Phantom Immigrants
Oikawa Jinsaburo, the Suian Maru, and the Miyagi-ken Japanese-Canadians of Lion Island and Don Island

密航船水案丸
(Mikkousen Suian Maru)

by Nitta Jiro
translation by David Sulz
in the hope that we all find the pioneer within ourselves and act to make our dreams of a better world come true.

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PHANTOM IMMIGRANTS: Oikawa Jinsaburo, the Suian-Maru, and the Miyagi-ken Japanese-Canadians of Lion Island and Don Island.

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**Translator’s Notes**

My involvement with this story has been one of coincidence and opportunity since my introduction to it in the summer of 1991. As an intern with the Miyagi Internship Programme, I stayed with many wonderful families for short homestays. During one such stay, the Grandfather asked where I came from.


“B.C.?” he asked.

“Yes, near Victoria.”

“Just a minute,” he said and whisked away to a back room.

A few moments later he returned with a book. To my surprise, there was a map of B.C.; on one side of the inside cover and a map of Miyagi Prefecture on the other. Grandfather explained that Jinsaburo Oikawa smuggled 80-odd people from Miyagi to B.C. in the late 1800s. He offered me the book, although I doubted I would ever be able to read it.

When I returned to the University of Victoria to finish a degree in Pacific/Asian Studies and Economics, I found I could add a minor in Japanese with only one more course. Dr. Hiroko Noro agreed to supervise an individual Directed Studies course (a mini-thesis) based on translating the Author’s Notes. Although her field of research was Japanese immigration to Canada, she had never heard the Jinsaburo Oikawa story and was interested.

After graduation, I applied for a job as a Co-ordinator for International Relations with the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme. The deadline for acceptance came and went with no word. The phone rang just as I was about to accept a job in my hometown of Cobble Hill.

“There’s an opening on the JET Programme,” the consulate’s representative said.

“Thank you,” I replied, “but I’ve already found a great job.”

“It’s in Sendai,” she said.

I promised to think about it.

It was a difficult decision: an interesting job in Sendai or an equally interesting job just up the road. The Canadian job was stimulating and the boss enlightened, “If you’re distracted, go to the lake for a swim, take a nap, or do some carving; come back to work when you’re fresh and can give your best.” The Japanese option was also intriguing. After a day spent pondering Robert Frost’s *The Road Not Taken*, I decided on Japan.

At the International Affairs Division of the Miyagi Prefectural Government, I had lots of free time and a colleague, Kei Yoshida, who was interested in the story. At first, I just planned on reading the book. This required so much effort I figured translating would only require minimum additional effort. By the end of that year, I had translated only a sixth of the book but was hooked and committed to finishing. When I heard the JET teacher in Towa-cho was returning to Canada, I requested a transfer to the heart of the story.

I spent two wonderful years in Towa-cho, officially as Assistant Language Teacher at the Junior High School but also assisting with International Relations at the Town Office especially during preparations for the yearly trip to Canada (Towa-cho and Vernon, B.C. are sister cities). Although an isolated mountain village on the border of two prefectures, Towa-cho is a remarkable town with a fascinating history. The other big local story is the *kakure-kurishitan* (secret Christians) who took to the mountains of Towa-cho when Date Masamune (the feudal lord) outlawed Christianity in the early 1600s in line with the Shogun’s edict to isolate Japan from the outside world. There is even a Canadian link; a Catholic Church in Quebec donated money and material to build a church when this story was rediscovered after World War II.

I translated a few pages each day and quickly learned that a translator’s greatest tool is background knowledge and an intimate relationship with the story. I would never have completed this book without a
connection to the landscape, the descendants, and the “not-included” events that lie behind this story, both in Japan and in Canada. Living in Towa-cho with people who knew the story made translating much easier. In particular, Mr. Kanichi Onodera (Head of the Public Hall), and two consecutive principals (Saito-kocho and Abe-kocho) were great supporters who explained difficult grammar and provided background information.

After two years, I had completed the entire story but the real challenge of revising the translation into real English remained. There is a long-standing debate over translating literally or creatively; literal translations stick to the original text whereas creative translations try to translate the meaning and intention of the story. I hope this translation is a happy medium. It sticks to the sentence and paragraph order fairly rigidly although the word order must be altered when translating Japanese into English). However, I tried to make the story flow for an English-speaking audience.

Of course, it would be arrogant to think that this work is all my own doing. Some of my wonderful friends (and family) who have contributed greatly by reading and suggesting and discussing are Terry Greatrex in Furukawa, Roger Howden in Victoria, Marilyn Sulz (mom) in Cobble Hill, and Tanya Berry (my partner in fun and learning). Ken Sulz (dad) and Jun Hirose in Sendai have also been very supportive and helpful. Finally, thanks to all my friends and family in Canada and Japan who may not yet have read the story but who have listened patiently to my explanations and ramblings.

Any mistakes are, naturally, my own responsibility.

**June 2000**: This “second printing” includes minor corrections suggested by readers who took time to contact me about spelling, grammatical, and name-reading errors. I am grateful to everyone who has shared their own stories. It seems Jinsaburo Oikawa has had a lasting effect on the lives and histories of Japanese and Canadians alike. Thank you also to the Nikkei Voice newspaper.

**January 2006**: A bibliography has been added - mostly from my M.A. (history) thesis research - Japanese “Entrepreneur” on the Fraser River: Oikawa Jinsaburo and the Illegal Immigrants of the Suian Maru. Many of these sources were unused (or unknown) to Nitta and add new nuances to the story. More thanks to Jennifer Hashimoto at Nikkei Books and everyone at the Japanese-Canadian National Museum.

**January 2009**: A few additions to the bibliography. To date, I have made about 350 copies of the book by hand (10-20 at a time) in response to requests which often include wonderful notes about personal connections and additional information. I have had opportunities to present this story to community groups, at academic conferences, and in print articles. In October 2006, the Japanese Canadian National Museum in Burnaby, B.C. hosted a Suian Maru Centennial Celebration which brought together several hundred people from Canada and Japan. In March 2009, a Japanese play called 加奈陀に渡った蛻火の夢 (loosely, “The Firefly’s Dream that Sailed to Canada”) will premiere in March 2009 in the town of Hasama, Miyagi-ken. It seems this fascinating story strikes a chord with a variety of people.
Chapter 1:

The Golden Horse

(Outer gate of the Batto Kannon Doh shrine
Masubuchi-village, Towa-cho)
I Runaway Horse

Parade banners filled the narrow street as hordes of people celebrated the Batto Kannon Doh shrine Spring Festival. Suddenly, a shrill cry rose above the general din and everyone froze in their tracks to look in the direction of the voice. Far down the street, they saw a knot rising above the crowd as the banners rose and fell.

“Runaway horse! Runaway horse!” a voice cried from a second storey window.

The celebrants scrambled wildly to find safe hiding places in small alleyways or under the low, overhanging eaves of private houses. Swirls of white dust were kicked up in the general disorder as parents rushed to scoop up their young children.

On hearing the cry, Jinsaburo Oikawa stepped into the street and saw the sturdy, chestnut stallion snorting and charging down the street with its mane flowing behind and its wild, deranged eyes. There was no mistaking the reckless run of a great horse.

Every year, on the nineteenth day of the third lunar month, there was a grand festival at the Masubuchi Batto Kannon Doh shrine in Yonekawa village. Since the temple’s founding in the second year of Daido (807 AD), the number of pilgrims coming to this sacred site had increased dramatically and they came from ever further away. Horse owners from all over Tohoku and as far away as the Kanto region to the south regularly journeyed to the festival and some 20,000 people and 5,000 horses bustled about the small town. Private homes became temporary lodgings for the travellers: people and horses alike. Once the extra stables were prepared and everyone was accommodated, the beating of the prayer drum started and continued for three days.

Every year there were runaway horses. Every year people were injured and occasionally killed but the villagers took this as a source of pride rather than shame. It could hardly be a proper festival without such danger and excitement.

Before the scream, Jinsaburo Oikawa had been standing beneath the eaves of a house watching the crowds of people in straw sandals flowing into town. At the shrill warning, the mass of people in the street rushed to seek shelter, many crowding into where Jinsaburo stood.

The runaway horse, without saddle and with reins streaming behind, grew larger and larger.

“Look out!” somebody yelled out from Jinsaburo’s right.

Jinsaburo, watching the horse approach from the left, whirled around to see a small boy, six or seven years old, dart into the street. Evidently, the boy had spotted his mother and was heading directly for her as fast as his little legs allowed. He ran hard and could have reached the other side safely had he run straight. However, he was cutting across the street at an angle and there was little doubt that he would be overtaken by the wild horse and trampled in its hooves.

It is said that horses will not trample a human intentionally. If someone, darts out unexpectedly, however, there is no guarantee that the horse will have enough time or room to change direction. In this

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1 The Batto Kannon is a Buddhist deity with a horse’s head. It was a symbol of the horse-worshipping culture of the northern region.

2 Yonekawa village (now part of Towa-cho in northern Miyagi Prefecture) is 400 kilometres north of Tokyo (Kanto region). Masubuchi is an area of Yonekawa.

3 Tohoku is the northern part of the main island of Honshu. It consists of the six prefectures of Aomori, Akita, Iwate, Yamagata, Miyagi, and Fukushima.
case, the street was too narrow and there was no chance for avoidance. It was little boy against great charging beast.

Suddenly, from down and across the street, a sickly pale woman darted out and ran towards the child with outstretched arms, hoping to scoop him up in time. Seeing her terrified face, Jinsaburo knew he had to act. He launched himself into the street.

By the time he had positioned himself in front of the horse and spread his arms in defiance, the space had shrunk to three metres. Startled by the man in its path, the horse pulled up slightly but the collision was inevitable. There was no escape.

The people huddled along the sides of the road held their breath in anticipation. This brave but foolish man would be kicked in the head or stomped on the chest and fall dead in the middle of the street. Terrified women covered their eyes with their hands.

In the split second that the horse pulled up, Jinsaburo turned slightly, grabbed the charging horse around the neck, and jumped up. The great stallion with a long, streaming mane snorted defiantly and charged on. Jinsaburo clung tightly around its neck, oblivious to the fact that his kimono was wide open at the front and his white underwear showed.

The wild horse, with Jinsaburo tailing out behind, continued its wild run for several tens of metres before finally giving up. Jinsaburo calmed the horse with soothing sounds - “Dohhh, dohhh” - and slid down, gripping the reins tightly in his hands. He continued to soothe the horse by stroking and patting its neck while slowly walking it around. Although settled, the horse shook its head vigorously to wrest the reins from its captor’s grip.

“Someone bring some water,” Jinsaburo barked sharply.

The spell broken, the watching crowd heaved a collective sigh of relief. In their hearts, they recognised the bravery of his act but the people of this region were not prone to showing admiration by clapping or cheering.

Several people responded to Jinsaburo’s command and ran to nearby houses to fetch water. Soon, three or four buckets of water appeared to fill the water trough that had also been dragged out. Someone else brought Jinsaburo his straw sandals.

While the horse gave its unwavering attention to the water and drank deeply, Jinsaburo fixed his kimono with his free hand and took a deep breath. It was deadly quiet and only a distant temple bell broke the silence. The wind scattered the frail petals from the blooming cherry trees and several fell into the water trough. Finally the drum beats picked up again and the owners of nearby tea-houses and street stalls went back to their business of entreating passers-by to sample their wares.

A horse neighed from the direction of an ema stall and a whole chorus of answering neighs came from all directions. The runaway horse ignored all the commotion and continued drinking contentedly until it jerked its head up suddenly at the hurried approach of its owner.

“I don’t know how I can ever thank you. Thanks to your quick actions, nobody was hurt. Thank you, thank you, thank you.”

The owner turned to the horse, “Now, don’t you go running off like that again. I promise to take good care of you and find you a good mate.”

The owner addressing his horse like another person was too much for the people standing around and they broke into raucous laughter. The owner took the reins and gently led the horse away, oblivious to the good-natured taunting.

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4 Votive plaques. Wishes are written on the back and the plaque hung on a temple wall or on a special rack.
Jinsaburo’s attention was diverted by a voice from behind. He turned to find a man directly behind him, head bowed politely.

“You saved my son from certain death. How can I ever make this up to you?”

“Really, it was nothing, anybody would have …,” Jinsaburo began before he noticed the man’s face, “Say, aren’t you Kichiji Goto from Oinokawara?”

At the same instant, the other man noticed Jinsaburo’s face.

“And you’re Jinsaburo Oikawa, owner of the silk-reeling factory over in Masubuchi.”

Oinokawara and Masabuchi were two kilometres apart and had five hundred households between them. Although they had been recently amalgamated into a town called Yonekawa, the two men still referred to them as separate towns.

Kichiji Goto knew Jinsaburo Oikawa as the builder of Miyagi Prefecture’s first silk-reeling factory (in 1886) which had recently acquired a German-built boiler. The factory employed one hundred and fifty people.

Jinsaburo Oikawa, in turn, knew Kichiji Goto as one of the more vociferous shareholders of his Masubuchi Silk Reeling Company. Kichiji had visited the factory many times to observe its operation and was known for asking very pointed questions.

Their eyes met and they laughed.

“My house is in Oinokawara but it’s not far. Please come around for a while,” Goto offered and, having no reason to refuse, Jinsaburo agreed.

The Batto Kannon Doh temple’s Spring Festival brought the villagers closer together and a custom had developed whereby they hailed one another in the street to invite them over for a meal.

“Hey, Kimpei, this is Jinsaburo Oikawa who stopped the horse. Say hello and thank him for saving you,” Kichiji said when they reached his house.

Kimpei said nothing. His head was bowed but his eyes were wide open, the picture of a cute kid.

“How old are you?” Jinsaburo asked.

Kimpei looked straight into Jinsaburo’s eyes and answered in a clear voice.

“Seven.”

Kimpei had not seen the dramatic events between Jinsaburo and the horse because he had kept running until he jumped into his mother’s arms. It had all taken place behind his back but he later heard how Jinsaburo, with split-second timing, had grabbed the wild horse around the neck and held on until it finally calmed down.

“Every year, one or two people are injured during the festival,” Kichiji stated. “There was even a death last year.”

Jinsaburo made no comment but accepted the proffered cup of sake and waited for Kichiji to continue.

“But then again, it is a horse festival, isn’t it? All in all, though, this whole festival is doomed because the Age of the Horse won’t last very much longer, will it?” Kichiji added.

“That’s the truth,” Jinsaburo said, happy that the conversation had turned to his favourite topic. “The Steam Age is coming for sure. Soon there will be steam powered trains on land and steam powered ships on the rivers. I’ve even heard that motor cars are starting to replace horses in America.”

There was not a single person in Yonekawa village who did not know Jinsaburo Oikawa at least by name (although he was more commonly referred to as ‘Oijin’

5 “Oijin” comes from the first syllables of Oikawa and Jinsaburo.

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Kitakami River to Ishinomaki. Besides the nicknames derived from his occupations, he was also called (not a little facetiously) ‘New-fangled Oijin’ for his interest in, and adoption of, new things and ideas.

“A motor car is like a horse cart powered by a machine, isn’t it,” Kichiji asked tentatively; he was not as up on modern contraptions as Jinsaburo.

“Yes, like a horse cart without a horse,” Jinsaburo agreed and laughed.

Kichiji laughed too, getting into the swing of the conversation.

“And then there is Souemon Sato from Nishikiori, who went to Canada two or three years ago. We got a letter from him not too long ago and it was full of very interesting things.”

“No doubt mostly about cars and such,” Jinsaburo guessed.

“Actually,” Kichiji answered, “it had more to do with a river. According to Souemon’s letter, there is a river in Canada that is ten times bigger than our Kitakami River. Every fall, the river turns completely red from salmon.”

“The river turns red because of salmon?” Jinsaburo asked in disbelief.

“That’s right,” Kichiji continued. “There are so many red salmon that they jostle each other to get upstream even in such a huge river. Apparently, they are just scooped out of the water, canned, and then sold all over the world. And, believe it or not, the people there think that salmon roe is too disgusting to eat so they just throw the eggs back into the river. Souemon just can’t believe they could be so wasteful.”

“They just throw the roe back into the river?” Jinsaburo repeated, thinking of how expensive Hokkaido salmon roe was during the New Year’s holiday time.

The thought of all those precious eggs thrown into the river resounded in his head and the image of a river ten times bigger than the Kitakami full of bright red salmon floated before his eyes. Even if all the salmon were taken by Canadian fishermen, all those beautiful eggs were left to rot. Maybe, if he went to Canada, he could arrange to export those eggs to Japan. His imagination carried him to that far away land of unimaginable profits.

“What’s wrong?” Kichiji asked when he realised Jinsaburo had suddenly gone quiet, eyes glazed over and staring into the distance. Kichiji wondered what thoughts or images could bring on such a state and cause such a look of anger on Jinsaburo’s face. He guessed it was related to the talk about Souemon Sato but he had no idea what had been aroused in Jinsaburo’s heart.

“How old is Souemon Sato?” Jinsaburo asked suddenly.

“Aha,” thought Kichiji, “so he was thinking about the letter from Souemon.”

“He must be either twenty or twenty-one this year because he is ten years younger than I,” Kichiji answered out loud.

“So that would make him twenty-two whole years younger than me.”

“You’re forty-two?” Kichiji exclaimed. “I never would have guessed.” In fact, Kichiji had assumed Jinsaburo to be only three or four years older than himself.

“This Souemon Sato from Nishikiori Village, is he a relative of yours?” Jinsaburo continued the questioning.

Kichiji replied that they were not actually related but “the year before Souemon left for Canada, a Nishikiori relative of mine asked me to help with his charcoal kiln up the Masubuchi River by the marsh on the left-hand bank. It was late fall just before the first snow. Souemon’s family kiln was within shouting distance of the kiln where I was helping out. It hadn’t rained for ten days, so it was really dry.

“Suddenly, I heard Souemon’s frantic shouting and looked up to see a fire burning outside his kiln. I grabbed a bundle of green pine boughs near my kiln entrance for that exact reason, and ran to his kiln.

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6 Nishikiori is the village next to Yonekawa.
7 The northern-most island of Japan.
started beating on the fire with the bundle of green branches because it’s the best way to put out a kiln fire.”

“Actually, Souemon himself reacted quickly enough in ripping off his jacket to smother the fire but his youth, the suddenness of the fire, and the extreme dryness of the surrounding area could have easily turned that small fire into a raging wild fire had I been any slower in arriving.

“Souemon left for Canada shortly thereafter but he keeps in touch through the odd letter, now and again.”

“Is that so?” Jinsaburo exclaimed. “I guess there are many things we don’t hear about even in a town as small as ours.”

Jinsaburo suddenly stood up to leave. Kichiji and his wife both tried to persuade him to stay but he claimed some other engagement and declined their offers. Before he left, however, he stopped to stroke Kimpei’s head.

“Do you think you’ll go to Canada when you grow up, son? Maybe I’ll take you with me when I go.”

Kimpei looked up into Jinsaburo’s face and wondered why this brave, strong man who had brought the raging horse to rest was looking at him with such tender eyes.

After Jinsaburo left, Kimpei sat and stared at the calendar hanging from the pillar where Jinsaburo had sat. Kimpei sat until the wee hours of the night, mesmerised by the numerals: 1896.

II The Vision

Yonekawa village is in Tome-gun in the far north-east of Miyagi Prefecture near the Miyagi-Iwate Prefectural border. It is a mountainous area, mountains beyond mountains, and the houses are scattered along a narrow valley created by the Futamatagawa River (a tributary of the Kitakami River).

In 1896, the Tohoku trunk railway was built through Miyagi but the nearest stop to Yonekawa was Ishikoshi Station: a 16-kilometre walk away. The Pacific Ocean was equally distant in the other direction by way of the Nishigori-kaido road that crossed the mountains between Yonekawa and the ocean. Despite this route to the coast, travel in and out of Yonekawa was either on foot to Ishikoshi or by boat down the Kitakami River to Ishinomaki further down the coast and closer to Sendai.

The Nishigori Road ran south from Yonekawa along the Futamatagawa River to Shibayama in Nishikiori village. Shibayama itself lay at the confluence of the Futamatagawa and Kitakami Rivers, about 4 kilometres south of Masubuchi.

Jinsaburo Oikawa was an impatient man who believed in striking when the iron is hot. Therefore, he decided to visit Jinuemon Sato in Shibayama straight away despite it being the middle of the great Batto Kannon Doh Spring Festival. Leaving the Goto’s place in Oinokawara, he had planned to stop at his Masubuchi home but the hoards of people and horses made that impossible; he went directly on to Nishikiori.

Jinuemon Sato, three years older than Jinsaburo, was born in Masubuchi Village but had been adopted by the Sato family of Nishikiori when he was a youth. Rumour had it that Jinuemon’s eighteen-year-old son had gone to Canada two or three years previously and Jinsaburo suspected that the Souemon Sato that Kichiji referred to was that son. Jinsaburo was hoping that Souemon had also sent letters to his father about his life in Canada.

\(^{8} \text{gun} = \text{county}\)
Jinuemon’s house was on a little rise overlooking the spot where the Futamatagawa River joined the Kitakami River. From its vantage point, one could look down on the vast rice paddies stretching to the western horizon.

Jinsaburo stopped halfway up the zelkova-covered hill and looked down on the Kitakami River. The weeds along the river bank had yet to bloom but the bits of foam floating in the fast-flowing river made it look stagnant and gave a feeling of late spring. As the huge, evening sun set in front of him, Jinsaburo lifted his hand to shade his eyes and watch the day’s closing scene over the river.

A deep-seated ache arose in his heart and spread throughout his whole body. He could do nothing to control it so he stood still and tried to endure increasing tightness. Soon, the discomfort peaked and he was staring at a golden river. It was a strange state of being where his spirit and body were no longer one; his soul had temporarily left his body and was floating freely in the surrounding air. The gold river, moreover, was not a gold-tinged Kitakami but a huge river in Canada overflowing with golden salmon swimming upstream.

A cool wind blew.

The tight, binding sensation eventually dissipated and he relaxed. He stood thoughtfully for some time, aware that his destiny had been revealed if he was willing to abandon human rationality and submit himself to fate. He took a deep breath.

“I can’t do a thing about it; it just happens,” he reassured himself.

He was not alarmed by the experience as it had happened periodically since his youth. Often, it was triggered by a cool spring breeze brushing his cheek or by the faint whiff of a wild chrysanthemum. His chest would suddenly start throbbing, an ache would grow in his heart, and his whole body would tense. Inevitably, these experiences revealed a vision of some new fate or different path for his life to follow. He emerged refreshed and aware of what his next great mission (some might say mischief) was to be.

“But I’m already forty-two years old,” he said, as if begging himself to reconsider. “What am I to do?”

He tried with all his might to repress his vision but knew it was useless; he was bound for a radical change in his life. He no longer saw the sunset over the Kitakami but rather, the sun dipping into a large Canadian river he had never seen.

“Oijin!”

The sudden call brought him back to reality and he noticed the kimono-clad figure of Jinuemon Sato standing before him. That he was wearing a kimono instead of farm clothes could only mean that he was on his way home from the festival.

“I was just on my way home from the festival, too,” Jinsaburo said in greeting. “Actually, I ran into Kichiji Goto and heard that your son, Souemon, has gone to Canada.”

His voice trailed off in hopes that his companion would offer an explanation.

“That kid! He set his mind on going and there was nothing I could do to stop him,” Jinuemon remarked to the slightly taller Jinuemon as they walked side-by-side.

Jinuemon stopped short.

“Oijin, are you thinking of going to Canada?” he asked, realising there was only one possible explanation for Jinsaburo’s sudden interest in Souemon. Everyone knew about Jinsaburo’s fascination with novel ideas and places; Souemon’s going to Canada had obviously piqued that interest.

“Is it that obvious? Truth is, I’d really like to know what it’s like over there.”

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9 A deciduous tree known as keyaki in Japanese.
The two men stood in the woods on the hill near Jinuemon’s house. It was an old custom to plant cedar and zelkova trees on the north side of one’s house so the age of the trees would reflect the history of the house.

“The silk factory is going well, isn’t it? I’ve heard rumours that you plan to expand it into the largest silk-reeling factory in Tohoku, not just Miyagi. Why would you want to give all that up and go to Canada?”

Jinuemon knew that little speeches would not change Jinsaburo’s mind about going to Canada but he tried anyway.

Fully aware that he could not explain that his decision to go to Canada was based on a vision, Jinsaburo tried the following:

“When I started the silk factory, everybody was investing in other things and nobody believed that silk-reeling could be successful. However, success breeds imitation and soon there were all sorts of people starting their own companies to compete with me. Now the market is very tight and the silk-reeling business is saturated.”

He went on to say that he was, indeed, considering going to Canada but could not decide definitely until he knew whether it was feasible and worthwhile. He said nothing, however, about the salmon roe.

“If it’s not too much trouble, I would really like to read the letters your son has sent home,” he concluded.

Jinuemon consented gladly but suggested that Jinsaburo might like to stay for dinner and read them leisurely. He ushered Jinsaburo into the sitting room.

“Do you remember when we were kids and lived in the same village?” Jinuemon asked. “We used to study kendo10 at the dojo11 in Oinokawara.”

Indeed, as young boys they beat each other with their bamboo swords for several years at Suto’s dojo. They had strong opinions of each other in those days: to Jinuemon, the three-year-younger Jinsaburo was a conceited little bugger and, to Jinsaburo, the older Jinuemon was a loud-mouthed, pompous twit. However, they had had little contact since Jinuemon moved away other than the occasional meeting that goes along with being distant relatives in a small town.

Jinuemon brought out his son’s letters and placed them in front of Jinsaburo.

“Before I read them, I have to ask what would make an eighteen-year-old boy decide to go to Canada all by himself?” Jinsaburo asked.

Jinuemon hesitated for just a moment before deciding to answer that after the incident at the charcoal kiln, Souemon was reluctant to work in the mountains. Jinuemon contacted an acquaintance in Ishinomaki who found him a job at the port in Oginohama. Unfortunately, the young man fell in with a group of sailors who promised to stow him away on a ship bound for Canada in exchange for 30 yen. Taking them at their word, Souemon went to his father to ask for the money.

After berating his son for contemplating such a risky venture, Jinuemon again contacted his Ishinomaki acquaintance about travelling overseas legitimately. The friend put them in contact with a passage agent in Yokohama who helped them arrange the trip and even arranged for a Japanese boarding house owner in Vancouver to meet Souemon on arrival and take care of him until he was settled in his new surroundings.

“In the end, it cost me 70 or 80 yen but it was worth it to make sure he was somewhat taken care of,” Jinuemon said, and laughed.

“I see,” said Jinsaburo.

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10 Japanese fencing using bamboo swords.

11 A place like a gymnasium but used for practising martial arts.
Obviously, any trip or venture is easier if one can call on familial obligations or contacts but what really interested Jinsaburo was that people sold (and others paid for) family-like connections with non-relatives. It was like a market for family ties.

“Your explanation answers most of my questions but would you mind if I looked at the letters myself?” Jinsaburo asked as he turned his attention to the pile of letters before him.

He was struck by the unusual stamps and shapes of the envelopes. Not knowing which letter came first, Jinsaburo waited for Jinuemon to pick one out of the pile and hand it to him. For some reason unknown to Jinsaburo, it was apparently the first.

That first letter essentially said that Souemon had arrived safely after an uneventful voyage, had settled into a boarding house for Japanese, and found a temporary job. When Jinsaburo was finished reading that letter, Jinuemon handed him the next. Souemon had found a job with a farmer just out of Vancouver.

"I’m living in a small shed off the barn and I get the left-overs from the family’s meals for food. I am working like a dog. I get paid a dollar a day each day because I am still learning and am more like an apprentice. It’s all still so strange to me."

The third letter came about a year after the second.

"I’m pretty used to life on the farm now. The Grandmother teaches me a little English every day and I can understand most of what the family says to me. Today, for the first time, I received a ten dollar bonus and some days off."

The fourth letter had come another year later.

"My English is now good enough to speak freely with the family. I’ve moved from the shed into the house and eat together with the family. I still get a dollar a day but now I have a contract and they bought me some clothes and a hat. I think all of my hard work has paid off. Sometimes I go out on my days off."

The fifth letter was written at the end of that year. Souemon had taken a trip to Vancouver and visited the town of Steveston where many Japanese immigrants lived.

"There is a town called Steveston at the mouth of the Fraser River. The Fraser is about ten times wider than the Kitakami and during the ‘season’ there are incredible numbers of salmon moving upstream to spawn. According to local stories, you can stand a pole in the middle of the river and it will be carried upstream by the swarms of fish without falling. There are others who swear that they have seen dogs run from one side of the river to the other on the backs of the fish."

"There are many different kinds of fish jostling their way upstream but only the sockeye are taken for canning, the rest are thrown back. There are canneries up and down
Jinsaburo looked up from the letter.

“It’s just like Kichiji said,” he thought to himself.

There was no hint of exaggeration in Souemon’s letters; he reported only what he had seen and heard.

“What a waste!” Jinsaburo exclaimed out loud.

“No kidding!” Jinuemon agreed. “All those fish and they only use one kind.”

Apparently, Jinuemon had not realised that Jinsaburo was referring to all the salmon roe going to waste.

“From your son’s letters, it sounds like there are all kinds of jobs to be had in Canada. He doesn’t once mention sending money so it must be hard to make enough to send home,” Jinsaburo remarked, considering his options very carefully. “I guess it’s just as hard to make money in Canada as it is in Japan.”

Jinsaburo laid the fifth letter back on the table, his face showing that he had given up going to Canada. He rose and, despite the protestations of his hosts, set out for home in Masubuchi.

The Batto Kannon Doh Festival did not slow down even after the sun set. There were paper lanterns everywhere: hanging outside every house and carried by people hurrying to the Batto Kannon Doh shrine along the steep, cedar-lined path. The horses neighed and carried on well into the night.

Jinsaburo slept fitfully as images from Souemon’s short letters spun in his head.

Only the sockeye salmon are taken, the rest are thrown back.

The salmon roe is wasted, thrown back into the river.

There are too many fish to imagine taking more than a mere fraction of the total.

The thoughts swirled until his head began to ache.

Jinsaburo figured that the Canadian government must have restrictions against Japanese (or any foreigners) just moving in and taking fish no matter how abundant. Souemon’s letter had not touched on that point.

“That’s one thing to consider,” Jinsaburo mumbled to himself and decided he could not go as a fisherman.

He had read in the newspapers that Japanese immigration to the United States had touched nerves there; perhaps it was the same in Canada. Nonetheless, he could not foresee any problems with taking fish that nobody wanted, let alone collecting roe that was just discarded anyway. What problem could there be in sending that back to Japan?

In his dreams, Jinsaburo saw himself dressed not in a kimono but in work clothes and was packing various kinds of fish (except sockeye) into salt kegs on the banks of the Fraser. As that image faded, he saw himself working in a factory packing salmon roe to be sent to Japan. He was not alone; he was surrounded by other workers, all from his home town.

He tried to block these images bombarding his dreams and tried to convince himself that the proposition was too difficult, if not impossible. The harder he tried to block out the visions, however, the stronger they forced their way into his dreams. There was no reason for him to be stuck in a small,
provincial county. In the end, the force pulling him to that vast, rich land in search of his destiny was irresistible.

“The factory is running smoothly so there is no problem leaving it now,” he thought. “If I wait and the company starts to falter, I could never leave.”

When morning came, he had slept little. He was awoken by the neighing of horses, the beating of the temple drums, and the general commotion outside his windows. Normally, he was proud of the festival and the boisterous activity surrounding it. Today, it all seemed empty and unfulfilling.

“I’m going to Yokohama this morning,” he informed his family.

Jinsaburo, born the third son of Juroji Onodera of Masubuchi, had taken the Oikawa family name when he married Uino, the sixteen-year-old daughter of Eizo Oikawa, also of Masubuchi. Jinsaburo and Uino had two sons: Taijiro (18) and Michie (10).

The news that her husband was off to Yokohama would not normally cause Uino the least concern. But that morning’s announcement, after a sleepless night of tossing and turning, worried her.

“What new scheme have you dreamed up this time?” she asked as she helped him prepare for his trip.

She knew him well enough not to expect an answer.

“It’s nothing for you to worry about,” he answered. As he left the house, dew from the oak trees fell on his western-style suit with a stand-up collar.

He followed the road upstream along the Masubuchi River at a pace that would be a run for most. After twenty or thirty minutes, he arrived at the Masubuchi Silk-Reeling Factory on the Onodera grounds (his childhood home). The factory was not yet open but he found his older brother, Tokusaburo Onodera, and told him that he was on his way to Yokohama.

“What made you decide to go down there all of a sudden?” Tokusaburo asked, slightly curious.

“I’m going to check on that shipment of raw silk we sent that apparently wasn’t packed well. I should have done it sooner but …,” was the extent of Jinsaburo’s explanation.

At the Masubuchi Silk-Reeling Company warehouse in Ishinomaki, raw silk from their own and other factories was collected, packed, and shipped to Yokohama. Several days earlier, they had received notice that their latest shipment was not packed well enough. The problem had been rectified to everyone’s satisfaction but that was the only explanation Jinsaburo would give for his going to Yokohama.

Jinsaburo went to Ishikoshi Station on horseback to catch the train. He left town so quickly that it almost seemed the festival drums were driving him away.

III Yokohama

On arriving in Yokohama, Jinsaburo visited everyone he knew, customers and acquaintances alike, with the ulterior motive of finding out anything he could about Canada.

“If it’s information about Canada you’re after, I’d suggest you go to the Nagano Inn. Everyone coming from or going to Canada stays there,” an old trader told him.

The old trader had been to Canada twice but only on business so there was little depth to his knowledge. He did, however, know about the incredible numbers of spawning salmon and when he heard that Jinsaburo was interested in salmon, he offered a wealth of information.

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12 For some reason, people in this area did not follow the common Japanese custom of naming the first son with some variation of Ichiro (first son). Variations on Jiro, Saburo, and Shiro were sometimes used but not in the usual order of second, third, and fourth son.
“Our company imports canned salmon but it’s more expensive than you might expect. We really can’t sell all that much,” the old trader began and then went on to explain in more detail.

Jinsaburo heard the trader out and discarded the information.

Back at the Nagano Inn near the port, Jinsaburo unpacked his belongings and murmured to himself, “This talk about canned salmon is all well and good but I’m interested in salmon roe, the eggs.”

Jinsaburo went looking for the owner to inquire if there was anyone around who knew anything about Canada. By some stroke of luck, there was a whole group staying at the inn who were setting sail for Canada the next day. One of them was a fisherman from Steveston at the mouth of the Fraser River.

Kouemon Nakabayashi, from the more southerly prefecture of Wakayama, had gone to Canada five years earlier on the advice of a friend. He had just come back to Japan to marry and was returning to Canada with three compatriots he had enticed along. Jinsaburo seized on this fortunate opportunity and pried the fisherman for information.

Although Nakabayashi wore a stylish, Western-style suit from Canada, his deeply-tanned face made it easy to imagine him slaving away on a fishing boat in work clothes. He spoke eloquently and his conversation was littered with phrases such as:

“We Japanese are fishermen: always have been and always will be. All we need is the ocean, no matter where it is.”

He spoke vigorously and assuredly and there was no hint that his confidence masked insecurity. His legitimacy lay in his belief that the Fraser River fishery owed its existence to the Japanese fishermen. He talked with conviction about the experiences of the Japanese in Steveston since their arrival there ten years before. He talked also of the fishery in general.

King salmon were the most valuable of all the many types of salmon in the river; they sometimes reached a metre or more in length. The fishermen targeted schools of salmon and dropped their nets, if any hook-nosed ‘dog salmon’ came up in the net, they were thrown right back overboard. Dog salmon were not for human consumption, they were fit for dog food only (hence the name).

“I’ve heard that a pole will stand upright amidst the millions of salmon jostling and pushing upstream during the height of the season,” Jinsaburo queried.

“Now, where did you hear that?” Nakabayashi laughed but went on to explain,

“The Indians have many legends about the number of fish in the old days. One of them, like you said, is that you could stand a long pole in the middle of the river and it would be carried upstream without falling over. Another one they like to tell is that dogs could run across the river on the salmon’s backs without getting wet. The Fraser is so wide there aren’t enough salmon in the whole world to make it that crowded but it is no lie that the salmon have to jostle and fight their way upstream once they hit the narrower upper reaches of the river.”

Jinsaburo was obviously disappointed.

“So, they’re only stories, after all?”

“Unfortunately yes,” Nakabayashi said and chuckled. “But, there are more salmon there than you could ever imagine.”

He then talked about the life of the Japanese fishermen.

“The Japanese fishermen sell their catch to the canneries but the White men running the canneries are the only ones who make any big profits. The Japanese are merely labour to bring in the fish.”

Nakabayashi’s voice rose passionately.

