the happiest memories for many of those children...are those camp days spent with Miss Foster (Moritsugu 136).

### **The Undesirable Choice between Dispersal or 'Deportation'**

As the war neared its end, the Canadian government had to decide what to do next with the Japanese Canadian internees. There was intense political pressure from British Columbian politicians to prevent them from moving back to the BC coast. Consequently, unlike their Japanese American counterparts who were allowed to return to their homes and livelihoods on the west coast nine months prior to the end of the war (Timmons 99), the Japanese Canadians were prohibited from doing so, and, in the form of a 'loyalty test', were given two very undesirable choices: 1) disperse to various locations in eastern Canada or, 2) agree to be 'deported' to Japan. This 'loyalty test' was administered between February and August of 1945. Those who agreed to move east of the Canadian Rocky Mountains (that is, east of BC) and enter government determined jobs were to be deemed 'loyal'. Those who refused this option and instead agreed to be sent to Japan were to be deemed 'disloyal'. This second option also required renunciation of Canadian citizenship. Those who chose to go to Japan would be given 200 dollars each plus 50 dollars for each child (under 16 years old) plus free passage (Timmons 12). By August of 1945, a total of 10,347 Japanese Canadians (6884 adults who had signed the form and their 3503 dependents under 16 years old), making up about 40 percent of the Japanese Canadian population, were on the list of those who had supposedly volunteered to be 'deported' to Japan (Sunahara 109).

Although the government claimed their choice was made willingly, in reality it was not so voluntary, and many made the decision out of desperation. Actually, most felt that they had no other realistic choice, one of the main reasons being that, due to the confiscation and selling off of their property and other assets, and

due to the prohibition against their returning to the BC coast, they had almost nothing with which to restart and rebuild their lives. Especially for those who were older and had spent their lives fishing or working as laborers in the forestry, mining or agriculture industries, there were strong doubts that they would be able to acquire new job skills and be able to make a living in the unknown environment of eastern Canada. Rumors of hardships and discrimination faced by a few who had who had already moved east aggravated this anxiety.

Another compelling motivation for many was deep anxiety about the wellbeing of their relatives in Japan, particularly elderly parents or children who had been sent to Japan for education before the war and were stranded there. Due to the impossibility of communicating with relatives in Japan during the war, many were desperate to learn whether their family members were still alive and how they were faring, and returning to Japan seemed to be the only way to do so.

Illness and the infirmities of old age within some families made it virtually impossible for them to move east, at least on the government's hasty schedule. When the government officials refused to show flexibility for such cases, the only option was for the younger healthier family members to move east and leave their ailing elders in the camps, thus effectively breaking up their families. This unbearable situation caused more to agree to be sent to Japan. In addition, some elderly Japanese Canadians wanted to return to Japan so they could die in their hometowns.

Others, of all ages, felt so betrayed and unjustly treated by the Canadian government that they just wanted to get out of Canada. Yet others worried that, if they moved to eastern Canada, they would again face discrimination there and possibly even be uprooted again. Finally, there were some who in fact were loyal to imperial Japan and even refused to believe that Japan had lost the war. Sunahara (106) points out that the extremely low morale in the internment camps after three years of internment strengthened this faction and enabled them to intimidate and coerce others into making the decision to go to Japan. In his autobiography, David Suzuki describes how those in the Slocan City camp who did not choose to go to Japan were called dogs and how his mother was ostracized by other women when they learned that the Suzuki family had decided to stay in Canada and move east (Suzuki 21).

Not unexpectedly, there were also disagreements within families about whether to return. For example, some older Japanese Canadians wanted to return to Japan for reasons such as the above, while their children, who had been born and raised

in Canada, spoke little Japanese and had never been to Japan, had no desire to go to what was for them a foreign country. Yet in the end, most reluctantly acquiesced to going to Japan with their parents (For a more detailed discussion of the various overlapping reasons why so many chose to be sent to Japan, see Sunahara 105-109).

Later, as they received more news about the atomic bombings, the surrender of Japan, and the dire conditions in post-war Japan, many regretted their choice to be moved to Japan and tried to cancel it. However, the Canadian government refused to accept any cancellation requests made after Japan's surrender on September 2, 1945.

After the war ended, the government tried to move ahead quickly with the deportations, but was slowed down by bureaucratic red tape and the time needed to charter the ships. There had already been spirited opposition in parliament from the small but vocal socialist party, and reservations had been expressed even by some members of the two mainstream political parties. In addition, perhaps due to the eye-opening experience of World War 2 and the horrors of Nazi racism in Europe, there was within Canadian society a growing awareness of civil rights and sympathy towards Japanese Canadians. Eventually a large number religious organizations, labor unions, civil rights organizations and liberal-minded members of the press united in protest against the 'deportation' of Japanese Canadians as a clear violation of their fundamental rights as Canadian citizens. They even challenged it legally all the way to the Supreme Court. Although the court ruled that the government was allowed to deport first generation Nikkei who still held Japanese citizenship and even those who had become naturalized Canadian citizens, it also ruled that it was illegal to 'deport' their Canadian-born children who were still under sixteen years old. This seriously complicated the government's 'deportation' plans. The matter was finally appealed to the British Privy Council, which ruled, on December 2, 1946, that the deportation plans were legal under Canada's *War Measures Act* and the *National Emergency Powers Act* (a law which extended some of the government's special powers following the expiration of the War Measures Act).

Meanwhile, however, during this process, public indignation and outcry continued to increase. In spite of its limited legal victories, the government finally gave in to the growing public outrage and ended the 'deportations'.<sup>4</sup>

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4 Masumi Izumi's article, "Tetsujonaki kyoseishuyojo—dainisekaitaisen shita no nikkeikanadajin" [Concentration Camps without Barbed Wire—Japanese Canadians during World War II], gives a good

## **Journey to Japan**

In 1946, before the government gave up its 'deportation' policy, almost 4000 Japanese Canadians were sent to Japan in 5 groups, using 3 ships chartered by the Canadian government: the Marine Angel (departed on May 31 with 668 passengers), the General Miggs (departed on June 16 with 1106 passengers and on August 2 with 1377 passengers), and the Marine Falcon (departed on October 2 with 523 passengers and December 24 with 290 passengers). Of the passengers, 34 percent were Japanese nationals whose average age was 51.6 years, 15 percent were naturalized citizens of Canada whose average age was 56.5 years, and 51 percent were Canadian-born citizens whose average age was 16.7 years (Timmons 70).

The lodging, food and treatment of the 'deportees' on the ships were apparently good, although there were reports of seasickness (e.g. Kage, 24, 30). Upon arrival they were processed and briefly lodged at the large repatriation center at Uraga or at nearby Kurihama on Tokyo Bay before being sent by train to their local destinations.

## **Conditions on Their Arrival**

According to a report by a Canadian military officer, Lieutenant Orr, who was stationed in Tokyo and met the passengers on their arrival at Uraga, the first group of passengers were immediately given typhoid and cholera inoculations and lodged in the camp for one night. The next day they were given train tickets to their various destinations and transported to the train station for the final leg of their journeys (Kage 24).

The first reaction reported by many was abject shock at the utter devastation and squalor that was immediately visible as they sailed past Yokohama. Soon they would see Tokyo, likewise devastated, with its numerous war orphans and homeless vagrants desperately seeking food and shelter, and long lines of people waiting to receive limited rations (Ibid).