“We are only oil for the hairy barbarians’ machines. No matter how hard we would work to build our own factories, we could never get the permission to do it.”
It was the first time that Jinsaburo had heard the term ‘hairy barbarian’. It amazed him that such a strong term of contempt for the White man rolled off Nakabayashi’s tongue so smoothly and effortlessly that it almost carried no scornful overtones whatsoever.

“There must be a lot of roe in all those fish,” Jinsaburo blurted out but Nakabayashi ignored him.

“The canneries are temporary affairs built out over the river on pilings. A plank floor with holes cut at intervals is laid on top of the pilings. Work benches are then set over the holes so the heads and guts can easily be dropped into the river.”

With wild hand and body gestures, Nakabayashi described every aspect of the cannery from the operation of the steam engine to the various assembly line jobs.

Jinsaburo cautiously pursued his earlier question.

“So all the roe is thrown out with the rest of the waste? Nobody collects it or gathers it up?”

“The hairy barbarians don’t eat salmon roe,” was the simple reply.

Jinsaburo finally had the information he wanted and had fulfilled the purpose of his trip to Yokohama. He asked nothing more about salmon roe but asked some general questions about Japanese life in Steveston. Nakabayashi was more than happy to oblige although his descriptions became less passionate.

“The fishing season only lasts through the summer and autumn so many Japanese work in nearby lumber mills during the off-season. They earn about a dollar-fifty or two dollars per day which works out to three or four yen a day but it’s not as much as it sounds because the cost of living in Canada is so high. In fact, it’s barely enough to live on. The Japanese in Steveston are young, single men who work themselves into the dust just to send a little money home. Sadly, many ruin themselves with alcohol, women, and gambling. Only immigrants with a strong character and amazing determination have any hope of making it.”


“Well, that depends on whether it’s fishing season or not. I’d say there are probably only two thousand who live there year-round. Out of those, only about a tenth have families. Mostly, they group together by home prefecture or village so their lifestyle in Canada is no different from Japan.”

Jinsaburo was surprised enough to learn that speaking English was unnecessary but the fact that the Japanese lived in the same area and ate Japanese food such as rice and miso\textsuperscript{13} soup just as they did in Japan surprised him even more.

“I’m planning to go to Canada myself in the near future, maybe we’ll meet again,” Jinsaburo said as they parted though he wondered if they ever would.

The next day, Jinsaburo went to the port to watch Nakabayashi’s ship set sail for Canada.

“What’s the easiest way to get to Canada?” he asked the innkeeper on his return from the port.

The wording of the question seemed to catch the innkeeper by surprise but he managed to regain his composure before answering.

“Depends on if you’re going for business or pleasure,” he answered.

“Whichever involves the least paperwork and is the quickest.”

The owner smiled knowingly, “The paperwork is not necessarily an issue, if you have the money, that is.”

He advised Jinsaburo that, regardless of the purpose, the arrangements were best left to an agent specialising in such affairs. From what he had heard, the arrangements for business travel took about three months while emigration would likely take six months or more with all the paperwork and such.

\textsuperscript{13} Fermented soy bean paste used as a soup stock.
“However, I have heard that you can get the paperwork done faster if you can come up with a convincing reason why you have to go immediately. It was some time ago that I heard that, though,” he added.

Jinsaburo knew that “come up with a convincing reason” really meant ‘put some money in the right hands’. Apparently, he had to find an expert agent to handle the details.

“You’re going on business, aren’t you?” the innkeeper stated matter-of-factly. Looking more closely at Jinsaburo’s dress, he had concluded that this was not just an emigrant.

“Just because someone goes on business doesn’t mean they won’t settle if there’s a good enough reason, does it?” was Jinsaburo’s noncommittal reply.

“It’s true. Many have done just that and they seem to have fewer problems with the procedures and formalities over there,” the innkeeper agreed. He gave Jinsaburo the name of a good travel agent.

The trip to Yokohama had been useful. Jinsaburo was convinced that he could collect, pack, and export as much of the wasted salmon roe as he wanted. There was only one way to be absolutely sure, however, and that was to go to Canada.

The rest of his stay in Yokohama was spent investigating every facet of transporting goods from Canada to Japan, from transportation costs to insurance, customs regulations to taxes. Despite his thorough searching, he could find no regulations or customs taxes applying to salmon roe.

Jinsaburo’s intuition was strongly in favour of going to Canada. He was convinced that nothing would go wrong and, indeed, a great discovery awaited him. He decided to go.

On returning from Yokohama, Jinsaburo gathered everyone who might be affected by his decision to go to Canada.

“I’ll be leaving for Canada as soon as I get permission to sail,” he told them. The protests raged forth like a tempest.

Jinsaburo had established the first silk-reeling factory in Miyagi Prefecture (The Masubuchi Silk-Reeling Company) and it had always been under his direct and complete control. How could he desert all the local people who had invested their hard-earned money in his venture? How could he just walk away when it was running so smoothly and was poised for expansion? What about the warehouse in Ishinomaki, the transportation and charcoal businesses, and his myriad other interests?

No one could understand why he suddenly decided to pack up and leave without any consultation with his workers or investors whatsoever. One shareholder’s voice rose above the others.

“How on earth could you be dissatisfied with all this?”

Jinsaburo replied immediately, without a moment’s hesitation.

“I do things that nobody has done before. Once a project is successful and can fly on its own, I lose interest. I know that I am fickle but fickleness has a good side and that is exactly my strong point. Please try to understand why I want to do this.”

Having announced his imminent departure, he entrusted all his affairs to the Onodera side of the family and turned his attention to preparations for the trip.

Later, he explained personally to his wife and children: Uino, Taijiro, and Michie.

“I’m going to Canada to have a look around, see what kind of place it is, and decide if there are opportunities for us there. I’m taking a big risk with our future so I can’t just go for a short time. I’ll have to stay for awhile. I promise I’ll come back and get you as soon as I’ve found something to do and somewhere to settle down. We’ll go and live together in Canada. Wait for me.”

He looked at his youngest son, Michie, whose eyes were wide, round, and full of tears but his mind was made up.
On August eighth of Meiji 29 (1896), Jinsaburo left his home for Canada.

In the spring of Meiji 29, I decided to leave Japan and cross the ocean. I had heard that the Fraser River in the English part of North America was the best salmon fishing area in the world. Incredible amounts of canned Fraser River salmon were sent to England. I also heard that the salmon roe was just as good as roe from Hokkaido but was all thrown back into the river. I set sail from Yokohama aboard the American ship, Pelican, to see for myself if the rumours were true. (from Jinsaburo Oikawa’s Autobiography, Chapter 8 - The Voyage)

IV The Voyage

Jinsaburo arrived at the dock wearing the new, Western-style suit he had ordered on his previous trip to Yokohama that spring. He had two portraits taken before boarding, one with top-hat and one without, and sent both home.

He was alone. Nobody from home made the trip to Yokohama to see him off because they had thrown him a grand farewell party before he left. The shouts and farewells still rang in his ears.

“Take care. Send for me if you find any good jobs.”

Thoughts of what his trip could do for his village or for Japan had never crossed his mind. He was going to see if he could export salmon roe, nothing more. He was not one of the tragic cases who had to sell home and belongings to scrape together enough for the chance to make a better life. He was forty-two, successful, and had a plan.

Taijiro, the older son, was independent enough that his father’s departure did not upset him excessively. Ten-year-old Michie, on the other hand, was still at the age of idolising love for his father who was deserting him. The vision of Michie waving good-bye, his eyes welling over with tears, haunted Jinsaburo.

“What a terrible, insensitive father I am,” he reproached himself out loud.

As the Pelican steamed out of Tokyo Bay, the passengers retreated to their cabins. It was not Jinsaburo’s first ocean journey (he had travelled from Ishinomaki to Yokohama by ship many times) but crossing the Pacific Ocean would certainly be his longest. Unlike the ordinary immigrants who travelled third-class, Jinsaburo was travelling on business and had a second-class cabin. His contact with other passengers was limited further since few passengers went to the cafeteria/dining lounge for meals besides himself and Goro Kaburagi, who also showed up regularly for meals. Goro Kaburagi was a Methodist pastor who had gone to Vancouver to set up a church for the Japanese living there. The job had kept him away from Japan for a long time.

Eventually, one of them said to the other, “It’s quite hot in here, don’t you think? How about a walk on deck?” and they became quick friends; only two days out of Yokohama and they had introduced themselves and were making interesting conversation.

Goro was not intrigued in the least when he first learned that Jinsaburo was going to Canada on business; he had met so many Japanese who were interested in foreign things only because they were
trendy\textsuperscript{14}. However, Jinsaburo’s incisive and zealous questions about everything soon convinced Goro that he was sincere. Goro did his best to answer Jinsaburo’s probing questions.

“We’ve twenty long days until we reach Canada so the least we can do is do have interesting conversations to help pass the time,” Goro said, laughing.

Day after day after day there was nothing but ocean. Jinsaburo and Goro spent many hours on deck together, watching the ocean and talking. For five days, Jinsaburo listened to and questioned Goro’s talk about Canada

On the fifth afternoon, Jinsaburo suddenly felt that it was his turn to share his thoughts and feelings, “When I look at the ocean, I wonder what it’s like on the other side. It’s like when I look at a mountain and wonder what kind of people live on the other side. I suppose that’s natural enough but I think I’m different in that I’m not content to just passively wonder; I have to cross that ocean or mountain and see the other side with my own eyes. I want to meet the people and visit their towns and villages.”

“Of course,” Goro replied. “That is precisely what makes us human. If it weren’t for dreams and a sense of wonder, humanity would never, could never, progress.”

“But, my dreams aren’t like other people’s dreams,” Jinsaburo persisted. “Once an image enters my mind, it becomes reality for me. It’s been like that for as long as I can remember. My first dream was when I was six. It was about a Golden Horse.”

“Really? That’s fascinating,” Goro said, obviously interested.

They were both the same age, in their forties, but Jinsaburo talked about his dreams with the vigour of a twenty-year-old.

“Yes, fascinating,” Goro repeated. “However, you are going to need a little more than just dreams, no matter how convincing, if you are to make the best of your time in Canada. It’s obvious that you know no English whatsoever. You need to learn to read and write the English alphabet and sign your name to survive in Canada. Actually, signing your name is the most important of all. Starting now, I will teach you the alphabet and a few simple words and phrases each and every morning. Then, in the afternoons, you will tell me all about this Golden Horse. That should alleviate the tedium of the voyage and fill the time until we reach Canada.”

Jinsaburo was not quite convinced.

“Are you sure? It will take a long, long time to tell you about the Golden Horse. I’ll have to start right from the beginning, from when I was born.”

Goro was not so easily put off, “However long it takes, you will be finished by the time we arrive in Victoria. Well? Why not pour your feelings into this wide, endless ocean? I promise to just listen and not interrupt. If you’d rather not talk about some things, that’s fine. If it becomes tiresome, we can stop anytime.

“When you reach the middle of your life, you have to look back on the paths you’ve followed. If you use your past as a foundation, progress and success are ensured and rapid. And, as a bonus, by the time your story is finished you will be able to sign your name and use a few English words and phrases.”

Goro finished speaking and redirected his gaze out over the endless sea. A white mass of cloud floated on the horizon above the ocean swells. Goro pointed to it and as they watched, a small, white cloud stirred as if awakened from slumber. That one, small cloud lifted itself out of the low-lying mass surrounding it and moved up into the deep-blue sky.

“I was only six years old when I saw the Golden Horse.”

\textsuperscript{14} The story takes place during the Meiji Era which followed a 250-year period of self-imposed isolation in Japan. It was a time of great change and interest in foreign things.
The Golden Horse

Jinsaburo Oikawa was born Ryoji Onodera in Masubuchi in 1854. Because the Onodera’s were an important family in the village (his father was the Village Head) and Ryoji was the third child, he grew up with few of the burdens and hardships that his brothers or the other village children had to bear, and it showed. From the time he learned to walk, he caused his family no end of grief with his tendency to wander wherever fancy and his feet led him. He did not fall into the Masubuchi River just once or twice, it was a regular occurrence.

He loved being outside and the family joke was that the only one way to be sure of his whereabouts was to tie him to a pillar in the house. At an age when most children do not stray from their mother’s side, Ryoji spent as much time outside as possible. He only came in to eat and sleep.

He did not wander in search of friends; he explored alone. Unknown roads and unseen places were irresistible. Once, during the harvest season when he was only four years old, the person watching him looked away for an instant and Ryoji disappeared. After an extensive search and a big fuss, he was finally found in the hills more than two kilometres away, too hungry and tired to even move.

When he was six, the range of his adventures broadened but his favourite place was the hill-top Batto Kannon Doh - Kessokuji temple complex about 500 metres from their house. The beautiful garden surrounded a tranquil pond and there was a huge nutmeg tree in the corner that produced baskets full of fruit every autumn. People came from all over to visit the shrine and stay overnight in the temple.

One spring day, just after the great festival, six-year-old Ryoji was sitting beneath the nutmeg tree after a full day of solitary adventures.

“Hey kid. Have you ever seen the Golden Horse,” a voice asked.

Ryoji looked up. One glance at the clothes and he knew he was looking at a horse dealer.


“At the bottom of the mountain there is a road that follows the Masubuchi River. Follow that road until you come up on the ridge. At the third hour of the Ox on a moonless night, the Golden Horse appears. It is so bright that you can see it even though there is no moon. Anyone who sees the Golden Horse is guaranteed wealth and success.

“But, if you want to see the Golden Horse, you have to go alone and make sure that no one sees you. As a matter of fact, there is no moon tonight so if you go you will see it for sure.”

To emphasise his trustworthiness, the horse dealer struck a solid pose and added, “It’s not a lie or a fairy tale, I tell you. Thirty years ago, I saw the Golden Horse. Now, I am the number one horse dealer in all Tohoku.”

And, indeed, he looked like the number one horse dealer in Tohoku; his clothes were not fancy but they were neat and clean. Ryoji went straight home and asked his grandfather about the ‘third hour of the Ox’.

“You get up at six every morning, right? Well, the third hour of the Ox is about four hours before that, at about two o’clock. Everything is sound asleep then, even the plants and animals,” Grandpa Tokuemon explained although it never crossed his mind to ask why Ryoji wanted to know.

As soon as it got dark, Ryoji sneaked out and started upstream along the Masubuchi River road. Following the horse dealer’s instructions, he was careful to make as little noise as possible and avoid attracting attention. At the faintest indication of another person, he hid behind the nearest obstacle.

It was pitch black and silent away from the village and its houses. The road entered a dark forest so he walked looking up; the starry sky between the tall trees flanking the road helped him find his way. He had never taken this road before, even in daylight, but he was not frightened.
How far it was to the ridge, he did not know. He did know that the Golden Horse appeared four hours before he woke up so his child’s logic told him that he would be in time if he walked all night without sleeping.

Ryoji walked determinedly through the forest and up the steep slopes, ever eastward. The mountain road seemed to go on forever and he began to worry that the ridge was too far away even if he did walk all night. His ever-abundant energy gradually dwindled as the night, and the walk, wore on. He was tired and cold. Luckily it was spring and there was no danger of the temperature dropping below freezing.

He was determined not to sleep for if he did, he would never see the Golden Horse. Briefly, he considered the commotion that would erupt when his family woke up to find him missing but he felt no remorse; he was on a mission. He regretted not packing any food, especially as he fought against sleep and his stinging eyes. Tripping over something, he fell to the ground but sprang back up and continued.

Occasionally, the cry of a far-off bird or animal startled him and the fright overrode his exhaustion for a short time. Nothing could scare him enough to give up on the Golden Horse. Soon however, his eyes drooped yet again.

Exhaustion closed in. He took ten steps and fell down. Five more steps and he fell down again. He was so tired that he was unsure if he was still climbing towards the ridge or if he had crossed it and was going down the other side. At last, he succumbed and fell down one last time. Curled into a little ball, he slept: oblivious to cold, hunger, and exhaustion.

A sudden noise awoke him. His first thought was to get up and continue to the ridge but it was already light and a quick look around told him he was already there.

He turned towards the brightening horizon and was blasted by a howling wind so strong it almost blew him over. A dazzling light poured over his face making him squeeze his eyes tight from the pain. He automatically lifted his left hand to shade his eyes and, peeking through his fingers, he saw it: the Golden Horse sweeping across the sky.

When he dropped his hand, the Golden Horse was gone. Turning to where it had disappeared, he was shocked to discover that there were no mountains, just the sun rising from the flat horizon. Ryoji had never seen the ocean before and he decided it must be a vast rice field stretching as far as the sun.

“I saw it! I saw it!” he cried. “I saw the Golden Horse. It was later than Grandpa said but I saw it.”

He looked around more closely and saw he was, indeed, on Yaso Ridge; he had found his way just as he collapsed.

Ryoji was overjoyed at seeing the Golden Horse but had no energy to attempt the long trip home; his legs were immobile. He knew he had to get home but was so overcome with hunger, thirst, and fatigue that it was impossible.

For two hours, he sat on the ridge, unable to move. Then, miraculously, a man leading a horse up the hill appeared and took Ryoji home.

There was a great commotion and to-do in the morning when Ryoji was discovered missing. They were sure he had been spirited away in the middle of the night. When a strange man appeared at the door claiming he had found Ryoji on Yaso Ridge, everyone rejoiced at the miracle.

Only Grandpa Tokuemon had any inkling of what might have happened and he guessed it was somehow related to Ryoji’s questions about the third hour of the Ox. He decided to wait until Ryoji had recovered from the ordeal to ask him about it in private.

Ryoji had a quick bite to eat and went straight to bed, exhausted.

Later, the family gathered around Ryoji and asked the expected question, “What on earth possessed you to climb Yaso Ridge by yourself in the middle of the night?”
Ryōji slowly surveyed the adult faces surrounding him and shouted, “I saw it! I saw the Golden Horse fly across the sky and now I’m going to be rich.”

When the uproarious laughter subsided, there was a barrage of questions:

“Where?”

“When did you see the Golden Horse fly across the sky?”

“On the ridge this morning,” he answered. “Then the sun came up from where the Golden Horse disappeared.”

Various family members had explanations but most were along the lines of, “There was a strong wind this morning and many clouds. You probably just saw the morning sun reflecting off a cloud you imagined to have the shape of a horse.”

Others commented on the preposterous idea of becoming rich because of seeing a Golden Horse and attributed the idea to Ryōji’s overactive imagination. Nobody thought to ask where he got the idea and he did not volunteer the story of meeting the horse dealer beneath the nutmeg tree in the Kessokuji Temple garden.

VI Childhood Education

When Ryōji was old enough to learn reading and writing, Grandpa Tokuemon read to him and taught him calligraphy. It was hoped that studying might curb Ryōji’s wanderlust but he intensely hated studying. When Grandpa Tokuemon summoned him for the lesson, he sat grudgingly until allowed to go outside. As much as he hated studying, however, he listened to his Grandfather’s stories with wide-eyed wonder.

Grandpa Tokuemon had big hopes for his obviously intelligent grandson. For example, Ryōji mastered each Chinese character after being shown only once. He only hated studying and learning because it was so tedious.

Eventually, Ryōji’s schooling was entrusted to Ringon, the head priest of the Kessokuji Temple who was teaching thirty of the village children to read, write, and use the abacus. Ryōji hated Ringon’s lessons more than his Grandfather’s; listening to the same things over and over again was unbearable. Every time the priest looked up, Ryōji had disappeared to wander in the mountains and play by the river.

One day, when he was nine, Ryōji was caught sneaking out of the classroom during self-study time. Rather than punish him, Ringon took him up the long stone staircase to the Batto Kannon Doh shrine. He pointed to the wall of the shrine covered with all sizes and shapes of ema. So many in fact, that the wall itself could not be seen.

“I’m going to tell you about the Batto Kannon Doh shrine so listen carefully,” Ringon said as he sat on the shrine’s open porch. A nightingale began to sing and soon the whole mountain rang with the songs of innumerable birds.

“In 791, Sakura-Ueno-Tamura-Marō was sent by the Emperor to administer this area. During the journey, his favourite horse died and was buried on this very spot. In memorial, Kessokuji temple was built to honour the Batto Kannon and this place was declared sacred for horses.

“Ryōji, the horse has been indispensable since the beginning of time. Horses carry our loads and cultivate our fields. They carry communications of important edicts to all parts of the country. Finally, horses and the ability to ride them make the difference between victory and defeat in war. Horses are to human development on land as boats are to human development on the water.

“The spiritual centre of the horse culture in Japan is right here. It is the birthright of everyone who is born here. The name Masubuchi itself comes from the much older name, Mashubutsu, meaning ‘horse-head Buddha.’ The town itself began as the collection of huts belonging to the lowly caretakers of the Batto Kannon Doh shrine.
They say that there are steam-powered boats on foreign seas and steam-powered carriages on foreign lands. Sometimes foreigners come to Japan in those steam ships. Do you understand what a steam-powered carriage is? It’s a carriage that moves because of a machine not an animal or person. The times are changing and the age of the horse is passing quickly. Soon, horses will be replaced by machines.

“Ryoji, what I am about to tell you is very important so listen carefully. This is a sacred place for horses, it’s true, but you must not take ‘horse’ at only its literal meaning. A horse is much more than a four-legged animal, it is anything that has the potential to further human progress. The ‘horse’ represents freedom and the ability to explore and develop. Do you understand what I am saying?

“Whether we like it or not, Japan will come into more contact with foreigners and many Japanese will leave for foreign lands. It is up to you and your generation to internalise the spirit of the horse, the spirit of freedom and exploration, and gallop across the seas. I’ve heard rumours that you saw the ‘Golden Horse’. Believe in it. It is a symbol of your nature and your destiny.”

Ringon paused and looked deeply into Ryoji’s eyes.

“Study when you want to study. I can’t allow the other students the same freedom but I give it to you. You may go wherever you want, whenever you want, as long as you don’t make a nuisance of yourself.”

Ringon stood up and walked down the stone staircase, leaving Ryoji alone with his thoughts.

When he was ten, Ryoji packed two days worth of food, left a note on the table saying he had gone to see the ocean, and crossed over Yaso Pass to Shizugawa on the Sanriku Coast: a twenty kilometre journey along mountain roads. The inspiration for the trip was something Ringon had said in one of his lectures,

“One cannot know whether the ocean tastes salty or sweet until one tastes it for oneself.”

So, Ryoji went to the ocean and tasted the sea water for himself. It was salty after all, but not at all like what he had imagined. Having accomplished his mission, he reached into his bag and found that he had underestimated two days worth of food; that is to say, his food was all gone. Therefore, he found a big temple and crept through the gate.

“I came from Masubuchi to taste the ocean, my food ran out, and I don’t know anyone in Shizugawa. I’d like to stay here, if it’s okay,” he announced at the entrance.

The head-priest, amazed at the sudden appearance of this audacious young boy, asked why he had chosen that temple.

“Ringon, the head priest at Kessokuji temple said that we should go to a temple if we are in need,” he answered matter-of-factly.

While not exactly true, it was not exactly a lie either. Ryoji had remembered some occasion when Ringon told them about the role of a temple. In particular, Ryoji remembered the part about temples taking in travellers who had lost their way and were without food. Of course, Ringon was referring to a temple’s duty to take in lost travellers in the spiritual sense of comforting and guiding those dissatisfied with their lives and the world. This was an emergency, however, and Ryoji was not above taking advantage of the situation. He was allowed to stay.

When Ryoji was twelve, Grandpa Tokuemon told him legends of hidden gold around Masubuchi. One legend, common all over Japan, had it that a wealthy man buried a golden treasure in a spot touched by both the rising and setting sun. More specifically, it was supposedly buried between the two swamps, Asahi-zawa and Yuhi-zawa. Another legend told of the feudal Lord who had buried his treasure in the

15 Literally “sunrise swamp” and “sunset swamp”.

22
ruins of *Hato-oka* castle near *Akabo-numa* swamp. Yet another legend told of an abandoned gold mine that had been deserted before all the gold was removed.

Also, there was the legend about the Christian martyrs’ buried treasure: based on a true story. In the 1600s, Christianity was banned in Japan and a large group of Christians went into hiding in the hills near Yonekawa. In 1612, Ju-an Goto and 120 others were executed *en masse* but legend held that they buried all the gold they had collected to build a church. Supposedly, the gold was buried near the Hashimoto and Iwaki estates.

Ryoji decided to find the gold.

“Grandpa, is there really buried gold near here?” he asked.

“Well, I can’t say for sure,” he answered. “Perhaps there is but it’s better to believe that there isn’t. Those legends are common in poor areas. They give hope to people who are born poor and will die poor.”

Ryoji would have none of his Grandfather’s advice and shook his head vigorously.

“You’re wrong, Grandpa. There is hidden gold here and I’m going to find it. You’ll see,” he proclaimed.

His body trembled with excitement. His whole being, mind and body and spirit, was hardened with resolve to find the gold. Surely, this was the opportunity he had been waiting for since he saw the Golden Horse gallop across the sky when he was six.

“How do you intend to find it?” asked Grandpa Tokuemon as he watched the trembling, brooding Ryoji.

“Don’t worry, Grandpa,” Ryoji replied, snapping out of his daydream. “I’ve got it all figured out.”

For days, Ryoji tramped the swamps and hills around Tsunagi with a shovel over his shoulder, looking for a place touched by both rising and setting sun. Frequently, he stopped to dig whenever he decided that ‘this must be the place’. Digging through grass and roots is hard work for a twelve-year-old boy, especially when all he gets in return for his efforts are rocks and more rocks.

“Sometimes I worry that Ryoji’s gone a little soft in the head,” his father, Juroji, said to Grandpa Tokuemon one day.

“You can say what you will but that Ryoji will grow up to do great things and will carry the Onodera name well. The Golden Horse soars above his head,” Grandpa Tokuemon replied with conviction.

The end of Ryoji’s quest for buried treasure came one day when he was digging around the old Hashimoto place. A passing villager called out to him,

“Hey, Ryoji, that’s private property. If you dig there without permission you have to give anything you find to the owner. If you keep anything, you’ll be arrested as a thief.”

Ryoji’s golden dreams evaporated with the prospect of being labelled a thief.

When I was a young boy, I hated school intensely. Whenever I was supposed to be studying, I left without permission to walk in the hills or fish in the rivers and ponds. I became so skilled at deceiving my parents and teachers into thinking I was studying that I could neither read nor write when I was eight years old: barely even my own name.

(from Jinsaburo Oikawa’s autobiography, Chapter 1 - Remnants of a Childhood Education)
Civil Unrest

By 1867, news of the revolutionary goings-on in Kyoto had reached even as far as the quiet mountain village of Yonekawa. Ryoji was thirteen and had started learning kendo in Suto’s dojo in Oinokawara. From time to time, samurai from Sendai visited the dojo and tried to entice the young boys into loud political discussions. Ryoji knew only what he heard from the samurai and that was nothing more than that the Southern Alliance and the Tohoku Alliance would likely end up at war.

“Hey, Ryoji, if the Southern Alliance attacks, you’ll have to fight, you know.”

Whenever the older boys in the dojo said this, Ryoji was sure the forces of the Southern Alliance were nearby and ready to attack.

In 1868, there were many rumours about which side the Sendai-han would ally itself with. One rumour was that the Sendai-han would join the Tohoku Alliance if the Southern Alliance attacked but this rumour soon died. Then there was the rumour that the Sendai-han had decided to wait out the crisis without taking sides. Another time, it was rumoured that the Sendai-han would join the Southern Alliance and attack the Aizu-han to the south. Such political manoeuvrings were too confusing for the fourteen-year-old Ryoji who had enough trouble keeping track of which rumour was prevailing at any given time.

Then came a declaration that all households must donate all of their copper and iron to the war effort - anybody failing to do so would be executed. Invariably, the Sendai-han samurai were at the forefront of such declarations and rumours.

In the evening of August 15th, three gunshots echoed from the direction of Oinokawara: sounds frightful enough to freeze one’s soul. Ryoji was sure that the war had started so he donned his kendo armour and waited for the call to action. He was only fourteen but a previous edict had stipulated that anyone with a knowledge of swordsmanship, even if only kendo, must be prepared to go to battle.

Nobody in the Onodera household slept that night. They sat up all night together, tending the fire. It was the same in every household. It was a terrifying night.

In the morning, it was learned that the shots were merely practice shots fired off by the Sendai-han samurai stationed in Oinokawara. Nevertheless, those three shots electrified every young man and every family.

On 8 September 1868, the new Meiji Era officially began and the new Governor to administer Togun as a part of Tsuchiura-han arrived on December 1st. Three days later, on a snowy December 4th, the Oinokawara Riot erupted over the handling of the compulsory donations of iron and copper. The metal was

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16 The Southern Alliance, Sa-cho-do-hi, was comprised of the four hans (administrative units loosely based on the ruling clan of the area) of Satsuma, Choshu, Tosa, and Higo (modern day Kagoshima, Yamaguchi, Koichi, and Kumamoto Prefectures). It was the anti-establishment alliance that was attempting to overthrow the feudal Tokugawa Shogunate and create a modern, democratic Japan with a restored Imperial Family at its head.

17 The Tohoku Alliance, referred to as Oetsu-repan in Japanese was comprised of Oshu (present day Aomori, Iwate, and Miyagi prefectures), Ugo (Akita, Yamagata), and Echigo (Niigata). It was a conservative faction that opposed the overthrow of the Shogunate.

18 The Aizu-han was based in present-day Fukushima. It was one of the most loyal supporters of the Tokugawa regime as it was governed by members of the Tokugawa Clan itself.

19 In 1868, the Southern Alliance consolidated their victories and restored the authority of the Emperor. This is known as the Meiji Restoration which led to the Meiji Era, characterised by Japan’s modernisation and Westernisation (Meiji was the Emperor’s name).
supposed to be used for weapons but none of it was returned after the restoration of peace. When it was discovered that the Village-Head of Oinokawara had it all stored in his storeroom, six hundred armed villagers gathered at the Hachiman Shrine and proceeded to the homes of Heiuemon (the Village-Head) and Matsuji Ichimonjiya. With weapons in both hands, they attacked the two compounds. On the morning of the 5th, a group of villagers from Masubuchi joined the angry mob.

Again Ryoji donned his armour (breast plate and straw sandals), fastened his black-sheathed sword around his waist, and stood guard at the gate outside the Onodera house. His father was the Village-Head for Masubuchi so there was some concern that the crowd might turn on their house but Masubuchi remained peaceful. The riot broke up on the morning of December 6th with no casualties.

The new government made little difference to everyday life except that the Governor was changed more frequently than before. Whether the region benefited from the change is moot but the collection of taxes did become stricter.

Another incident broke out in January of Meiji 2 (1869). The principal participants were from Oinokawara and Maiyabu but altogether some 200-odd rioters from 13 towns gathered. They holed themselves up on Mt. Odakeyama where they drafted a 20-article petition demanding the return to Sendai-han rule. In the end, they were unsuccessful and broke up after a month.

Ryoji was constantly entreated to join this so-called January Uprising and when he was around his colleagues from the Oinokawara dojo he joined in shouting the slogan: “Destroy the new government formed by the Southern Alliance and reinstate the traditional Sendai-han”. He did not share the sentiments of the slogan nor support the aims of the protesters but he was sharp enough to see that the former Sendai-han samurai were orchestrating it behind the scenes and he nominally went along with it.

In 1870, Tome-gun became Tome Prefecture and Ken Yamanaka was named Governor. This lasted but a year and Tome Prefecture was amalgamated into Ichinoseki Prefecture in 1871. Later it became part of Misawa Prefecture and then part of Iwai Prefecture. Finally, in 1876, it was assigned to Miyagi Prefecture where it has remained.

Even against this extremely changeable and unpredictable background, Ryoji walked his own road.

After the turmoil of the Meiji Restoration died down, Ryoji began helping more with the daily work of the family. It was mostly farm work but he could not focus his efforts and frequently quit in the middle of a task. He was keen on thinning and clearing the forest plots in the mountains, cutting and hauling lumber, making charcoal, and splitting wood because it allowed him time to mingle with the important men of the village. By the time he was nineteen in 1873, he was doing a grown man’s job in the mountains but loathed working in the rice paddies and the fields - especially weeding.

“I know you don’t like the farm work but you have to get used to doing the ordinary, everyday work, as well,” his father had to say repeatedly.

Jinsaburo always answered confidently, if not boastfully, “I have absolutely no intention of being a farmer for the rest of my life.”

Gradually, he came to like working with horses as much as he enjoyed the mountain work so he chose to do more work that required horses, like transporting wood and charcoal, for example. Sometimes he hauled rice using a three-horse team. He even started doing farm-work, but only if it involved the horses. He rode for pleasure, too and was often seen riding down the street in the early morning. Naturally, he became a skilled horseman.

VIII Firefly
One early summer evening, he was grazing his two horses in the field below the house. Just as he was about to go up for dinner, he heard loud and joyful children’s voices coming from the nearby Masubuchi River. They were catching fireflies.

Several crystal-clear mountain torrents, gushing through narrow valleys, joined to form the Masubuchi River. In early summer, the slower-moving, lower reaches of the river were a favourite place for the village children to catch fireflies. The captured fireflies were carefully folded into a butter-burr leaf, taken home, and placed in a container covered with mosquito netting. Children and adults alike enjoyed these ‘pets’.

The river banks were a great place to catch fireflies but the best place of all was the bridge that crossed the river in front of Shimodai House (the Onodera’s large family house). The wind that carried the fireflies downstream died suddenly near the bridge and the fireflies gathered there, as if taking a rest from a long journey.

On the one hand, Ryoji felt too old to join the children. On the other hand, the excited voices and the boisterous dance of the fireflies were too tempting. He walked over to the bridge.

There were about ten children on the bridge using willow branches in each hand to catch the fireflies. When the tiny lights gathered on the leaves to rest their wings, the branches became glowing brooms, rustling in the wind. Ryoji looked at the river. There were so many fireflies above and along the river that their reflecting lights lit up the entire surface of the river.

At first glance, there is neither pattern nor logic to the movement of fireflies; they seem to fly and dance and flicker totally randomly. On closer examination, however, a pattern emerges - the swirling lights move slowly downstream casting an eerie glow over the surface of the water. Just when they are about to fade out of sight, they change direction and come back upstream. Suddenly, the whole mass is compressed into a luminescent ball which, a moment later, explodes into a million tiny shards of light flying off in all directions. The fireflies illuminate the darkness so completely that one has to lean far back and squint to see that the stars are still shining.

Despite the glow of the fireflies, however, the area around the bridge is actually pitch black. The tiny lights may give the illusion of being able to see as far as the water but, in reality, the tiny lights cannot actually light up the darkness.

Suddenly, the whole mass of firefly light changed direction and moved toward the bridge.

“They’re coming! Look! They’re coming towards us!” the children yelled excitedly.

The glowing mass floated right up beside the bridge and stopped as if showing off for the children. All at once, the luminescent ball moved up onto the bridge and hundreds and hundreds of tiny lights enveloped the bridge. The light swelled, lighting up the night for just an instant, and contracted, plunging the world back into darkness. The light swelled and contracted again and again; there was no limit to the number of times the fireflies could light up. The whole mass then moved further up onto the bridge and surrounded a young girl standing on the edge. She was bathed in the pale, blue-green glow.

Ryoji looked at the girl. She had an indescribable air of nobility about her. Her eyes opened wide with the enchantment of the moment. She was so mesmerised that she did not even lift the butter-burr leaf from her side to catch the fireflies. She was so completely illuminated that Ryoji could see that she wore a tightly-sleeved kimono; he could see the obi; and even that her hair was done up in a momoware coiffure.

The other children suddenly rushed over to catch a few of the thousands of fireflies coiling around her body but just as the words “Look out!” rose in Ryoji’s throat, the girl was pushed off the bridge into the middle of the river.

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Sash for a kimono.
The Masubuchi River was not deep but it was swift and there was a deep pool beneath the bridge. Ryoji dove into the chest-deep water a split-second after she fell and flailed frantically where he thought she had gone in. Finally, he felt a piece of her *kimono* and hauled her up. She was Uino Oikawa, Eizo Oikawa’s daughter, who lived just down the road.

Thanks to his quick reaction, she had not swallowed any water but was in mild shock for she did not utter a sound. Ryoji crouched down and lifted her up piggy-back. Without a word, she put her arms around his shoulders, still clinging tightly to the wet and limp butter-burr leaf.

Ryoji ran towards her home as fast as he could. They were both completely soaked but they reached the outer gate to her house even before he felt her body heat against his back. She began to cry. Ryoji stopped.

“Where does it hurt?” he asked.

Uino shook her head.

“My fireflies,” she whimpered.

“Don’t cry,” he said. “I’ll bring you a whole bunch of fireflies tomorrow night. I promise.”

Uino lived about 2 kilometres from Shimodai House on the far west side of Masubuchi in Hosogoe House\(^2\) which belonged to the Eizo Oikawa’s (another of the area’s old and respected families). Eizo Oikawa business was transporting lumber and charcoal down the Kitakami River to Ishinomaki; he was an important man with good connections like the Date-\(^\text{han}\)\(^2\) Magistrate’s Office in Ishinomaki.

At the gate, Uino said she could walk the rest of the way on her own.

“It’s okay. It’s not that much further. I can manage,” Ryoji said.

“I’m fourteen,” she said, making it clear that she was not a child.

So, he put her down and walked her to the front door but left without entering the house.

Early the next morning, Eizo Oikawa visited Juroji Onodera to thank him for his son’s admirable conduct the previous night. Juroji looked at Ryoji with a pride he had never before shown.

That evening, Ryoji went to the river to catch the fireflies he had promised Uino. He wrapped them in a butterburr leaf and delivered them to Hosogoe House. Uino’s face went red when he arrived and despite her mother’s prodding to thank him for saving her life, she was too embarrassed for words.

Ryoji cultivated the relationship with Hosogoe House and was soon plying the Kitakami River on Eizo’s boat. The downstream trip was easy, of course, but the return was very hard indeed - not a job for one man alone. The difficulties of the upstream trip made it impossible to predict a return time but Uino was always waiting when Ryoji finally pulled the boat up to the Ishinohana moorage. At first they exchanged only friendly glances but it was soon clear that they were growing fond of each other.

There were many beautiful girls in the area but Uino’s big brown eyes set her apart. In her fifteenth year, she became a beautiful woman and the rumours flew that she and Ryoji would surely marry. At first, Ryoji paid no heed to his changed feelings but the realisation that he would be miserable without her crept slowly into his consciousness.

They married in 1875; he was 21 years old, she 16. Because there was no son in Eizo’s household, Ryoji was adopted into the Oikawa family and took their name. It was also common to change one’s first name on marriage so Ryoji took the name of an ancestor and became known as Jinsaburo Oikawa.

Grandpa Tokuemon died soon thereafter. His last words before dying were, “You are marrying into an important family but you can’t change your essential character; you have to be true to yourself. Trust your instincts. Believe in yourself. Most of all, promise me that you won’t lose your youthful spirit.”

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\(^2\) Houses with names were, and are, rare. Only old families live in them.

\(^2\) Date-\(^\text{han}\) and Sendai-\(^\text{han}\) are synonymous. Historically, the Date family was the most powerful family in southern Tohoku.
One day, shortly after their wedding, Jinsaburo asked Uino if she remembered the fireflies. “Of course I do. It was only two years ago.”

“Even when you fell in the river, you clung tightly to that butter-burr leaf. You started to cry when you realised that the fireflies had escaped. Do you remember that, too?” he teased.

Uino laughed, “You’re terrible for remembering a thing like that. Do you remember the next day? You caught some fireflies and brought them to me wrapped in a butter-burr leaf. I was so happy. I knew right then that I liked you.”

Her eyes shone with the brilliance of a firefly.

By 1877, Eizo had entrusted most of the charcoal transportation business to Jinsaburo, particularly the 14 metre long by 4 metre wide boat that held 200 bags of charcoal. At first, the trip offered some thrills and excitement but Jinsaburo gradually lost interest in the routine: sail to Ishinomaki with a full load, unload at the warehouse, stay overnight, and return the next morning. It was an unusual job but too simple and he often toyed with the idea of running away and going back to the mountains to work. It had been a full two years since he had married into the Oikawa family but however much he disliked the job, he had an obligation to uphold.

One August day, Jinsaburo found himself stranded in Ishinomaki at the mercy of foul weather. As usual, he had made the 40 kilometre trip down the river, unloaded at the warehouse, and stayed the night. When he awoke, however, there was a strong north wind and heavy rain. Although the boat was empty and light, the upstream trip required more than just physical strength; it required the cooperation of the wind, too.

The Kitakami flows almost directly north to south so a south wind filling the sails made the upstream trip relatively easy. On the contrary, a north wind combined with the southward flow of the river made the trip almost impossible. Strictly speaking, if returning up-river was absolutely essential, one could hire more river-boys to help row but the need to get home had to offset the greater cost and, even at that, the river-boys were unavailable at any price if the wind was too strong.

With no pressing reason to return, Jinsaburo decided to wait out the weather and visit Oginohama port. Since the beginning of the Meiji Era, Oginohama had quickly become the most important port in Tohoku with links to both Hakodate in Hokkaido and Yokohama in the south. The big ships that called at these major ports often called at Oginohama, too.

The 20-kilometre hike over Kazakoshi Pass along a mountain path in the wind and rain was extremely difficult; Jinsaburo was tired when he finally reached Oginohama. He went immediately to a small eatery near the port to grab a quick lunch after which he planned to wander around the port and look at the big ships. Just as he sat down at the counter, a sailor carried in a block of ice covered with sawdust.

“Here’s your ice,” he said as he handed it to the woman in charge.

“Thank you very much.” The woman put the ice into a large tub and disappeared into the back. Presently, she re-emerged and placed a deep bowl of glittering ice fragments on the counter before the sailor. She obviously knew what to do with the ice.

The sailor filled a glass with water from the counter jug and dropped a fragment of ice into it. He drank the water as if it were the most delicious thing on earth. He turned to Jinsaburo, “This is Goryokaku Ice from Hakodate. Do you want to try some?”

“Goryokaku Ice?” Jinsaburo was dumbstruck by the concept of ice in the middle of summer. He stared at the precious fragments. Everyone turned to look as he pulled the deep bowl of ice fragments towards
him. Another brave soul from the restaurant crowd said he would like a piece, too. All attention quickly focused on the sailor.

If Jinsaburo had never heard of ice in summer, he had certainly never tasted it. He crunched it. He chewed it. The icy water slithered down his throat leaving a sharp pain in the back of his mouth.

“How did this Goryokaku Ice get here?” he asked. Obviously he knew it had come by ship but he wanted to know why it had been shipped all the way from Hokkaido. The sailor was amiable enough and willing to answer all his questions.

“It’s all the fashion in Tokyo and Osaka, don’t you know? In fact, anyone who doesn’t eat ice is said to be uncivilised. Tokyo used to get summer ice from Mt. Akagi and Mt. Haruna but there wasn’t enough to fill the demand so people started building ice houses all around Tokyo. Even that wasn’t enough so they finally had to go all the way to Hokkaido to find enough ice for Tokyo. Goryokaku Ice is the most famous ice in all of Tokyo, you know.

“Tokyo and Yokohama have at least a thousand places that sell crushed ice mixed with a little flavoured syrup. It’s not just used for drinks, though. Restaurants and fish markets are starting to use it to keep food from spoiling and it’s essential to hospitals for a number of reasons. I can only see the demand increasing as more and more uses for it are found. How about another piece?”

Jinsaburo accepted.

“How do you keep it into the summer without melting?” he asked. “And transporting it must be a real problem, too.”

The sailor answered without hesitation,

“They used to store it in deep holes packed with straw and sawdust but that method isn’t practical today because you can’t store enough. Nowadays, they build huge storehouses and pack the ice in mountains of sawdust.

“As for transporting it, if you transport a large amount at once, the whole ship stays cool. Of course, some ice around the edges melts but really very little of the whole. Anyway, it’s not a big worry unless you are forced into harbour by unforeseen circumstances.”

(Apparently, that day’s unusually wild weather constituted an ‘unforeseen circumstance’ serious enough to force the ship to take refuge in Oginohama).

The idea of ice in the summer seized Jinsaburo’s imagination. He thought of nothing else during the walk back to Ishinomaki and it was all he could think of that night as he lay in the hotel bed.

“First, I build an ice house and then I ship ice to Tokyo during the summer,” he said out loud to himself in the middle of the night.

There were many factors to consider: where to get the ice, where to build the ice-house, and how to get the ice to Tokyo (to name just a few). According to the sailor, there was never enough ice so he could not lose. However, that was the present situation. When word got out about the money to be made selling ice in summer, everybody would get in on the action. There would be fierce competition There was no time to lose. He decided to do it.

The next morning was perfectly clear and calm with a slight southerly wind to fill the sail. Jinsaburo physically held the rudder but his mind was racing with thoughts of ice. Ordinarily, he was the first out to grab the rope and pull the boat over the river’s fast spots. Today, however, he was so preoccupied that he just sat and held the rudder while his two crew members hopped ashore to drag the boat.

Farther upstream were rapids that required the help of the river-boys who waited in huts beside the river. There were many boats on the river that day so it was slow but Jinsaburo was oblivious to his
surroundings as he walked along the bank holding the pole attached to the rudder and listening absent-mindedly to the river-boys’ peaceful, rhythmic songs.

“Hey, boss! Give us the money to pay the kids.”

Jolted back to reality by his crew’s voice, he realised they were through the rapids.

Eizo was caught off guard by Jinsaburo’s proposal but listened patiently.

“Why don’t you go to Sendai and check out the possibilities there first?” he suggested.

Sendai was the centre of the Tohoku region and Eizo was familiar with it because of his inherited right to sell charcoal to the Sendai-han. He knew that any fashion current in Tokyo eventually came north to Sendai; if selling ice was feasible in Tokyo, it would be feasible in Sendai, too.

The next time Jinsaburo took a load of charcoal to Ishinomaki he left the return trip to his two crew members and went on to Sendai to assess the possibilities of selling ice in the summer.

He got the same answer from every person he asked, “Ice? In summer? I don’t know of anywhere you can buy ice in the summer.”

On his return, he told Eizo that even the idea of ice in summer had not reached Sendai. Eizo was a prudent man, however, and had no intention of taking such a big risk. On the pretence of testing Jinsaburo’s resourcefulness and business acumen, Eizo declined to give any financial assistance to the project. Jinsaburo went to his mother and asked her to lend him ten yen, promising a three-fold return of thirty yen after three years.

The Onoderas were involved in sericulture and had a forest plot in the mountains so ten yen was not much money for them. However, it was big money in the sense that a good day’s wage was about 50 sen in those days. Jinsaburo asked her not to tell Juroji about it; it was to be a secret. She gave him 20 yen without even asking why he wanted it.

Jinsaburo’s plan consisted of damming the small stream that passed through Kunugisaki swamp and filling it with water to freeze in the winter. The location was perfect. There was a bigger stream just below the swamp that led right to the boat mooring at Ishinohana a short distance away.

As for the ice-house, he found an old hut that had been used for drying straw in a nearby rice paddy; it saved him building a special ice house but did take his entire 20 yen capital to fix up. That was inconsequential, however, because local farms and wood-lots had sawdust for the taking and all the ice work was done during the winter slack season so there was no conflict with his regular income.

Over the cold winter, he filled the converted straw shed with big blocks of ice.

In August 1878, Jinsaburo loaded his ice onto a boat, took it to Ishinomaki where he transferred it to a boat going to Shiogama, and had it sent on to Sendai from there. The ice proved extremely popular - more people wanted it and were willing to pay more than he had imagined. If anything, the problem lay in increasing the supply.

The converted hut was too small for the quantities he needed and not well enough insulated, too much ice melted in the spring and early summer. He asked all the old-timers for hints on storing ice but found he was already using the most common way. He did learn that some places in Tohoku used large store-rooms dug deep into the ground for better insulation. He planned to build a huge ice-house eventually but decided to get local farmers to put up ice on their own that he would buy in the summer and transport to Sendai.

By 1880 (three years after its founding), Masubuchi Ice was famous in Sendai and Jinsaburo was able to return his mother’s investment three-fold, as promised. Despite this success, however, he did not expand further as it was a simple operation and many competitors soon emerged.

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23 There are 100 sen in 1 yen. Sen are no longer used.
Jinsaburo’s success with the ice business convinced Eizo of his son-in-law’s business acumen and he began transferring more of his operations to Jinsaburo’s care.

With the political stability that accompanied the Meiji Restoration, both national and prefectural governments began massive public works projects all over the country. Eizo and Jinsaburo’s most successful operation was supplying the Public Works Division of the Ministry of Home Affairs with vast amounts of charcoal for their improvements to the Kitakami River.

However, despite the apparent money to be made in charcoal, Jinsaburo soon realised how low the profit margin really was when the cost of securing contracts was included. Securing contracts required substantial amounts of time and money (albeit in the form of gifts and entertainment) to persuade public officials to award a contract. Eventually, all this dealing with seemingly impartial and upstanding officials who were corrupt and manipulative drove Jinsaburo into conflict with his father-in-law.

“Anybody who is in this business must be crazy,” he said to Eizo one day in exasperation.

It was not a particularly diplomatic thing to say to a man who had spent his entire life pursuing contracts with the public sector and fervently believed it was the best way of doing business.

“It may seem tough right now,” Eizo said, “but it’s worth it. Doing something, even if it requires enduring some hardships, is better than not doing anything at all.”

Jinsaburo was not placated. He was not content to endure a job that would drive him crazy in the end. He wanted to start some new, exciting business to challenge his abilities.

It was 1884 (Meiji 17). Jinsaburo was thirty, Uino twenty-five, and Taijiro was six.

X   Silk Reeling

One June day in 1885, Jinsaburo went to the Nobiru Office of the Ministry of Home Affairs’ Public Works Division to collect money for a shipment of charcoal he had delivered. Nobiru is roughly 10 km west of Ishinomaki at the mouth of the Naruse River and the Nobiru Office was in charge of the port construction taking place there.

The person he needed to see had just stepped out on some other business.

“He should be back shortly if you don’t mind waiting. You can read this in the meantime, if you’d like,” the receptionist handed Jinsaburo a thin pamphlet that was close at hand.

It was an in-house periodical distributed to prefectural employees and branch offices to promote ideas on how Miyagi could contribute to the nation’s goals of modernisation and industrialisation.

The pamphlet turned out to be nothing more than technical information on prefectural administration but Jinsaburo flipped through it anyway. Nothing caught his attention until the very last article entitled “Implications of the Suwa Silk-Reeling Industry’s Remarkable Development” written by Rokuemon Sato.

Jinsaburo began reading. The article was technical and full of difficult words but something attracted him and kept him reading.

Rokuemon Sato had been sent by Miyagi Prefecture to investigate the silk-reeling industry in the Suwa area of Nagano Prefecture and the article presented the results of his investigations.

The mechanical silk-reeling industry in Nagano’s Suwa county has developed rapidly since the Miyamada Silk Factory was founded in 1873 (Meiji 6). It began on the banks of the Kadomagawa River in Kamisuwa using a waterwheel for power and the most recent machinery (such as boilers) imported from Italy. Today, there are more than 150 mechanical silk-reeling factories in and around Suwa employing 50 or more female factory workers each.
There is nothing remarkable about the old foot-powered silk-reeling machines that we are all familiar with. But, it is a wondrous sight (and quite indescribable in words) to watch fifty-some young girls reeling silk thread (just steamed off cocoons) onto huge automatically rotating frames.

Jinsaburo read on. The author described the equipment and machinery in greater detail and also how Suwa had become the most vigorous silk producing area in all of Japan. In conclusion, he wrote:

In the end, the success of the mechanised silk-reeling industry in Nagano is not a result of guidance, money, or encouragement from the prefecture or other relevant authorities. Rather, success is due to the originality, effort, planning, and commitment of the companies and entrepreneurs themselves.

In general, there are four factors essential for the success of a silk-reeling enterprise. Firstly, the area has to produce (or be able to produce) silk worms. Secondly, the water has to be pure - if the iron content is too high the colour is affected and the silk can not be exported to the United States. Thirdly, there must be the potential for using waterwheels as a power source. Finally, there must be an abundant source of fuel to feed the boiler.

Many places in Miyagi fulfil all four requirements for a silk-reeling industry. There is no reason why some courageous entrepreneur with vision could not make Miyagi the silk-reeling capital of the Tohoku region and famous throughout Japan.

Jinsaburo did not lift his head for some time after finishing the article. If what Rokuemon Sato had written was true, he, Jinsaburo Oikawa, was the man to accept the challenge and build a silk-reeling industry in Miyagi.

When finally he did look up, the head of the Finance Section was standing right in front of him.

“You certainly are absorbed in whatever that is you’re reading, Mr. Oikawa. I’ve been trying to get your attention for quite some time. And quite unsuccessfully, I might add,” he said and then laughed.

Jinsaburo apologised for his rudeness and asked if he might, if it was at all possible, and not too much of an inconvenience, borrow the article for a time.

“It would be no problem at all, Mr. Oikawa. Please take it home with you but I do ask that you return it eventually because we need to keep it in our files.”

Jinsaburo made no effort to disguise his delight and gratitude. He wrapped the pamphlet very carefully in a furoshiki and fell all over himself in thanking the Finance Head: bowing deeply again and again. Had he not been reminded of his original purpose, Jinsaburo would have walked off without the money he had come to collect.

When he got home, he read the article once more and asked Uino to copy it out as soon as possible. He had found his future. Everything he needed was around him: silk worms, clean water, and a river for the water-wheel. He knew success was there for the trying. The next step was to work out how much money it would take and where to get that money.

He started by learning all he could about the production of silk worms and their cocoons. It was an easy task because the recent, rapid increase in the price of silk cocoons had induced many people to plant mulberry trees and raise silk worms. Raw cocoons were sold to merchants who had the equipment and facilities to kill the pupa inside, dry the cocoon, and store large volumes until it could be sent to the silk-

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24 A large cloth used to wrap articles into a bundle.
reeling factories.

Killing pupa and drying the cocoons was not particularly difficult so practically every town already had such a factory. The high costs of obtaining large volumes and the difficulties involved in boiling the cocoons and reeling out the threads, however, meant that there were few silk-reeling factories. Most households reeled silk thread using traditional methods of boiling and old, foot-operated, reeling machines but the quality of this silk thread was low and could not fetch a high price. Hence, little silk was produced for sale on a small scale.

After his preliminary investigations, Jinsaburo decided to pay a visit to Rokuemon Sato in Sendai to get more details.

“I’ll be going to Sendai tomorrow,” he told Uino one evening.

Uino did not ask where he was going or why; she only nodded. However, she stopped him the next morning as he was preparing to leave, “Don’t you think it would be a little impolite to go to the Prefectural Office looking like that?” she asked (Jinsaburo was wearing his usual working clothes with a brand new *happi*-coat over top).

In answer to her own question she added, “Yes, western-style would be much more appropriate,” and handed him his collared shirt and suit.

He had said nothing about going to the Prefectural Office but she suspected his purpose was related to the article from the Nobiru Public Works Office that she had copied.

“Yes, western-style is much better,” she said again as she helped him change. “There’s going to be trouble when you come back, you know.”

She was already thinking about how to mediate between her husband and her father on Jinsaburo’s return.

“We’ll worry about that when the time comes,” he replied and briefly considered the variety of difficulties yet to overcome.

Jinsaburo took a boat down the Kitakami River to Ishinomaki and then caught a regular sailing to Shiogama. On arriving in Sendai, he took a place for the night and was up early the next morning to meet Rokuemon Sato at the Prefectural Office.

Scarcely had he stated the reason for his visit when Rokuemon Sato slapped his knee and said,

“I knew it! I knew Miyagi had men of talent. You read that article I wrote about silk-reeling and knew you were the man for the job. You’re an admirable man, Mr. Oikawa. I think the thing to do now is to introduce you to the Governor as soon as possible. Yes, that’s what we’ll do.”

At first glance, Rokuemon Sato appeared to have the impressive build of a *kendo* master, but closer examination revealed it was an image that he worked very hard at portraying through choice of clothing and posture.

Jinsaburo had said nothing definite about building a silk-reeling factory, he had just come for some information, but here he was about to meet the Governor. Rokuemon confirmed Jinsaburo’s present occupation, stood up, and said that he would be right back.

“The Governor wants to meet with you right away. This is a great honour, a great honour, indeed,” he said on his return.

It went without saying that an audience with the Governor was a great honour, especially on such short notice. Jinsaburo’s father had often told him that the Governor was the modern equivalent of Date Masamune, the feudal Lord who had ruled Miyagi for many decades during the early Edo era and

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25 The Edo Period lasted from 1600 to 1867 (the beginning of the Meiji Period).
established his family as the ruling clan for hundreds of years thereafter. Jinsaburo had grown up during the transition from the feudal Edo era to the modern Meiji era so an audience with the Governor was truly a great honour.

When Jinsaburo entered his office, the moustached Governor Masanao Matsudiara stood up sharply, like a soldier. He was the most impressive looking man Jinsaburo had ever seen; more impressive in real-life than in his portraits. He was broad-shouldered and wore a well tailored, Western-style suit and his office was filled with Western things.

“I understand you are Jinsaburo Oikawa, the businessman from Masubuchi. Please relax, you look very tense. I just want you to know that we are expecting great things from you and the first silk-reeling factory in Miyagi. Please do your best.”

As the Governor spoke, Jinsaburo could not help but break into a great, wide smile. He was so overcome with emotion that he was speechless and tense to the point of pain. He began to tremble violently. The Governor in his black suit with pure white collar became blurry and seemed to fade into the distance. The whole room took on a golden hue and everything in it sparkled radiantly.

Jinsaburo went to Suwa to see silk-reeling for himself. Changing trains at Ueno station in Tokyo, he rode the Shinetsu line as far as Yokokawa in Gunma Prefecture where he was forced to get off because of tunnel construction and continue on foot. When he crossed into Suwa via the Nakasendo Road through Usui Pass, he noticed that the smell of silkworm pupae permeated everything. In Suwa county alone there were more than 2000 silk-reeling factories, the bigger ones employing more than 200 female factory workers.

On the recommendation of Rokuemon Sato, Jinsaburo met with Zentaro Koguchi who owned one of those factories. In all, Jinsaburo stayed for ten days to learn as much as he could about the business and, just near the end of his stay, found a 26-person silk-reeling factory for sale. He made a deposit on the 200 yen sale price with the idea of moving the whole thing up to Masubuchi. On the spur of the moment, he persuaded the shop master (who understood the machinery) and his wife (who was an expert at the reeling) to move to Masubuchi with the factory. After all, equipment is useless if nobody knows how to use it.

On the journey home, he worked out the rough organisational details of his new company - the ‘Masubuchi Silk Reeling Company Limited’ would be publicly financed with sixty-five percent of the shares held by the Onodera Family and the remaining thirty-five percent to be held by outsiders. As for the ‘outsiders’, he planned to target local silk farmers as investors so they would have a tangible interest in the company. The total capitalisation was to be 300 yen.

Jinsaburo stopped at the Prefectural Office to tell Rokuemon Sato about the tentative deal to buy the used factory.

“Now to get it moved up here and working. I wonder, though, if I might ask a favour of this office?” he asked.

Rokuemon began to answer, “If it’s money you need I’m afraid that we can’t help you. You see, right now, the prefecture is...”

Jinsaburo interrupted, “No, no. It’s not money I’m looking for. I only want a simple letter to the effect that I, Jinsaburo Oikawa, submitted a proposal to establish a mechanical silk-reeling factory in Masubuchi and the proposal was approved by the relevant prefectural authorities on the very day it was received. I also want it to say that the Prefecture requested me to build the factory because establishing a mechanical silk-reeling industry is a priority in Miyagi. So much a priority, that the Governor himself will come to inspect the factory once it is completed.”

XI Factory

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“I think that would be possible,” Rokuemon answered, “but I don’t quite understand why you want it.”

To which Jinsaburo answered, “I have to convince a lot of very conservative country people to take a big risk on a venture that is far beyond their imaginations. The interim contract is only valid for twenty days so I need all the help I can to get the money together in time. By the way, I need the letter by tomorrow.”

“I’m afraid that tomorrow is quite impossible. It has to be drafted and then officially approved by everyone concerned. The soonest we could get it to you would be five days,” Rokuemon answered.

“That’s not good enough,” Jinsaburo replied. “I’d hoped that you would draft it yourself and personally take it to each person who has to approve it.”

Through his dealings with the Public Works Division, Jinsaburo knew quite well what was involved in a government office producing a document. He also knew that if one pressed hard enough, and the request was important enough, it could be done very quickly.

Jinsaburo reminded the hesitant Rokuemon that he himself had convinced Jinsaburo to undertake the venture in the first place. He also pointed out that as Rokuemon was responsible for promoting industrial development, the success of Jinsaburo’s project would surely reflect well on him and help his bureaucratic career.

Jinsaburo had the letter by the next day.

Back in Masubuchi, Jinsaburo went straight to his father to tell him about the whole scheme. Juroji approved of the business itself but had serious misgivings about the plan for raising capital. Jinsaburo explained the concept of publicly held companies in detail but Juroji lacked the courage to jump into such a new and unknown business strategy.

The next day, Jinsaburo gathered the whole Onodera clan to sell them on the idea. They all listened intently to his presentation and when he finished, his oldest brother, Tokusaburo, and his cousin, Kuraji Suto, got up and expressed their approval. The older members of the family sat quietly and listened to the goings-on of the younger men. When Jinsaburo passed around the letter from the Governor, however, their old faces lit up and murmurs rippled through the group about the Governor himself coming to inspect the finished factory.

Yaekichi Suto, Jinsaburo’s uncle, stood up, “The Governor is like the old Lord of the Date clan. If he comes to see our factory, the honour to our family would be tremendous.”

The decision to go ahead with the silk-reeling factory was unanimous.

In all, the Onodera family came up with 200 yen. Jinsaburo’s days were long and hectic as he concentrated on finalising the purchase contract and worrying about the many other details. It was decided to build the factory on the Onodera land and use the nearby Masubuchi River to power the water wheel. That was the easy part; the complexities of moving the equipment up from Suwa by horse-cart and constructing a building to house the factory were daunting.

By the latter part of 1887, Jinsaburo had everything together. The water transportation business was entrusted to one of the employees and he had visited every silkworm farmer and persuaded them to invest, even if only one share. In the end, he was more successful in getting investors than he had anticipated.

Eizo Oikawa objected strongly to the plan but it was the Onodera’s project and he had little influence. Furthermore, community opinion pressured him to invest in his son-in-law’s business although he invested only the average amount of what the various Onodera families put up. Relations between he and Jinsaburo strained further as he continued to ignore his son-in-law at home.

“Don’t worry,” a defensive Jinsaburo said to his concerned wife one night. “His temper will improve as soon as the factory is up and running.”
The equipment, every single last piece of it save the water wheel, arrived in Masubuchi with the Yamadas (the consultant couple) close behind. They were to live with the Onoderas for the time being.

The ‘factory’ building was only a shack to keep out the wind and rain. While it was being set up, the Yamadas used the large shed beside the house to teach everyone how to reel silk with machinery. They steamed the cocoons in a kitchen pot and turned the take-up reel by hand as three people at a time sat at the machine and practised reeling. Hordes of young women came from all over to learn this new and interesting method of reeling silk - the company had a large pool from which to choose the most dextrous to continue under Tsuru Yamada’s tutelage.

The Masubuchi Silk Reeling Factory was completed in November 1887, the first 26 employees were chosen, and work finally began. The cocoons were stored in the attic of the huge (100 mat) family house but the machine went through cocoons faster than expected so a separate storehouse became a priority.

The wisdom of hiring Shokichi and Tsuru Yamada and bringing them all the way from Suwa was soon apparent. Under Tsuru’s guidance, the 26 factory girls were turning out above-average silk in a remarkably short time.

By the beginning of 1889, the factory was in full-swing with profits and dividend allotments increasing day-by-day and hour-by-hour. The raw silk was transported to Ishinomaki by barge where it was loaded on a ship bound for Yokohama.

In the fall, Governor Masanao Matsudaira travelled to Masubuchi village to inspect the first mechanical silk-reeling factory in Miyagi Prefecture. With that visit, and the Governor’s glowing praise of the operation, Jinsaburo Oikawa’s fame soared and his name became well-known throughout the prefecture. Jinsaburo’s example inspired people all over the prefecture and similar operations began popping up everywhere. For example, a factory employing 150 workers was built in neighbouring Shizugawa using techniques and equipment brought in from Shinano Prefecture.

Rapidly changing conditions required rapid adaptations. Jinsaburo purchased a new, German-made boiler that allowed him to increase his work-force to 60 people; promoted his cousin, Kuraji Suto, to company president; and made himself Director.

He recognised that as the mechanical silk-reeling industry expanded, there would be a need for cargo-collection and inspection facilities closer at hand. So, in 1892, he established a collection and inspection facility in Ishinomaki, leaving his brother, Tokusaburo, and his cousin, Kuraji, in charge of the Masubuchi factory. With everything taken care at the factory, Jinsaburo could concentrate on his new job of collecting, inspecting, and shipping raw silk.

In 1893, he established an office in Sendai which collected raw silk from as far south as Taira in Fukushima Prefecture although the Taira silk had to be transported to Sendai by horse-drawn wagon as the Joban Railway Line had not yet been built. The Sendai office inspected, packed, and shipped the silk off to Yokohama independently of the Ishinomaki office. That same year, the Masubuchi factory expanded to 150 workers.

Prosperous times came to Yonekawa starting with an extraordinarily good harvest in 1894. The Sino-Japanese war broke out in 1895 but it had inconsequential direct effects and favourable indirect effects. Directly, the town was required to supply only 36 horses for the war effort. Indirectly, the prices of rice and raw silk skyrocketed (rice by 13 yen per koku and raw silk from 300 to 350 yen per bundle). The 1895 harvest was also unusually bountiful so times were good.

By the time the war finally ended in April 1896, the price of silk had risen to 450 yen per bundle. Every

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26 A tatami mat is about 1 metre wide by 2 metres long
27 Present-day Nagano Prefecture
28 Unit of measure like a bushel
silk-reeling factory invested heavily in new equipment and the local farmers increased their production of, and reliance on, silk worms.

Jinsaburo Oikawa, who had thrown himself whole-heatedly into the silk business, began to lose interest. His waning interest was not due to increased competition from rival companies nor to the decrease in the profit margin. Rather, it wore thin because of his very nature.

“The smell of silk-cocoons is really starting to get to me,” he said to Uino one night.

“Time for a new business, eh?” Uino said simply.

She wondered if the seeds of a new business had already sprouted in his mind but did not ask: she knew her husband’s nature and temperament well enough. As far as she was concerned, the river cargo business had been quite enough but it was already ten years since he had left that business for silk-reeling. After a long struggle with that, he had finally made a name for himself. What on earth could he be thinking of getting into now?

“Does the future of the silk business look bad?” she asked.

“I have no idea,” he said. “But I’m really starting to hate the smell of silk worms and their cocoons.”

“He is so capricious in business. If he was as capricious about women I would have to do something drastic but he hardly ever drinks and there has never been an incident involving women. Sometimes, he is so easy to read and I can tell what he is thinking just by looking into his eyes. But lately, he seems to have lost his vitality. I wonder what it could be?” Uino thought to herself.

She decided to say something, “I know you can’t live without being involved in something new and exciting. Yes, I know that only too well. Just don’t forget that your family depends on you.”

After extensive investigations, Jinsaburo Oikawa established Miyagi’s first mechanical silk-reeling factory in Masubuchi’s Karukome area. The factory employed 60 workers and used a water wheel to power the machinery. His contributions to the development of the silk-reeling industry in Miyagi were substantial. (from The History of Yonekawa Village, Tome-county)

XII  End and Beginning I

As the Pelican neared Canada and the land came into view, many people came up on deck.

“What a fantastic trip! Not a single storm the whole way and travelling with you made the trip especially meaningful,” exclaimed Goro Kaburagi.

Jinsaburo was puzzled; ‘Meaningful’ seemed a strange adjective to attach to a trip.

Goro explained, “That is to say, it was a meaningful trip for both of us. I sensed that your long, long story was a confession of sorts. According to Christian beliefs, a baptised believer must confess his sins to a priest. Unfortunately, this practice becomes ritualised and, as with most rituals, tends to lose its meaning. When a confession comes out unwittingly as a life story in the person’s own words, it is a real confession. Your ‘confession’ made me think about many things so the trip was meaningful to me.”

Goro’s face was as calm as ever, betraying none of his deeper thoughts.

“Well, I suppose, my story was a confession of sorts. I guess I needed to tell someone what I was feeling in my heart and telling you my whole life story was a way to do that. I wanted to make some atonement for the grief I’ve caused my family: my parents, my brothers, my wife, and my sons. I needed to perform san-ge,” Jinsaburo admitted.

“Ah, san-ge, that’s a Buddhist term,” Goro said. “San-ge is begging forgiveness by publicly confessing
your sins before an image of Buddha and writing your confession out on paper. If you were to write out the confession that you have related to me, that would become what Christians call a ‘written confession’.

“Objectively, I suppose, a Buddhist confession and a Christian confession are not all that different and there is no reason to search deeply for apparent differences. But, let’s lighten up and talk of more mundane matters. Suffice it to say that I heard your soul calling out. Your story was very interesting and made the voyage pass quickly and pleasurably.”

Goro laughed heartily.

Jinsaburo, however, was deep in reflection. Goro’s talk about religion and the differences between Christian and Buddhist confessions had shaken him.

“I’ve caused my family, especially my wife and sons, so much unhappiness in pursuing my own dreams,” Jinsaburo thought to himself but had no idea why he felt that way. Perhaps, something about leaving Japan had triggered this bout of self-reflection, the likes of which he had never experienced.

“You said earlier that you learned many things from my confession. What kind of things?” Jinsaburo asked.

“Well, the part about the Golden Horse for one. Let’s see. How can I explain it? I think it’s wonderful and yet I envy you for having a tangible image to inspire and fortify you.

“You are bathed in the golden glow of the Golden Horse and it gives you the confidence to pursue your goals without fear of failure. But, you must always believe that the Golden Horse has followed you across the ocean from Yonekawa village. Canada is a different country and the people are different. There is a different way of thinking and a different way of living. Sometimes it will seem impossible to conjure up images of the Golden Horse and you might be tempted to believe it deserted you when you left Japan. You have to believe it is with you even if the image appears as a Black Horse or even as a Cinnamon, or Albino, bear.

“If you work hard and don’t waste time dreaming of ease and leisure, you will settle in quickly and be successful. Two or three months are not enough. Indeed, two or three years are barely enough. You have to commit, persevere, and nourish the soil with your sweat. If you don’t, you will go home understanding no more than when you came.

Goro paused and watched Jinsaburo’s expression change as he gazed upon the North American continent, now in plain view.

“There’s just one more thing,” Goro resumed. “The Golden Horse is not yours exclusively; the people of Yonekawa and all Japan are relying on it to come through for you.”

Jinsaburo listened quietly but thought how Goro’s talking had become a sermon. Goro was a preacher, after all.

The fog rolled in and time seemed to thicken with it. In the distance, a foghorn sounded continuously.

“We should be in Victoria by morning,” Goro said as he bade Jinsaburo good-night.

Back in his cabin, Jinsaburo extinguished the electric light and looked out the round port-hole into the pitch blackness. On clear nights, when the moon and stars were out, it was possible to see the ocean. Tonight, he could see nothing but black. Light leaked from another port-hole and reflected off the fog. The blackness was meditative and relaxing but the light revealed the eerie flow and swirl of the fog. It was unsettling.

“Why couldn’t I just stay in Masubuchi and be content with the factory?” he mumbled to himself, wondering if he was making a big mistake.

Recounting his life story to Goro had been a confession but he wondered if it was more. Did it perhaps reveal a deeper desire to justify his reckless actions?
Goro had invited Jinsaburo to his Vancouver home and offered to introduce him to interesting and useful people. Having a contact and adviser eliminated at least one of Jinsaburo’s worries but all the others crowded in still closer.

“I’m 42 years old,” he muttered under his breath. “Sure, I agree with what Goro said about working hard but I haven’t done much physical work myself for quite a few years. And, even if I’m pretty sure I could handle it, no one is likely to give an old man like me the chance to prove it.”

Doubt and anxiety crept in and swirled around and around him. He had trouble falling asleep but finally fell into a deep sleep just as morning came. In his dreams, he snuggled deep into the bales of soft cotton that filled the ship’s hold far beneath him. So deep, in fact, that he had to struggle to get out of bed in the morning.

When he awoke, the ship had already arrived in the port of Victoria. It was his first time ever in a foreign country and he had to blink to convince himself it was real. The breakwater was no different than the breakwater in Yokohama; the ships floating in the harbour looked basically the same. The people on the docks, however, were different and, try as he might, he could not spot a single one that looked Oriental.

From time to time he caught glimpses of a solidly-built, red-haired, white-skinned sailor whose deep-set eyes sparkled in the sunlight. Jinsaburo found him frightening. Of course, he had seen a few foreigners at the port in Yokohama but they were very few amongst the mass of Japanese. There were only foreigners here and he realised for the first time that he was in a foreign country.

Very soon the ship was underway again and they pulled away from Victoria.

“What’s wrong? You look terrible all of a sudden,” Goro remarked as he came up on deck.