Another shock was the extremely poor quality of the food and water they received in Uraga and Kurihama (e.g. Kage 30, 104). The food was stale and at

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historical overview in Japanese of the situation of Japanese Canadians before the war, their uprooting, dispossession, internment, and the policy of 'deportation' and dispersal. For a good summary in Japanese of the historical background to the 'deportation' as well as a discussion of what motivated many Japanese Canadians to choose 'deportation' to Japan over dispersal to eastern Canada, see Kage (*Nikkei Kanadajin no Tsuiho*, especially pages 27-66).

times moldy, and tasted so bad that the teenagers and children refused to eat it. These dismal conditions were exacerbated by high prices for any food that might be available for purchase (often on the black market), the deportees' lack of cash due to severe restrictions against bringing in foreign currency, and devastating exchange rates which made the small amount of money they did have lose more than half of its value. The money which they received from the Canadian government was only dispensed in small installments which were clearly insufficient. These factors left them in dire financial straits. Consequently, subsequent groups of 'deportees' were strongly advised in advance to bring a large supply of goods, including foodstuffs and daily necessities that would help them through this initial difficult period in Japan. (Kage 25-6)

Conditions on the trains to their home villages were also deplorable. The trains were filthy and so crowded that the passengers could hardly move their feet, and had to crawl out through the windows to even use the toilet. People were struggling with each other for better position, and had to watch out for thieves who tried to steal valuables from their luggage (Kage 87). Some reported that, by the end of their train journey, they had become covered with soot (Kage 54, 62).

### **Extreme Conditions in Their Home Villages**

The 'deportees' were in for even more shocking experiences when they reached their final destinations, which were usually their ancestral villages. As it had been impossible during the war for them to make contact with anyone in Japan, many were able to ascertain whether their relatives had survived the war only after arriving in their home cities or ancestral villages. On their arrival they learned for the first time the tragic news of those relatives who had been killed in the war either as soldiers or as civilians.

It also soon became clear to the 'deportees' arriving in their ancestral villages that the near-famine conditions they had first encountered on their arrival at Tokyo Bay also extended even to the rural agricultural areas of Japan. Due to the large influx of demobilized soldiers and Japanese repatriates from China and other Japanese colonies, there was even more extreme competition for the little food that was available, and lodging was also in short supply. Many had to find places to sleep outside their relatives' homes such as storage sheds and hastily erected temporary shelters. Hence, even here they continued to experience severe hunger and squalor. There were even some reports of elderly repatriates dying of malnutrition in the months after they had returned to their villages (Kage 72,

Sunahara 127). As could be expected, these shortages of food and shelter, combined with language problems, cultural misunderstandings and general stress led to frictions with Japanese relatives and neighbors.

In addition, even after the war, some Japanese retained their wartime xenophobic attitudes. This sometimes led to deliberate and extreme harassment of some of the 'deportees' as despised foreigners (e.g. Kage 71). Some were resented because of the nicer clothes they were wearing when they arrived from Canada which made them appear much better off than their relatives who had suffered through the war in Japan. The goods that some of them brought back to share with family and neighbors quickly ran out, and they began to be viewed as yet another burden by their already strained relatives and neighbors (Timmons 80-81).

### **The Education of their Children in Japan**

The education of the children continued to be a difficult issue after they had settled down. A few of the young 'deportees' had previously been sent back to Japan while small children to receive a Japanese education, and then had returned to their families in Canada before the war started. Consequently, they already spoke Japanese at a native level and had experienced Japanese culture as children. For them, readjusting to Japanese culture and school life was relatively easy (Kage, 43, 48). But these were a minority; to the majority who were not so privileged, Japanese culture and language were foreign, and the adjustment process was much more difficult, particularly for those who were already in their teens (Kage 39).

Children under 16 were allowed to enter the Japanese school system to complete their required education. Most of these children struggled initially with the Japanese language and therefore had to re-start their education in Japan at a much lower level than they had already achieved in Canada. They were conspicuous due to their language deficiency and the fact that they were older and taller than their classmates, and this often resulted in bullying and exclusion (Kage 70-1), although some of them were later able to turn the situation to their own advantage by teaching their classmates sports they had learned in Canada (Kage 63-4) and helping them with their English studies.

Those over 16, who had already received only a limited education in the internment camps, were not able to enter the Japanese school system, and hence found it extremely difficult to go on to university. This educational barrier was a major hindrance to finding good employment, although years later, when the

economy started to improve, some of the young exiles were able to use their English skills combined with effort, natural talent and good social skills as a ticket to good employment with companies that would normally require a higher level of formal education (Example of Tak Matsuba in Kage 40-41).

### **Employment with the American Occupying Forces**

Due to their limited Japanese ability and education, it was nearly impossible for the Japanese Canadians to compete for the very limited jobs that gradually became available in the years immediately following the end of the war. However, many of them, with their native or near native English ability, quickly found employment with the American occupation forces which needed a wide variety of civilian workers on their bases who could speak English. Depending on their particular skills, they were employed as maintenance workers, construction laborers and tradesmen, office workers, barbers, technicians, researchers, translators, and interpreters, etc. (Kage 33-34). Not only were they paid slightly better than non-military jobs, they also were able to receive various foodstuffs and medicines that were otherwise unavailable in Japan. However, because this work decreased as the bases downsized following the end of the Korean War, for most of these workers it served as a temporary transition job until they could finally find private sector work in the gradually recovering Japanese economy. As there was a dearth of Japanese who could speak English well, the English skill of these newcomers also enabled some of them to eventually get good employment with both Japanese and foreign-owned companies that required their skills. A very few continued to work long-term for the US armed forces (Kage 48).

### **Attempts to Regain Canadian Citizenship**

Upon arriving in Japan and being confronted with the desperate conditions there, many of the young exiles immediately wanted to go back to Canada and join their friends who were still there and had moved east. However, this was impossible because their agreement to be sent to Japan also included renunciation of their Canadian citizenship, and the Canadian government had classified them as ‘disloyal’. This would not be remedied until April, 1949 when the Canadian government finally removed restrictions on the Japanese Canadians, allowed them to return to the west coast, and gave them the right to vote.

One option for regaining Canadian citizenship was to join the Canadian army based in Japan. About 40 young men did so and trained at the Canadian base in

Kure and were highly estimated for their enthusiasm. Many of them fought for Canada in the Korean war. Some women also used various armed forces as a means of leaving Japan but in a different way: They married American and other allied soldiers stationed in Japan (Timmons 86).

### **Why Some Stayed in Japan**

In spite of the terrible conditions in postwar Japan and the desire of many of the 'deportees' (especially the younger ones) to return to Canada, many ended up staying permanently in Japan. While there are no reliable statistics, it is generally estimated that only about half of the exiled Nikkei eventually did return to Canada (Kage, 20). This raises the question as to why the other half did not, but instead settled permanently in Japan.

Kage interviewed several of 'deportees' living in Japan about their reasons for remaining in there. He received a variety of answers, which often included a combination of factors. One of the most common reasons given was marriage to a Japanese spouse and having children in Japan (e.g. Kage 75-76). Another was that, thanks largely to demand for their English skill, they were fortunate enough to find a good career path in Japan that they came to enjoy and did not want to relinquish. Another reason given by some was that, over time, they had come to feel secure and comfortable in Japan, even if they had not completely assimilated to the culture (Kage 74). A few said that, due to their bitter memories of the unjust treatment they had received from the Canadian government during the war, they felt too much resentment towards Canada to ever want to return, although this resentment dissipated with time for some.

### **Their Sense of National Identity**

A very interesting question about those who stayed in Japan concerns their own sense of national and cultural identity after having lived in Japan and away from Canada so long. Did they eventually come to feel more Japanese than Canadian, and if so, to what degree did they feel Japanese and/or Canadian? One would naturally expect answers to these questions to vary depending on several factors such as one's childhood memories of Canada, one's age at the time of moving to Japan, the kinds of experiences one had after moving to Japan, one's individual personality, and so on.

Kage got a wide spectrum of responses regarding these issues. Some felt within themselves that they had become just like other Japanese, but were sometimes

reminded by Japanese around them that they still had an element of foreignness, whether in their mannerisms or their way of speaking Japanese, even if they spoke it at a native level. Others said they felt that they still had elements of both identities, while some felt neither Japanese nor Canadian, but something “in-between” that just superficially appears to be Japanese (Kage 67).

Kage also gives one rare but noteworthy example of deliberate effort to achieve complete assimilation with Japanese culture. Although this individual used his English ability to his advantage in his career, he diligently studied Japanese on his own and did his best to fit in and act just like a native Japanese businessman in order to receive the approval of those around him. Even his wife said that he lacked the characteristics commonly seen in other second generation Japanese Canadians in Japan. He admitted trying very hard to completely assimilate, never had any wish to return to Canada, and considered Japan his ‘first homeland’ and Canada his ‘second’ one (Kage 76-80). However, this desire for complete assimilation seems to be rare.

The rest of this paper will attempt to put a ‘human face’ on the above historical background by presenting the life histories of a Japanese Canadian father and his son who experienced this history firsthand and were among those ‘deportees’ who ended up staying in Japan for the rest of their lives.

## **Chapter 2: Life History of Suejiro Ibuki (father)**

### **Sources of Information**

Unfortunately, as Suejiro Ibuki is no longer alive, he could not be interviewed and asked to speak for himself about his own life history. Therefore, it was necessary for this study to rely heavily on the childhood recollections of his son Mikio, as well as on photographs, personal correspondence, and various official documents related to his life. Fortunately, he did leave behind an extraordinary number of such materials which have been faithfully preserved by Mikio. For the basic outline of his life history, two of the most useful documents were his handwritten English resume of the jobs he had held both in Canada and during the period after his return to Japan and a brief article based on an interview with him that was published in the *Nikkei Voice* (November, 1989).

### **His Roots and Move to Canada**

Suejiro was born on April 28, 1908. He was the fourth son among four brothers

and four sisters. He was raised in Mitsuya, a small farming village near Hikone city in Shiga Prefecture. He left Mitsuya and went to Canada in September of 1923, at the age of 15. One reason for his leaving Japan was that he had failed to pass the entrance examination of Omi Hachiman Commercial High School, which limited his career options in Japan. He chose Canada because he had an older sister already living with her husband in Vancouver. Furthermore, his older brother Totaro already had plans to go to Canada, so Suejiro decided to go together with him.

### **Continuing His Education and Starting a Career**

After his arrival, he first lived at 359 Powell Street (1923-1926), and later at 390 Cordova Street (1926-1934). Although he was 15 years old and had already finished primary school in Japan, when he arrived in Vancouver he entered Strathcona Public Elementary School at the grade 1 level as was common for new immigrant young people who could not speak English well. He quickly jumped several grades during the following months. He transferred to Seymour Public School in September, 1924, and finished primary school in June, 1925, and then began high school. While a student there, he began working as a night clerk at the Owl Drug Store at 197 East Hastings Street in 1924, and continued until June of 1928. In 1927 he entered Vancouver City Night School of Commerce and graduated in 1928, after which he began working as a shipping clerk and later as a travelling salesman at E.A. Morris Ltd., located at 435 East Hastings Street. He continued working there until the internment in 1942.

### **His Life as a Bachelor in Vancouver**

In addition to his work, it seems he had an active intellectual and social lifestyle. He enjoyed writing and was a member of a small literary coterie composed of several male friends. He even tried his hand at writing some short novels (with a distinctly erotic flair), and had several articles and short stories published in the Vancouver Japanese papers. He also seems to have been an avid photographer as he took numerous photos and videos of life in Vancouver, which his family still has today. It appears from some photos that he was quite an avid golfer in his free time. Judging from his photos and his correspondence with various people, he seems to have had a lot of friends in the Japanese community, and to have been very popular, especially among the young ladies. Years later, this was confirmed to his son Mikio by various people who had known Suejiro during that time.

Mikio once met one lady who had been one of his father's girlfriends and got the impression that she still loved him.

### **His Marriage to Mitsue**

In November of 1934 Suejiro returned to Japan for three months, during which time he met his wife-to-be, Mitsue Otake, through the introduction by an older brother living in Tokyo. She had been born on February 8, 1918, and raised in Tokyo (Senjyu-cho, Minami-Adachi-Gun) where her father worked as an artisan (tortoise shell art, and later carving images on fountain pens). At the time she was employed by Marubeni Company. They married at the Meiji Jingu (shrine), and Suejiro then went back to Canada alone. About one year later (February, 1936), at the age of 16, Mitsue sailed alone to Canada and joined him.

### **Married Life in Vancouver**

At first, the new couple lived at 431 East Georgia Street until 1936, and then at 501 Hastings Street until their internment began in 1942. They had a happy marriage and their life in pre-war Vancouver also seems to have been comfortable and happy. Although Mitsue's English ability was limited, they enjoyed an active social life within the Japanese community as can be seen in several photos of them picnicking and socializing with friends. Four years later on January 1, 1940, they were blessed with their first child, Mikio. As far as Mikio knows, they intended to stay in Canada permanently. Suejiro's parents had already passed away before he left Japan, so his correspondence with his relatives in Shiga Prefecture was not very frequent. However, until the war began, he and Mitsue sent many letters to her family in Tokyo, often including pictures of their first baby, Mikio.

### **Life in the Internment Camp**

The family was interned in the Slocan City camp from July 1942 to September 1946. Suejiro was first sent to a road construction camp as were many of the able-bodied Nikkei men, but because his wife was pregnant with his second child, he was soon allowed to leave and join his family in the internment camp. He did various kinds of work in the camp, including cleaning chimneys. He also served as leader of the camp residents' self-governing committee.

His second and third children were born at Slocan City during the internment. The second child, a girl, was born on July 9, 1942. She was the first baby born to the internees of the camp, so everyone celebrated. She was named Gloria by the

attending nurse, but Kazuko (和子) by her parents, which expressed their wish for peace. Their second son, Toshiaki, was born on November 3, 1944.

### **Return to Japan after the Internment**

Suejiro and Mitsue were among the many Japanese Canadians who made the decision to be ‘deported’ to Japan rather than move to eastern Canada. While there was of course a variety of factors behind this decision, his son Mikio believes that the most compelling reason was extreme anxiety regarding Mitsue’s parents in Tokyo. As mentioned in the first chapter, there was no contact between the Japanese Canadians and their loved ones in Japan during the war, and the resulting desperation to reestablish contact and confirm the survival and welfare of loved ones became one of the strongest motivations to choose the ‘deportation’ option. Mikio also believes his father had one more strong motive to return to Japan—the wish to use his experience in Canada to help rebuild a better and more internationalized Japan following its destruction in the senseless war.

In October of 1946, he was moved with his family to Japan on the Marine Falcon, one of the three ships chartered by the Canadian government to ‘deport’ Japanese Canadians. According to the ‘Repatriate Card’ issued to the family upon arrival in Japan, the ship left Vancouver on October 2 and arrived in Kurihama on October 15. Suejiro was the group leader of the Japanese Canadian passengers.

Although the ‘deportees’ received only a modest amount of money from the Canadian government and were not allowed to bring foreign currency into Japan, Suejiro did take many large boxes and trunks filled with various kinds of goods (including foods such as rice and canned goods, medicines, sweets, etc.) to be distributed to people who needed them. Obviously he had heeded the strong advice given to the ‘deportees’ to take as many such goods as possible.

The ship was originally scheduled to arrive at Yokosuka, but as that port was already too full, it was diverted to Kurihama. Soon after disembarking, they learned the heartbreaking news from Mitsue’s father that her mother had passed away during the war. The family entered a temporary lodging for several days, and then stayed a few more days at the home of Suejiro’s elder brother in Mikata, Tokyo, after which they went to his home village in Shiga by train. Due to severe overcrowding of the train, it was an extremely stressful trip (more details to be explained in next chapter on Mikio’s history).