“I didn’t sleep very well last night,” Jinsaburo answered, not mentioning it was because they were so close to Vancouver and so close to the end of all he knew. “I’m sure I’ll sleep much better tonight when I’m settled into a good Japanese hostel.”

Having heard there were many Japanese-run hostels in Vancouver, he planned to find one as soon as he got off the ship.

“Before we dock, I want to give you just a short test on what I’ve taught you,” Goro said.

“I hope you don’t mind but I’d rather not today,” Jinsaburo said, staring into the distance as the ship wove through innumerable small islands.

Goro Kaburagi ignored Jinsaburo’s protests, “You’ve learned the English alphabet quite well and, most importantly, you know how to sign your name. Plus, you’ve learned several short English expressions. Which is your favourite? English expression, that is.”

“I am Japanese,” Jinsaburo answered.

“Ah yes. That is one I hope you never forget,” Goro replied and scanned the clumps of islands with Jinsaburo. Jinsaburo’s answer made him think of all his Japanese brothers who lived and flourished in Canada on the strength of that phrase and the sense of identity and purpose it gave them.

“Jinsaburo Oikawa will be just like them,” he thought.

Suddenly, Jinsaburo exclaimed in a wild and excited voice, “Those are pine trees! The islands are covered with pine trees!”

Jinsaburo had spotted a pine tree on a small outcrop of an island. Every island met the sea with sharp cliffs: some towering above the water, some barely a few metres high. Pine trees grew right to the edges and balanced precariously on the precipices with their branches dangling over, exposed to the naked elements and pounding waves. To Jinsaburo this was just like the famous pine-covered islands at Matsushima, near Ishinomaki.

“They look very similar to Japanese pine trees but they’re actually a type of fir,” said Goro.

Whatever they were, technically, they were pine trees to Jinsaburo: a touchstone of familiar scenery to
help him accomplish anything.

“When we arrive in port, you will be asked many questions by the Customs and Immigration officials but don’t worry because I’ll be right beside you,” Goro reassured the excited Jinsaburo as the port drew nearer and nearer.
Chapter 2

The Fraser River

(Fishing boats on the Fraser River)
I  Vancouver

The Pelican sailed into a large open area that could have been either an inlet or the mouth of a river. To the north, towering mountains came right to the water’s edge. To the south, the city of Vancouver lay hidden in smog. The ship docked slowly and Jinsaburo had a sudden twinge of anxiety as he disembarked. Would this great continent, to which he had travelled so far from home, accept him?

Something smelled. Neither good nor bad, just a foreign smell. “But, this is a foreign country after all, so foreign smells are only to be expected,” Jinsaburo muttered to himself. It was only later that he realised the smell actually came from the people.

The noise and bustle of the milling crowd enveloped him as he went through the Customs and Immigration procedures which were accomplished with silent gestures as he could not understand a single word. The flood of strange words and Western music that filled the emptiness of the large, open, Western-style building was overwhelming.

“Have you completed all the necessary formalities, Mr. Oikawa?” Goro asked; Jinsaburo was off in reverie and did not notice him.

Many Japanese had come to meet passengers and every last one of them wore western-style clothes and shoes: not a single kimono or geta was to be seen. Jinsaburo’s immediate judgement was that they were all extremely successful and he wondered if he was too late in coming to Canada. Strangely, the style and colour of his own newly-made clothes from Yokohama seemed to fade the moment he stepped off the ship.

Jinsaburo searched the crowd for Souemon Sato. Both Jinsaburo and Jinuemon Sato had written him letters with detailed itineraries so Souemon could meet the ship. He never came. Goro and the other passengers dispersed one by one in carriages or on foot with the people who came to meet them. Jinsaburo was left standing by himself.

“Mr. Jinsaburo Oikawa?”

Jinsaburo turned to face a short, smiling man with a driving hat pulled tightly down over his head.

“I’m from the hostel. Mr. Goro Kaburagi asked me to come and meet you. I thought I could catch you at the baggage counter but I had to wait until everyone else left to figure out who you were.”

Excuses made, the man shouldered Jinsaburo’s bag.

Jinsaburo suddenly remembered that Goro had promised to contact a Japanese hostel on his way home and have them send a man to meet him. Jinsaburo was relieved.

“Is something wrong?” the man from the hostel asked hesitantly.

“Actually, I was waiting for someone who was supposed to come and meet me,” Jinsaburo answered and explained the arrangements with Souemon Sato.

“If he hasn’t shown up by now something has come up. Don’t worry, there are only three Japanese hostels on Powell Street, also known as ‘Little Tokyo,’ and every newly-arrived Japanese stays at one of them. He’ll be able to find you there quite easily.”

The man carried Jinsaburo’s bag and trunk to his bicycle parked nearby.

“This is at least a hundred times bigger than the foreign settlement in Yokohama,” Jinsaburo thought to himself as they passed through town. It was bright; it was beautiful; it had a lot of open space; and there were Westerners everywhere. All at once, he realised the stupidity of comparing a city like Vancouver to the small foreign settlement in Yokohama.

Once into the city, he did not see any Japanese. The combination of wide streets, Western-style buildings, European writing, and total dominance of blue-eyes made his head spin. The scene was straight out of pictures he had seen except for the reality of kicked-up dust and the smell of the two-horse carriages.
When he realised that the horses smelled the same as horses in Japan, the strange smell that had filled his nostrils since leaving the ship vanished.

Jinsaburo shrugged his shoulders, took a deep breath, and reminded himself once again that he was Japanese. Shifting his attention back to his guide, he obediently looked around wildly, trying to follow the breathless explanation. However, his interest waned with each foreign word; it was mentally exhausting.

They walked away from the port, the man from the hostel pushing the bicycle and cart contraption loaded with Jinsaburo’s trunk and bag. The huge mountains across the inlet on the North Shore to their left made it easy to keep track of direction so Jinsaburo’s mind wandered; everything was so different that the guide’s explanations served more to confuse than clarify.

Suddenly, he was ripped back to the present by a sign written in Japanese characters; it read スター魚肉点 and stuck out like a sore thumb. Jinsaburo had no idea what ‘Star’ meant except that it was definitely not a Japanese word. All at once he noticed that the street was full of signs with strange Japanese. Most signs indicated stores but there were restaurants and hostels, as well.

His hostel had a strange name, too: ‘Tokyo House’. In fact, the whole building was different, right from the genkan. The reception counter and dining lounge/cafeteria were on the first floor, the guest rooms on the second and third floors. Each room had a door with a lock, a cold-looking, wooden floor, and a bed plopped in the middle. There were no tatami nor was there a tokonoma. There was, however, a distinctly Japanese smell that permeated the whole building. It was a nostalgic and comforting smell but somehow different.

There were ten other Japanese staying at the Tokyo House, mostly labourers who had come to Canada looking for better jobs. Jinsaburo recalled the words of the man from the hostel who had met him.

“The Japanese here are like leaves floating on the water. They wander from place to place looking for good jobs but they always end up back in Vancouver, where they started.”

Jinsaburo had an opportunity to meet them at dinner that night. On the whole they looked neither healthy nor affable as they sat at the table looking surly and ready to quarrel with anyone. As for the meal, the rice was dreadful but the boiled fish stock was delicious and Jinsaburo ate heartily; it had been so long since he had eaten a Japanese meal with vinegar-pickled seaweed and salted Chinese cabbage.

“Where did you come over from?” the bearded man sitting across from him asked.

“Yokohama,” Jinsaburo replied.

“That’s not what I meant. What part of Japan are you from. That’s the standard greeting here, you know.”

“Miyagi,” Jinsaburo answered.

“Oh,” the man made no attempt to mask his disappointment.

Everyone else ate silently.

When the meal was over, a man with a bluish-black facial tinge sitting on Jinsaburo’s left turned and remarked,

“We heard we had a big victory against China in the war. Things must be looking pretty good at home now, eh?”

The ice was broken and questions about the war came fast and furiously. Judging from the questions, the victory had been greatly exaggerated on this side of the Pacific and the men were eager to hear tales of

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29 Star Fish and Meat Market
30 The entrance hall.
31 Thick floor-matting made of rice straw.
32 An alcove for displaying scrolls or flower arrangements.
heroism more elaborate than the incredible ones they had already heard.

Jinsaburo spoke in a low voice.

“As far as battles or victories go, I only know what was reported in the newspapers. I can tell you about the hardships the war inflicted on the farming villages, though. There are only 500 households in my village but 10 men and 36 horses were conscripted. Of course, we were willing enough to sacrifice for the war effort but the inflation made life really tough for some people. Rice shot up from 8 yen per koku to 13 yen and people were forced to live on millet and wild grasses. Granted, the price of silk cocoons went up more than rice but few could make a living off silk worms alone; it was too risky. Luckily, there were no crop failures and nobody died of starvation.”

There were a few expressions of understanding and some deep sighs but no further questions. The men stood up and left by ones and twos.

The next day, another man came to take Jinsaburo to meet Kaburagi who, in turn, took Jinsaburo to the bank to deposit his money and learn how to make deposits and withdrawals.

“If you lose all your money in a foreign country, there is nothing left to do but die. It’s not as uncommon as you might think, either,” Goro warned.

Jinsaburo had dealt with banks in Japan so it took little time to understand the procedures. However, he panicked momentarily when it came time for him to sign his name instead of using his seal as in Japan. At that moment, he finally grasped why Goro had drilled him over and over on signing his name in English.

Back at the hostel that very evening, someone came begging for a small loan saying that it was dangerous to refuse a compatriot in need (especially in a foreign country) because one would eventually need the favour returned. Jinsaburo found it very difficult to refuse the man despite having no money with him. He was glad that he had put it all in the bank.

Vancouver was a barren, lonely place to Jinsaburo. Flowers bloomed in the window box outside and dahlias filled the White people’s gardens but Jinsaburo felt no emotion whatsoever.

The wind was as different as the smells. At home, the rice seedlings would be poking out of the ground and a sweet, gentle wind would be blowing across the rice paddies. There was no such wind here. Vancouver’s wind was a dry wind that carried on it whiffs of the hairy barbarians.

The man at the hostel said that the hairy barbarian smell was cheese but when Jinsaburo probed about where the smell actually came from the man stiffened and thrust out his chest but did not answer. Jinsaburo wondered how many years it would take to get used to the smell.

A week after his arrival, Goro Kaburagi took him to the Consulate to be registered as a businessman. After completing this simple task that was required of even the most important Japanese, they went in to meet Masutaro Miyakawa whom Goro introduced as a translator.

“You’re a businessman not just a labourer working to send money home so you will want to see a lot of things. Of course, you can do it on your own but I suggest you consider using someone like Mr. Miyakawa here to act as your guide and interpreter until you get used to the city and its ways,” Goro advised.

Masutaro Miyakawa looked to be six or seven years his junior but Jinsaburo knew nothing more about him than the little Goro had told him beforehand: Miyakawa had taught himself English and was an ardent Christian.

II  Steveston

Masutaro Miyakawa took Jinsaburo to Steveston, 20 kilometres south of Vancouver by omnibus and gave him little titbits of information along the way such as:

“The railway will soon be extended out here so this rather long trip will become unnecessary.”

Miyakawa’s information came voluntarily but it was short and he immediately turned to the window
and sat silently; Jinsaburo had no opportunity to ask questions. Taciturn men like Miyakawa made Jinsaburo nervous no matter how well-informed they were and how much English they spoke.

As soon as the omnibus arrived in Steveston, Jinsaburo jumped out and went straight for the Fraser River. More than anything else, he wanted to see the masses of salmon migrating upriver.

To his dismay, the so-called river was not a river but a part of the ocean. Miyakawa explained that it only looked like the ocean because it was the mouth of a great river. Jinsaburo was sceptical until he looked closely at where the ‘river’ met the sea and saw that it was a river after all.

It was not, however, a beautiful river. Truly, it was more than ten times wider than the Kitakami but the water was not clear and light. The Fraser was full of silt and, Jinsaburo sensed, full of dread.

Despite being assured at the Consulate that the salmon run was underway, there was not a single salmon to be seen. The only sign of salmon were the many, many fishing boats. Jinsaburo sighed; the legends about dogs running across the river on the salmon’s backs were just legends and tall tales, after all. In fact, there was no way they could ever have been true; the Fraser is just too wide and deep even for all the fish in the world. Maybe the fish came to the surface and jostled each other further upstream where the river narrowed, but certainly not here.

Jinsaburo said he wanted to walk upstream along the river bank but Miyakawa stopped him,

“Don’t you want to look around the canneries?”

The canneries and fish companies lined the river bank near Steveston and many fishing boats were tied up at the numerous piers.

“Canneries as well?” Miyakawa had asked when Jinsaburo told him he wanted to learn everything about the Fraser River. The order did not matter as long as he saw and learned everything.

Miyakawa stopped in front of a large cannery building which was not impressive by any standards or stretch of the imagination. The rough-planked, outside walls were painted but not with any care. It looked hastily built and half of it extended out over the river on pilings.

At the entrance, Miyakawa stopped to fix his tie and run a comb quickly through his hair. Without a word, he handed the comb to Jinsaburo to do the same.

“Maybe he’s not so bad, after all,” Jinsaburo thought.

The wind blew up-river from the ocean and Jinsaburo noticed how much cooler it was here than Japan. He glanced up at the cloudy sky which explained the coolness. Suddenly, it struck him that there had not been one clear day since his arrival.

There were no flowers or trees anywhere near the cannery entrance and nothing that even resembled a flower garden although the weeds grew luxuriantly. Most numerous were the thistles, somewhat different from Japanese thistles, but thistles nonetheless.

Jinsaburo lifted his gaze from the thistles to the large, English sign hoisted over the cannery entrance. Jinsaburo thought ruefully how those damn English letters and signs would afflict him for a long time to come.

“Mr. Oikawa is a businessman here from Japan. He would like to have a look around your cannery if you could spare the time,” Miyakawa explained at the reception counter.

After a short wait, a fat man in work clothes appeared. He gestured them into the factory and spoke very rapidly to Miyakawa,

“We are very busy right now but you are welcome to look around on your own.” He disappeared. The interior was quite unexpected given the shabby exterior. It was constructed of thick timbers and the working area was more comfortable than Jinsaburo thought necessary. Machinery noise filled the air and the workers shouted to be heard above it.

Work was organised along a conveyor belt that carried the fish from workstation to workstation. At the
first workstation, a fish was grabbed from the belt, the head was cut off and dropped through one of the many holes cut into the floor, and the remainder put back on the belt to be taken to the next workstation where the belly was slit open. Next, the entrails were removed in two steps and dropped through the floor into the river below. The fish was then washed, cut into pieces, minced, stuffed into cans, and the cans were soldered shut before being sent into the heat treatment for cooking and sealing. After the heat treatment, the cans returned to the belt where women workers attached paper labels. Finally, the cans were taken off the belt and boxed.

The unwanted fish-bits fell through the holes directly into the river, explaining why the cannery was built out over the river. Jinsaburo watched as the bright red salmon roe was dropped into the river right before his very eyes. Collecting the roe looked easier than he could have imagined. He would buy a small boat, float it under the cannery, and wait for the falling roe to fill it up.

The cannery workers were mostly Chinese, Japanese, or Native Indian - only about 30 percent were Whites.

Just then, the fat White man approached them.

“Were you able to see everything you hoped to?” he asked.

“Yes, thank you,” Jinsaburo answered. “It was very interesting. I have a question, though: Do you think that new canneries will continue to be built?”

Jinsaburo did not understand Miyakawa’s translation of the question but it prompted this response from the cannery man:

“The government is coming up with many ways to restrict fishing because of a concern over dwindling stocks. For example, they’re increasing the ‘no-fishing areas’ and shortening the fishing season so it’s getting harder and harder to get fish. Most people think the cannery business can’t expand at this rate for much longer but if the demand is there, there is no reason why it shouldn’t. I will tell you one thing though; they won’t give Japs permission to build any new factories.”

Of the whole exchange, Jinsaburo understood only ‘Japs’ and that was because the man had glared at Jinsaburo when he said it. Jinsaburo had come to look at the cannery as a businessman so the use of the word made him stop and think.

On the way out, he stopped to look at the thistle once more.

“It figures! It’s a devil’s club thistle,” Jinsaburo muttered as he remembered the White man’s face and the way he had said ‘Jap’.

“The Japanese either work directly for the canneries or supply their whole catch to them. By and large, their houses, boats, and fishing gear are all leased from the company. They are mere labourers making a pittance of a wage and yet they are bound to the company nonetheless,” Miyakawa explained and went silent.

Jinsaburo cast his gaze to the Fraser River. There were identical canneries crowding the river bank as far as he could see.

“Well, shall we continue on to the Japanese section of Steveston?” Jinsaburo asked. He wanted to see the reality of the Japanese workers’ lives.

“Is there anyone in particular that you’d like to meet?” Miyakawa asked.

“I’d like to meet Kouemon Nakabayashi whom I met in Yokohama, if I could,” Oikawa answered.

Miyakawa nodded deeply; he obviously knew Kouemon Nakabayashi.

From what Nakabayashi had said in Yokohama, Jinsaburo knew that Steveston was a booming town. He was a bit surprised, therefore, at the shabbiness of the Japanese section where each house had only a small garden with a few flowers. He knew that the population was overwhelmingly single men but was not prepared for the sight of men drinking alcohol during daylight hours; this would never be done in Japan by
Jinsaburo had contacted the Nakabayashi’s on his arrival and they had invited him and Miyakawa for dinner that evening. It was a two-storey house with twelve tiny apartments that they rented out. Each of the one-or-two room apartments had its own door with a lock. The idea of actually living in such a place for long gave Jinsaburo a strange feeling.

The Nakabayashi’s lived on the first floor and there was a small patch of cosmos flowers blooming outside their window. The wife, whom Jinsaburo had also met at the Nagano Inn in Yokohama, was in the cosmos patch when they arrived; she invited them into the house where Mr. Nakabayashi greeted them,

“I don’t drink alcohol and I don’t serve it to my guests. I don’t gamble either and that’s how I could afford to buy a house and bring my wife over to live here. I may not drink like a fish but if it’s fish you’re after, I’ve got lots of salmon and lots of salmon roe. After all, that is what you came to Canada for, isn’t it?”

It was a strange greeting and Mr. Nakabayashi had an ‘I-knew-it’ smirk on his face. He was dying to tell them that he knew Jinsaburo would eventually show up to find his fortune in the muddy Fraser.

Kouemon Nakabayashi and Masutaro Miyakawa knew each other from the previous year’s minor dispute between the Japanese fishermen’s union and the White fishermen’s union; Miyakawa had acted as translator.

“The Steveston fishery was built by Japanese and sixty per cent of the fishermen are Japanese but we’re still subcontracted to and at the mercy of those damn fishing companies and canneries. No matter how much the hairy barbarians trample us and contemptuously call us ‘Japs’, we go on working for them because all Japanese dream of a ‘Gorgeous Silk Homecoming’. Sadly, the reality is that most will never even save enough to buy the fare home let alone return rich and successful in silk clothes,” Nakabayashi said.

Nakabayashi had talked a little in this vein when they met in Yokohama but he spoke with much more feeling, disappointment, and urgency now.

Jinsaburo listened with the same sinking feeling he had when he discovered that dogs could not run across the river on the salmon’s backs. It was exactly why he had come all the way from Japan: to learn first-hand about the real conditions, the shattered dreams, and the tragic exaggerations.

“You’re a businessman, Mr. Oikawa, not an immigrant labourer and that makes all the difference. I have to say, though, that your plan to build a business here using Japanese labour is like a mantis trying to use an axe: unrealistic. The Japanese Consulate is merely decorative; it has absolutely no power here. In fact, many believe it is just a front for the Japanese Government’s Overseas Japanese Policy.”

Jinsaburo had trouble following Nakabayashi, especially when he used unfamiliar expressions like “a mantis using an axe” and “Overseas Japanese Policy.” He listened quietly and watched Nakabayashi’s face intently.

“If you really want to start a business here, Mr. Oikawa, I suggest you say nothing about it and join in as an ordinary labourer to see what it’s really like. There is no problem getting a job because the fishery is just getting busy. In the winter, you can work in a sawmill. If you experience the life of a labourer first-hand, you will run a more successful business venture. It will give you a chance to study how Canadian flowers are different from Japanese flowers, so to speak.”

At the mention of flowers, Jinsaburo remembered the beautiful cosmos blooming in the small garden just out front. He noticed that some were arranged in a small vase placed on a narrow wall shelf beneath a photograph.

“That’s a picture of my brother. He died without fulfilling his dream of a Gorgeous Silk Homecoming. He brought the cosmos seeds with him from Japan,” Nakabayashi replied to Jinsaburo’s unspoken
Jinsaburo finally saw his first salmon when he went out on a fishing boat. The experience also laid to rest another myth - the one about standing a pole upright amidst the salmon and it not falling over. That is not to say there were no salmon; every time the net was pulled in it was so full of salmon that one could barely imagine how many salmon there really were.

The Steveston Japanese fished in the ocean as well but they all returned to the river when the spawning began. Unlike ocean fishing that required much equipment, river fishing only required a net stretched across the river to trap the fish swimming upstream and the take was incredible.

The coho salmon run started sometime in June, followed shortly thereafter by the steelhead salmon (so called because of their extremely hard heads). Steelheads are ferocious fish, ripping nets to shreds and thrashing violently for a long time when caught and brought on board.

The salmon season lasted from June to October although the actual number of fishing days in a year was limited to fifty-five to preserve the fish stocks. There were two or three ‘openings’ a week and notices were posted a few days before each. Starting and closing times were strictly enforced by the authorities and fishery patrols monitored the river mouth on the closed days. Poachers were severely punished.

During the openings, the fishermen worked without rest. A collection boat came around periodically to pick up each boat’s catch and transport it to the canneries so the fishermen could fish continuously. Careful records were kept.

The whole operation was precise, especially when the net was full. It was essential that the net be pulled up only so far for two reasons: 1) to keep the net from being torn by the weight of the fish and 2) to avoid needless expenditures of energy. There was no limit on how many fish could be taken within the time limit so efficiency was of the essence.

Wages were determined by the price of fish in the marketplace and were paid to the fishermen through the fish companies that were invariably owned by the canneries. Jinsaburo was interested in the whole operation from the fish companies to the collectors to the fishermen, so he spent much time learning about each. He was particularly interested in wages and discovered that the fishermen’s wages were actually quite low on average. On the surface, their hourly wages were much higher than the $1.50 per day that road building paid but fishing was risky and seasonal. Risky in that there were days when one did not catch enough (or any) fish. Seasonal in that the off-season was seven months long and all the fishermen competed to find winter jobs in the lumber mills.

Jinsaburo stood beside the Fraser River in the pouring rain until he was soaked right through and wondered why it rained every day in this country. The sky clouded over at the end of September and more than half of the days in October were rainy. Then, starting in November, it rained every day, day after day after day. In fact, since Jinsaburo’s arrival, there had been not been a single autumn day like the clear, crisp autumn days of home. Granted, the incessant rain made the golden leaves of the cottonwoods and maples sparkle in the vast scrub-land stretching back from the river’s shore. He tried hard to imagine himself in his hometown beech forests as he walked through this golden-hued world.

It took a long time for Jinsaburo’s body to get used to his more ‘humanistic’ lifestyle. He had been administrating and managing so long that his capacity for manual labour had almost disappeared and he returned home each day so totally exhausted that he barely had the energy to drag his body into bed. Thankfully, most of the fishermen were young and single so there were several options for getting food. Some men cooked for themselves, others teamed up and cooked together, some alternated cooking duties
with friends, and still others arranged to have someone’s wife prepare their meals. In general, the meals were little different than home: rice, miso soup, seaweed, hijiki, tofu, salted vegetables, and lots of fish (of which there was no shortage). Lunch was a lunch box centred on salted onigiri rice balls.

Because the Japanese spent all their time together, there was absolutely no need (nor opportunity) to use English except for those few who worked in the cannery offices. Furthermore, the Japanese themselves split into various factions based on their home prefecture or village and those divisions were strong. Jinsaburo found himself surrounded by people from the southern prefecture of Wakayama who treated him like a complete outsider. In fact, differences in regional dialects made communication in Japanese difficult and increased the distance between groups.

Jinsaburo tried to work unobtrusively for Kouemon Nakabayashi’s fishermen’s union but he was the new guy and therefore constantly invited and cajoled to join drinking and gambling clubs: refusal meant harassment and ostracism. The restaurant section of town was also the gambling, drinking, and prostitution section so it took a man of uncommon willpower to resist these temptations and save his money.

Most of the young, single men succumbed to the temptations and followed the path of hedonism. Then, when they received letters from home asking for money they went grovelling to the boss for loans. Sending money home reminded them of their purpose in coming to Canada and they temporarily repented of their selfish ways. They earned many, many times the wage they could earn in Japan and could easily afford to send money home but the initial homesickness and nostalgia that a letter from home brought on was soon replaced by resentment. The worst thing about the constant requests for money was the obligation to respond.

Despite the bitter reality, most clung to the three-fold goal: send money home, pay for a fare home, and save enough money to return home successful and rich. Whether or not one realised those goals depended mostly on the group to which one belonged; if one’s group of sempai, relatives, and people from the same town had good connections, one was more likely to succeed.

Jinsaburo, from Miyagi, remained an outsider in this insular system. On his day off (every Sunday except during the fishing season), he went off on his own and did some form of recreation. If not for these Sundays, his body would surely have given out very quickly.

Since coming to Canada, Jinsaburo had written home only once although he had written Souemon Sato twice. In his letters to Souemon, he wrote that he had considered trying to track him down by the address but did not yet feel comfortable enough to try it alone. He was convinced that Souemon would show up before too long.

October came and it was cloudy every single day - not a single clear day all month. Snow threatened many times but never came. The rain continued day after day. Without a doubt, a good strong rain would have been easier to endure than the drizzly, moist seepage from the sky.

At the end of the fishing season, Jinsaburo got a job in a lumber mill on the banks of the Fraser. The logs were floated down from far upstream, pulled onto the bank, piled, and fed through the steam powered sawmill to become posts and planks. Jobs feeding logs through the circular saws required skilled labour so newcomers worked mostly outside at simple tasks such as placing logs on the rollers and stacking the waste wood coming out the other end of the mill.

Mill work was full of dangers. Outdoors, there was the danger of getting an arm or a leg crushed by a log. Indoors, it was the risk of getting an arm caught up in the belts and ripped off. Such accidents were

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33 A type of seaweed.
34 Those of one’s ‘group’ who are older.
uncomfortably frequent.

Jinsaburo chose to work outside because he had grown up in the mountains and was familiar with lumbering. Also, the smell of sap from the cut trees reminded him of home. Working as an immigrant labourer was hard but his goal of starting his own business in Canada helped him rise above his situation and not become wretched or miserable.

Twenty or thirty centimetres of snow fell in January.

The weather began to improve in March with about one clear day per week. Jinsaburo quit his job in the mill and went upriver to log in the mountains with a team of about 30 Japanese labourers, mostly from Hiroshima Prefecture. They worked hard every day; lived on simple food; and slept in a small, cold shack.

The fir trees they cut were so large it took several men’s outstretched arms to encircle them. The fellers set a plank into the trunk of the tree about 2 metres from the ground to stand on while cutting because cutting closer to the roots was too difficult. This job had its dangers, too. Every year several fellers were crushed to death if they could not get out from under the falling tree fast enough.

“Boy, this job must be really tough when you’re over forty, eh?” a young man twenty years Jinsaburo’s junior said one day.

“That may be true,” Jinsaburo said, “but no matter how tough it is, there are no hairy barbarians out here.”

The Japanese foreman used the Japanese under him mercilessly. He was not a friendly man and did not smile or laugh except when the White superintendent came around (for whom he always had a toothy, obsequious grin). Food was plentiful with enough rice and miso soup for even the hungriest man and there was always tofu and seaweed on the side. Fish and meat to keep their bodies healthy and muscles strong, however, was scarce. Occasionally, a Japanese man came to the cookhouse selling eggs and bacon which the workers bought up very quickly to restore their physical well-being.

Once, when the foreman had gone, the egg-and-bacon-seller lowered his voice to a conspiratorial whisper and said,

“There is a White logging camp near the swamp by that mountain. They eat meat three times a day for each and every meal. On top of it, they get paid five dollars a day. Can you believe it? Here you are, doing the same work, eating this disgusting rice, and only getting a dollar fifty a day. It’s a crime.”

Anger rose on many faces but everyone fell silent and docile when the foreman poked his head around the corner. The foreman was not a bad man at heart but the Japanese workers had to be cautious. They had two choices, ‘low pay and a job’ or ‘no job and no pay’. The White owners liked the Japanese and Chinese who worked for such low wages because it was good for profits.

Jinsaburo left the woods at the end of March.

In April, the weather improved and the flowers bloomed. The ivory-white, dogwood flowers opened wide to the blue sky, reminding one of the gentle whiteness of a woman’s skin.

Jinsaburo made his way back to Vancouver and visited Goro Kaburagi to bring him up to date on his adventures since their last meeting.

“It sounds like you’ve had a tough time and experienced much,” Goro said. “Did it help you decide on a business venture?”

“Well, I’m sticking to the original plan.”

“Ah, yes. The salmon roe idea,” Goro remembered.

“I’ve had to change it a bit, though. First and foremost, I need to get people from my own village to work for me because the Japanese here are so insular. They only associate with their own little group.”
“And, that is the source of so much unhappiness and difficulty,” Goro added. “If they weren’t so stubborn about maintaining their separateness and made a greater effort to assimilate by becoming Christian or speaking the language of the land, there would be a lot less discrimination. Perhaps, there would be none at all.”

“Maybe,” Jinsaburo said, “but, as nice as it sounds, it may not be realistic given the situation. To get a job, or keep your job, you have to fit into the way things are: separate and insular.”

This was Jinsaburo’s conclusion after six months in Canada.

Leaving Goro, Jinsaburo made a tour of the Japanese hostels in Little Tokyo to see if Souemon Sato had ever come to Vancouver. It appeared not, so Jinsaburo wrote a third letter and sent it care of Jinuemon Sato in Japan.

IV  Souemon

The pure-white, dogwood flowers contrasted with the deep blue sky and cast a spell on anyone taking the time to look. Under their spell, one could imagine floating up into heaven. The White-people’s gardens burst with blooming tulips and the cherry trees were as red as miso soup. Yellow narcissus overflowed onto porches making the railings themselves seem to bloom. Besides these flowers that Jinsaburo could name, there were multitudes he had never before seen.

Under the bright spring sun, Vancouver and its adjacent forests and meadows became a blaze of colour. Honeybees buzzed everywhere, attracted by the bright yellow dandelions and wild strawberries. There was bracken, flowering fern, and the river bank was hidden beneath the budding horsetails. The farmland surrounding Vancouver was an ocean of flowering fruit trees: apples, apricots, and peaches.

Jinsaburo went back to Steveston and, with Kouemon Nakabayashi’s help, found lodging in a fishing company dormitory. It was not much different than his former rooming house but the rent was cheaper.

As it was still too early for the Fraser River spring-salmon run, he hired on with a Japanese, offshore-fishing boat. Fishing in the salt chuck was very different than river fishing and he spent most of his time gripping the railing and vomiting into the water below while reflecting on how unsuited he was to ocean fishing.

On the first Sunday of June, Jinsaburo was walking along the river bank when he was suddenly assaulted by snow flakes carried across the river on the wind. He was puzzled because, of course, it was too warm for snow. On closer examination, he saw that the soft flakes battering his cheeks were like pieces of cotton torn into a thousand pieces and scattered to the wind.

Looking around, he realised that the cotton fluff came from innumerable cottonwood trees on some islands in the middle of the river. There were Chinese characters for this ‘willow pollen fluff’ and Jinsaburo had often come across it in poetry although he never knew exactly what it meant until now. The cottonwood pollen stuck everywhere, turning his clothes and hat snowy white.

He was so astounded by the blowing cottonwood pollen that he went to visit the Nakabayashi’s that very evening. On the way, he stopped at a Japanese store to buy a wrapped package of green tea as a gift.

“I guess that means the salmon run will be starting any time now,” Kouemon Nakabayashi said simply. Apparently, the cottonwood pollen and the spring salmon run usually coincided.

Nakabayashi’s forecast proved true the very next day when Jinsaburo’s boat took a large load of spring salmon near the entrance to the river. The salmon averaged a metre in length, the flesh was deep pink, and the taste was at its best. They sold for the highest price. Soon, Steveston bustled with newly-arrived fisherman from everywhere, even the United States. They were all after the salmon.

As much as Jinsaburo had learned about the fishery, there were several types of fish amongst the
salmon and trout that he did not recognise. The spring salmon started upstream in July and were joined by a number of other species. As the season progressed through August and September, Jinsaburo noticed a strange thing: the pink salmon fetched a good price but the silver-coloured salmon sold for a penny apiece if they were not refused outright.

Jinsaburo had noticed this the previous year but became more aware of it now. There were incredible numbers of these ‘dog-salmon’ but they were always thrown back with the roe and other waste parts of the good salmon. Apparently, there were so many ‘good’ salmon that the fishermen and the companies could afford to be picky.

Jinsaburo saw his opportunity. He was positive that he could sell all the dog salmon and roe that he could salt and send to Japan if only he could find a way to get them.

The fine weather continued through August but cloudy days reappeared in September. The day after the mountain ash first sported their red autumn leaves, the gloomy days began in earnest. The rainy season had returned.

Jinsaburo went back to ocean fishing in the pouring rain although it was not nearly so bad this time around. In fact, he did not get seasick once, even out on the open ocean where they fished for halibut.

The past year had been productive. He had seen and learned almost everything about the fishing industry and, more specifically, the Japanese involved in it. But, he was not ready to quit yet.

It was not for money that he continued to fish; the money he had brought from Japan sat untouched in the Vancouver bank (in fact, he had added to it from the past year of working). Neither was it because he gave up on his original salmon roe plan. It was simply that he needed someone to help him and other people to work for him. It was too much to do alone. He needed a partner.

Thoughts of Souemon Sato surfaced. Why had there been no replies to his three letters? Was Souemon dead?

On one particular day, there was a storm like none he had seen since arriving in Canada. The fishing boats were tied fast and everything shut down. Jinsaburo walked home alone, bent low against the stinging wind and rain. ‘Home’ was a lonely place with nobody to greet him and few visitors except for men looking to borrow money. He was a bit of an outcast and regarded somewhat suspiciously by the other Japanese.

Various factors contributed to this suspicion: he was supposedly a businessman but he worked as a labourer on a fishing boat; he was too old to be working for a ‘Gorgeous Silk Homecoming’; he did not drink; he did not dabble with prostitutes; and he did not gamble. Some called him a miser to his face although that nickname rather pleased him. He worked hard to avoid the spiral of hopelessness that claimed many Japanese working overseas. If anything, his peers’ opinions reassured him that he was succeeding.

“I have to get a boat of my own somehow,” he mumbled, deep in conversation with himself. “Captain Oikawa. I like that. But since a ship can’t sail with only a captain, I need a partner. I need someone to share my ideas with, open my heart to, labour with, and succeed with.”

A whole year of looking had not produced that person; everyone was from another part of Japan with binding loyalties to their past. Jinsaburo was forced to play the lone wolf, wandering in isolation.

“Maybe I should start again from the beginning,” he suggested to himself. “Maybe I should go back to Japan and bring some of my own people back.”

Partners and workers, however, were just the first obstacle. Next was the problem of getting land to accommodate all those people.
Jinsaburo drew a deep breath as he approached the smoke and rain-enshrouded company dormitory for single men. On the verge of defeat, he had almost lost hope.

As he started up the staircase, he noticed a young man waiting off to the side. An eerie feeling of recognition struck him so he looked more closely. To his surprise, he saw the deeply-set eyes, high jutting cheekbones, and the characteristically huge irises that made the whites barely visible. He would recognise that face anywhere. The young man’s face broke into a huge smile as he lifted both arms to greet Jinsaburo saying,

“You are Mr. Jinsaburo Oikawa from the silk factory, aren’t you?”

Jinsaburo was caught off guard for a moment as it had been so long since he had been associated with the silk factory. In truth, “Mr. Oikawa, formerly of the silk factory” was more appropriate but he was not about to split hairs.

“And you are Souemon Sato, are you not?” he replied, grasping the outstretched hands. “You look just like your father, Jinuemon, when he was young.”

Souemon beamed to hear his father’s name spoken by a fellow villager.

Arm-in-arm, they climbed the stairs to Jinsaburo’s second floor room. They were both cold and wet so Jinsaburo lit the old stove and piled on the firewood. When the fire was blazing, Jinsaburo turned to Souemon whose face was illuminated by the fire’s red glow. He knew right then that Souemon Sato was destined to be his partner and confidante.

They talked and talked but the more they talked, the more there was to say.

“I just quit my job on the farm,” Souemon said. “It was the only way I could come to meet you.”

It came out that Souemon had received all of Jinsaburo’s and Jinuemon’s letters and had asked his boss for the time off to meet Jinsaburo in Vancouver. Unfortunately, the first time was the middle of potato season and his boss absolutely refused to let him go. Souemon could understand his boss’s position to some extent and thought it best to forgive him his unreasonableness that time.

Shortly thereafter, when Jinsaburo’s second letter arrived, Souemon was preparing to write a reply but his boss said,

“I know you want to meet your friend, so I’ll give you some time off soon. There is no need to write him.”

Souemon took his boss at his word and did not write the letter.

When Jinsaburo’s third letter arrived and his boss gave him the same empty promise, Souemon decided to quit as soon as he contacted Jinsaburo. He sent a reply that was returned because Jinsaburo had changed addresses.

When Jinsaburo’s next letter, including his new address, finally came, Souemon immediately quit the farm and went to meet him.

“My father wrote that you are planning to start a business here and maybe even bring some of our fellow villagers over to do it, Mr. Oikawa. I’d like to help, if I can. I’ve lived with the hairy-barbarians for some time now and I can understand English quite well. Maybe I can be of some assistance to you,” Souemon proposed happily.

They sat up and talked the whole night. When Jinsaburo related how Souemon’s letter to Kichiji Goto had persuaded him to go to Canada in the first place, Souemon immediately pledged to work with and help Jinsaburo to the utmost of his ability.

They talked with the candour of fellow villagers brought together by fate in a foreign land. They talked mostly of inconsequential things like whether the holly tree was on the left side or the right side of the staircase leading up to the Batto Kannon Doh shrine from Kessokuji Temple. Finally, when the night sky began to brighten, they fell asleep.
Jinsaburo took the next day off.

Jinsaburo dug out the Fraser River map he had bought in Vancouver and opened it flat on the table. “The first step is to find some land near the Fraser River, preferably far enough upstream that the squalid air from Steveston doesn’t blow over us.”

Jinsaburo envisioned a refuge from the alcohol, prostitution, and gambling that swirled in the air around Steveston leaving disappointment and betrayal in its wake.

“First we build a base for our fishing operations. There is no problem selling the fish, the fish companies will buy all we can supply. If that’s profitable, we can lease more boats. There are still lots of fish upriver so there should be no conflict with the downstream fishermen. We won’t compete directly with them, at least not for the first year or so.”

Jinsaburo talked to Souemon as a partner: freely, easily, and about things he had never told anyone.

“Whether we start by renting or buying the land outright, it’s going to take a lot of money. I have some saved up that we can use for that,” Souemon offered.

“Thank you very much,” Jinsaburo said. “I think I brought enough money with me but if it is not enough I will take you up on that offer.”

The whole world suddenly became brighter right before his very eyes.

Steveston, the most prosperous fishing town on the Fraser River, was situated right at the mouth where the river spills into the Pacific Ocean. Many Japanese immigrants went there hoping to make enough money to send home but few were disciplined enough to resist the temptations of gambling, drinking, and prostitution that thrived in Steveston. We decided to establish ourselves upstream from Steveston and away from its vices and temptations. (From Chapter 8 of Jinsaburo Oikawa’s Autobiography - “Ocean Voyage”)

V Mr. Clark

One miserable, rainy day, Jinsaburo and Souemon Sato walked upstream looking for a place to build a base for their operation. The prime fishing area extended 15 kilometres from the mouth of the Fraser River and the fishing companies controlled it all. Beyond the upstream limit was a free zone where the fishing companies thought the fishing too scarce to bother with.

Sunbury, 17 kilometres from the mouth on the south bank, was just out of the fishing companies’ control although the river was wide and could support a hundred fishermen or more. As well, there were only a few houses (belonging to White fishermen) in the area so the two partners decided to locate there. The final factor was the proximity to the last of the canneries that extended upriver from Steveston.

No Japanese had ever successfully established a private operation on the river; they were, without exception, completely dependant on the fishing companies for boats, fishing gear, and houses - everything in exchange for an exclusive contract with the company who paid their income. Jinsaburo and Souemon planned to be the first to break free. Having done their research, they decided to set up near the Whites’ houses and strive to create good relations (or, at least, avoid causing antipathy).
Sunbury was a marshland with nothing but grass to the east and south and a huge jungle of cottonwood trees at the western boundary. There had been some attempts at draining the water with diversion creeks but the land remained unsuitable for agriculture or building houses.

As they walked, they noticed two White men up ahead, one of whom was very tall, perhaps over two metres. The pair was walking along a creek and bending down occasionally for a closer look. They were intent and seemed knowledgeable about the area.

“Let’s ask if they know who owns this place,” Jinsaburo suggested.

As they drew near, Souemon nodded and the taller one said to him,

“You two are Japanese, aren’t you? Well, I own this whole area and I’ve got some work if you want it. I want my land cleared and logged; I’ll pay you 75 dollars an acre to do it. I want it done as soon as possible and I’ll pay you cash as you go along.”

Souemon translated and Jinsaburo doffed his hat in greeting to the two foreigners.

“My name is Jinsaburo Oikawa and this is my partner, Souemon Sato. I came to Canada a year ago to build a house and start my own fishing company. Perhaps we could help you with your logging proposition during the off-season.”

As Souemon translated, Jinsaburo composed what he would say next. It struck him that conversing in such a manner might seem like a hassle although it was actually rather efficient as it allowed time for thought and reflection.

“We would prefer you to start right away but don’t you think it will be too much for just the two of you?” the smaller man said, laughing. Jinsaburo interrupted,

“If we are to undertake this proposition, we have a few conditions of our own. First, we would like to build a house on the land … with our own money, of course. Secondly, perhaps you can help us get started in the fishery by negotiating with the nearby cannery on our behalf. I assure you we have enough fishing experience. When the house is built, we will get other Japanese to come and work with us so we can log your land and fish at the same time.”

The two white men discussed the proposal. Finally, the taller one spoke, tension showing on his face,

“I don’t know why you include fishing in the deal because we have nothing to do with fishing. What if you only clear out the worthless cottonwoods?”

Jinsaburo listened with closed eyes. He could not understand the words but he caught the meaning all the same.

“That’s better, but it’s hard work and seventy-five dollars per acre barely covers the cost of our food so we need to fish to make up the difference. During the summer, we will fish both for food and cash. Then, during the winter, we will clear your forest. According to my calculations, that combination should give us year-round work for at least ten years.”

Jinsaburo’s proposal seemed to satisfy the White landlord.

“That sounds good. For my part, I will negotiate with my friend who runs a nearby cannery once you’re set up and have started clearing. If I vouch for your identity and can show him that you’ve settled here, there will be no problems getting you employment.”

The negotiations completed, Jinsaburo wrote down the White man’s name and address giving him his own address at the Japanese rooming house in Steveston in return.

“Well, Mr. Clark, if everything is settled we will begin building our house tomorrow. Am I correct in assuming that we won’t be paying rent?” Jinsaburo asked and Mr. Clark confirmed it.

“Oh, there is one more thing,” Jinsaburo added. “I know we didn’t specifically discuss it but would you object to our using the cottonwoods that we clear?”

Mr. Clark had no objections so the deal was made.
Jinsaburo Oikawa and Souemon Sato had secured a 3000 m$^2$ cottonwood forest and their lives became accordingly busy.

After more discussion, Jinsaburo and Souemon decided that a verbal contract was too risky for such a long-term project so they wrote out a formal contract. From his long experience as a manager and entrepreneur, Jinsaburo knew exactly what needed to be included in such a contract but this was Canada and the other party did not speak Japanese so an English contract would have to be drafted. Souemon was competent enough in spoken English and could read and write a little, but not well enough to draft legal documents.

Therefore, Jinsaburo went to Vancouver to tell Goro Kaburagi about the arrangements and to enlist Masutaro Miyakawa’s help in drafting and translating the contract with Charles J. Clark. With Kaburagi’s and Miyakawa’s assistance, Jinsaburo wrote out a Japanese version of the contract which Miyakawa then translated into English.

The contract was to run for three full years from the date of signing and could only be cancelled with the mutual consent of both parties. The main provisions were that Jinsaburo and Souemon agreed to clear 10 hectares per year with the cleared cottonwoods becoming the property of the loggers, and Mr. Charles J. Clark agreed to act as guarantor for any of Jinsaburo and Souemon’s people who got hired at the nearby cannery in Sunbury.

When all was ready, Jinsaburo and Miyakawa took the contract to Mr. Clark at his real estate agency in Vancouver. Mr. Clark was quite surprised to see Jinsaburo formally attired in a suit. When Miyakawa introduced Jinsaburo as a businessman from Japan, Mr. Clark signed the contract immediately.

Jinsaburo then went to the bank to withdraw all his money and move it to a bank in the much closer town of Ladner.

While Jinsaburo was in Vancouver looking after the contract, Souemon went to Steveston looking for reliable, hard-working Japanese (preferably from Miyagi) with some carpentry experience. After much searching, he finally found three such men and invited them to join their Sunbury project. Unfortunately, they had already arranged winter employment and were not interested at that time.

Due to various delays, it was not until mid-December that Jinsaburo, Souemon, and a carpenter named Yamamoto finally began building the first log house. Jinsaburo paid for everything: the building materials (and the cost to transport them), Yamamoto’s wages, and food for the three of them. After all, this was the very reason he had brought and saved so much money. He decided to use it all in their new venture.

“It doesn’t matter what they look like as long as they are warm and comfortable,” he said when they started building.

The plan was to build three log houses big enough to accommodate ten people each.

The old year passed and the New Year came, marking the start of Jinsaburo’s third year in Canada.

One day, two of the men Souemon had approached earlier came to visit. Although still not interested, they had decided to at least see for themselves whether Jinsaburo really was starting a business in Sunbury.

There were close to 10 000 Japanese in Canada at that time with most living in and around Vancouver. Of that total, only about 400 hailed from Miyagi Prefecture but, unlike those from Wakayama who tended to congregate in fishing and those from Shiga who concentrated in the forestry, there was no one employment or place where people from Miyagi gathered.

Jinsaburo offered to pay the two visitors $1.50 a day to help complete the log house and then an equal share of the $75 per acre they got for clearing.
The two men looked at Jinsaburo suspiciously, “That sounds like a good deal for us but we can’t figure out what’s in it for you.”

“Don’t worry about me,” Jinsaburo replied. “I’m a businessman and I’ll come out ahead in the end.”

Naturally, building went much faster with two more men and the first log cabin was finished by the end of January. The five men immediately moved in and started the second log house immediately.

At the beginning of February, Charles Clark sent an employee to tell them to go to the cannery two days hence at 2 pm. As promised, Mr. Clark had contacted the cannery when he saw the finished cabin. The meeting at the cannery was successful as they arranged for two boats complete with fishing gear and a certificate stating that they were employed by the cannery as contractors. By March, they were legitimate, semi-independent fishermen and entitled to make a living as such.

Two more men joined the group just as they completed the second log house, bringing the total to seven. Jinsaburo sent out a team of five men (excluding himself and Souemon) to start clearing the cottonwoods. One acre, worth $75, normally took the five men 10 days but could take as few as seven with intense effort. In addition to their share of the $75 per acre, Jinsaburo offered to pay an extra 5 cents per bundle of fire wood that they cut from the fallen trees. With this incentive, the men spent their break times cutting firewood for extra pocket money.

When the third log cabin was finished at the end of April, Yamamoto the carpenter, went back to Steveston but the foundations for an all-Miyagi work company had been laid.

June came and the cottonwoods bloomed. In preparation for the imminent salmon migration, Jinsaburo took all his remaining money and bought three used fishing boats with gear; he knew about the ‘lease trap’ all too well from his past experience.

Most Japanese fishermen leased their boats, gear, and even homes from a fishing company and delivered their whole catch to the company’s cannery. In return, the cannery paid them a wage based on the value of their catch less their inflated lease payments. In the end, only about half the value of the catch came back as wages.

Conversely, those with their own boats and gear received the whole value of their catch. Of course, they still had to pay for their boats, gear, and rent but not at the inflated prices the canneries extracted. Most of the White fishermen operated under this semi-independent option.

With the three boats he had bought and the two he had leased through the fishing company, Jinsaburo was the boss of a five boat fishing fleet. Four more Miyagi-ites joined the company and the ten of them lived together in the first log house.

Jinsaburo set about teaching them how to fish.

As the fishing season was still closed, they were unable to take the boats out on the river to practise throwing and retrieving the nets. Instead, they held their first practice sessions on dry land. When this was mastered, they practised throwing their nets from the river bank.

Jinsaburo soon realised that, however good in theory, this teaching method had no practical value as these men were raised in the mountains far from the water. They might have gone fishing in small streams for small fish (wild carp or killifish) but they had never been in a boat nor seen a huge living salmon. To make matters worse, more than half of the ten could not even swim.

Souemon had grown up near the Kitakami River so he knew how to swim and handle a boat but even he was at a loss over teaching the others.

“What are we going to do now?” Jinsaburo wondered out loud, and then answered himself, “Well, I guess we start right from the beginning and teach them how to row a boat.”
Even this seemingly simple task was made excruciatingly difficult by the fact that the non-swimmers also had a morbid fear of the water. Jinsaburo made sure that each boat had more than enough life preservers.

News that the fishing season was finally opening came from the cannery along with the news that Jinsaburo’s crew had been assigned an area on the north side of the river near two small islands called Don Island and Lion Island.

Jinsaburo addressed his crew, “All right, the fishing season starts tomorrow and you’ll finally get to see a real live salmon. This is going to put all your hard training to the test.”

Jinsaburo reviewed the procedure one last time before opening a cask of home-made sake to make a toast to good fishing.

They were up at five o’clock the next morning to launch the boats: two men to a boat. They rowed out to their assigned area and prepared everything so they could set the nets at right angles to the current as soon as the signal sounded.

Jinsaburo and Souemon went out in the same boat. As they prepared their nets, Jinsaburo surveyed his fishing fleet. He had travelled so far from home but when looked out on his five boat fleet, he knew it was all worthwhile. His heart pounded furiously as he imagined his boats pulling up to the cannery full of salmon.

With no wind to disturb the surface, the river was as smooth as glass. As it grew light, a huge school of salmon passed right beneath their boat and metre-long fish leapt out of the water all around them. Jinsaburo wanted to toss his nets in after them immediately but there was a huge fine for anyone caught fishing before the appointed time. Although he could not see any patrol boats making a circuit of the river ensuring compliance, he knew there were other patrols watching from shore with binoculars. They had to wait.

“The salmon! The salmon! They’re here! They’re here! And they’re huge,” excited yelling came from one of the boats. The voice sounded like the man’s head was thrust in the water amongst the leaping salmon.

The sound of fireworks echoed along the river and they turned to see a flare arcing through the sky just downstream.

“Quick! Put out the nets! Put the nets out!” Jinsaburo ordered frantically, almost angrily.

Ten men in five boats simultaneously threw out their nets just as they had been taught.

The response was immediate. There was a strong tug on each net.

“Pull them in! Pull them in!” Jinsaburo yelled angrily, seeing that the nets were already full.

As ordered, the men immediately began pulling in the nets but they were fuller and heavier than the men could ever have imagined. All of Jinsaburo’s coaching to be especially careful and pull the nets in slowly and patiently was forgotten in a moment. Seeing the nets so full of huge fish, the men were afraid the net would rip and all the fish would get away. Against all their training, they tried to hoist the whole mass of fish into the boat at once.

One of the boats tipped precariously and one of the fishermen fell overboard. Seeing his partner floating downriver, the other man threw out the life preserver. Despite being a non-swimmer, the overboard man had the presence of mind to grab the preserver that landed right in front of him. The other boats started to pursue the overboard man but quickly realised that they had to let go of their own nets to do so.

By the time they had released their nets and reached the overboard man, he had been picked up by a couple of White fishermen from Sunbury who had already pulled in their catch.
It was a rough first day with not a single salmon to show for it.

That evening, Jinsaburo filtered some of the home-made sake through a cloth, bottled it, and paid a visit to the White fisherman who had pulled their man to safety earlier that day. Souemon went along to translate.

The White fisherman was surprised by the unexpected visit and, although leery at first, tasted the gift of sake. He was pleasantly surprised and commented on how delicious it was.

This was the start of good relations between Jinsaburo and the White fishermen in the area. Jinsaburo made every effort to improve relations at every opportunity.

News of Jinsaburo’s disastrous start spread rapidly and eventually reached the downstream Japanese community.

“Did you hear about the mountain monkeys who tried to become fishermen?” the story went. “They were doing fine until they actually threw the nets in the water for the first time and caught some fish. They were so surprised and confused that one of them fell overboard and drowned.”

By the time these rumours made their way back upstream, Jinsaburo and his group had already regrouped and were back out fishing. Of course, the loss of equipment resulted in a reduced fishing area and a smaller catch for the first few days. But by following the salmon, they increased their catch little by little each day. As a precaution, Jinsaburo tied ropes around the non-swimmers’ waists so that if they did fall overboard they would not be swept downstream like the last time. It was not long before every one of them was a seasoned fisherman and did not need the ropes.

The fishery was only open two or three days a week so they worked themselves to exhaustion on those days. Four of the five boats fished while Jinsaburo and Souemon used the fifth boat to collect the catch and ferry it to the cannery. They ate their rice-ball lunches on the boats and worked late into the night on those few openings; it was the only way to achieve a worthwhile level of production.

Once their own fishing was going smoothly, Jinsaburo began approaching White fishermen in nearby boats and offering to buy their dog salmon for a penny-a-piece. The response was usually something like, “Japanese eat dog salmon? Well, we just throw them back in the river so you can have them for free.”

In return for the dog salmon, Jinsaburo took them bottles of his home-made sake.

Jinsaburo salted and packed the dog salmon in big barrels to sell to cook-houses feeding the Japanese working in the sawmills and on the railway. Jinsaburo’s salted salmon was a big hit with the workers who found that the big price difference between dog salmon and sockeye salmon more than made up for the slight taste difference. Sales soared.

Jinsaburo’s operations in Canada really began in a little town called Sunbury where there were only three White houses at that time. To the east, there was a large grassy field. to the west a luxuriant forest.

We started out clearing land (for fields and houses) and got $10/acre for scrub-land and $75/acre for the forested areas.

Everyone who came into contact with Jinsaburo was amazed at his diligence and work ethic. As one of his workers once said, “We have no idea what time our boss goes to sleep nor what time he gets up.”
Jinsaburo always said that the best way to stay warm in intense cold was to “pick up a saw and saw until you get warm.” He always set himself as an example for his workers. (from Sato Souemon’s Recollections - “About Jinsaburo Oikawa”)

VI Home

By September of 1898, Jinsaburo was producing sake in earnest which he traded for all the dog salmon any White or Japanese fishermen would save for him. It was a good deal for both sides; the fishermen got something for worthless fish they would normally throw back in the river and Jinsaburo got the dog salmon that he salt-packed in any available waterproof container and sold to the cookhouses. Of course, the Whites and Japanese had different tastes in sake so he traded home-made sake (with bits of rice still floating in it) to the Japanese and clear sake (filtered through paper) to the Whites. Everyone came looking to trade dog salmon with Jinsaburo.

As their enterprise became more successful, more men came around looking to join them. Soon the three log houses were so full that there was trouble fitting everyone in. Surprisingly, men from all different parts of Japan came to them, not just Miyagi-ites. The number of workers stabilised at 20 for a time so Jinsaburo bought more boats.

Jinsaburo was unable to sit still for long and tried to put every idea into action as soon as it occurred to him. Before long, he was selling the salt-packed dog salmon wholesale to Japanese businessmen who then took it to the interior to sell to Japanese in lumber and railway camps. The containers were eventually sent back to Sunbury to be refilled but Jinsaburo was forced to buy any and every waterproof container he could find. Once the distribution network and transportation routes were established, efficiency and profits increased rapidly.

There were no competitors, as yet, but Jinsaburo knew that was just a matter of time. He wanted to make it impossible for anyone to usurp his position in the market but did not have the manpower to do so. The only solution was to bring people from home that he could rely upon.

So it was that in December 1898, Jinsaburo decided to return to Japan and entice people to go to Canada with him.

“I want to build a colony of Miyagi-ites from Tome County so I’m going to bring at least 30 people back with me,” he explained when he told Souemon he was going to Japan.

Souemon was not in favour of the plan but what could he say? Jinsaburo had so many abilities and everything he tried was successful. In the end, Souemon only listened silently.

On his departure, Jinsaburo left Souemon in charge and gave him a list of things to do over the winter: continue logging, build three more 10-person log houses, and keep an eye on the salted salmon in the storehouse.

It was early 1899 before Jinsaburo finally arrived home in Yonekawa. He had sent a telegram ahead from Yokohama on his arrival, so there was a crowd of people to meet him at Ishikoshi Station.

Jinsaburo was surprised at the new roads that had been built and at how his son, Taijiro, had grown into a fine young man. He was glad to see Uino, too, but she looked unhealthy and he worried that she was ill.

Jinuemon Sato from Nishikiori was also at the station to meet him.

“Thank you for taking care of my son over there in Canada,” he greeted Jinsaburo.
“Not at all, I should be thanking you for Souemon’s help. He has become indispensable to me. He is quite the translator.”

The word was new to everyone so Jinsaburo explained that a ‘translator’ was someone who spoke English very well. They were impressed.

It was a royal homecoming. Jinsaburo rode a horse while everyone else walked beside, in front of, and behind him talking all at once. Jinsaburo wore his new, herring-bone suit from Vancouver and looked very much the part of local boy who made it big in a foreign country.

He told how well things were going and that it was necessary to expand. He said there were jobs and living quarters for as many of them as wanted to go back to Canada with him.

A deadly silence fell and the party slowed to a crawl. Everyone’s feet dragged.

“Last year was really hard. The famine was so bad that some died of starvation,” Jinuemon finally said.

The formerly joyous party stopped, as if struck down by Jinuemon’s words. Jinsaburo’s horse stopped, as well.

“If that’s the case,” Jinsaburo thought to himself, “there will surely be many young men willing to go to Canada with me.”

Jinuemon read his mind, “I received all your letters and I tried to find people to go, but…”

Jinuemon’s answer was evasive but made it clear that nobody was interested in going to Canada.

Jinsaburo spent the rest of that day walking around town and renewing acquaintances. When night fell, he returned to his Masubuchi home where the Masubuchi Silk Reeling Association had organised a welcome party for him. It was not much of a party in terms of food, the bad harvests meant that there was neither sake nor mochi35, but any shortage of food and drink was compensated for by good will and joy at his return.

Jinsaburo made great efforts to convince everybody that he was very successful in Canada and that his enterprises in Steveston were running smoothly except for the manpower problem.

“A man can make the equivalent of 3 yen a day over there. Here a good worker might get 50 sen per day, if he’s lucky. Think about it. That’s six times what you can make here. If you go to Canada, you will eat well, live in nice houses, and wear clothes that only government officials can afford here,” he said as he showed off his own clothes.

He wanted to tell them that it really takes a lot of hard work and a lot of time to make that three yen-a-day he was promising. He wanted to be honest about the higher cost of living but he was trying to induce people to go to Canada, after all, so he decided against telling too much about the difficulties. When he realised that he was only talking about the good things, he stopped.

After the meeting, he walked home with Jinuemon. Suddenly, Jinuemon turned to him,

“Nobody can afford the 60 yen fare and nobody wants to go so badly that they would sell their house or land. Perhaps you could offer the same deal you offered the cask maker. That is, you lend them the money to get there and they pay you back a little at a time as they are able. That would take an awful lot of money, though.”

The reference to the cask maker was from the letter Jinsaburo sent Jinuemon asking him to find a brewer to make sake and soy sauce and a cooper to make casks for the brewer’s products. As these were absolutely essential to Jinsaburo’s enterprise, he had offered to lend them the fare. In the end, finding a cooper and brewer proved as difficult a task as finding anyone else to go, despite the offer to pay the fare.

35 Sweet rice pounded into a sticky pulp.
“The upshot is that there are five people who are, more or less, committed to going: myself and my oldest son, Soshiro; Yasuemon Iwabuchi; a cooper from Ishinomaki; and a sake maker also from Ishinomaki with whom I am still negotiating,” Jinuemon concluded.

Jinsaburo was shocked to hear that Jinuemon, three years his senior, was planning to go. He looked at Jinuemon in surprise.

“I can afford the fare now but if I wait a few years, there’s the possibility our family will not only lose all our savings and wealth to bad harvests but also starve to death. Besides, my son is there and I’d like to be with him,” Jinuemon responded to Jinsaburo’s look.

When Jinuemon said ‘our family’, he was referring to one of the oldest, most established households in Nishikiori. If bad harvests had shaken the foundations of that household, things were serious, indeed. It was a bittersweet homecoming for Jinsaburo to come back to a village that had been ravaged by two bad harvests in a row.

It was late when Jinsaburo finally got home and his adoptive father, Eizo, was already asleep. Jinsaburo went straight to bed.

“I’m sorry I’m so late. We got talking and lost track of the time,” he whispered as he gave Uino a sip of his water and commented on how delicious it was after drinking filtered water from the Fraser River: so delicious that it was a shame to waste even a drop of it.

That night, Uino laid her head on his chest and cried the whole night. She had never done such a thing before but he had been away so long that she gave in to her emotions.

“I’m not going to leave you alone again,” he reassured her. “The main reason I came home was to take you and the children back to Canada. We’re going to live and work there together, as a family. We won’t be alone because others will come with us. We are going to live there until we die; it’s the only way to make a good life.”

That was the first time he had ever told Uino about his plans. She did not answer. She continued crying.

Of course, Eizo was happy at Jinsaburo’s return but something seemed to be bothering him although he showed no outward signs of sorrow or displeasure. Everyone knew that he had opposed Jinsaburo’s decision to leave his family and business in the first place but that was not the problem. Twenty-one-year-old Taijiro finally brought it all to the surface,

“He’s upset that you never sent even a single sen of your earnings home to your family and business. It was expected.”

“I couldn’t send any. I have to live and eat. Besides, it’s all tied up in the business,” Jinsaburo replied.

“I’m sure he’d understand if you explained.”

Jinsaburo could just picture the old man grumbling and complaining all year and then making the grandson bring it to Jinsaburo’s attention so he did not have to do it himself.

The inevitable collision between the two came when Jinsaburo asked Eizo to counter-sign a bank loan to pay for fares to Canada. Jinsaburo promised to send the money as soon as he returned to Canada but Eizo’s answer was short,

“No!” and they had nothing further to say to each other from then on.

Jinsaburo visited everyone in town trying to get people to go to Canada. Everyone’s answer was the same,
“I want to go but we haven’t the money,” or
“I would go in a second if you lent me the money for the fare.”

Nobody wanted to go enough to even think about selling their house and land to raise the fare. Jinsaburo went as far as Oinokawara to try to persuade Kichiji Goto.

“I really want to go but I couldn’t bear to leave such wonderful children behind,” Kichiji answered as he stroked his children’s hair.

Jinsaburo was amazed at how much Kimpei had grown and changed. When he asked the boy how old he was, Kimpei looked back at him with sparkling eyes and answered that he was ten.

“My son is thirteen and he is going with us to go to school there. Kimpei is growing fast; he should go to North America when he’s bigger and learn English. If you can speak freely with the locals, you can get so much out of living in a foreign country,” Jinsaburo said half to Kichiji, half to Kimpei.

As soon as the words left his mouth, Jinsaburo realised they were exactly the words Goro Kaburagi had said to him so long ago. Remembering Goro Kaburagi’s words made him more determined than ever to build a colony for his villagers. He had to find a way.

Without exception, everyone he approached wanted to go but could not unless Jinsaburo lent them the fare; he could not afford that. In addition, there was the problem of the paperwork that had to be done as soon as possible to avoid delaying their departure. Jinsaburo was starting to worry about his business in Canada.

By the end of February, Jinsaburo gave up entreating people to join him and resigned himself to the fact that he would get no more than the nine who were already committed: Jinuemon Sato and his son Soshiro; Yasuemon Iwabuchi; Tatsunosuke Suzuki (the cooper); Juro Saito (the brewer); his own family (Uino, Taijiro, and Michie); and Yaeno Oikawa (daughter of his relative Chusaburo Oikawa).

Seventeen-year-old Yaeno had been helping Uino at the Oikawa house for quite some time and was indispensably to, and well-liked by, Uino. Yaeno had no desire to go with them but Uino worked hard to finally persuade her. Uino herself, however, was at odds because accompanying her husband meant that she had to oppose her father’s wishes. She was melancholy and did not smile once until the day they left although, with Yaeno’s help and encouragement, she did manage to organise everything in time to go.

Jinsaburo went to Yokohama to complete the necessary formalities and they finally left for Canada in the middle of May. In the end, Jinsaburo paid the fares for his own family (including Yaeno), the cooper, and the brewer but had to sell his remaining Masubuchi Silk Reeling Company shares (in Taijiro’s name) to do so.

30 April 1898 – Money is tight so the people are enduring very difficult times. Some are forced to rely on millet and wild grasses for food; there is even a market for these wild plants. Dry, withered leaves are used in place of tobacco.

31 July 1898 – Almost everyone is forced to eat wild plants and grasses, even dandelions. Times are so tough it is almost impossible to find ink or paper. Prices at the markets are unbelievably high so life is difficult. For example, one stone weight of Nanking rice costs an unbelievable 12 yen. Theft and fraud are commonplace. Many people are dying of starvation.
4 September 1898 - Massive flooding on every river. The Hirose River is up 7 shaku\(^37\) (7 feet); the Kitakami R. - 2 joh, 1 shaku (21 feet); the Naruse R. - 1 joh (10 feet); the Arao R. - 2 joh, 6 shaku (26 feet); the Eai R. - 1 joh, 1 shaku (11 feet); the Kitada R. - 6 shaku, 3 sun (6.3 feet). All 7 dikes around Nishigori and Maiya are damaged. (from the Yonekawa Village Records, Tome county)

The bulbs of wild marsh kohone are edible when their yellow flowers bloom. Sensha grass is also edible. (from the Towa Town Education Office)

\section*{VII \ Death}

Uino got seasick. In fact, the whole party of nine (except Jinsaburo) got seasick but Uino was, by far, the most affected; she was confined to her cabin for the whole voyage while the others recovered within 5 or 6 days. As trying as it was, however, she never once showed a tear nor complained that she should not have come. The voyage took a heavy toll on her and it was a long time before her body returned to normal even after reaching land.

As they waited to disembark from the ship, everyone chattered excitedly about the sights and sounds of the foreign country. Everyone, that is, except Uino who could only think about how much she missed sleeping on a tatami mat.

On reaching Sunbury, they found that a separate log house had been built to accommodate Jinsaburo Oikawa and his family. Taijiro and Michie were paralysed when they saw their new house and how different it was. All the colour drained from Yaeno’s face when she saw it. Uino, however, stepped between her immobilised sons and the pale Yaeno and marched into the house where she went about deciding who would sleep where.

Meals were taken in a special building designed so the kitchen and eating area were combined. At meal time, everyone gathered in the meal cabin and ate together. The men appreciated the women’s efforts on their behalf and often thanked them, commenting on how much better the food was compared with before.

Sometimes, in moments of melancholy, Uino thought that the only reason Jinsaburo brought her to Canada was to cook for these thirty men. She was a proud woman, however, and her husband was ‘boss’ and ‘master’ to everyone in the colony so it was her responsibility to uphold his reputation; she silently accepted her fate. Besides, she could not imagine the men cooking for themselves while there were women around.

Uino and Yaeno were responsible for meals from the first day they arrived. Of course, most of the work fell on Yaeno’s shoulders because she was younger and was, after all, Uino’s domestic helper. Still, two people cooking for thirty was a lot of work. The heavy work, combined with the strange environment, was especially hard on Uino’s already frail body. She had a bad heart and even the slightest slope left her short of breath but she refused to admit she was sick. Eventually, the fatigue built up to the point that she could barely get out of bed in the morning.

Taijiro was more aware of his mother’s declining health than Jinsaburo and repeatedly told his father that preparing meals for thirty hungry labourers was too much for her frail body. Jinsaburo realised it too

\(^{37}\) Old Japanese measurement system based on divisions of 10 and roughly equivalent to feet and inches. 1 sun = 3 cm or about 1 inch. 1 shaku = 10 sun or 30 cm or about 1 foot. 1 joh = 10 shaku or 3 metres or about 1 yard.
but there was no one in this foreign land to take her place. Men absolutely refused to work in the kitchen and one could count the number of Japanese women on two hands.

Even if Jinsaburo did notice the state of Uino’s health, he was too bogged down in work to pay it much heed. If he could not accumulate enough money in the busy spring-to-autumn season, he would lose his dream colony that had suddenly grown to 30 people. He worked from early morning until late at night which made for a long day as Canadian summer days are longer than Japanese days (although the winter days are much shorter).

Jinsaburo kept Tatsunosuke Suzuki (the cooper) working full-time making casks out of the cottonwood trees they had cut and dried. These new casks were not for the salted dog salmon but for the miso, soy sauce, and sake that he had Juro Saito (the brewer) busy brewing. Saito’s first task was to bring Jinsaburo’s home-made sake up to a higher quality.

Jinsaburo, who had his fingers in so many other pies, suddenly became known as ‘raw-sake Oijin’. He was not exactly happy with the nickname and would have preferred something like ‘dog-salmon Oijin’ but ‘raw-sake Oijin’ stuck with the Japanese up and down the Fraser.

Jinsaburo asked Goro Kaburagi for his help in enrolling Michie in a Vancouver school because Goro had done so for a number of Japanese children. Goro’s ideal was that all second-generation Japanese would speak English fluently and be Christian. He was very persuasive and Jinsaburo outwardly agreed with this ideal although he harboured the secret fear that Michie would move far away and lose contact with his family roots as a result.

The cold winter came. In actual fact, the temperature was little different than in their home country but living in large log houses made it seem much colder. If the woodstove was allowed to go out, the cold outside air rushed in and attacked them with a vengeance.

Uino’s condition worsened with the cold. She continued to work and sacrifice her health for the success of her husband’s dreams but every breath seemed a painful gasp. She realised also her importance to the men who had become used to Uino and Yaeno’s varied menu; they especially looked forward to the special foods for special occasions (the women even pounded mochi on cottonwood cask lids for New Year’s Day).

Good food helped rejuvenate the men’s sore muscles so they could work long days in good humour. Plus, the combination of delicious food and mealtime camaraderie helped them avoid the pitfalls of gambling, drink, and prostitution that Jinsaburo constantly warned against. As a result, all of the men were able to send money home regularly.

1899 rolled into 1900 and in May, Uino collapsed. It happened just after breakfast when she and Yaeno were deciding on the evening’s menu. Uino pushed back her chair to get up and collapsed on the floor. They rushed her to the Ladner hospital by horse-drawn cart.

She had a serious heart problem. So serious, in fact, that the doctor ordered Uino not to work under any circumstances. After ten days of rest in the hospital, Uino was well enough to return to the colony but she could not resume even the lightest of her duties.

It was an exceptionally fine day when Yaeno came to the hospital to help Uino home. The sunlight shone down and white cotton fluffs blew from the cottonwoods and adorned her hair.

“You know, these flowers have been my only consolation since we came to Canada,” she said to Yaeno, referring to the cottonwood pollen. (Cottonwood trees are a type of willow so the fluffy, white pollen is not strictly a flower. Nevertheless, it made a big impression on her.)

One day a few weeks later, Uino called Yaeno to her,
“Yaeno, I know I don’t have long to live, I have barely enough energy to hold on. I’m having Taijiro take me back to Japan to die in my own village. If, or rather when, I die I would like you to become Jinsaburo’s second wife. Now, I realise he is older than your own father and I don’t want to oblige you to serve him, but you’re the only one here for him.”

Yaeno was both surprised and sad to hear Uino’s talk about dying and her request to become Jinsaburo’s second wife. The move from daughter status to wife was not appealing but she could not say so without insulting Uino. Uino was so strong and not a tear fell from her eyes. The power of Uino’s words lodged in Yaeno’s heart.

“Uino’s going to die,” she thought.

Yaeno reflected on Uino’s bravery. She had cried unabashedly when they left their hometown but that was the last time: not a tear had sullied her cheek since they had boarded ship.

Even the weather co-operated on the day Uino left Sunbury; it was a beautifully clear day and the bright yellow fall leaves of the cottonwood forest glittered in the sunlight. Mt. Baker, with a crown of snow already upon it, rose majestically across the withered marsh to the south-east. It looked so much like Mt. Fuji. Even the mighty, muddy Fraser seemed to slow in its own expression of grief over Uino’s departure. Far across the north bank of the Fraser, the mountains bordering Vancouver stretched on forever. Behind the first row of mountains were even higher mountains that shone dazzling silver.

Uino gazed long on the scenery she had grown to love. She turned to Yaeno, “I know in my heart that I will never see this beauty ever again.”