### **Problems Resettling in His Home Village**

Finally they arrived in Mitsuya, Suejiro's home village in Shiga. Like many of those who returned to their ancestral villages in Japan after the war, they soon faced serious difficulties. The most immediate one was that, due to the severe shortage of housing, they could not live in the family house but instead moved into a nearby storage shed, where they lived for a year and a half. They had no electricity, so for lighting they depended on a kerosene lamp. They also experienced some serious friction with their relatives, partly due to the severe shortage of food (more details in next chapter). Everyone was lacking food and other basic necessities, and although Suejiro had brought many goods from Canada, they were not enough to satisfy the relatives, and some resentment resulted. Fortunately, in April, 1948, they moved to Otsu City for Suejiro's employment.

### **Employment after Returning to Japan**

Suejiro's first job after returning to Japan was as an assistant managing director with Hokoku Sangyo Ltd., a textile company in Nagahama City which was managed by his nephew. After one year (1947) he was able to get employed as a Labor Liaison and Advisor by the Labor Section of the US Armed Forces at Otsu City. This job involved him in the hiring of Japanese workers for the base, which employed a total of 6000 Japanese civilian workers. This position enabled him to help many of his relatives and friends get employment there. He studied hard about various aspects of his job, but his handicap was that he had not graduated from college or university, and this limited his advancement (This hardship later led him to make sure his children got a good university education). He was transferred to Nara in 1957 where he continued working until the US Armed Forces closed its camp there in 1958.

The following three years were quite difficult for him economically, but he did engage in various kinds of jobs including sewing machine sales, and established a small English school which continued for 3 years. He also started to teach English conversation lessons to many people of all ages at Otsu City Hall, which continued for 35 years. These jobs helped provide money for his children's education. He told Mikio that, from the time he returned to Japan, he strongly felt that teaching English was the best way he could help Japan become an international country and contribute to mutual understanding and world peace.

His economic situation significantly improved in 1961 when he entered a pearl

company, Jinbo Pearl Ltd., to which he had been introduced by his niece (elder brother's daughter) who was married to the company's founder. During the following years the Japanese economy was improving rapidly, and his career in the pearl industry went well. He soon began to work at a subsidiary pearl exporting company, Jinbo Pearl Exporting Ltd., located in Kobe. His son Mikio joined him in this company in 1962. Six months later, Suejiro moved to the company's pearl farm in Shiga and continued to work there for 6 more years. Then, at age 60, he started his own company in Otsu City, Jinbo Shinju Shokai Ltd., which retailed fresh water pearls from Lake Biwa. Many of the pearls were supplied by his son Mikio who continued to work in the pearl export company. Mikio recalls that this was a very enjoyable period of Suejiro's life. Incidentally, his company is still active and is managed by his younger son, Toshiaki.

### **Continuing Contact with Canada**

Suejiro continued to stay in contact with his friends in the Japanese Canadian community in Canada. In addition to personal correspondence and sending Japanese magazines to various friends in Canada, he sometimes contributed articles to Japanese publications in Canada.

Interestingly, although he encouraged his children to move back to Canada, he himself never returned to Canada, even for a visit. His wife Mitsue did visit Canada once with her daughter for two weeks in the autumn of 1994, at the invitation of her niece's daughter who was living in Toronto. In addition to Toronto, she also went to Vancouver and visited one of the apartment buildings where they had lived before the internment. It still looked the same as when they had left it at the time of their uprooting, and she was moved to tears. Suejiro's son Mikio is not sure why Suejiro never visited Canada, but speculates it might have been because he did not wish to be reminded of what he had suffered there. However, in a brief profile based on an interview conducted by Art Miki and published in the *Nikkei Voice* (November, 1989), he mentioned that he hoped one of his children would move to Canada so that he himself would be able to go and visit, so it is clear that he at least thought about it. The following year, at the age of 80, he was awarded the Honobono Taisho prize in recognition of his educational contribution to the city through his 35 years of teaching English classes at Otsu City Hall.

On February 17, 1995, Suejiro passed away at the age of 85. His wife Mitsue passed way 8 years later at the age of 83, on November 5, 2002.

## **Chapter 3: Life History of Mikio Ibuki (son of Suejiro)**

### **Family Roots/Background**

Mikio was born in Vancouver on January 1, 1940 as the first child of Suejiro and Mitsue Ibuki.

As mentioned above, he has a younger sister, Kazuko (born July 9, 1942 in Slocan City), and a younger brother Toshiaki (born November 3, 1944 in Slocan City). He himself was only 2 years and 6 months old when his family was uprooted from Vancouver, so he has almost no memories of his life in Vancouver before that, except for a very vague memory of watching a moving train in Vancouver and his mother being worried about him getting too close to it.

### **Uprooting and Internment**

His family was suddenly uprooted from Vancouver and interned at Slocan City Camp from July 1942 to September 1946. As mentioned earlier, at first his father was briefly sent to a road construction camp, but very soon was soon allowed to join his wife and small son at Slocan due to her pregnancy with their second child. Mikio has only a vague memory of watching the scenery from the train as it travelled from Vancouver to Slocan City. However, he has many vivid memories of his experiences as a small child in the camp during the following almost 4 years. He says that although his parents must have been suffering emotionally from their uprooting and the confiscation of their property, they did not pass on their anguish to their children, so most of his memories of this period are pleasant, heartwarming, and in some cases, amusing.

### **Anglican Kindergarten**

Many of his happiest memories relate to his attending a kindergarten in the camp run by teachers from the Church of England in Canada (Anglican). These memories have been kept alive by the various mementos that he still has from his kindergarten days. They include official portrait photos of his kindergarten class as well as photos of kindergarten events such as graduation ceremonies, Christmas pageants and other class activities. He also still has some pictures he drew and handicrafts which he made in the kindergarten, as well as some Bible story lesson pamphlets and Bible story pictures which he received from his teachers. He nostalgically remembers being taught common children's songs such as "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" and religious children's songs such as "Jesus Loves Me

This I Know". Although he does not have clear memories of specific interactions with any particular teacher, his general recollection is that the teachers treated him very kindly, and this left him with a very positive and warm impression of non-Japanese Canadians and Christianity, which continued long after he left the camp.

### **Activities with Friends**

He also has pleasant memories of making many friends with other children in the camp and playing outside with them. Manabu Murakami and his younger brother Tsumoro, who lived in the same building (#12) were his close friends. He recalls various activities with them such as making a fire on the river bank and roasting wieners. They also got into mischief together. Once they entered an empty house together and searched for anything worth taking. Another time they entered an empty train that was stopped at Slocan City and peeled the rubber lining from a window and used it to make a slingshot. Apparently they successfully shot a sparrow with it. Mikio remembers taking the sparrow to his mother as a present, being severely scolded by her, and then burying it.

Various recreational and sporting activities were also a big part of his life in the camp. Once he sprained a wrist while wrestling with his friends and cried loudly while being taken to the hospital, thinking that his arm was broken. Fortunately, it turned out to be a minor sprain and healed quickly. Although he himself did not own ice skates, he was loaned a pair by an older friend. He has a picture of this, in which he is sitting on the edge of what appears to be a simple outdoor ice rink, holding a hockey stick and wearing skates that are clearly much too big for him. He is obviously very happy as he is smiling broadly in the picture. However, he does not recall actually playing hockey, or even watching hockey games. He does have memories of sleigh riding and watching baseball games although he did not play much baseball himself.

Incidentally, after the war, the Murakami brothers moved with their family to eastern Canada. Mikio really wanted to meet them again but unfortunately completely lost contact with them.

### **Interacting with Nature**

Mikio also has many memories of the beauty of nature around the camp; for example, small colorful flowers, ferns and pussy willow bushes growing luxuriantly in a swampy area near the lake. He recalls catching minnows with a net and taking them home in a bucket, and leaving the bucket near the doorway.