Something glinted in her eye. It was a tear: the first tear she had shed since crossing the ocean.

Uino left Vancouver at the end of October to die in her ancestral land. She passed away a month-and-a-half later.

Taijiro, who had accompanied his mother back to Japan and nursed her until the very end, blamed his father for her death. It was Jinsaburo’s fault for taking the frail Uino to Canada and making her feed thirty hungry men. It was Jinsaburo’s fault for sacrificing everything for the success of his business. It was Jinsaburo’s fault for working her so hard she could never recover. Worst of all, after driving his wife to a premature ill-health, he left Taijiro to accompany her to the homeland to die. As far as Taijiro was concerned, this was the ultimate betrayal.

To Jinsaburo’s credit, he had offered to send Uino to the finest hospital in Vancouver and it was her own decision to return to Japan. In fact, he had every intention of returning with her except for some serious tensions that arose with the White fishermen in Sunbury at the last minute.

The three White fishing families in Sunbury had become seven but there were still no disputes between them and the Japanese fishermen. In fact, they got on quite well - the river was wide, there were many fishing spots, and there was no trouble selling the fish to the cannery.

The trouble all started when the downstream, White fishermen’s union in Steveston tried pressuring the fish companies to raise the price they paid to the fishermen. The 3000 member Japanese fishermen’s union took a different approach than the White union and decided not to strike and when the White fishermen saw that the Japanese were not supporting their strike, they began to hassle them.

Sunbury was quite far up-river from Steveston and the events did not affect them directly. However, the seven White fishermen in Sunbury belonged to the Steveston union and were told to ask Jinsaburo not to fish until the canneries agreed to pay a higher price. Jinsaburo was troubled by the request. He did not belong to the Japanese fishermen’s union so he was not bound by their refusal to strike but he did not have
the means to wait out a strike should last for any length of time. Jinsaburo explained his situation and his concerns to the White fishermen and, rather daringly, continued to fish.

Of course, the fishing companies were happy with his decision but the White fishermen were not. Even the Sunbury Whites, with whom the Japanese had been on good terms for so long, distanced themselves and relations strained.

One night, a party of unfriendly fishermen came upriver from Steveston and sabotaged boats, cut nets, and set fire to one of the log houses. Fortunately, the fire was discovered and extinguished quickly or there would surely have been serious injuries and, perhaps, deaths. It got so bad that the Japanese fishermen had to be on guard for their lives. There were stand-offs and scuffles between the two fishermen’s unions in Steveston and numerous reports and rumours circulated about the resulting injuries and deaths. The tension mounted and continued well into the fishing season.

In the end, justice was served when several of the violent offenders were arrested. During the trial, several thugs hired by the White fishermen’s union showed up in court waving pistols at the judge. This act served to turn the jury against the Whites and the court found in favour of the Japanese. Legally, the Japanese union won the battle against the White union. However, the loss fired the anti-Japanese feeling within the White fishermen’s union who began thinking of revenge.

Eventually, the tensions in Steveston subsided and peace returned to Sunbury. Happily, the hard feelings did not crystallise into an eternal grudge and things returned to normal.

Jinsaburo sent Taijiro a detailed letter explaining the situation. Taijiro could understand his father’s position to some extent but, having watched his mother die before his eyes, he continued to hold Jinsaburo responsible for her death.

Taijiro sent a telegram informing them of Uino’s death. He was depressed and explained that he planned to stay in Yonekawa a while longer to be near his mother’s grave.

Uino died at the end of 1900 only a few days before the New Year. It was a cold day.

VIII  Passing

Uino had worried about Yaeno from their first step on the island; one single, attractive, young woman living amidst thirty labourers in the prime of their lives is not an enviable position. Having seen more than a few frightening leers from some of the men, Uino begged Jinsaburo to put a western-style door on Yaeno’s room (that is to say, a door with a lock that could be turned from the inside). Sensing the deadly seriousness of Uino’s request, Jinsaburo had one of the carpenters make the necessary alteration. When Jinsaburo informed everyone of the alteration, there were a few complaints that he was locking the only woman away in a cage.

Uino’s return to Japan left Jinsaburo and Yaeno alone in the big log house and on the very night of Uino’s departure, someone tried to break into Yaeno’s room. Getting into the log cabin itself was no problem but there was a strong lock on Yaeno’s door. The amorous visitor used a pair of pliers to twist off the lock but the noise of the pliers woke Jinsaburo and he bellowed out a warning. The man fled. It was too dark for Jinsaburo to identify the intruder but he thought he recognised the outline of a man Uino had pointed out as a potential danger.

All the men, without exception, were lonely and starved for female companionship. Many were fortified by thoughts of returning home with all the money they had saved, others remained true to their purpose of sending money home to their families. Inevitably, however, some lost the dream and succumbed to desires which they satisfied with visits to the prostitutes of Steveston and Vancouver.
One effect of the scarcity of females was that the men were coarser mannered and quarrelsome - fights broke out over the most trivial incidents. It was interesting to note how their manners softened when Uino and Yaeno arrived which, in itself, made their presence worthwhile. However, a man trying to slink into Yaeno’s room on the very night of Uino’s departure was a severe shock to Jinsaburo. He conferred with Jinuemon as soon as possible.

“Well, we’ll just have to be more vigilant until the situation is resolved. Whenever you have to be away, my boys and I will stay in the house with Yaeno,” Jinuemon suggested although he did not elaborate on what he meant by “until the situation is resolved.”

Two months later, Taijiro’s telegram informing them of Uino’s death arrived. After dinner that evening, Jinuemon stood up in front of everyone and said he required everyone’s strict attention. After offering his sincere condolences to Jinsaburo, he made an unexpected announcement,

“We are all sad to hear of Uino’s death and there will be an emptiness in our hearts for her. She came to me the day before she left Sunbury to ask a favour. She asked me to make sure that Yaeno became Jinsaburo’s second wife on the event of her own death. She knew that if they didn’t marry there would never be peace in the colony. Do you understand me? She knew that the stability of our colony depended on it.”

Silence.

There had been no hints or rumours about relations between Yaeno and any of the men since it would cause an uncomfortable situation should one of the thirty men marry the only woman. At the least, there would be fierce competition over who that one man would be. There was only one way to maintain the peace in the Japanese colony and that was for the ‘boss’ to marry Yaeno.

Yaeno listened intently with her head tilted to one side. She wondered exactly when Uino had asked for this favour. It crossed her mind that she possibly never had and that Jinuemon was making this all up.

“They never asked me,” she thought angrily to herself. “I won’t let them run my whole life including whom I marry. Just who does Jinsaburo think he is, anyway?”

Jinsaburo listened quietly. He recalled Uino telling him that she had asked Yaeno to become his second wife should she die. As he glanced over at Uino and noticed her look of sad resignation, he reflected that there was twenty-eight years difference between them. Why had Jinuemon chosen that day to make the announcement? Why the very day the telegram came? Perhaps this is what he had meant by “until circumstances are resolved” that night the man tried to break into Yaeno’s room.

“Does everyone understand?” Jinuemon asked. “The boss and Yaeno will get married in 49 days. I expect we’ll have a big celebration, right?”

Jinuemon finished. Several men clapped and the others joined in although it was obvious that the younger men were not pleased. They tried to look happy but could not hide their resentment. They had worked too hard and given up too much to have this beautiful flower plucked from beneath their noses by the ‘boss’. It was quite a struggle to keep their feelings from showing.

“Did Uino really say all that?” Jinsaburo asked Jinuemon later when they were alone in the log cabin.

“I just put her wishes into words. I know Yaeno will be a little disappointed but I’ll talk to her. Come on, Oijin, we both know this is a critical time. If we don’t bring everyone together now, things will fall apart. You know how fickle the young ones are.”

Jinuemon’s reference to fickle youth was specifically directed at Yasuemon Iwabuchi who, wanting to learn English, left the colony and became a houseboy for a White family in Vancouver. The catalyst for Yasuemon’s desertion was Jinsaburo’s second son, Michie, who said he picked up English merely by visiting White people’s houses.
Michie, still in Goro Kaburagi’s care, came back to Sunbury every Sunday. He could not only speak English fluently but could read and write as well. Everyone was so impressed that he could go back and forth to school without any translation assistance whatsoever.

The rapid turnover of colony members ceased and settled into a slow but steady increase.

At the beginning of 1901, Mr. Clark contacted Jinsaburo to set up a meeting. Mr. Clark was pleased with the conscientious and inexpensive way the Japanese had worked at clearing his land and would have been more than happy to have them continue. His friend the cannery manager, however had asked him to approach Jinsaburo about moving from Sunbury to Don Island.

The number of fishermen, White and Japanese, working out of Sunbury was increasing every year. There had been no incidents between the respective fishermen’s unions but the cannery manager thought that separate fishing and living areas was the best way to avoid future problems.

The company was unconcerned about the race of their fishermen, as long as they worked hard and brought in the fish everyone was happy. It was in the company’s best interests therefore to prevent friction between the groups and this could be best attained by separating them.

Mr. Clark eventually got to the point,

“There is an island called Don Island right in front of Sunbury in the middle of the Fraser. What would you think about moving out there?”

Mr. Clark watched Jinsaburo’s expression closely as he continued,

“It’s uninhabited and covered with thick forest. Of course, we realise that moving would involve some expense on your part. What are your thoughts on that?”

Jinsaburo knew that they would be more isolated on the island than they already were and it would be inconvenient. On the other hand, it was a chance to have an island all to themselves: for Japanese only. The idea was very attractive but he tried not to let on. He asked Mr. Clark what provisions they were willing to give.

“The continuation of our Sunbury deal plus ten years. You can have the land rent-free for the duration of the contract. Of course, you are free to use the cleared land for crops and gardens,” Mr. Clark said.

It sounded good.

“How about including Lion Island next to Don Island and giving us twenty years rent-free?” Jinsaburo ventured.

“Done. Lion Island included,” Mr. Clark answered.

Jinsaburo and Mr. Clark went over the details once more and they had Masutaro Miyakawa draw up a formal agreement which they signed a few days later.

Don Island and Lion Island are on the north side of the Fraser River at a point where the river is almost 1200 metres across. The two islands together cover about 20 acres although Don Island is twice as big as Lion Island. Both islands were heavily forested with cottonwoods and huge firs.

The move began in May of 1901. First, they cleared and levelled enough ground on Don Island to move and re-erect the houses. Then they built a brew-house and a big store-house, as well. The salt-salmon business continued to expand at a remarkable rate even during the move.

The fishing companies actually preferred Japanese fishermen over White fishermen and contracted as many as they could. The Japanese were diligent, took their promises seriously, strove to fulfil their agreements, and never complained. In short, they were good for the company’s all-important profits. The Japanese were in high demand for other low paying jobs such as road building, railroad construction, and lumbering, so fishing companies took care of their Japanese fishermen. Once the move to the island was
complete, the fishing company agreed to lend Jinsaburo’s fishermen more boats and countersign his personal loans to purchase more boats himself.

“I think you and Yaeno should get married before we move over to the island. Then the old things will be settled and we can start anew,” Jinuemon suggested.

“Yeah, whatever,” Jinsaburo grunted.

Jinuemon knew that the young men exchanged explicit and obscene stories about Jinsaburo and Yaeno from bits of conversations he had overheard. Some of the bolder men engaged in ribaldry when they knew Yaeno was within earshot and occasionally teased her outright. Jinuemon was convinced that they should hold the wedding as soon as possible if only to spare Yaeno the embarrassment. Yaeno was discomfited by the situation. There was nothing between her and Jinsaburo; she wondered where all the rumours were coming from and why.

Jinsaburo saw Uino in Yaeno’s eyes, especially in her noncommittal look that was neither approval nor reproach. He tried to show his affection for Yaeno by bringing her the occasional outfit from Vancouver or by busying himself outside the bath house while she bathed as he had done with Uino. He was very discreet around the other men, however.

During the chaos of the move to Don Island, a stranger came to stay. This was not unusual as it was a custom in this new land to take in any Japanese without checking their credentials or character: their nationality was enough. In those days of easy travel, the paperwork was simple and perfunctory so even those unable to travel legally could find passage as stowaways. Not unexpectedly, such travellers were often criminals escaping prosecution at home. The number of such travellers was increasing all the time.

The stranger had an unsettling look about him and he glared at everybody. More than one of the men commented on the stranger,

“That guy’s not normal.”

As per custom with such overnighters, they put him to work chopping firewood. Everyone was busy moving things over to the island so only Jinsaburo, Yaeno, a few of the men, and the stranger remained behind. Confident that the men were busy elsewhere, the stranger saw his chance and attacked Yaeno. Yaeno let out one short, terrified scream before he grabbed her throat and squeezed hard to keep her quiet. Jinsaburo heard that terrified scream and came running. Seeing the stranger strangling Yaeno, he grabbed a piece of firewood and brought it down hard on his head. Needless to say, the stranger left Sunbury that day.

That evening, Yaeno came to thank Jinsaburo for coming to her rescue.

“I was worried about him from the moment I saw him…” Jinsaburo’s voice trailed off.

In fact, he had stayed behind and always within earshot of Yaeno for that very reason. He had sensed the danger in the stranger’s eyes.

Realising Jinsaburo’s kindness and protective nature, Yaeno felt unexpectedly happy, happier than she had been for so long. Suddenly, something snapped,

“This place is too frightening. I want to go home. I want to be near Uino’s grave in Masubuchi.”

She could not endure the threatening looks any longer and the thought of another incident terrified her. Through her tears, she realised that there was only one man who could take care of her and make her happy.

“I know that you will never forget what happened today but, if you stay and marry me, I will do everything to fix it,” Jinsaburo said. “If you really can’t bear the thought of marrying me and still want to return to Japan, we will arrange that as soon as the moving is finished.”
This was the first time Yaeno had heard anything like a proposal from Jinsaburo’s own lips and it shocked her like a bucket of cold water. All she had ever wanted was one word to suggest that he actually cared for her: here it was, and more.

“Do you still want to go back,” he asked.

Yaeno slowly shook her head and worried that her abrupt reversal might make her appear fickle. He told her he loved her and waited for her to say she would marry him.

“Will you stay?” he asked.

“Well, Uino did ask me to …” she left the rest unsaid.

“Then you’ll marry me despite the great difference in our ages?” Jinsaburo stared at her feet. He reached out and pulled her close.

The wedding took place as soon as the move to Don Island was complete. Jinsaburo was forty-seven, Yaeno nineteen.

We moved over to Oikawa-jima Island after our fourth year (1901). The number of people and houses in Sunbury was increasing every year and we wanted a place of our own, a place for Japanese only. That was Oikawa-jima until the War. We even established a Japanese school there. (from the chapter “Jinsaburo Oikawa” in The Recollections of Souemon Sato)
Chapter 3

Phantom Immigrants

(A floating house on Lion Island)
Among the Japanese living there, the bigger island became Oikawa-jima\textsuperscript{38} and the old name, Don Island, was soon forgotten. However, the smaller neighbouring island continued to be known as ‘Lion Island’ and the two islands were referred to together as ‘Lion Island’.

Jinsaburo’s marriage to Yaeno and the move to Oikawa-jima marked the beginning of his second life and still more remarkable endeavours. The first task undertaken on the new island was clearing enough of the luxuriant forest to build houses. That finished, they kept clearing until there were fields for crops. Finally, they turned their attention back to the fishing.

In many ways, life on Oikawa-jima was more inconvenient than Sunbury but the isolation made it easier to keep sight of their goals, maintain their independence, and concentrate on their work. More than anything, it brought them closer together.

Much to Jinsaburo’s delight, Masutaro Miyakawa introduced a young couple into the island group. Miyakawa’s motivation for bringing the Nishiyama’s was not to become more intimately involved with the colony, nor was it admiration for Jinsaburo’s goals, nor even a spirit of humanity. Rather, Masutaro was simply responding to Jinsaburo’s oft-stated concern over having only one woman living amongst thirty men.

Jinsaburo was all too aware that the main cause of Uino’s premature death was the overexertion of preparing meals for thirty labourers and this knowledge weighed heavily on his conscience. He had no intention of pushing Yaeno and Mitsuko Nishiyama to the same end so he changed the system. The men took turns preparing meals during the week and the two women prepared a special meal every Saturday night to relieve the monotony of the men’s simple cooking.

The women’s mushroom pilaff became so popular that there was never enough to satisfy the men. Salt-salmon was traded for mushrooms which were minced and added to the cooking rice. These local mushrooms were not as strong tasting as Japanese matsutake mushrooms but were, without a doubt, very similar. The mushroom pilaff transported them all, at least temporarily, back to their homeland.

The Nishiyama’s had no children and although Mitsuko Nishiyama was little help with the hard labour of preparing meals, she was a nurse and knew much about maintaining health and improving sanitation. Her first change was a water filtration system made by layering charcoal, pebbles, and sand so they could drink water straight from the river without boiling it first. To the hard-labouring men, a source of unlimited water was a godsend. Next, she stocked all the appropriate medicines and medical supplies to treat simple injuries and sicknesses on the island.

It had never been Jinsaburo’s goal to build a Japanese Utopia in Canada but, given their total freedom with the island, it was not surprising that he began toying with the idea. With everyone’s hard work, the island’s appearance changed dramatically and did resemble a Utopia of sorts. The population hovered around thirty, neither increasing nor decreasing much, but their accomplishments were remarkable. The number of buildings increased rapidly, the clearing continued, and they built more docks to moor the ever-increasing number of boats. Despite all this other activity, fishing was still the main activity (day and night during the season).

The closest town to Sunbury had been Ladner so that was where they had done business when they lived on shore. However, Oikawa-jima was nearer the north shore and New Westminster so they made that crossing in their small boats instead. By coincidence, Miyakawa went to church in New Westminster on Sundays so he and Jinsaburo met more often.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{jima} = island
The first item on Jinsaburo’s business agenda was to expand the salt-salmon operation. Pilings were driven into the river bed on the west side of the island with planking laid across the top in the manner of all canneries up and down the river. On this platform, the dog salmon were gutted, the guts tossed back into the river, and the meat salt-packed in large casks.

Preparing the fish for export required care and required various experiments; for example, the salted fish were packed in wooden casks and stored at various temperatures for between twenty days and a month. It was discovered that the salmon went bad more quickly at higher temperatures because the salt dissolved too quickly and was not absorbed into the meat. To find the best way to send the salmon to Japan without spoiling, they sent small samples to their Yokohama contact via different companies and routes. Fish sent via Hawai’i spoiled on the way but there were no problems with fish sent directly from Vancouver to Yokohama.

Salmon roe, however, was much more difficult to ship with the major challenge being to preserve it without losing any of the red colour. This was Uino’s project while she lived on the island although she never quite mastered the process before her departure. The finicky task was passed on to Yaeno who eventually discovered the proper ratio of salt and they were able to send sample casks of salmon roe to Yokohama.

Between fishing, selling salt-salmon to Japanese labourers, and producing soy sauce and miso, Jinsaburo was making a good profit which he immediately put into the construction of new buildings, particularly larger quarters for the soy sauce and miso operations. Sake production was cut back to their own use and they began paying cash for dog salmon instead of trading sake.

When a fishing company representative came to see the island, he was so impressed that he gave Jinsaburo the rights to run two collector boats much larger than their previous two-man boats. Jinsaburo assigned these boats to his English speakers, Souemon Sato and Masutaro Miyakawa, because they collected not only from Japanese but also from Whites and Indians. The collector boats plied the mid- to upper-reaches of the Fraser River delta and delivered their loads to the canneries. As they collected from each boat, they offered a penny for each dog salmon that would have been thrown back.

Jinsaburo’s position as leader of the Japanese fishermen on the upper delta was uncontested.

From spring until fall, they fished. In the off-season, they logged Mr. Clark’s land in Sunbury and cleared their own two islands: Oikawa-jima and Lion Island. In this way they had year-round work.

Peer pressure and competition to send money home was strong since most of the men came from the same prefecture (if not the same town); each man worked hard to send home as much (or more) than the next man. Crops at home were continually failing due to cold weather and flooding so their relatives relied on their remittances just to survive. Jinsaburo became famous not only along the Fraser River but also in his home town where he was worshipped for going overseas and becoming successful.

In 1902, Jinsaburo and Souemon began targeting outstanding people in their home town who could make positive contributions to the colony and sent them money for the fare. Taijiro Oikawa, still in Yonekawa, handled all the necessary formalities and paperwork. In all, they sponsored more than ten people from Yonekawa and Nishikiori villages, including three couples, on the understanding that they would work for Jinsaburo to repay the fare. Yaeno was extremely happy to have three wives to help her.

Jinsaburo came to admire Goro Kaburagi more and more as time went on and found himself preaching many of Goro’s gems of advice. In particular, he often repeated Goro’s belief that becoming one with the land (in life and in death) was essential to success in Canada. All successful Japanese in Canada believed
likewise but the majority of immigrants only worked to send money home to their families and have a ‘Gorgeous Silk Homecoming’.

Not unexpectedly, the single men that Jinsaburo and Souemon sponsored fit into the second category, planning to work hard and return home as quickly as possible. Disappointingly, the three couples announced their intentions to do the same right from the outset. Jinsaburo had hoped that they might raise families on the island, but all the couples worked as hard and saved as much as they could with no thoughts of staying.

The soy sauce and *miso* paste operations were going well but still could not keep up with the demand generated by the increasing numbers of Japanese immigrants to Canada. In early July of 1902, the spring salmon run arrived and life became more hectic than ever. In addition to the regular fishing, all their preparations and experiments with the salt-preserved salmon and roe were about to be tested. Exports to Japan commenced.

The salt-salmon exports required little adaptation as they merely redirected all the salmon they had been selling to the Japanese labourers in Canada. Similarly, collecting the salmon roe in large quantities was remarkably easy. They positioned empty boats under the holes in the cannery wharves to be filled with the guts and valuable roe falling from above. At the end of the day, they collected the boats. Of course, the cannery owners had no complaints as it was all waste to them.

Preparing the salmon roe for shipment, on the other hand, was a delicate operation. First it was laid out on a drain board and washed thoroughly with water. Then it was sprinkled well with salt and left to stand for a day and a night. The next day, the salted eggs were laid in box and salted again, one strip at a time. The box was covered and left until the red eggs hardened, darkened, and increased in lustre.

The appearance of the final product depended critically on all three steps: preparation on the drain board, salting, and the length of time left to sit. Simply put, if the salt was too thin, the roe spoiled before reaching Japan; if too thick, the roe turned almost black. The ideal was a deep ruby colour. Experiments on the island notwithstanding, the transportation factor (length of journey and ship’s temperature) was completely out of their control. Further experiments and adjustments were made based on the condition of their trial shipments on arrival in Yokohama. By the time the season started, they had perfected the procedure.

This tricky salting operation was first done by Uino and then by Yaeno; neither Jinsaburo nor anyone else ever interfered nor was allowed to help. Yaeno had a touch for the operation and succeeded Uino capably. In fact, she devised a method for turning the orange roe into a ruby red; she was sure that Uino would have been proud.

At first, they used simple little casks to ship the roe, but they were soon shipping such large amounts that they needed the same large wooden boxes as were used for the salt-packed salmon. There were a few mishaps, such as one shipment going via Hawai‘i due to a communication mix-up and spoiling, but the operation was extremely successful overall.

Exporting salmon roe to Japan had been Jinsaburo’s dream and he had achieved it. However, to expand to greater quantities, he needed more equipment and many more workers. Sending money to Japan to sponsor fares was not enough.

A year and a half after their wedding, Yaeno gave birth to a baby boy whom they named Eiji. It had been an extremely good year for Jinsaburo Oikawa.
They call it dog salmon because it’s only fit for dogs to eat but it is, in fact, very similar to Hokkaido salmon. The Fraser River fishermen threw them right back into the river from their nets so we bought them right on the fishing grounds for a penny-a-piece (two sen) from Japanese, French, English, German, and American fishermen. Rock salt from Liverpool, England sold for eight to ten dollars a ton so our material costs were low.

We bought, salted, and shipped about two tons of the one-penny salmon to Japan that year (1902).

Westerners do not eat salmon roe; they throw it all away. We collected that, salted it, and shipped it to Japan, too. Shipping to Japan is very expensive and the duty on salted salmon roe at Yokohama was 24 yen per 100. It was painstaking and expensive work (four years and 7000 yen worth of experiments and failures) but we finally mastered the processing and shipping. We made over 10,000 yen profit in 1902. I decided to put that money into building up our colony and projects in Canada further. (from Chapter 9 of Jinsaburo Oikawa’s Diary, “Dog Salmon and Salmon Roe Exports”)

II Split

At the beginning of 1903, Jinsaburo went back to Japan alone with two goals: 1) to find more people to travel to Canada and 2) to establish his own trading company in Yokohama that could import and sell his shipments of salt-salmon and salmon roe. The trading company he had been dealing with liked his enterprise on a part-time basis but was not interested in expanding.

With the help of an old acquaintance in the trading business, Jinsaburo set up the ‘Eibei Shokai Company’39 to handle their import/export transactions (receipt and sales). Cutting all ties with the other company and striking out completely on his own was risky but he considered it an adventure. For the time being, he left the company in the care of his old acquaintance with the understanding that Taijiro would eventually take over. Eibei Shokai opened for business with many unresolved questions.

Jinsaburo returned to his hometown.

Six years previously he had returned as a successful emigrant; this time he returned a successful businessman. The town, however, had not been so successful. The famine had finally ended and the townspeople had survived but no sooner had the famine ended than a deep recession settled in. The towns and villages overflowed with the unemployed who had no jobs and nowhere to go.

Jinsaburo had sent Taijiro a letter from Canada informing him of his planned return so Taijiro had been busy scouting suitable people to go to Canada.

39 British-America Trading Company
“All the young men want to go but have no money unless you lend it to them. As for married couples, it doesn’t look good. The men are interested but none of the women are willing to go…for various reasons,” Taijiro was deliberately vague about the women’s reluctance.

He discovered the reason the next day when he went to the Bodai40 Raikoji Temple to plant a new memorial stake beside Uino’s grave. He knelt and joined his hands in prayer for a long time.

“Uino, thanks to your efforts and sacrifices, we’ve finally started exporting salmon and roe to Japan. I hope it makes you happy. We couldn’t have done it without you,” he communicated silently to Uino.

Suddenly, a woman’s voice from behind broke into his thoughts.

“Poor Uino, poor, piteous Uino,” it said. “Imagine, going all the way to America only to be murdered.”

Jinsaburo did not look around to identify the voice that lashed him like a whip. He sat still and silently.

“No doubt Yaeno will be back, too,” the voice continued. “She’ll come back sick and she’ll die, too. Just like Uino.”

Jinsaburo could bear it no longer. He stood up and left.

It was clear that no village women would go to Canada because they believed that Uino had been forced to labour until she fell exhausted into her grave. They all believed that the same fate awaited any woman who went to Canada: hard labour leading to an early grave. Uino’s death was a barrier between Jinsaburo and his hometown; it explained the coolness and distance he felt from his own people.

Ironically, Taijiro, who had initially accused his father of killing his mother, had come to terms with her death. He came to understand Jinsaburo’s standpoint and realised that Jinsaburo grieved, as well. He had finished dwelling on his mother’s death and was willing to help his father.

“How are they making out, the ones you sent the fare for? Are they working hard?” he asked.

“Yes, they are,” his father answered. “Very hard actually.”

“Have they paid back the fare,” Taijiro continued.

“No yet.”

Since he had worked so hard to persuade them, Jinsaburo had decided not to deduct the fare from their earnings until they were established.

“Aren’t you worried that they won’t pay you back if they haven’t already?” Taijiro asked.

Without waiting for a response, Taijiro told Jinsaburo what he had heard whispered around town. Rumour had it that Jinsaburo was so rich and so desperate for fellow villagers that it was unnecessary to repay the fare.

“Wait him out,” was the advice. “There’s no need to sell your land or house or forest plots because he’ll eventually offer to pay your fare.”

Jinsaburo sat with folded arms and listened intently. Apparently his strategy to loan money for fares was not so successful after all. There was no incentive to work hard if one did not have to pay (or repay) the fare. Jinsaburo decided to limit the number he would sponsor to three: a carpenter, a blacksmith, and a man familiar with machines.

He took the mechanic to Tokyo to find some machinery where they decided on a rice polishing machine and other, miscellaneous machines. Even with the transportation costs, it was cheaper for them to buy in Japan because mechanisation and machinery production had developed rapidly in the past few years. Steam powered boats had even replaced the older boats on the Kitakami River.

Jinsaburo leaked rumours that he was weary of trying to entice people to accompany him and was returning to Canada forthwith. Immediately, three young men willing to pay their own way came forward.

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40 Bodai is a type of Buddhism.
Shortly thereafter, however, they reneged. Jinsaburo suspected something was behind this sudden about-face so he sent Taijiro to find out what.

“Some time ago there was a conscription survey and it seems the government has a policy against conscription-aged men leaving the country, especially those who were interviewed in the survey. In short, our three men couldn’t get papers to leave the country,” Taijiro reported after talking to an official at the town hall. Apparently, the order had come down from the Prefectural Conscription Office.

Further research showed that this policy, or edict, or law, or whatever it was had not been announced publicly in the official gazette. One plausible explanation for this was that Japan was secretly preparing for war with Russia.

“I’ll bet they really cancelled because people are saying that anyone who deserts Japan when we’re on the verge of war with Russia is a traitor. Maybe it’s better if they don’t go, after all,” Taijiro said.

In the midst of all this, a telegram came from Canada. There had been a fire on Oikawa-jima and one person had died in the blaze. Jinsaburo had to return immediately. He was disappointed to leave without accomplishing his goal but could stay no longer. He had done all he could to no avail.

After only two months in Japan, he prepared to leave again. All the details relating to the new recruits’ paperwork and transportation of the machinery was left to Eibei Shokai and Taijiro, who went to Yokohama to assume his new post in that company.

Before leaving Yonekawa, Jinsaburo took leave of all his Onodera and Oikawa relatives. Eiji Oikawa, his father-in-law, had aged so quickly since the deaths of his wife and daughter.

“This will probably be the last time we meet, I don’t think I can hold out until your next visit,” he said in farewell.

Jinsaburo decided to go to Yokohama by ship from Ishinomaki so he could take the new steamer down the Kitakami from Maiya. As he stood waiting at the Maiya pier a child’s voice addressed him from behind,

“Mr. Oikawa, do you remember me? I’m Kimpei Goto from Oinokawara.”

Jinsaburo turned to find not a child, but a strapping youth of fourteen.

“Are you going back so soon?” Kimpei asked. “When will you come back again?”

“In two or three years,” Jinsaburo answered.

“Promise me that you’ll take me with you the next time?”

Jinsaburo nodded. If only he had fifty or a hundred men like Kimpei. He let out a deep sigh.

At the end of April, Jinsaburo arrived back at Oikawa-jima to find the joint dining room/meeting hall/leisure area building completely destroyed by the fire. Fortunately, there had been no wind that night and the men had responded quickly in controlling the blaze so the fire only one building burned and casualties were limited to one.

The fire was caused by carelessness with a cigarette. A group of men had stayed up drinking and partying one night; someone had passed out with a burning cigarette in his hand. The only casualty was the man who had passed out and caused the fire in the first place.

“Why is it that everyone breaks all the rules as soon as I’m gone?” Jinsaburo later asked Jinuemon Sato more out of frustration than as a rebuke.

The rule was that drinking was allowed until 9 p.m. except on special occasions. On the night in question, the drinking had continued past midnight.

“Sake is special,” Jinuemon argued. “If you prevent the men from drinking, they will lose their desire and incentive to work hard the next day. Everyone thinks you’re being unreasonable about this.”
Jinsaburo immediately grasped the deeper meaning behind the “everyone thinks you’re being unreasonable.”

“There’s something you want to say, isn’t there?” Jinsaburo stated.

On reflection, he had noticed a change in Jinuemon since moving over to Oikawa-jima. For example, he seldom supported Jinsaburo enthusiastically anymore at meetings and often avoided making eye contact.

“I probably should have said something sooner but you’ve been so preoccupied with working and building that I’ve put it off until now,” Jinuemon said. “Now that everything has stabilised, we’d like to take over Souemon’s share ourselves.”

“Souemon’s share?” Jinsaburo asked, a little bewildered.

“That’s just what I thought you’d say and it punctuates my point perfectly,” Jinuemon said. “Have you already forgotten that this whole project started out as a partnership between you and Souemon? I’m 52 years old, Jinsaburo, that’s three years older than you. I don’t want to work beneath someone else for my whole life. I want to be my own boss.”

“So that’s what this is all about?” Jinsaburo thought to himself.

Of course, Jinuemon was right; it had started as a partnership. As much as he wanted to believe the success of the salt-salmon and salmon roe business was completely his own doing, Jinsaburo had to admit that he would never have got so far without Souemon’s help. This was especially true when they first started out and built the log houses in Sunbury.

“Here’s what we want,” Jinuemon said. “Half the boats is too much, a third is plenty. Also, we’d like to use Lion Island next door and call it Sato-jima. Finally, we’d like everyone’s help to build three log houses over there. As for people, we’ll take our family, people from Nishikiori, and anyone else who wants to move.”

Jinsaburo had only one question, “Did Souemon consent to this?”

He suspected that this was all Jinuemon’s idea and Souemon was a reluctant participant.

“He was against it at first but he finally consented,” Jinuemon said.

The Sato family (father and two sons) were close and Jinsaburo knew that Souemon would be unable to resist his persistent father and older brothers.

“I want to talk to Souemon alone,” Jinsaburo said, “but I think I can accept your terms in principal.”

Jinsaburo knew it was too late to stop the split but he also knew that both sides would fail if care was not taken. He was sure he could make Souemon understand this.

Jinsaburo and Souemon talked as they walked eastward along the road they had built during clearing.

“I told him over and over that our relationship was a master and apprentice partnership, not a partnership of equals. He just wouldn’t listen. And now this…,” Souemon stopped, tears welling up in his eyes.

“If this is what you really want, I have no choice but to go along. We’ll split it up just like you wanted: a third of the boats, the other island, and help building three houses. Don’t worry about people, there will be more than enough of our villagers for both islands. How about a little contest to see who can build Utopia first?” Jinsaburo challenged in an attempt to lighten the conversation and cheer Souemon.

Souemon buried his face in his hands and did not look up for some time.

They stopped beside a huge stump: as high as a man is tall with roots spreading three times wider than where the tree was cut.
“When this stump stands alone in the middle of an empty island, our future will be clear. Until then, we work to the best of our ability,” Jinsaburo said and leaned against the stump, trying to push it over. The stump did not move even slightly. A dandelion bloomed amongst the roots.

Jinsaburo continued, “I have one favour to add to the agreement. From time to time, I will have to go back to Japan and I want you to keep an eye on Oikawa-jima when I’m gone. We may be splitting Lion Island into Oikawa-jima and Sato-jima but there will be no animosity or quarrelling. Agreed?

“Sato Island is the child who grew up and became independent but, when the parents are away, the child comes back to care for the house. You’re the only one I trust. Other things may change as time goes on but that one is unalterable.”

Jinsaburo put his hands on Souemon’s shoulders and squeezed firmly but gently in the way he had learned from the White men since coming to Canada. Souemon gave a single, vigorous nod.

### Michie

The move to Sato Island was done quickly because the fishing season was upon them again. In all, five boats and fifteen people moved.

The carpenter, the blacksmith, and the mechanic from Yonekawa arrived in the middle of the busy summer accompanied by five other men from the same village. These other five, completely unexpected, were all in their thirties and had scraped together the money for the passage themselves. They were allowed to leave Japan because they were too old to be conscripted. There were now close to forty people on Oikawa-jima.

Everything came together in 1903 and the businesses took off, especially the salt-salmon and salmon roe. Shipments multiplied over the previous year. Demand was extreme from October to December but dropped off completely after New Year’s which was a given because salmon roe is mostly eaten on New Year’s Day. Taijiro sent them weekly updates from the Yokohama office of Eibei Shokai outlining everything from the condition of goods on arrival, to the quality of the fish, to the sales figures.

When the machinery arrived, they set up the steam engine and connected the rice polisher to polish the brown rice they had shipped from Japan. The result was delicious and they were able to sell large quantities of rice and the bran by-product, as well.

Miso and soy sauce production went into high gear and the sake improved considerably. Despite this success, Jinsaburo had no plans to establish a large-scale brewery as he only wanted enough miso, soy sauce, and sake to satisfy the demands of the islanders and nearby Japanese along the river. Salt-salmon and roe were the focus of business.

Jinsaburo could not let money sit idle and was always looking for ways to put his increasing profits to work. At the end of 1903, he bought a small steam powered boat to transport goods along the river.

In 1904, the year Jinsaburo turned fifty, Yaeno had a baby whom they named Shima (meaning island). She was Jinsaburo’s first daughter and he thought her the loveliest baby ever.