The fish soon died and started to smell bad. After a severe scolding from his mother, he carried the bucket of dead fish outside and buried them. He also remembers trying to catch reddish-colored fish<sup>5</sup> with his hands in the river near the camp's movie theater.

### **Births of Siblings in Slocan City**

Mikio vaguely remembers his younger siblings' births during internment. As mentioned above, his sister, Kazuko, was the first baby born to Japanese Canadians in the Slocan City camp. He recalls the special celebrations that followed her birth. He also remembers the time of his brother's birth, and looking out the window of the hospital.

### **Father's Work in the Camp**

As mentioned previously, his father did various kinds of work in the camp, including cleaning chimneys. Mikio remembers occasionally being allowed to accompany his father to some of these jobs.

### **Voyage to Japan:**

Mikio does not have clear memories about the end of the internment or of the train ride back to Vancouver to board the ship for Japan. However, he does recall seeing many large wooden boxes and trunks that his father had packed with food and other goods to be distributed to people in Japan.

He has some negative memories of the trip by ship to Japan. For example, he vividly recalls noticing a white lady handing out balloons to some white children on the ship's deck. When Mikio approached her for a balloon, she coldly refused and said that the balloons were "not for Japanese children". This is his only memory of being overtly discriminated against because of being Japanese, but it was an experience that he never forgot.

Some other memories relate to his observations of his mother during the trip. Apparently she suffered for several days from severe seasickness. He also recalls first seeing the contours of the Japanese islands in the distance and many small fishing boats, and his mother shedding many tears as they neared port. As they disembarked, they noticed a brass band performing a welcoming ceremony. The passengers at first thought it was welcoming them, but later learned the ceremony

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<sup>5</sup> We can speculate that these reddish fish were salmon which migrate up the rivers in this area to spawn.

was to welcome Elizabeth Vining, who had come to Japan to become the private tutor of the crown prince.

### **The Situation Immediately after Arrival**

After disembarking, they entered a temporary lodging. Although a year had passed since the war ended, there was still destruction everywhere. Mikio remembers seeing and playing on the nearby remains of destroyed military vehicles and large artillery. His sister became ill and was given okayu (soft-boiled rice) to eat. Mikio also really wanted some okayu but was refused because there was too little, and it was reserved only for sick persons. He can't remember what food they did receive there, but he does remember that it tasted so bad he couldn't eat it. Fortunately, his father had packed and brought from Canada a lot of foods and sweets to give away, and for some time Mikio's diet consisted largely of chocolates provided by his father.

One pleasant memory of this time was being allowed to ride together with his father on an American military jeep and being driven around and seeing various places, including the ruins of Nakajima Airport and Yokosuka Port. Apparently this opportunity arose because his father was the group leader of the Japanese Canadian passengers and was summoned to the military headquarters to be interviewed by the officers.

A very moving memory concerns the emotional reunion of his mother, Mitsue with her father. A small festival or outdoor market (not sure which) was being held at a nearby shrine. Mikio recalls going there with his mother and buying a small plate with a piece of persimmon on it from one of the outside vending shops, then walking down a narrow gravel street with her and suddenly meeting up with his mother's father (with whom they had completely lost contact during the war). His mother and her father embraced each other and cried loudly. Apparently her father had read in the newspaper about the ship arriving from Canada, and had seen the name of Mikio's father as the leader of the group (this was the only way he could learn that his daughter's family was coming back to Japan), so he immediately came to meet them. Perhaps one reason for their open crying was the fact that Mitsue's mother had passed away during the war, and this was his first chance to communicate this heartbreaking news to his daughter.

### **Return by Train to Father's Hometown**

They stayed about a week at the home of his father's older brother in Mitaka City,

Tokyo. Then they made the arduous train trip to the father's home town Mitsuya near Hikone in Shiga prefecture. The train was extremely overcrowded so the trip was excruciating. Most people were standing packed close together and a few people were lying on the floor, making it extremely difficult to move. In fact, it was so crowded that they were unable to get off the train when it reached Kawase, the station closest to their village, and they had to stay on until it reached the main station at Kyoto. Even at Kyoto it was impossible to exit through the doors, so they had to go out through the windows. Then they boarded another train and backtracked to their home station, where a relative with a trailer cart<sup>6</sup> was waiting to meet them.

### **Tensions with Relatives in Home Town**

Mikio also has memories of various tensions and frictions which arose between his parents and his relatives due to the extreme living conditions in the village after the war. As they were unable to live in the main family house, they instead lived for a year and a half in a storage shed. Mikio refers to this time as their "kerosene lamp lifestyle" due to their lack of electricity and resulting dependence on kerosene fuel.

He also has specific memories of the tensions that were related to the severe shortage of food during this time. For example, once he picked a persimmon from a relative's tree and started to eat it. Unfortunately, it tasted unexpectedly bitter, so after one bite he threw it onto the ground. The relative, extremely angry that Mikio had wasted this precious food, severely scolded not only Mikio, but also his mother, who apologized profusely. Mikio recalls that his mother, who was only 28 years old, was always apologizing to relatives during this period. Apparently Mikio's father also had some serious tensions with his eldest brother and his wife. Mikio does not recall the details, but does remember the tension he noticed between them.

### **Adjustment to Japanese Elementary School Life**

Mikio soon entered elementary school (Take Primary School) in Mitsuya, Hikone. He recalls that, while in Canada, his parents had done their best to teach him Japanese using various methods including singing Japanese children's songs with

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<sup>6</sup> This kind of trailer cart, called a rear car (リヤカー) in Japanese, was commonly used to carry various kinds of loads before automobiles became common in Japan. It was usually pulled either by a bicycle or by a person on foot.

him. However, in spite of their efforts, at that time he was not very interested in learning Japanese. Hence, when he arrived in Japan, he knew only a few Japanese words and was unfamiliar with the local customs, so for some time he felt quite disoriented.

Fortunately, his elementary school teacher, Miss Tanaka, took a strong interest in helping him and gave him special individual lessons after regular class hours had finished. He does not remember her explicitly teaching him Japanese, but he does recall that she spent time with him and listened to what he had to say. He told her about Canada and sang English children's songs to her. This personal emotional support from Miss Tanaka alleviated his confusion and anxiety, and before long he began to enjoy school life.

Soon he was participating in school dramas. Specifically, he recalls participating in the school festival where he played a role as a dancer in *The Monkey's Cage* (お猿のカゴ屋), and also the role of the monkey in *The Battle between the Monkey and the Crab* (サルカニ合戦). From this time on, his Japanese ability improved quite quickly while he gradually forgot his English. Another school memory is that they had printed textbooks, but some parts which were about the emperor or were deemed to contain nationalist propaganda were crossed out with black ink or covered over with thin paper.

He does not recall any overt bullying by his classmates over his language or cultural shortcomings, but does recall being teased and called a girl because he was wearing a red sweater. He was also laughed at because his lunch bentos consisted mainly of sweet potatoes (his preference), while the other children's bentos were mainly rice.

Overall, he does not remember feeling particularly troubled during his adjustment to Japanese life and thinks that he adapted and learned the language fairly quickly. He attributes this largely to the fact that he was just under 7 years old when he arrived in Japan.

### **Secondary Education, Conversion to Christianity**

In 1948, Mikio's family moved to Otsu city where he completed elementary school at Nagara Primary School in 1952. He then graduated from Ojiyama Junior High School and Zeze Senior High School. He belonged to the baseball teams at both schools, and remembers wearing number 11 at Zeze where he "was a benchwarmer". That year Zeze was very strong and participated in the Koshien Spring Tournament.

He recalls an important life decision during this period (at the age of 17), namely his conversion to Christianity. At the time he was experiencing various anxieties about his present situation as a high school student and his future life course. One day he saw a leaflet advertising an evangelistic meeting at the Otsu United Church, so he attended and listened to the sermon. Soon he converted to Christianity and was baptized. He now believes that this conversion experience was partly the result “of the seed planted” by the teachers during his 3 years at the Anglican kindergarten in the Slocan City internment camp. Ever since his conversion he has continued to be actively involved in the United Church.

He also met his wife Kana Ikeda there and they married on May 1, 1966 at Otsu United Church. She is an organist. They moved to Okamoto in east Kobe where they became members of the Okamoto United Church. They have two daughters, one of whom is married and has a teenage son and daughter, and one who is single and lives with Mikio and his wife.

### **Post-Secondary Education at Doshisha University**

Mikio must have done very well academically in high school as he was accepted into the Economics Department of Doshisha University, one of the most prestigious private universities in western Japan. His mother also must have played a significant role in his successful elementary and high school education as he recalls her attending his university entrance ceremony and his feeling at that time that this was the best present he could give her. He also recalls making some close friends among his classmates, and regrets losing contact with two of them, Kota Otsuka and Ikuo Ebata, who went back to Canada after graduating from Doshisha University.

### **Initial Plan to Return to Canada and Eventual Stay in Japan**

Mikio’s father apparently regretted his decision to return to Japan with his family, and he often apologized to his children, saying that it was a mistake. Furthermore, he frequently urged Mikio to move back to Canada and make a new life there. He recalls his father saying, “Mikio, Japan is not the country that you are meant to live in. Japan is too cramped for you, and your personality is much more suited to living overseas. I really want you to make your life in Canada!” Mikio says he has never forgotten these words of his father, and he believes that his father wished for his own lost Canadian dream to be fulfilled by Mikio.

Consequently, while in university, Mikio made plans to move to Canada after

graduating. However, as the time of his graduation approached (March, 1962), he received a letter from his father's most trusted friend in Canada (Mrs. Miyake), explaining that the Canadian economy was doing very poorly and that it would be better for him to wait for a couple more years before making the move, and to find employment in Japan in the meantime. This situation was also confirmed through a visit to the Canadian embassy in Tokyo. Mikio followed this advice and temporarily postponed his move to Canada.

### **Employment History in Japan**

In addition to studying English at university, Mikio had many chances to speak English with the foreign missionaries in his church, so he became quite fluent. In order to save more money for his future move to Canada, he looked for some part time employment in Japan. He worked together with his father as a simultaneous interpreter at an international trade fair for small and medium sized businesses held in Osaka. One of the displays at the fair was by a pearl company located at Lake Biwa called Jinbo Pearl Company. This company happened to be managed by the husband of a cousin, and Mikio's father had already started working there. At the fair, the vast majority of his work involved negotiating with foreign buyers. Although he was extremely busy, he found this work very interesting.

In 1957, the son of the owner established a new export company in Kobe called Jinbo Pearls Exporting Co. Ltd. It dealt with processing and exporting Biwa freshwater pearls. Mikio's father transferred to this new company and Mikio was also offered a position there which he eagerly accepted, and he started working there in 1962 after graduating from Doshisha University. This was the beginning of a career with the company which lasted 30 years. At first, his work consisted mainly of sending letters to various pearl import companies around the world in order to start business relationships with them. However, eventually he became vice president and was involved in all aspects of the company management including buying and selling. The company grew from about 5 or 6 employees to more than 20. However, when the economic bubble burst in 1992, he resigned from this career.

Next, he worked for 2 years at Kobe Gyosei Gakkuen, a private high school that specialized in educating special-needs students, where he taught history, English, and bookkeeping. In 1994 he started working as a clerk at a transportation company. This mainly involved various kinds of administrative work and taking care of the drivers. Due to poor health he retired from this position in 1997.

In 1998 he returned to the pearl business field, joining the Japan Pearl Exporters Association. At first he just did bookkeeping, but his duties quickly expanded and eventually he became the Executive Director of this association. As Executive Director, he engaged in various major activities to promote the export of Japanese Akoya Pearls, established a new pearl inspection system, arranged for international pearl auctions to be held in Kobe, and attended the World Pearl Organization meetings in New York and Tahiti. He also recalls working very hard to improve and strengthen the Japanese pearl booth at the Hong Kong Jewelry show. He retired in 2009 at the age of 69.

However, although past retirement age, he did not stop working. He was instrumental in establishing (and even now continues to manage) the Hyogo Unga Shinjugai Project.<sup>7</sup> This organization mainly educates school children about water ecology; for example, the importance of keeping water clean, the roles of marine creatures such as plankton in water ecology, and more specifically, how this relates to the cultivation of pearls. He explains, “Every year, more than 100 children join the project where they try their hand at various aspects of operating the farm, help harvest the pearls and clean them. In addition, they get to create their own jewelry with the cropped pearls and conduct a pearl fashion show.”

He is now in his ninth year with this project. He is actively involved every week and says, “When we started, we initially faced resistance from some pearl company presidents, but we finally succeeded with strong support from parent-teacher associations. Now it is very successful. Promoting the understanding of pearls like this in Pearl City Kobe is the most important work I have ever done in my life, and I am very proud of it.”

### **Memories about His Mother**

Mikio remembers his mother, Mitsue, as someone who, in spite of the extreme difficulties and heartbreaks she faced in her life, remained strong and optimistic about the future. As noted earlier, she was only 16 years old when she married. Although she had no training in how to be a housewife and was unable to read or speak English at the time, she travelled alone to Canada to join her husband. In difficult times she often expressed her enduring optimism with the phrase, “Things will somehow turn out ok” (何とかなるわ). Later she became able to both read and converse pretty well in English.

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7 In Japanese, 兵庫真珠貝プロジェクト . Website: sea.ap.teacup.com

After returning to Japan, in addition to taking care of her family, she also worked hard outside the home to supplement her husband's income. First she got a job working as a housekeeper at the American armed forces camp at Otsu where her husband was also first employed. Later, she worked helping the family of the founder of Jinbo Pearl Company where her husband also had started working after his job for the American armed forces had finished.

Mikio also recalls that she had a very active sense of curiosity and participated in various activities and hobbies. One of his fondest memories is watching a professional baseball game between Hanshin Tigers and Tokyo Giants with her at Koshien Stadium. She really enjoyed cooking and knitting. In her fifties she began to study Chinese poetry recitation ( 詩 吟 ), and advanced to the top level. As mentioned earlier, Mikio felt that his entering Doshisha University was the best present he could give her, which strongly implies that she had played an important role helping him reach that educational milestone.

### **His Present Sense of Relation to Canada**

Some of the 'deportees' interviewed by Kage, who were already teenagers when they were sent to Japan and hence were conscious of the injustices they had suffered at the hands of the Canadian government, were very bitter at Canada for years afterwards. In contrast, as noted above, Mikio was so young at the time that his memories even of the internment were mainly pleasant ones—exploring nature, playing and getting into mischief with friends, and enjoying kindergarten life. Also, his parents did not pass on to him their own anguish that they surely must have been feeling, and his father rarely even talked about this difficult period, even later in life. Hence Mikio was spared much of the sense of betrayal and resulting anger towards that lingered for years in the minds of the older 'deportees'.

Although he never returned to Canada, Mikio has continued to have a deep interest in Canada and Japanese Canadian history. This is attested to by his careful preservation of documents, photos and other materials related to his family's time in Canada. He also has continued to read extensively about Japanese Canadian history and related human rights issues. He takes pride in telling people that he was born in Vancouver. He seems to have no personal bitterness about what his parents suffered in Canada and says, "I am so glad that, in spite of everything that happened to my parents, they were finally able to succeed and have a nice life in Japan."

## Chapter 4: Summary and Discussion

This final chapter will first mention briefly some limitations of this study. Then it will compare some of the experiences of Suejiro and Mikio Ibuki with those commonly reported by other Nikkei ‘deportees’ and recorded by Kage, as well as discuss some of the particularly noteworthy aspects of their experiences that have emerged. Finally, it will suggest some future directions this research could take.