In the spring of 1905, the first camellias on Oikawa-jima bloomed in Yaeno’s little flower bed in front of the house. Most of the garden plants on the island were grown from seeds that had either been sent from Japan or brought by people coming to the islands; it was illegal to bring roots with dirt on them. Of course, the climate was different so some plants grew and flowered, some sprouted but did not grow, and some did not sprout at all.

In Yonekawa, camellias grew in the sunny gardens of Kessokuji Temple, Raikoji temple, and in the gardens of the old family houses. Yonekawa was near the northern limit of the camellia’s range so they were very precious to the people there.
“The camellias are beautiful,” Jinsaburo said in roundabout praise of Yaeno’s gardening. “It’s like the birth of our third child.”

Apart from camellias, violets brought from Japan bloomed alongside narcissus and Japanese quince bought in a nursery in Vancouver.

One Sunday evening, Jinsaburo sat with Shima on his knee and Eiji beside him. Jinsaburo stroked Eiji’s head and Eiji, only three years old and a fluent talker, talked with Michie who was home from school for a visit.

“How is school going?” Jinsaburo interrupted. “Is it interesting?”

Nineteen-year-old Michie answered, “It’s really interesting. I’ve made lots of friends and I can speak English without even thinking about it. When I finish high-school, I’m going to University.”

That Michie told his father he was going to University, rather than asking for his help or permission, underscored the distance that had grown up between them in this foreign land. Eiji idolised his older brother and followed him everywhere on Sunday’s when Michie returned to the island. Jinsaburo realised that Eiji would be saying the same thing before too long.

“You will come back to the island to help me when you finish University, won’t you?” Jinsaburo half asked, half stated.

Michie laughed.

“We’ll see, Dad. That’s a long way off and who knows what will happen in the meantime. I’ll think about it, though. I promise.”

It was not the answer Jinsaburo wanted to hear. Ironically, he failed to recognise that his own son embodied the very words of Goro Kaburagi that he, himself, admired most: “living peacefully with the White men will never be possible unless many Japanese learn to speak English, eat bread, and go to church.”

His thoughts turned to Yasuemon Iwabuchi and he wondered how Yasuemon was making out after leaving the colony to become a house-boy in a White household. Yasuemon was one of the few Japanese creating a new life for himself through his own efforts.

“I’m going to Japan this year to bring back many people for our colony,” he said out loud but as much to himself as to anybody. As hard as it was, he could accept that some of those closest to him would choose another path, but he still dreamed of creating a Utopia for his fellow villagers on Oikawa-jima.

“It can’t be done, father,” Michie broke into his thoughts, “Japan is at war with Russia and needs every young man to fight. There’s no way anyone could get permission to leave the country.”

“The war won’t go on forever,” Jinsaburo responded.

“You’re right,” Michie agreed. “Russia is in no condition to fight a war with Japan.”

He had learned this at school.

The Russo-Japanese war broke out in February 1904 and was a big concern with the Japanese in Canada. There were no Japanese language newspapers published in Canada at the time but articles from the English newspapers were translated, mimeographed, and distributed. These news-sheets were devoured by the Japanese who were eager to read about how the Japanese armies were routing the Russians in victory after victory.

“It’s almost impossible to emigrate from Japan,” Michie said, again surprising Jinsaburo with his knowledge.

“What do you mean?” Jinsaburo asked. “Why is it so difficult?”

“Last September, the Japanese government revised the conscription law lowering the minimum age for the reserve forces to 10 years old; even those too young to be conscripted are forbidden to leave the country. If you want to bring anyone over, you’ll have to wait until the war is over.”
As this sort of information was not common knowledge, it was evident that Michie was reading English newspapers and talking to many different people. Jinsaburo was impressed.

“So, when will the war be over?” Jinsaburo asked.

“Like I said before, it won’t be long. Right now, Russia’s main Baltic Fleet is rounding Africa on its way to Vladivostock but the Japanese fleet is waiting. There will be a big battle that will end the war. They’re already deciding which country will mediate the surrender.”

Michie’s information was all new to Jinsaburo.

Just as Michie had predicted, the decisive Battle of the Japan Sea was fought on the 27th and 28th of May 1905. The Russian Baltic Fleet was completely destroyed in what was an unusual and significant battle in the history of international warfare. It was a remarkable accomplishment for the Japanese Armed Forces. In June, the President of the United States presided over the peace agreement.

The moment the agreement was signed, Jinsaburo began making plans to go to Japan.

IV Phantom Immigrants

In July of 1905, Goro Kaburagi introduced Jinsaburo to Saburo Yoshie, a clerk at the Japanese Consulate. Saburo had joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately upon graduating from University and had been in Vancouver for three years. He was an intelligent and energetic man whose words and gestures seemed somewhat posed or exaggerated, but whose knowledge and consciousness was unparalleled.

“Canada is developing rapidly but it’s still short of labour. The federal government wants to finish its ambitious railway building projects and is very keen on hard-working, diligent Japanese labourers who work for low wages. As for Japan, they want to ease the overpopulation pressures by encouraging emigration. Despite this compatibility of goals, however, the two governments recently signed an agreement to limit the number of immigrants,” Saburo told him when they first met.

Despite the mutual desire for increased immigration, other factors were involved in signing the agreement. The Canadians were facing a strong anti-Asian movement by White labourers who felt they were losing jobs to Asians working for low wages. The Japanese Government, for its part, reversed their easy emigration policy for military reasons. Many young men had died in the war against Russia and all indications suggested further military activity; Japan needed every potential soldier in the home country.

“Of course, Japan was very happy at defeating Russia but most experts worry that Russia saw it as only a regional conflict and didn’t take the war seriously. In other words, Russia has not surrendered but has only made a strategic, temporary retreat. Russia is very powerful and if they decide to resume hostilities and treat it as an all-out war, Japan hasn’t got much of a chance.”

Yoshie stopped abruptly as a waitress entered the room.

They had met in a restaurant that, except for the carpeting in place of tatami, was very Japanese: the building was Japanese, the waitress wore Japanese clothing, and the yellow flower in the tokonoma41 was so Japanese-looking that one immediately assumed it had been brought over from Japan.

“This is private, please come back in a little while.”

Having dismissed the waitress, Jinsaburo leaned over to pour more sake for Yoshie who was sitting cross-legged on a floor cushion and leaning on the low table.

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41 Decorative alcove
“If that’s true, the Japanese government isn’t doing a very good job of stopping people. Just today I saw a whole load of Japanese arriving in Vancouver,” Jinsaburo argued, remembering all the Japanese he had seen earlier that day on Powell Street, struggling with their heavy luggage.

“I see what you’re thinking but young men can not get passports. Japan is in military mode and the civil servants obey the powerful military. This always happens after the military wins a battle or war and their power is at a peak.

“You’re from Miyagi, right? Well, you may not know it but the young men from the Tohoku area earned a reputation as the best soldiers in the country during the war with Russia. At the Battle of Kuromisodai, for example, they were badly outnumbered and were losing men at an alarming rate. Still, they didn’t retreat even one step. If things heat up again, there will be a strong demand for Tohoku soldiers. They would never give permission for young men from Tohoku to leave the country now.”

“Is that just your own opinion or is that official?” Jinsaburo asked.

“Just my opinion, but I’ll be offended if you don’t believe me on this,” Yoshie laughed but there was an unmistakable coldness in his eyes.

“Well, I wonder what the military would say if I brought a hundred of my villagers to Canada?”

The unexpectedness of Jinsaburo’s comment showed on Yoshie’s face.

“A hundred people, eh?” Yoshie paused. “That would be really difficult. You would never get permission, so how do you plan to do it?”

“I’ll charter a ship to carry us over. Ostensibly, it will be a fishing boat but when we reach Canada we’ll pull into port on the pretence of an emergency. Then we’ll leave all the formalities and paperwork to the Consulate. If the Canadian government really is keen on Japanese workers, there should be no problem getting permission to stay. You know as well as I that most immigrants pretend to be sailors or fishermen to get into the country.”

Jinsaburo’s chest tightened as he finished outlining his plan; he had been planning this for some time.

“You’ve really thought this through, haven’t you?” Yoshie finally said. “It’s going to be extremely difficult, you know.”

“What will be the most difficult, do you figure?” Jinsaburo asked.

“Obviously, getting out of Japan will be the most difficult. If you somehow manage that and do reach Canada, we can probably help. But we’ll need something to convince the Canadians to let you in. Perhaps your people will have to work a year or two on the railway before they can join you on Oikawa-jima.”

Yoshie was quite candid and offered concrete suggestions although he refused to talk about specific details or make any promises.

“This is going to be quite the adventure, isn’t it, Mr. Oikawa? First, it will take a lot of money. Then there’s the issue of the boat - it takes a very good boat to survive the wild Pacific storms.”

Nonetheless, Yoshie did not try to dissuade Jinsaburo; in fact, he only added fuel to the fire by saying, “If you do manage it, it will certainly warrant special mention in the history of immigration. I will start sounding things out at the Consulate now just in case you do manage to somehow pull it off. You know, you might consider bringing women, too. There’s a real shortage of women and it’s a problem. Look at me, even I’m still single.”

This last comment was said in jest but Jinsaburo took Yoshie seriously.

“I’ll find you a bride myself and bring her back,” Jinsaburo said.

The two men looked at each other and laughed.

“You know,” Yoshie said, “Goro Kaburagi has plans that are not so different from yours.”

“Ah, you mean the Queen Charlotte Islands?” Jinsaburo replied, remembering how Goro had talked about them on his first passage over.
“The Queen Charlotte Islands are as big as Shikoku but there are only a few Indians and even fewer Whites living there,” Goro had said. “I want to take a group of Japanese there and build a settlement. We would build a church and create a little Japan in Canada centred on the church. Everyone would speak both Japanese and English.”

“Maybe you should forget Oikawa-jima and build your Utopia on the Queen Charlottes instead,” Yoshie suggested. “The best fishing grounds in all of Canada are right there and the salmon spawn up its rivers.”

Yoshie spread out the map of Canada he had brought and pointed to the Queen Charlotte Islands.

“It is possible,” Jinsaburo said.

“You never know until you try,” Yoshie said. “You have to be careful not to land on an unpopulated island or you’ll either be eaten by bears or starve to death. On the other hand, if you manage to land in a populated area, who knows what will happen.”

As he spoke, Yoshie circled the populated areas along the coast.

“As for what will happen then,” Jinsaburo said, “we’ll leave that in the Consulate’s hands.” He laughed.

“I won’t go any further in saying what the Consulate can do,” Yoshie said. “We’ll worry about that when the time comes but I think you have a lot to do before then. A hundred people will be very difficult, indeed.”

Yoshie said no more.

From that day on, Jinsaburo bought all the maps and marine charts of the Queen Charlotte Islands and Vancouver Island that he could find. He met with Yoshie and Goro Kaburagi several times more. His heart was set on chartering and sailing a ‘Phantom Immigrant Ship’.

Jinsaburo told only Souemon the whole plan. To the rest, even Yaeno, he said only that he was going to Japan to bring back more people. Before his departure, he gathered everyone from the two islands together and announced,

“I’m going to Japan to get more people so I will be gone quite a long time. I’m leaving Souemon in charge of everything so I expect you to give him your complete co-operation and assistance.”

There were many questions and concerns; Jinsaburo addressed them all.

Yaeno sensed that Jinsaburo was holding back and was up to something bigger than he let on. However, she did not pursue this premonition by asking him outright.

“I don’t think I’ll ever understand him,” Yaeno thought and suddenly remembered that before she left for Japan, Uino had said the same thing. Even Uino had little idea of what went on in Jinsaburo’s mind and heart despite all their years together.

On the day of Jinsaburo’s departure, Saburo Yoshie went to the pier to see him off.

“I think it would be better if you avoided recruiting people from Tohoku this time. When you get to Yokohama, go to this company and have a talk with them,” Yoshie said and handed Jinsaburo a letter of introduction.

On arriving in Yokohama, Jinsaburo visited Taijiro at Eibeishokai and then went straight to the Hiroshima Overseas Development Agency office for which Yoshie had given him the letter of introduction. The company acted as an immigration agent for people from the Kinki-Chugoku Area and had an extensive operation. Apparently, they could be trusted.

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42 One of the four major islands of Japan
43 From the Osaka-Kyoto to Hiroshima.
News of Jinsaburo’s visit had preceded him through Yoshie and the company had already started working on his behalf. In fact, the very first thing that Bumpei Inoue, the Yokohama Branch Manager, said to Jinsaburo was,

“There will be no problem in finding a hundred or even two hundred people who are interested in immigrating, although it would be wise to limit our advertising so as to avoid complications. I suggest we concentrate on people from Hiroshima, Wakayama, and Shiga Prefectures since many of them already have contacts in Canada and are comfortable with the idea of overseas voyages.”

The complications he referred to were information leaks that could lead to the fisherman disguise being exposed; it had happened before.

The Russo-Japanese war had ended but still it was almost impossible to get permission for legal emigration; the company had gone ahead and made all the legal arrangements to classify the enterprise as a fishing operation. They had also arranged for a 200 tonne ship out of Hakodate, Hokkaido called the Dainomaru and had set a fare of 130 yen per passenger to cover costs and leave a profit for the company, as well.

With Jinsaburo’s approval, the Hiroshima Overseas Development Agency began advertising for men to emigrate on the pretence of deep-sea fishing off the coast of Canada. Within twenty days, 100 men had signed up so they split the group in two: one group of 50 to leave from Hachinohe Port in Aomori Prefecture and the other from the Port of Aomori, itself.

The ship met the group in Hachinohe and took them on board with no difficulty. However, on the evening of their scheduled departure from Aomori, the local police boarded the ship and arrested Jinsaburo, Bunpei Inoue, and the ship’s captain on suspicion of smuggling emigrants out of the country.

The company hired a lawyer and argued that they were not smuggling immigrants but were a legitimate deep-sea fishing outfit. On further examination, the police found that every one of the 100 men was a certified fisherman and the Dainomaru was a fully equipped fishing boat. The captain was immediately given leave to return to his boat.

One month later, when all hints of suspicion had blown over, Jinsaburo and Bunpei Inoue returned to the pier to find that the Captain had returned to Hakodate and left the hundred men in Aomori. The reason, they soon discovered, was that the Company’s accountant had disappeared with the 13 000 yen that they had collected from fares.

Of course, it fell to Jinsaburo and the Company to compensate the ‘fishermen’ but since it was the Company’s employee that had stolen the money and disappeared, it was responsible for most of the repayment. Despite the money being returned in full, there was an article in the local paper suggesting that Jinsaburo was some kind of swindler. This was more than Jinsaburo could bear.

It was not until November that the whole ‘Dainomaru Affair’ was settled. In the interim, Jinsaburo worked in Yokohama devising systems for Eibei Shokai to market the Canadian salt-salmon and roe in Japan and send Japanese goods to Canada.

Japanese goods in Canada were either expensive or hard to come by so he hoped to import high value goods, in addition to brown rice, to sell to the Japanese in Canada. No matter how involved Jinsaburo became with his import/export systems, however, he never stopped thinking about his immigration dreams.

At the beginning of 1906, he decided to drop the immigration company and find his own people, from his own hometown, and his own ship to take them all to Canada. He had discovered that the reason for the Dainomaru fiasco was one man who had gone out drinking in Aomori City the night before they left and

44 The northern-most prefecture on the main island of Honshu.
bragged that he was smuggling himself over to Canada. Somehow, his drunken bragging reached the ears of the local police.

“No matter what, when it comes right down to it, you can only trust your own people,” Jinsaburo mumbled bitterly.

By February, he had started to organise his new plan.

Canada had a desperate need for Japanese labourers but the Japanese government refused to give potential labourers the passports or permission to go. We chartered a first-rate, 200-tonne ship out of Hakodate and fitted it out as a deep-sea fishing vessel to carry 100 men from Wakayama, Hiroshima, and Shiga Prefectures posing as fishermen. The plan was to board the ship in Hachinohe and Aomori, but we were foiled at the last second. (from Chapter 10 of Jinsaburo Oikawa’s Autobiography “Phantom Ship”)

V The Secret

At the outbreak of war in 1904, Yonekawa village was required to contribute 3,665 yen, 22 men, and 36 horses toward the war effort. It was a steep levy but understandable for, after all, Japan was at war with Russia.

The war coincided with severe weather that resulted in consecutive bad harvests in 1904 and 1905. By the beginning of 1906, most farming families were out of food and had to dip into their seed rice just to survive. In April, each of the 120 poorest families in Yonekawa received nine litres of seed rice per paddy (half of what was usually planted) from the prefecture at no cost. Other prefectures sent contributions to help alleviate the famine in the Tohoku region (Miyagi alone received 468,000 yen) but food, not money, was the problem. Even such generous assistance only allowed most families to survive on very thin rice gruel.

By April of 1906, after two years of crop failures, the grumbling was at a feverish pitch.

“The crops are so bad that even farmers don’t even have enough to feed themselves. The rice crops are bad, wheat and barley won’t grow, and there’s nowhere to work that pays enough to support a family. I, for one, am beginning to think that going to America is the only solution,” was typical.

So was, “I heard that the ones who went to Canada with Oijin are making three yen per day and can send home as much as twenty yen a month.”

And it was true. When they heard that famine had hit again at home, the men in Canada worked harder, saved more, and sent home as much as they could. There was not one among them not touched by the suffering at home; every one of them was afraid of losing parents or brothers and sisters to starvation. When those without relatives in Canada saw the money coming in, they realised they should have taken Jinsaburo up on his offer to go to Canada when he had come begging.

At the end of 1905, the very name of Jinsaburo Oikawa appeared in newspaper articles about his failed attempt to smuggle emigrants out of Japan. Some of the articles slandered him by suggesting he was a swindler and a con man but the people of Yonekawa knew him too well to believe him capable of such actions. They were sure that the newspapers had made some sort of mistake, especially since the boat was filled with people from Hiroshima, Wakayama, and Shiga Prefectures; had he really been smuggling emigrants, he surely would have come to his home town first.
In April 1906, Jinsaburo Oikawa showed up in Yonekawa without warning. He summoned all his relatives and close friends to the Masubuchi home.

“Look around you,” he said, “the town is starving. There hasn’t been any crop, let alone a decent crop for how many years now? The only way to save your families and homes is to go overseas and make money. Unfortunately, it’s not possible to emigrate legally so there is only one way to go and that is to collaborate with me. We will charter a boat to take us across the ocean on our own, without the officials finding out about it.”

Jinsaburo told them the details of the last attempt and drilled into them the reason for the failure: a big mouth. They were emigrating but they had to make everyone believe they were going deep-sea fishing. His final word was that it would cost one hundred yen for anyone wanting to go.

Times were tough with crop failure after crop failure and the severe post-war depression in which business after business went bankrupt. Everyone complained that the hundred yen fare was impossibly. Nonetheless, five or ten people appeared with the fare within two or three days and fifty were confirmed after a month. They all came from Yonekawa’s middle to upper class families who had the forest plots, or rice paddies, or vegetable plots to sell to raise the 100 yen fare. They knew the only way to save their families from starvation was to go to Canada and send money home.

Eighteen-year-old Kimpei Goto was working as a temporary elementary school teacher. He had wanted to continue his schooling at university but his family did not have the means and the job market looked bleak. He often wondered why the Japanese people had to live such a difficult life if the country was strong enough to defeat Russia in war. When he thought of this, he remembered meeting Jinsaburo Oikawa at the boat slip in Maiya those three years ago. He had long since decided that, given the chance, he would cross the ocean to the new world.

One day, a fellow teacher leaned over and whispered, “Jinsaburo Oikawa’s back in town and it seems he’s starting another big project.”

The teacher knew no details but similar rumours soon made their way throughout the town although it was a big secret and nobody knew the details.

Kimpei went to his father, Kichiji, to see if he knew anything more.

“As a matter of fact, I just met Oijin yesterday sneaking from Masubuchi to Oinokawara, doing his best not to be seen. I promised not to tell anyone but he’s planning the biggest thing that has ever happened in this village. He’s chartering a ship to smuggle a whole bunch of people to Canada. He can do it if he gets more than seventy people and sixty-five have already committed. The hurdle is the cost: a hundred yen per person. A hundred yen is a lot, most will have to sell their forest plots or rice paddies, but it sounds like it won’t take long to pay back that 100 yen once they get to Canada. Actually, your uncle, Kosaburo Goto and your cousin, Sosuke Hatakeyama, have decided to go.”

Kimpei wanted to say how much he wanted to go but that would have meant asking for the hundred yen. Kimpei would have paid himself but one hundred yen was twenty months worth of salary at a temporary teacher’s wage of five yen a month.

“If you want to go, I’ll sell our forest plot to raise the money. Everyone else is emigrating to save their families and homes but you’re different. I wasn’t able to help you continue your studies so I want to send you to Canada in place of that. It will be enough for me if you study hard and become a good and worthwhile person. I want you to know, though, that I’m not sending you away expecting you to send money home.”

Kimpei looked at his father’s face; it was horribly contorted with the effort of concealing his deep emotion. Kimpei was astonished that his father had somehow sensed his deep desire to go to Canada and had secretly made all the arrangements. Kimpei was at a loss for words; what could he say?
“I really want to go, more than anything else,” he said simply, with all the intensity that he could muster.

Kimpei was on the wings of elation. He wanted to run through the town announcing to everyone that he was going to North America. He was so happy that he felt he would just burst into song at any instant.

“Jinsaburo has already said you can go but it’s going to be harder work than you’ve ever known. But, it’s a new country and, unlike Japan, there are lots of jobs,” Kichiji tried to bring Kimpei back to earth just a little. “You must not say anything to anybody about the trip, especially that you are smuggling yourselves out of Japan. If there is ever an occasion when it’s impossible to evade answering, you must say that you are a fisherman with the Tohoku Deep-Sea Fishing Company and that you are going to fish off the coast of Canada.”

It took so little time to gather eighty people that Jinsaburo was began to feel the urgency and responsibility of it all. Those who had signed up were, in general, the backbone of Yonekawa village who had the means to raise the hundred yen by selling forest plots and paddy fields, mortgaging their lands, or borrowing money from relatives. Jinsaburo had targeted this very group but had underestimated the effect of the Russo-Japanese War and the continued crop failures on their resources and spirit. In short, his timing was perfect as they had few options left except to going to Canada.

Of the eighty-two people who signed up to go, sixteen were in their forties, twenty-three in their thirties, thirty-eight in their twenties, and five under twenty. Collecting the money was a painstaking and difficult task for each and every one of them but when the money was all in Jinsaburo’s hands he brought them together.

“I’m going to Osaka to arrange for the boat and to bring it up to Oginohama Port near Ishinomaki. I should be back by the middle of July so have all your affairs in order and be ready to go by then. Above all, be extremely tight-lipped about our plans, more so than you’ve ever been in your life.”

Ten days passed without word from Jinsaburo to Kosaburo Goto (the group’s elected representative) or to anyone else. Twenty days passed with nary a peep. Everyone realised that any correspondence, be it telegram or letter, might compromise the secrecy of the project but still they grew restless. Some even suggested that, perhaps, he had absconded with the hundred yen collected from each person. The Dainomaru Incident was brought up more than once.

“If you consider the man Jinsaburo is and what he’s done, there is no way you could suspect him,” his defenders argued as they reminded everyone of his past accomplishments and that he came from a respected family with a big house and hectares of land in Masubuchi; he would not throw that away. In short, there was nothing to suggest that he would do anything underhanded. Nonetheless, the lack of contact triggered doubts in many minds.

Jinsaburo finally returned at the beginning of August and called the group’s leaders together.

“The Sui-an-maru has arrived in Oginohama but before we attempt to sail it across the Pacific Ocean, there are repairs to make and rigging to be set. Once that’s done, we’ll take it for a shake-down cruise to Osaka and back. Then, when we’ve checked and double-checked everything, we’ll sail. I figure we’ll be ready to leave by the first or second week of September.”

The next day, Jinsaburo and several others took the steam boat down to Ishinomaki and crossed the mountains to the port of Oginohama where the three-masted Sui-an-maru lay at anchor. They boarded the ship and made the rounds of introductions to the captain and crew.

“I told you we could trust Oijin,” Kosaburo Goto said in a low voice to the man next to him.

Everyone was relieved when they saw that the Sui-an-maru had actually come but the reality of the departure soon hit them and they realised they were leaving their homes and loved ones behind.
In April, 1903 I enrolled in the Takayamasha Silk Production Training Centre in Fujioka-town, Tanno-county, Gumma Prefecture and graduated in June, 1905, ranking 54th among the six hundred other students in my year. I had already arranged to take a position teaching advanced silk production techniques in Gumma Prefecture when I found out that my Uncle, Jinsaburo Oikawa, was planning to smuggle emigrants to Canada. I abandoned my teaching plans immediately to join in the enterprise.

The initial payment of sixty yen was a lot of money back then, especially for a twenty-three-year-old just out of school. I talked with my Aunt Hanayo in Iwabuchi about the possibility of my going. She talked to my Uncle Denzo Maruyama in Higasaki, Nishigori who agreed to borrow the remaining forty yen that I needed from Mr. Einojo in Masubuchi. This is how I finally got together the hundred yen I needed.

(from the recollections of Chiyomi Oikawa)

VI Departure

The night before departure, Kimpei was too excited to sleep a wink. He waited until it was barely light and snuck out the back door. Everyone else was sound asleep and did not hear him leave.

Not a soul was to be seen on the road that passed in front of the house and was still black with morning dew. He turned toward the north and took off at a run. The road forked after a few minutes; subconsciously he chose the branch that went up Mt. Wakakusa and loped on until he reached Inari Shrine surrounded by large cedars at the top of the hill.

He bowed at the front of the shrine, clapped twice and, holding his hands together, prayed for a safe arrival in Canada; it was all he could think to pray about.

The bell rope hung down before him. As he stood there trying to remember whether it was correct at this particular shrine to ring the bell and then clap or to clap and then ring the bell, he found himself ringing the bell. The bell rang out clearly and unexpectedly long. Of course, he had rung the bell many times before: every first of November at the shrine’s festival and, more often, as a child when he and his friends rang the bell as a joke or a dare. Nonetheless, the bell had never rung out so clearly, so loudly, or so strongly as it did that morning.

Surprised, he looked around sheepishly. There was nobody in sight but he felt watched. He had done nothing wrong but somehow felt like a guilty man with something to hide.

He left the shrine, walked past the sumo ring he had competed in as a child during the autumn festival, and came out at a place where he could look down on the town of Yonekawa. The dew on the grass underfoot soaked the bottom of his kimono.

Looking down onto the roof and grounds of the school, he saw the playing field buried under fallen leaves from the enormous oak trees that bordered the school grounds. Only days before, he had stood beneath those same trees and said farewell to the school children. When he told them he was going to Tokyo they became excited and said such things as, “Wow! Tokyo’s a neat place, isn’t it?” and, “Make sure you send us a letter when you get to Tokyo, okay?”
They would probably never forgive him for saying he was going to Tokyo when he was really going to Canada but he had no choice.

He recalled Jinsaburo’s words from the night before when he came to meet with the travellers from Oinokawara only (no parents or family):

“This is a small town with poor land; any money that finds its way here gets passed from one purse to the next, from pocket to pocket in an endless circle of obligation and poverty. There is unlimited land and opportunity in Canada. If you go and work hard only to send money home, your town will only be richer by the amount you send, and that will circulate in the endless circle forever. In the end, nobody gets ahead.

“We all know that the first born son gets everything; if you are the second or third, you have little hope of getting a mountain plot or a rice paddy. However, if those second and third sons go to Canada and start their own family line, they can make a very good life for themselves.

“Look around, you are all second and third sons. I chose you specifically to build a new Yonekawa in Canada. Once you’ve settled and built a foundation in Canada, you won’t come back to this small country area. Your sweat and bones will become part of the Canadian soil. Canada is full of people from all over the world with the same dreams and goals: to start a new life and build a new country. I want you to be a part of that.

“Soon we will set sail. You are the pioneers, the leading spirits. Others from our village will follow you when they hear of your success. Think of them.”

Kimpei had never heard such talk and it stuck in his mind. He was especially affected by the realisation that there was no way to get ahead in Yonekawa because every gold piece passed endlessly from hand to hand. The thought that people from all over the world gathered in Canada to build a new country and a new life excited him like nothing ever had.

“I’ll probably not be back here more than twice again in my life,” he whispered softly as he took a last, long look at the school below where he stood, hoping to etch the image into his memory forever.

Shifting his gaze away from the school, he looked toward the town. It was a simple town with houses built on either side of a single road that ran down the middle. He looked towards his own thatched-roof house where his family still slept. He wished he could leave town while they slept because he had no idea what to say to them when he left; it was the only thing he could not prepare beforehand and he was not looking forward to it.

Long and narrow Yonekawa village stretched out along the road that paralleled the Futamatagawa River. Mulberry patches and tobacco fields surrounded the town but were constrained by the mountains that rose up quickly from the fields. The village sat in a small basin surrounded by mountains upon mountains that hemmed it in and blocked the view beyond.

Kimpei looked out on the dim and melancholy mountains enveloped in a thin mist. The distinctions between near and far, big and small were blurred; it was like standing inside an upturned bowl. In fact, the mountains themselves looked like overturned bowls. It struck him that he had lived his whole life beside those mountains and never noticed their shape.

His gaze was drawn back to his house and he saw his mother out in the street looking left and right. No doubt she was looking for him so he jogged down off the mountain towards home, his soaking wet, straw sandals flip-flopping as he ran.

Kimpei returned home to his favourite breakfast of fried eggs. When the younger brothers and sisters protested that he got eggs and they did not, his mother answered,

“Kimpei is going all the way to Kinkasan Island so he will need energy. When you get older and go to Kinkasan, I’ll make fried eggs for you, too.”
Eighty-odd people leaving a tiny village simultaneously is bound to attract attention and suspicion so Jinsaburo Oikawa split the travellers and assigned them different times and days to leave the village. Each individual or small group was to make their way to the steamboat pier in Maiya and go to Ishinomaki where they were to stay in various inns. On the night before departure, everyone was to gather at a pre-determined hostel in Oginohama.

One last precaution was necessary. As ancient custom dictated that travellers meeting on the road ask one another where they were headed, the phantom immigrants agreed that they were going to see Kinkasan Island\textsuperscript{45}, a famous, sacred island near Ishinomaki.

The younger children were not mollified and continued to protest about not getting fried eggs. They fell silent, however, when they saw the tears welling in their mother’s eyes. Kimpei divided his eggs with his chopsticks and shared with everybody. Kichiji sat silently but cried inwardly at losing his son.

“Well, Mother, Father, I regret that I must finally take my leave of you,” he said as he placed his hands on the floor in front of his knees and lowered himself into a deep, kneeling bow, touching his forehead to the tatami matting.

He had never spoken so formally to his parents but it somehow seemed the proper thing to do. His parents, taken by surprise, scrambled to bow in turn. It was a sad scene.

Kichiji, seeing the younger children’s confusion over the unusual display of emotions, hastened to add,

“But you’ll be home soon enough, won’t you?”

His mother, no longer able to hold back her tears, lifted her sleeve to her face to conceal her pain. Only Kichiji stepped outside to see Kimpei off; his mother stayed inside lest the neighbours see her tears and suspect something.

“Take care of yourself.”

She disappeared from view.

Kimpei walked straight and with purpose away from his home. Naturally, the urge to turn around was strong but the excitement of going to a far off country was stronger. Not one of the many villagers he met along the way asked where he was going. Instead they surreptitiously whispered wishes for good health or told him to take care of himself. Yonekawa was a small village and everybody knew he was going to Canada. It was also a tightly-knit village so, despite their well-wishes, they passed by as if they did not even know him. Kimpei was the youngest traveller and everyone was concerned for him.

He walked southward without looking back once until he reached Idoi about five kilometres from Yonekawa. When he looked back, he saw Mt. Kogai framing the village to the north. Mt. Kogai, at 400 metres is the highest mountain in the area and had a single, huge cedar tree growing right on the summit. As per custom, he addressed the mountain and the tree,

“I’ll be back!”

In contravention of custom, Kimpei did not call out in a loud voice but his heart was true. It was not until that moment that he was really conscious of leaving home and everything that was familiar.

Many of the travellers were already at the riverboat pier in Maiya when he arrived but no one acknowledged anybody else; they all pretended to not know each other. There was no one at the pier to see them off.

The riverboat left on schedule and arrived in Ishinomaki on schedule, as well. They each went to their various inns and hostels. Kimpei had two days until he had to be in Oginohama.

\textsuperscript{45} Ironically, or coincidentally, the characters for Kinkasan are “Gold Mountain” which is exactly the name the Chinese gave to North America.
The departure was set for August 31st so he crossed over into Oginohama on the thirtieth and went straight to the ship.

“Only two more to come after you,” he was told as he dropped down into the hold.

The hold was small, dark, damp, had a strange smell, and was full of faces he did not recognise.

Secrecy was of the essence so they had boarded separately and were given short tours of the ship in small groups of three or five. Aside from these brief forays on deck, they were strictly warned to remain below deck until the ship had left port and the Captain gave the all clear.

Looking around the hold, Kimpei saw that everyone was dressed alike: straw sandals, coolie hats, and walking sticks. They really did look like an expedition to Kinkasan Island.

That night, they were awoken by a commotion up on deck. Bunji Goto had finally made it to the ship.

In the end, the one remaining person never arrived and they sailed without him.

The Sui-an-maru set sail from Oginohama Port five hours later at 7:30 a.m. on 31 August 1906.

On the morning of 20 August 1906, I bought a forty sen ticket and took the river steamboat down to Ishinomaki Port. When I arrived that afternoon, I went to the Kajikuya Inn run by Kyunosuke Goto in the Sumiyoshi district of Ishinomaki. I stayed there three nights.

When I heard from Jinsaburo Oikawa that our departure would be delayed a few days, I returned to Maiya to be present for the reserve militia roll call on the twenty-fifth. I then returned home to await further word from Jinsaburo. On the twenty-ninth, word came that we were sailing soon so I went back down to Ishinomaki the next day.

After lunch, I caught a small boat leaving Watanoha at 5:30 p.m. for Oginohama. The sea was unusually rough and we didn’t reach Oginohama until 2 a.m. on the thirty-first. In other words, I made it just in time because the 196.2 ton Sui-an-maru (captained by Moritaro Nishikiori) set sail that morning at 7:30 a.m. (from the ship’s diary kept by Bunji Goto)

VII Setting Sail

The white sails were hoisted on each of the three masts and the white-hulled Sui-an-maru leapt forward as if awaking with a start after a deep sleep.

Kimpei had seen the ocean from the top of a mountain but never had he been so close to either ocean or a ship. Of course, he had read books about, and seen pictures of ships, but the surprising smallness of the Sui-an-maru worried him just the same. That worry dissipated when the sails went up and he imagined how grand the ship must look from a distance. It was so refreshing to be up on deck. The masts stretched toward the blue sky above.

He was not alone on deck. In fact, everyone was on deck despite Jinsaburo’s order to stay below until they were well out of port. They were all too excited at their first voyage; excluding Jinsaburo, this was the first experience on a boat for every single one of them.
Suddenly, Kimpei noticed three young women dressed as if they had just come from a shopping trip in Ishinomaki. He assumed they had come to see someone off and had not disembarked in time. He wondered why Jinsaburo seemed unperturbed at this obvious problem although it never occurred to him that they might be going to Canada, too. Nothing had been mentioned about women going.

All the men were equally curious. They all gathered in one spot, pointing here and there and asking what this was and what that was, but all they really wanted to know was why the women were on board.

Finally, an explanation made the rounds.

“The one on the right is Seigo Suzuki’s wife, Hisayo. The one in the middle is a distant relative of Jinsaburo’s named Toyo and her younger sister, Yun, is beside her. Yun is only sixteen or seventeen.”

This was the first anyone had heard about women going with them. As out of place as they looked, their presence was reassuring; if Jinsaburo felt that Canada was safe enough for women, it must not be so dangerous after all.

“All right, everyone, listen up! I have important things to tell you so listen carefully,” Jinsaburo bellowed in a fearsome voice as they stood at the rail watching the scenery go by. Everyone gathered in front of him and watched his face attentively.

“One person suddenly came down sick and couldn’t come so that makes eighty-three of us. There are forty-five from Yonekawa, ten from Maiya, eleven from Uwanuma, two from Takarae, two from Asamizu, and one from Nishikiori for a total of seventy-one from Tome-county. In addition, there are three from elsewhere in Miyagi, three from Iwate Prefecture, and five from Kanagawa Prefecture. Altogether there are eighty-three if you include me, the original pioneer.”

After this unusual expression -’original pioneer’- his voice became harsh.

“We have a long, hard ocean voyage ahead of us. We will get there safely but between now and then many things will happen. Some of them you won’t like. Some will scare you half to death but whatever happens, I’ll be here with you, so everything will be okay. Leave everything to me.”