### Limitations of This Study

A limitation that is common to most life history research is that it relies to a large degree on oral data, which in turn depends largely on human memory. Needless to say, human memory is a very delicate and changeable thing, particularly when it is of events that happened in the distant past. This study is no exception as it relies largely on one informant’s memories of events that occurred long ago, in some instances more than 70 years ago. Furthermore, the informant was a very young child when many of these events took place.

Another obvious limitation that needs to be acknowledged is that, as one of the subjects of this study (Suejiro Ibuki) is no longer alive, it was impossible to directly gather oral data from him and have him speak for himself. Even the very limited oral data that we do have about him was not gathered directly from him but rather from his son, Mikio. It is very regrettable that he was not interviewed and recorded before he passed away. Such oral data would have been not only fascinating in its own right, but also would have complemented and enhanced the oral data we received from Mikio.

However, on the other hand, in this case study we are fortunate to have quite a large amount of external data, namely the established historical narrative that was summarized in Chapter 1, and this provides a general framework against which we can measure the oral data we gathered. In addition, we have previously-reported life history research about some of the other ‘deportees’ (for example, as gathered and reported by Kage), and we can use the commonly reported experiences in this data as a set of external reference points to compare and analyze the experiences reported in the specific data we gathered about the life experiences of Suejiro and Mikio Ibuki.

We are additionally fortunate to have, within our specific study, a relatively large amount of diverse non-oral data which can be used to help corroborate the oral data that we gathered from Mikio Ibuki. As mentioned previously, Suejiro left

a quite a significant amount of such data including formal documents, photographs, mementos, private notes, and so on which could be used to corroborate and enhance the oral data about him that we gathered from his son. Specifically, the oral informant, Mikio, had these non-oral materials on hand and frequently referred to them when preparing his written answers to questions in the original questionnaire, and when orally responding to questions for more details in the follow-up interviews. He even checked them again when responding in writing to ad hoc follow-up questions via email. In this way, much of the oral data gathered in this study was supported and corroborated by the data contained in these written documents and other relevant materials.<sup>8</sup> Hence, while being aware of the natural limitations of life history research that depends on oral data, we can be quite confident that most of the information provided by the informant in this study is relatively reliable and accurate.

### **Suejiro's Life History**

As mentioned above, although Suejiro left numerous photos, documents and other materials that enable us to establish a clear outline of his life history, due to the fact that he is already deceased and hence cannot be interviewed, and because he rarely spoke to his children about his ordeals in Canada while he was alive, there is much that we can only speculate about. However, from what we could learn about him, we can notice some interesting similarities and differences between his experiences and what was commonly reported by other Japanese Canadians of his time.

### Reasons He Went to Canada

Suejiro was very similar to most of the immigrants from Shiga Prefecture in that he was from an agricultural family. Also, like many others, he and his brother who he accompanied to Canada were following relatives who were already there (in his case his older sister's family).

However, the reasons he went set him apart from the majority. While we don't

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8 Kawahara ( "Nikkei kanada-imin no life history wo meguru chosa hoho wo saiko" [Reconsidering the methods for researching the life histories of Japanese Canadians]), while discussing the difficulties in verifying the validity of oral data, emphasizes the usefulness of various kinds of non-oral data (including both public and private documents, old pictures, diaries, etc.) for corroboration. He also emphasizes the usefulness of this non-oral data not only for verifying and enhancing the oral data, but also as a very useful means for stimulating the memory of the informant during an oral interview and helping her or him provide more detailed information.

know all the factors, the most immediate reason was his not passing the entrance exam of the commercial high school he was aiming for. From this it appears that even as a young teenager he already was determined to “leave the farm” and make a life in the business world, and when the road to that path in Japan seemed blocked, he saw the growing Japanese community in Vancouver as a place he could realize that dream. This speculation is supported by the fact that, unlike many others who first came as laborers, he instead immediately set about getting a Canadian education, worked part time in small businesses to support that education, and then continued to work in the small business world until the internment. After returning to Japan, he worked hard to succeed in the business world and finally was able to do so. Hence we can conclude that he had a clear goal from the beginning to be a successful businessman and doggedly pursued that goal both in Canada and Japan until he succeeded, and this distinguishes him from many others who went to Canada at the same time.

#### His Relatively Nice Lifestyle in Canada

Another noteworthy aspect about his story is that, although he was in Vancouver during a time of rising anti-Japanese sentiment and increasing economic discrimination, he appears to have led a relatively enjoyable and comfortable lifestyle both as a single and a married man. For example, there are some photos of him happily posing with his golf club and in full golf attire, others of him with members his small well-dressed literary coterie, yet others of him in what appear to be business conventions, and some of him socializing with friends. We also know that he had enough leisure to try his hand at writing some short novels, and even had some short stories published in the local media. These all indicate that, in spite of the difficult circumstances of the time, he was able somehow to lead a relatively good life within the Japanese Canadian community, and perhaps was looking forward to an increasingly prosperous future.

#### His Puzzling Decision to Be ‘Deported’ to Japan.

In light of the above, his decision to be ‘deported’ to Japan seems all the more puzzling. Unlike many others who made the same decision, he was relatively young and successful and could speak English well. Also, unlike some business owners who lost everything they had poured years of effort into building, he was just a business employee and hence was not as financially devastated as they were. In contrast to those whose job skills were limited to labor jobs in the fishing,

mining, forestry, and agricultural industries, he had a good Canadian high school education plus a business qualification and a variety of business experiences. He had three young children who would receive a Canadian education and hence would be well positioned to succeed in Canada. He did not have elderly parents who he was obligated to accompany to Japan. In short, he was an ideal candidate for successfully restarting a new career and life in eastern Canada. His later expressions of regret and his urging of Mikio to return to Canada suggest that he himself realized this too late.

We do not know all of the overlapping reasons for this decision, but based on the information we do have, it seems to have been mainly based on the anxiety felt by him and his wife about the welfare of her family in Japan with whom they had completely lost contact during the war. This indicates how overpowering a motivation this anxiety must have been for many who made the same decision. Of course there would have been other contributing causes as well, as listed in the first chapter, but due to lack of information, we can only speculate what they were in his case.

### **Mikio's Life History**

It is quite amazing that Mikio still has so many vivid memories of his early childhood in the internment camp and during the period following his arrival in Japan. It is likely that many of these memories were bolstered by the numerous related photos, documents and mementos that he has kept and preserved.

### Memories of the Camp

What is especially notable about Mikio's memories of the camp is how surprisingly positive and happy they are in spite of the harsh living conditions and trauma being experienced by the adults and teenagers. In chapter 1 it was mentioned that the adults made great efforts to hide their own anguish and anger in order to create a normal and cheerful environment for the children so that they could enjoy a normal happy childhood. Mikio's happy recollections of this period indicate how successful the adult internees were in achieving this.

Likewise the role of the Anglican kindergarten teachers in this regard is noteworthy. Mikio's happy memories of his kindergarten teachers' kindness and the lasting positive impression it left on him are a lasting testament to the important contributions they made in helping the parents create a normal and positive living situation for the children in spite of the harsh realities confronting

their families. Satsuki Ina acknowledges the extraordinary role of the parents and teachers as follows:

Did we make the best of a terrible situation? Yes, many of us did...The 'blessing' was the parents, friends, and teachers who worked to make our lives more meaningful, who helped us to have hope, who took care of us during desolate times (In *Honoring Our People: Breaking the Silence*, 10).

#### Sad Memories of the Trip to Japan

While Mikio has few memories of the voyage to Japan, his clear recollection of being blatantly discriminated against by the white lady who refused to give him a balloon because he was Japanese illustrates painfully the discrimination that even the children of Japanese Canadians experienced at that time, and the lasting memory that such a childhood experience can leave. His other memories of the trip, particularly his mother's weeping upon seeing Japan from the ship portray the depth of her longing for her homeland, the anguish that she had been experiencing, and perhaps most of all her extreme anxiety about her parents' wellbeing.

#### Experiences at Uruga and the Train Trip to Shiga

Mikio's memories of the terrible tasting food at the repatriate processing center and his inability to eat it echo exactly what was reported by several of the 'deportees' interviewed by Kage. But his situation differed from theirs somewhat in that, due to his father's bringing many foodstuffs from Canada, he was fortunate enough to receive edible food from his father. His report that the chocolate received from his father made up a very substantial portion of his diet lends some humor to the otherwise grim picture of extreme shortages and hunger.

His memory of seeing numerous remains of destroyed military vehicles and equipment also accords with the reports by others of the severe devastation that remained after the war, but perhaps due to his young age, he did not feel the shock that the older exiles reported. The image of him playing on these remains (like a child in a playground) also adds irony to the situation.

His recollection of being with his mother when they met her father (who had quickly come to meet them upon finding out about their arrival through the newspaper) illustrates the anxiety caused by the total loss of communication with loved ones in Japan during and immediately following the war. Likewise, his memory of seeing his mother and her father embrace and loudly cry provides a

specific example of the deep heartbreak felt by many when meeting their family members for the first time in years and then being informed by them that some of their loved ones had in fact not survived the war.

Mikio's memories of the excruciating train journey from Tokyo to Shiga are also very similar to what others reported to Kage. His account of the extremely crowded train cars that prevented his family from getting off at their designated station and consequently having to board another train at Kyoto and backtrack to the intended station gives a vivid specific example of how extreme the conditions on the train really were.

#### Early Experiences in the Village and Elementary School.

Mikio's recollections of the lack of food and lodging as well as the frictions with relatives during the period immediately following the family's arrival his father's home village also corroborate and particularize what many others reported. One wonders if his father's bringing so many goods from Canada to share with others might have actually caused resentment among his relatives who had suffered so badly during the war and had so little compared to him.

The fact that, due to his age, Mikio could enter elementary school and adjust fairly quickly with no recollection of excessive bullying, and then go on to get a normal Japanese high school education and enter a good university is an important contrast with the situations of those who were older when they returned and had more difficulties learning the language and adjusting to Japanese school life. The way that one teacher, Miss Tanaka, took him under her wing and gave him special language help and emotional support suggests the importance of such key enablers in the adjustment process. One wonders how well his initial adjustment period would have gone if Miss Tanaka had not been there and offered him special support.

#### University and Career

Mikio's success in entering a high level Japanese university is further evidence that he was able to adjust quickly and do well in the Japanese educational system. His feeling that his university entrance ceremony was the best gift he could give to his mother suggests both the level of his gratitude to her and also the extent of the role she had played in helping him reach that goal.

His religious conversion is rather unique (no conversions to Christianity were reported by those interviewed by Kage) and it is interesting that he himself

speculates that it may have partly been due to his very positive experience as a small child in the Anglican kindergarten in the camp in Slocan City. This conversion seems to have given him a focus and sense of direction that helped him throughout his life.

In short, it is clear that Mikio's arrival in Japan at such a young age obviously put him in an advantageous position in terms of cultural and linguistic adjustment. Admittedly, he forgot much of his English as he grew up in Japan and hence was not like the native-speaking 'deportees' who were able to use English as a ticket to employment first with the American occupying forces and later with companies in the private sector. However, the fact that he had been a native speaker of English as a child no doubt facilitated his English acquisition later in high school and university and also contributed to his present ability to speak it fluently and naturally. His quick adjustment and integration into Japanese school life made it possible for him to do well academically and enter a good university. As a result, he was strongly positioned both linguistically and academically to succeed as an international businessman.

#### Reasons for Staying in Japan

Mikio was somewhat unique in that he ended up staying in Japan even though his father had strongly encouraged him to go back to Canada and he himself had been preparing to do so. His immediate reason for not returning to Canada as planned, namely the advice he received to wait until the Canadian economy improved, was not given as a reason by any of the exiles interviewed by Kage. However, his other reasons for continuing to stay in Japan for the long term are very similar to those commonly given by others; namely, his entrance into a successful business career in Japan which he greatly enjoyed, and his marriage to a Japanese spouse.

#### Mikio's Present National and Cultural Identity

As noted previously, several of the 'deportees' reported to Kage feelings of confusion and ambiguity regarding their national and cultural identities, most saying that they felt neither completely Canadian or completely Japanese, and one reporting that he had deliberately assimilated completely to Japanese culture through conscious effort. As would be expected in the case of a child who was so young when he arrived in Japan, Mikio differed from both these situations as he naturally and completely integrated into Japanese culture, albeit while forgetting his English. Although Mikio speaks English well and appears comfortable

interacting with non-Japanese, when talking with him one gets the impression from his bearing and polite deferential manner that he is in many ways a typical Japanese gentleman of his generation. Yet he expresses pride in his Canadian roots and continues to feel some kind of connection to Canada as the land of his birth and of his earliest and most formative experiences.

### What if...?

As one reflects on the life histories of Suejiro and Mikio Ibuki, it is very tempting to wonder, what if Suejiro had not made the fateful decision to be sent to Japan and had rather chosen to stay in Canada? As mentioned above, compared to most other Japanese Canadians who had been uprooted and interned with him, he was in a strong position to do well had he chosen instead to follow the Canadian government's policy of dispersal and move to eastern Canada and re-start his life. In light of both Suejiro's and Mikio's later business successes in Japan and their contributions to Japan during the critical period of its post-war economic rebuilding process, one has to wonder what kind of contributions both would have made to Canadian society and to the Canadian economy had they stayed in Canada after the war rather than gone to Japan. When we see how, like some of the other 'deportees', they survived the first extremely difficult years in postwar Japan, used their English ability and whatever other skills they had to overcome their disadvantages, and finally ended up prospering and contributing to Japan's postwar economy, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that Canada's 'deportation' of almost 4000 Japanese Canadians to Japan after the war was not only a tragic injustice committed by Canada, but also a real economic loss for Canada.

### Possible Directions for Future Research

In closing, I would like to make a few observations about future directions this life history research could take. Perhaps the most obvious direction would be to interview other 'deportees' who are close to the same age as Mikio Ibuki to record in detail and compare their childhood memories with his, particularly their memories of their experiences playing with their friends and enjoying the nature around the camps, their kindergarten experiences and interactions with their teachers, their journeys with their families to Japan, their experiences in their ancestral villages, and their life journeys since. Another interesting but challenging line of research would be to try to find people in the Canadian Japanese

community who knew Suejiro Ibuki and could share more details of the life that he himself rarely talked about. Yet another albeit very challenging direction would be to try to find more information about the wife and mother, Mitsue Ibuki, which is even more limited, and compare it with what is known about other Japanese Canadian women with similar life stories. One more very relevant and instructive study would be to compare the experiences the Japanese Canadians before World War II with attitudes towards visible groups of immigrants now such as, for example, Muslim immigrants. Due to current developments in human migration, perhaps this type of research is needed now more than ever.

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**Suejiro Ibuki (on right side of front row) with his coterie of young literature friends in Vancouver**



**Suejiro practicing his golf swing (Vancouver, 1935)**



**The Ibuki family in Vancouver shortly before the war and internment**



**Mikio Ibuki (second from left) and some of his friends in Slovan City Internment Camp**



**Mikio's kindergarten class in Slovan City Camp. Margaret Foster is at the back on the right.**



**Mikio wearing ice skates at a simple outdoor rink at Slovan City**



**Mikio's kindergarten class having a Christmas celebration in 1943**



**Suejiro teaching his English students at Otsu City Hall, which he continued to do for 35 years**

**Note: The above pictures were provided by Mikio Ibuki and used with his permission.**