Jinsaburo paused to look at each of the stowaways in turn to make sure they understood.

Kimpei was somewhat frightened by Jinsaburo’s gaze. Jinsaburo always looked stern but never frightening; it was like he had turned into another person as soon as the sails were raised.

“What does original pioneer mean?” someone in the midst of the assembly asked.

“If you don’t understand that word, you can think ‘Commander’ in its place. I am the Commander, so you listen carefully to all of the Commander’s orders.” His tone made it obvious that no further questions or comments were welcome nor indeed allowed.

Jinsaburo reached into his pocket and pulled out a piece of paper.

“First, I’ll read out who is responsible for which chores,” his voice was so domineering that the whole group stared with mouths agape.

“Kimpei Goto is in charge of the calendar and I want Bunji Goto to keep the ship’s diary. Of course, the captain is responsible for the actual ship’s log but it is necessary to keep a separate log for the Tohoku Deep-Sea Fishing Company.”

He continued, assigning everyone to various details: mess, infirmary, sanitation, and cabin detail. Kosaburo Goto was assigned the role of overall supervisor. Assignments were made unilaterally and there was no opening for discussion or disagreement whatsoever. However, when all was said and done, nobody could say that there were any bad assignments.

Jinsaburo assigned Bunji Goto to log duty because he seemed to the most sea-worthy (if his efforts at reaching the ship were any indication). Jinsaburo was amazed that Bunji had spent eight-and-a-half hours in a raging ocean in a tiny boat to get from Ishinomaki to Oginohama. He was even more amazed that Bunji not only avoided getting violently seasick but bore the ordeal with passivity, as if it were nothing out
of the ordinary. Kimpei got calendar detail because he was the youngest and seemed to be conscientious and intelligent.

As soon as the ship hit open water, it began shaking and heaving.

After only one or two pitches (forward and back rocking) and a few rollings (side to side rocking), the whole mass of shocked and flustered men rushed back into the hold. Since the Sui-an-maru was a cargo ship there were no actual cabins; they laid various layers of straw matting between the pillars in the hold and laid their bedding on top of that. Jinsaburo, however, had a room to himself and the three women had one between them.

It was not long before everyone started throwing up and the wash basins and empty cans were passed up and down the cabin. Brought up in the mountains, these men had never experienced seasickness and had no idea how to combat the painful, unknown feeling. They had expected the journey to be little different than a trip on the Kitakami River steamboat and were stunned by the nausea that assaulted them as soon as they left the shelter of land.

Jinsaburo came down to the hold with this advice:

“If you feel like throwing up, throw up. Try to find as comfortable a position as possible and stay that way. Seasickness is not an illness so it will go away as soon as you get used to the ship’s movements. Look at the sailors, there are ten of them and every single one of them is working as hard as normal. Look at me, I’m no sailor but I’m not sick either. Don’t worry, it hits you like lighting and it goes away just as quickly. You’ll be fine in two or three days. Besides, in the whole history of the world, no one has ever died from seasickness.”

Knowing the feeling would soon pass was a huge relief and, with the reassurance that nobody had ever died from seasickness, they regained a little strength even if their insides were still all twisted.

Jinsaburo looked in on them from time to time and repeated his comforting words.

By evening, Kimpei had spent the entire day vomiting until there was nothing left to throw up. There were no windows but they could tell it was evening by the little light that came through the hatch and reflected off Jinsaburo’s back as he came down the ladder. Kimpei asked him the time.

“It’s six o’clock,” he answered. “We passed Kinkasan Island and turned into the open ocean around noon. It will be dark soon so this is your last chance to see Japan.”

From amongst the supine figures, Bunji Goto arose with a groan and climbed out the hatch onto the deck. Kimpei followed. As sick as they were and as painful as it was, they wanted one last look at their homeland.

The boat skimmed over the smooth ocean surface. Naturally there were swells but the sea was calm and Kimpei wondered how the ship could pitch and roll so violently on such a calm sea.

The land grew dark although the setting sun reflected off the tops of the mountain ridges as far as one could see from left to right along the horizon. The burning red on the ridges faded into purple as the sky and Japan silently grew blacker and blacker. The stars came out and twinkled above.

Kimpei wanted to call out a farewell to Japan but the words stuck in his throat. He would never forget the beauty nor the simultaneous sinking of sun and land. His last glimpse of Japan burned into his memory.

Kimpei suddenly noticed Bunji Goto standing next to him, licking his pencil as he wrote or drew something on a piece of paper.

“It’s definitely better up here,” Bunji said, half to himself. “Being down below makes you want to throw up no matter how healthy you are.”

At Bunji’s mere mention of throwing up, Kimpei suddenly remembered how sick he felt and clutched his stomach. He had temporarily forgotten the seasickness in the rapture of sunset but the feeling came
back with a vengeance. He made his way back to the hatch slowly and painfully, wanting to throw up but unable.

Everyone was indescribably seasick and there is absolutely nothing with which to compare the feeling of absolute entrapment that comes with it. Of course, we were buffeted by huge waves most of the way (if not the whole way) so it was inevitable that we would suffer. But, the severity surprised us all. Many clutched their heads and begged to be put ashore anywhere as long as it was soon. (from the diary of Chiyomi Oikawa)

31 August (13 July by the old calendar) - set sail at 7:30 a.m.
1 September - sailed on a favourable wind.
2 September - favourable wind. Wind died in the evening.
3 September - no wind, calm day.
4 September - strong wind, high waves.
5 September - no wind. Passed by Chishima Island off Hokkaido
6 September - favourable wind and small waves so everyone got up and is happy.

(from Bunji Goto’s ship’s log)

VIII Storm

As promised, the seasickness soon wore off and the recovered men came up on deck in ones and twos. There was, however, nothing to see as the ocean surrounded them as far around as the eye could see.

Bunji Goto, in charge of the ship’s log, spent much time on the bridge talking to the sailors and absorbing everything about the ocean and sailing. Later, he explained to the others in simple terms what he had learned. For example, he drew a sketch map of the northern hemisphere and explained they were passing just south of the Kamchatka Peninsula and were only a quarter of the way to Canada despite travelling for more than a week. The reason for the delay was the winds which were not so favourable at that time of year (they were on a sailing ship, after all).

September ninth was a calm day with a favourable wind so the ship glided smoothly across the water. About ten o’clock, the ship passed right through the middle of a huge school of bonito. Everyone rushed on deck and fished following the sailors’ instructions. There were only twenty-five fishing rods on the ship but they landed ten fish within a very short time. To mountain folk who had never caught ocean fish, the huge fish wriggling and flopping on the deck were a fascinating sight. The men stood rooted, staring in awe.

That afternoon, they crossed the International Date Line (180 degrees longitude) and entered the Western Hemisphere. Kimpei, in charge of the calendar, understood the International Date Line concept and tried to explain why there were two September ninths. Understandably, most of the men could not grasp the whole concept but were contented with the simple explanation that it was because they had crossed into the Western world.
That evening, they prepared the fresh bonito as sashimi\(^{46}\) for dinner. After the long bout of seasickness and not eating well, everyone was looking forward to the feast. However, never having eaten such fresh fish, they found the meat hard and more than a few said it was disgusting.

Naturally, a few wanted to drink sake but nobody had brought any. The persistent drinkers figured the sailors must have some and could be persuaded to share a taste all around but Jinsaburo was firm,

“I said no sake on this ship and when I say “No”, I mean No!”

Tension mounted and tempers rose over Jinsaburo’s strictness. Kosaburo Goto turned to Kimpei,

“Kimpei, you know a lot of folksongs and you’re a good singer. How about a song, to calm things down?”

Kimpei had been a member of the teachers’ folksong club when he worked as a temporary teacher. With his beautiful voice and sense of rhythm, he had quickly learned most of the folksongs from the Tohoku region.

Kimpei got up silently and stood still and erect. He sang the most well-known Miyagi folksong, Sansa Shigure, a congratulatory song for weddings and victorious homecomings from war.

\[
\text{Sansa shigure ka, kayano no ame ka} \\
\text{Oto mo sede kite nurekakaru}\(^{47}\)
\]

As he sang, images of his mother’s sinking face, his father’s worried face, and the happy faces of his younger siblings floated into his consciousness. These were followed by recollections of his last day when he climbed Mt. Wakakusa and looked down on his village below. Suddenly, older memories such as playing under the thousand year old cedar on the grounds of Hachiman-jinja shrine next to Mt. Wakakusa, flooded in. Why had he not gone there before he left? Overcome with images and memories, he did not notice himself how sentimental his singing had become.

Many people attribute the original Sansa Shigure to Date Masamune, the great Miyagi warlord who was also a literary man. However, the tune and words predate him in many variations from many places, although his version eventually became the standard. Soon all the men were clapping in time and accompanying Kimpei. Kimpei sang all six of the usual verses and made one of his own to add to the end:

\[
\text{A long voyage, crossing an angry sea,} \\
\text{Going to Canada, and returning home no more.}
\]

When he finished, he looked up to see the three women bent over and crying into their hands. Apparently, they had come down to the hold when they heard him singing. The men held back their tears but were equally affected if the wringing of their hands and the pained looks on their faces was any indication.

Someone said, “Wow! Kimpei’s singing has more punch than a whole bottle of sake.”

Everybody laughed.

As the ship sailed just south of the Aleutian Islands, the temperature dropped dramatically. There was no ice and the temperature stayed above zero but the wind on deck sliced right through one’s body.

\(^{46}\) Raw, sliced fish.

\(^{47}\) A loose translation might: “whether a strong rain, or a light drizzle, one gets soaked without a sound.”
On September 15th, the wind changed to an easterly and, although their progress was not altogether stopped, they had to tack more often to catch the wind. On the sixteenth, however, the wind suddenly became much stronger.

The captain explained to Bunji Goto that a low pressure front was approaching and asked him to tell the passengers that a storm was coming. There was no need to worry, however, because the storm would last only an afternoon and a night at most. Knowing nothing of the ocean or of instruments such as thermometers and barometers, the men became quite anxious at the news despite Bunji’s explanation that it was possible to predict the weather to some degree with such instruments. The fact that the ship was already starting to pitch more violently under their sensitive stomachs did not help either.

The crew rushed around the ship preparing everything: lowering the sails and securing anything that might slide easily (especially the life rafts). The ship turned to the east to meet the waves head-on. They fired up the reserve steam engine to more easily manoeuvre the ship into less dangerous positions to meet the waves but even this was little help.

As they climbed each huge wave, the bow soared into the air and every single passenger was thrown toward the stern. No matter how hard they struggled and held fast, human will and strength were no match for the power of the angry ocean. Cries of pain and certain death rang out as the passengers at the back of the hold were crushed by the human wave coming at them. Then, the ship peaked the wave and sat level for the briefest of seconds before plunging hard into the trough at the bottom of the wave. This time the stern rose high in the air and everyone was thrust to the bow, squeezing painful cries from those at the front end of the surging mass of flesh.

The pitching motion was compounded by the rolling. The boat pitched back and forth and rolled from left to right throwing them to the left, then forward, then to the right, and finally aft in a sickening cycle. They had barely recovered from the first bout of seasickness when the storm hit. Some, who had not quite recovered, had gone a long time without eating but even they managed to continue vomiting.

Buckets full of vomit slid and rolled back and forth amongst the passengers and the vomit spilled out into the room. Unmeaningful and indistinguishable shouts of pain and prayer created a roar in the small cabin and indicated that everyone was still alive, if only barely. Occasionally a prayer-chant of ‘Namu Amida Butsu’ rose above the din although these prayers for mercy and salvation gradually became fewer as the men became convinced that their time on earth had run out in this small, noisy, rank cabin.

Until this point, the 200-tonne Sui-an-maru had seemed a big ship to men who knew nothing of the sea. They soon realised, however, that their huge ship was but a tiny toy to the mighty ocean. Compared to the rolling, the pitching was nothing. It felt like they were rolling right upside down, especially to these first-timers who had only been on the ocean for sixteen days.

The ship floated up from the depths of hell and sat level for just a moment: the pushing and pulling and tossing temporarily on pause.

A voice yelled out, “We’ve been tricked by Oijin into an early grave.”

It was not an angry accusation but the natural expression of one who feared he was on the brink of death.

“I didn’t bring you all this way to kill you. This ship will withstand any wave, no matter how big. It won’t sink, I guarantee it. Hold on just a little while longer and the friendly ocean will return, mark my words,” Jinsaburo’s unexpected voice came from the direction of the hatch.

Apparently he had left the safety of his own private cabin and sat firmly lashed to the staircase at the bottom of the hatch opening.
“I’m not lying,” he continued as the ship began to plunge. “The storm is winding down. If you open your ears and listen closely to the wind outside you’ll hear longer and longer breaks. The wind is dying and when the wind dies the waves die, too.”

They strained their ears to hear the wind which howled on. Whether the howling and groaning was from the friction between wind and mast or between wind and some other part of the boat they did not know nor care, but there definitely were longer breaks.

The men started to believe that they were saved and, in so believing, calmed the wind through their own faith.

“I told you this ship wouldn’t sink,” Jinsaburo shouted above the noise.

The men had reached the limits of fatigue and exhaustion.

The waves eased.

7 Sept - Strong winds and high waves. Everyone back to not eating after yesterday’s feast of bonito.
9 Sept - Good winds. Ship running well. Clear sky. Crossed 180 degrees longitude today into Western hemisphere so tomorrow is 9 Sept. again.
9 Sept - Clear sky but a north wind blew in - bigger waves and dropping temperature. 30°Fahrenheit.
11 Sept - Clear sky. 50°F
12 Sept - Clear sky. Same temperature as yesterday.
15 Sept - Clear sky. Easterly wind. High waves. We were heading north to cut waves this morning but turned south this afternoon.
16 Sept (1 Aug. on old calendar) - Threatening skies. Strong easterly wind. Not making progress.
17 Sept - Clear sky. Ship running well again on good winds.

(from Bunji Goto’s ship’s log)

IX Land!

Having received their ocean baptism in such a violent storm, the travellers soon tired of the monotony. To alleviate the boredom, Jinsaburo encouraged them to take more responsibility for their own comfort and
safety. The three experienced carpenters lent their advice and skill in building partitions between the pillars to prevent the violent tossing of passengers the next time a storm hit. They also built covered boxes to keep the vomit pails from sloshing all over the hold.

Everyone participated wholeheartedly in the planning and construction of the various projects and, more than anything, the exercise kept the easily fractured group working together as a unit. As long as there was work to keep them occupied, things went smoothly. However, when they had exhausted all their ideas and materials, dissatisfaction and tempers surfaced again and disputes became more frequent.

Jinsaburo had foreseen this and brought various games such as shogi\(^{48}\), go-i\(^{49}\), and some card games. Gambling on the games, however, was strictly forbidden.

A study group to learn the English alphabet was started because, as Jinsaburo warned them, “If you can’t write at least your own name in English, you’ll have a lot of trouble.”

Chiyomi Oikawa was put in charge of this for the simple reason that he had finished school. Kimpei helped because he had been working as a sort of teacher.

An entertainment committee was formed to organise daily shows of parlour tricks, singing, story-telling, and anything that anyone was willing to do. However, without sake, few were willing to stand in front and perform so it always ended up that Kimpei sang alone. Kimpei was so talented that nobody wanted to listen to anyone else’s amateur attempts.

Sansa-shigure was Kimpei’s speciality but he knew many other folksongs from all over Miyagi and the Tohoku area. From Miyagi, he knew: Shiogama-jinku, Jogi-bushi, Toshima-inku, and Saitaro-bushi. He also sang Isenzaka (popular in both Miyagi and Iwate) and Otsue-bushi (well-known in the three prefectures of Miyagi, Yamagata, and Fukushima). As for songs that were not usually sung in Miyagi, he knew Ushikata-bushi and Karame-bushi from Iwate, Yasaburo-bushi and Tsugaru-yosare-bushi from Aomori, and Matsumae-oiwake-bushi from Hokkaido. In other words, he had an extensive repertoire.

Despite the entertainment committee, the responsibility for keeping everyone entertained fell wholly on Kimpei’s shoulders, even the off-duty sailors came to hear him. On nice days when the sea and wind and ship were calm, Kimpei sang in the open air on deck.

“Look! Even the sails are taking a break to hear Kimpei’s songs,” someone said as they sat beneath the drooping sails listening to Sansa-shigure for the hundredth time. Everyone’s thoughts returned to their hometowns and the mood was peaceful and melancholy. It became an unspoken ship’s rule that Kimpei sang whenever the atmosphere on board became gloomy or violent.

“If it weren’t for Kimpei, things would really get tense on this ship. I hate to think what kind of violence might break out,” someone said.

One day, after nearly a month at sea, Bunji Goto was on the bridge and overheard the Captain say to himself, “We’re really close to Canada so we should see some big ships soon.”

Bunji relayed this information to the others and, as predicted, they saw a huge steamer belching smoke and a large, many-masted schooner that very afternoon. The realisation that they were so close to their destination suddenly hit them.

The next afternoon, another storm hit and raged all night. This time, however, there was neither worry nor dread and nobody doubted their survival.

The following day, a large hawk-like bird with a smaller bird in its talons settled on the mast-top. Having plucked the smaller bird’s feathers with its frightening beak, the eagle devoured it and flew off. To everyone’s surprise, however, the eagle returned that night and roosted in the sails.

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\(^{48}\) Japanese chess

\(^{49}\) A game similar to Othello
According to the Captain, the eagle was proof that they were near land and would probably sight it within the next day or two. The excitement was palpable and everyone worried about not bathing before they landed. Since leaving, Oginohama, they had bathed but twice in order to conserve their limited water supplies. In fact, there was barely enough water to even wipe their bodies on a regular basis. Whenever it rained, they rushed up on deck to collect rainwater for bathing and washing clothes.

Bathing and laundry were particularly difficult for the three women who had to keep out of the men’s sight. This meant performing these tasks in the dead of night and in the shadow of a lifeboat: one kept watch while the other two washed.

Of all the discomforts and troubles from such inhumane conditions, the lice infestations drew the most complaints. Gradually, the men became bolder with their complaints and voiced them when Jinsaburo was within earshot.

“If I had known we’d be travelling on such a lice-infested ship, I never would have come!”
“Everyone is going to think we’re a bunch of Japanese beggars when we land!”
“What kind of man is Jinsaburo, anyway, to make us live like this?”

When the eagle came to roost on the mast again that night, one of the sailors climbed up and captured it in a big bag and transferred it to a wooden box to keep as a mascot.

“We’re so close to Canada now that the eagle has been coming and going from the land,” Jinsaburo said and spontaneously made up a poem:

One month on the Sui-an-maru, waiting and waiting.
An eagle from the land, a welcome and greeting.

Kimpei sang Sansa-shigure and they broke out the sweet bean paste they had been saving for such a moment. Nobody slept that night as they spent the whole night shuffling excitedly between hold and deck.

Finally, three nights later, they saw Canada. It was eleven o’clock but there it was, illuminated by the light of the full moon. Once land was sighted, everyone was too excited and agitated to stay below deck so they stood on deck gazing out at land.

The next morning was foggy and land lay hidden in the mist. By afternoon, the fog had burned off and the shape of the land was very clear for they were quite close.

“Why, it hardly looks any different than Japan at all,” someone said.

Apparently, they had assumed that everything about Canada would be different, even the topography. In truth, however, Canada had forests, and grass, and steep cliffs on the coast. In other words, it looked like Japan. Somehow, this geographic similarity allayed their fears and apprehensions. They yelled to the land at the tops of the voices, feeling that their fellow villagers already in Canada would answer back if only they called loudly enough.

They rode a westerly wind closer and closer to the land.

As a sailing ship, the Sui-an-maru could not manoeuvre like a steam ship. It was a tension-filled time; if they approached the land too closely, they were sure to be sucked onto a reef by powerful currents and grounded.

The captain studied his charts carefully. Once, he started in towards shore and pulled out again. The opening to the Strait of Juan de Fuca (between Vancouver Island and the mainland of Canada) is about twenty kilometres wide but can be extremely hard to locate. Finding it requires travelling close to land but
this, in turn, is dangerous as the winds and currents combine to drive ships towards the rocky shore. Missing the Strait of Juan de Fuca means missing the port of Victoria and thus the way to Vancouver.

Captain Nishikiori had thirty years of sailing experience but it was his first time on the other side of the Pacific. He could read the dangers from his charts and was extremely prudent - every move was critical. They rode a southerly and kept their eyes peeled for the opening to the strait. The weather was variable but the Captain remained calm and patiently waited for the ideal conditions.

Ideal wind and current conditions did occur but never long enough for the sailing ship to capitalise; just when they caught a favourable westerly, the fog came up and they were forced to wait for fear of being driven up on the rocks. As they waited for the fog to lift, the westerly built up and blew them towards shore at a terrifying speed but, just before being run aground, the wind changed to an easterly and they were carried back out into the open ocean. Each of these changes occurred in the blink of an eye so the crew and captain were tested to their limits.

The Captain wondered why the weather was so uncooperative. Why were they being prevented from reaching their destination? Why was fate using the weather to mock them?

One cause of their difficulty in manoeuvring into the strait was the lightness of the ship. Thirty-five days at sea had almost exhausted their stocks of food and water and, by extension, the ship’s draught was too shallow making it difficult to steer.

After consulting with the captain, Jinsaburo called everyone on deck to scoop sea water into the bottom of the ship to act as ballast which would give the ship the necessary weight to manoeuvre. He assigned the three carpenters to fix and improve the damaged rudder.

Eventually, they had enough ballast to return the ship’s stability.

18 Sept. - Running on a favourable wind
19 Sept. - Rain and a strong southerly
20 Sept. - Clear skies. Southerly wind
21 Sept. - Morning rainy but no wind. Strong wind in afternoon. Skies cleared later but high waves washed up and over deck
24 Sept. - Clear sky. No wind in morning but a north-westerly blew up in afternoon
26 Sept. - Strong wind and rain in morning. Afternoon turned clear and wind died.
27 Sept. - Clear with a light wind. Entered shipping lanes. Saw first steam freighter at 1 p.m. Saw a large schooner later.

51 Portion of the boat below the water line
28 Sept. - Running on good winds in good weather. A very strong wind blew up around 1 p.m. with big waves washing over deck. Could not sleep because of noise and storm.

29 Sept. - (15 August by old calendar) By morning, last night’s storm had vanished and the sea was calm and flat. At 9 a.m., the sails were full and the boat running well. At noon, a hawk with a smaller bird in its talons landed on the mast and stayed a long time before flying away although it returned around 6 p.m. When darkness fell, one of the sailors climbed up and captured it to keep on board. Big celebration tonight on being near land. Jinsaburo Oikawa even made up an impromptu song. Everyone in high spirits.


3 Oct. - Clear skies but high waves. Running on a westerly. Caught first sight of Canadian mountains at 11:35 p.m. Approached to within 15-16 miles but the wind changed to a southerly. Will wait for dawn.

4 Oct. - At dawn, we found ourselves seventy or so miles off-shore so possibility of following coastline is remote. Waited until weather cleared at 12 p.m.

5 Oct. - Rain and an easterly wind from 6 a.m. By 4 p.m. we were close to shore and looking for entrance to Victoria but it seems to be hidden behind the mountains of Port Alberni. It is too dangerous to approach the shore so we move further out. The ship’s draught has become too shallow and the helm is damaged so we can’t steer away. The captain was frantic so Jinsaburo called everyone on deck to fix the helm and scoop sea water into the bottom of the ship for ballast. At last, we were able to steer out of danger.

(from Bunji Goto’s ship’s diary)

X Waiting

The night was as cold as late autumn in Japan and even the bridge offered no relief. They had dropped anchor and were just drifting, waiting for dawn. The wind had died and the fog cleared. The sky was

52 author’s note: probably confused with Cape Alava.
cloudy. The dark outline of Vancouver Island stretched from one extreme of the Eastern horizon to the other. Only a few lights from lighthouses or dwellings on the coast lit the night sky.

“We’re about thirty miles off the town of Tofino on the west coast of Vancouver Island,” the Captain said, pointing to a spot on the map.

Vancouver Island is a large, narrow island about 400 kilometres long and 70 kilometres wide running north to south. Tofino is about half way up the coast. Apparently, the southerly wind that had picked them up as they searched for the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca had blown them quite far north.

“If we get a good northerly at dawn, we should be able to get into the strait and land in Beecher Bay by about this time tomorrow,” the Captain said with conviction.

Jinsaburo, however, was studying the map intently.

“Of course, a northerly would be great, but what if the southerly continues?” Jinsaburo asked.

The Captain did not answer. The *Sui-an-maru* was a sailing ship, but there are ways of using any wind to get to one’s destination even if it is straight into the wind. The Captain was not in the mood to explain, especially since Jinsaburo knew enough about ships to know the answer already. Why was Jinsaburo asking such strange questions?

“If we took the southerly wind and went straight north we would probably reach the Queen Charlotte Islands within three days, don’t you think?” Jinsaburo remarked as he measured the distance on the map with a compass.

The Captain, turning his own attention to the map, replied, “The Queen Charlottes are about 400 miles north of here, so we could make it there in about three days if we got favourable winds. But, why on earth are you asking about the Queen Charlotte Islands?”

The Queen Charlotte Islands are roughly 120 miles (190 kilometres) north of Vancouver Island. The chain is about 200 kilometres long and an average of 50 kilometres wide. However, the charts on board the *Sui-an-maru* did not give details about passages or routes to the Queen Charlottes. Furthermore, the islands were almost uninhabited despite their size.

As the Captain wondered why Jinsaburo was suddenly talking about the Queen Charlotte Islands, he looked up from the map. Jinsaburo was staring off into the blackness of the ocean with a strange look on his face: a look the Captain had never seen before. Jinsaburo was concentrating intently yet was not looking at anything in particular. He almost looked possessed by spirits. The Captain attributed the abnormal visage to the eerie glow of the bridge lantern but there was no doubt that Jinsaburo was concentrating on something out there.

“The Queen Charlotte Islands,” Jinsaburo whispered, almost mystically.

Jinsaburo remembered Goro Kaburagi’s words, “We could make it into a Japanese island. We could build schools and churches and other things. How about it?”

He also remembered what Yoshie (from the consulate) had added to Goro’s idea, “The Queen Charlottes are about the same size as Shikoku in southern Japan but there are so few people living there except for natives. There is no shortage of land and it is right next to the richest fishing grounds in Canada. It might be a good thing to create a settlement of Japanese fishermen there.”

“A Japanese Utopia the size of Shikoku in Canada,” Jinsaburo muttered to himself.

Jinsaburo did not wonder why the idea suddenly imposed itself on his consciousness that night on the bridge of the *Sui-an-maru*. He had never been anywhere near the Queen Charlotte Islands and, aside from Goro’s and Yoshie’s descriptions, had only ever heard of the islands from a few Japanese fishermen in Steveston who had been there. Everyone, however, agreed that there were few Whites and plenty of virgin land and forest.
Jinsaburo suddenly felt the numbing cold of the night and his stiffened body trembled faintly; he felt like collapsing. Before long, the trembling stopped and his body lightened. A desire to sprout wings and fly off over the pitch black of the ocean overcame him. Light streamed in through his eyelids and the vivid image of a yellow island floated before his eyes. Soon, the yellow island filled his entire field of vision.

“Head for the Queen Charlottes,” Jinsaburo suddenly announced as he returned to reality.

“What?” asked the Captain. “Why should we go to the Queen Charlotte Islands?”

“We’re going to get off there and build a Japanese colony.”

“What is this nonsense you’re talking? You see some uninhabited islands on a map and you decide to go there? Are you crazy?”

“It’s new land and it’s best to start on land that hasn’t been touched by the White man’s hands,” Jinsaburo said.

“Mr. Oikawa, they may be uninhabited but they still belong to Canada and Canada belongs to the White man.”

“Look here. In this Canada, there are French who have built a French-only land, there are Germans who have built farm colonies for Germans, and the English have built English towns. What is so strange about one island in Canada for Japanese?”

“I don’t know anything about that but I do know that I agreed to take you to Beecher Bay on Vancouver Island and that is what I will do,” the Captain replied firmly.

“So, we change the agreement. The journey now terminates on the Queen Charlotte Islands. You will please drop the eighty-three of us there,” Jinsaburo said.

“Well, it only makes three or four days difference to me so if you say to go to the Queen Charlotte Islands, we go to the Queen Charlottes. However, you changed the plans so I’m handing all the responsibility over to you. That is all right with you, I presume?” the Captain said.

The thought of assuming all responsibility sobered Jinsaburo somewhat. The Queen Charlottes were complete unknowns. What would they do once they landed? Jinsaburo was confident they could overcome anything and set up their new lives if they landed in an inhabited area. The problem lay in the possibility of landing in a completely uninhabited place where there was a high probability of getting lost in the mountains and starving to death.

“Once you put us ashore at some populated spot, I’ll take responsibility from there,” Jinsaburo offered and held out his hand to the Captain.

As they shook hands, Jinsaburo felt a presence behind him and turned to find Bunji Goto standing there.

“What are you doing up here in the dead of night?” Jinsaburo asked accusingly.

Bunji lowered his head a little, as if apologising.

Jinsaburo continued, “We’re going to the Queen Charlotte Islands instead but don’t say anything to anyone just yet, there’s no sense getting them all worried for nothing. We’ll just tell them that we’re still having trouble finding the entrance to the strait.”

Bunji Goro nodded. The clock on the bridge wall read one o’clock in the morning.

The *Sui-an-maru* set a new course but the weather turned and they made very little headway on account of heavy rain and a strong north wind. When the rain finally let up and the fog blew away, Vancouver Island was still visible on their right side.

Seven days later, they finally sighted the Queen Charlotte Islands but there was no sign of a port. In fact, there were no signs of any sort of human habitation. All they could see were small islands, reefs, and cliffs. Approaching the shore looked impossible.
The men grew suspicious when they again drew near the land but did not land. One of them asked Bunji Goto why they had been languishing off shore for days on end. Unsatisfied with Bunji’s vague answer, the man went straight to Jinsaburo.

“We’ve been able to see the mountains for days now but we haven’t gone ashore. What is going on?”

“You’re right, we can see the mountains. Can you see any signs of life, though? If we were to land just anywhere, we’d be eaten by grizzly bears before you knew it. Don’t worry, we’ll find the entrance to the port tomorrow,” Jinsaburo answered.

Despite food rations being halved, food stocks were in danger of being depleted very soon. A one or two day storm delay would finish them.

“It’s been ten days since you decided to come to the Queen Charlottes but we still haven’t found a place to land. And if that wasn’t enough, our food has almost run out. If you don’t change your plan quickly, there will be riots, maybe even a mutiny. I suggest we give up on the Queen Charlottes and head back to Beecher Bay. There’s a good north wind so it should only take two days,” the Captain said to Jinsaburo.

The Captain was not exaggerating when he said there would be a riot if not a mutiny. The crew had given the Captain and Jinsaburo a petition demanding special considerations if they were to continue with this dangerous voyage. Furthermore, one of the sailors told Bunji Goto that they had all been fooled by Jinsaburo and were going to be dumped on an uninhabited island. Bunji Goto, in turn, reported this to Jinsaburo.

“It is unfortunate,” Jinsaburo replied, “but I suppose we have to give up on this idea.”

The dream he had seen so clearly was shattered; however, Jinsaburo was already thinking of his next plan.

That morning, bad feelings and frustration swirled through the cabin.

“Hey, Kimpei! What day is it?” someone yelled provocatively.

“October seventeenth. Forty-eight days since we left Japan.”

“What’s to become of us? How long are we doomed to wander the ocean, unable to land? I, for one, just can’t take it anymore,” someone whined as Jinsaburo descended slowly into the hatch.

“We will land tomorrow, for sure. No mistake this time, I promise,” Jinsaburo responded. “I have equipment to give you and things to tell you before we reach land.”

Having detailed the many considerations during, and after, the landing, Jinsaburo gave each person a set of military surplus clothes and boots. It was the first anybody had heard about wearing army clothes but, despite the complaints of the clothes being too big or too small, everyone was happy. There was no doubt that they were going ashore. Finally, Jinsaburo handed out handfuls of dry, stale bread.

“You’re a magician. A first-rate magician when it comes to pulling things over on people,” the Captain said rather sarcastically when Jinsaburo walked into the wheelhouse.

“And your prudence has rarely been found in Captains throughout the whole of history,” Jinsaburo retorted, implying that the Captain was a coward.

The Captain did not reply.

“I will go to the Queen Charlotte Islands someday,” Jinsaburo said with a tinge of regret. He stood with his back to the north wind that carried them so favourably towards the south.

“After you’ve done a bit more research on them, I’m sure,” said the Captain, staring straight ahead over the bow.

“Columbus did his research before he discovered the Americas but I prefer to discover by adventure,” Jinsaburo’s answer was so forceful that it caught the Captain by surprise.
“I don’t think there are too many adventures that can beat this one. As for me, being known as the Captain of the Phantom Immigrant Ship is so great an honour that I plan to give up sailing after this trip,” the Captain said and they both stood silently, staring out to sea, each alone with his own thoughts.

They continued southward at a good clip. That afternoon, the lookout spotted a large, sailing schooner to the east and the Captain, guessing that such a large ship could only be carrying freight to Victoria, decided to follow it. As luck would have it, a westerly suddenly blew up and they sailed easily into the Strait of Juan de Fuca. At two a.m., they dropped anchor about five miles north of the Port of Victoria; apparently they had overshot Beecher Bay.

The Captain suggested that they drop the boats and send the stowaways to land right then but Jinsaburo disagreed. Jinsaburo’s argument was that Victoria was an international port and there was a strict watch on ships’ comings and goings - hence the contract to drop them off at Beecher Bay further north and out of sight of Victoria. The Captain argued that going back to Beecher Bay would take at least half a day - not a favourable option given the exhausted passengers and crew.

The immigrants did not know which course of action was the prudent choice so they looked upon the violent quarrel in silence. In the end, the Sui-an-maru weighed anchor and headed north. They dropped anchor in a calm Beecher Bay at ten o’clock the same morning.

Jinsaburo, using a compass and map to point out the landing spot, told the gathered adventurers that they were going ashore in small boats at 10 o’clock that night. Wispy, cotton-like clouds scattered across the clear blue sky and the day was as calm as an autumn day in Japan.

Jinsaburo formed three ‘overland’ groups of sixteen members each and gave the respective leaders a compass and a map each. Their instructions were to head straight north from the landing spot until they came to a railway and follow that railway out to the port of Sydney where they were to wait for boats to pick them up.

The fourth group was the seventeen-member ‘sea-borne’ group that was to continue to Sydney via Victoria using the Sui-an-maru’s fourth life-boat. The overland group had forty kilometres (as the crow flies) to travel while the sea-borne group had fifty-three. There were, however, no comments or questions about the relative lengths of the routes or the methods of travel. Jinsaburo spent a good portion of that day teaching them how to read a map and use a compass.

The wind died. Everyone ate dinner and changed into army clothes and boots. They gathered their belongings and waited for the appointed time.

At ten p.m. on 19 October 1906, four boats slipped away from the side of the Sui-an-maru. Altogether there were sixty-five people in the four boats with the three women making up part of the sea-borne group. As secrecy was essential to their success, they were not permitted to call out or even wave as they left the ship. Jinsaburo had drilled them extensively on the procedure and the dangers.

The four boats disappeared into the blackness of the ocean, leaving the remaining seventeen and Jinsaburo Oikawa on board. Those eighteen were to continue on board the Sui-an-maru posing as fishermen so they could enter the port legally. After completing the necessary formalities, they would disembark. Jinsaburo had a proper passport so he planned to disembark immediately and send a telegram to Souemon Sato on Oikawa-jima. Souemon and a few others would then come across to Sydney in boats they had prepared to meet the new arrivals.
6 Oct. - At 1 a.m. (after a heated discussion between the Captain and Jinsaburo), we changed course towards the Queen Charlotte Islands north of Vancouver Island. We can no longer see the land for the fog.

7 Oct. - At 2 a.m., we were about 300 kilometres out to sea. A gale and heavy rains started around 7 a.m. but cleared up by noon.


9 Oct. - Spotted mountains.


11 Oct. - Still heading north-east. Heavy winds and rain since morning.

12 Oct. - Rain in morning, cleared around noon.

13 Oct. - Clear sky spotted mountains. Storm began in the middle of the night.

14 Oct. - Very high winds and six metre waves washing over deck. Cleared in the middle of night.

15 Oct. - Again beset by high winds and waves. Wind is a strong easterly.

16 Oct. - Clear but heavy winds and rain returned about noon. This is a stormy passage.

17 Oct. - Until today, Jinsaburo Oikawa kept saying we could not land despite being able to see the mountains every day. Today he forced all the members to sign a collective promise to pay him an extra seventy dollars on top of the original amount. As soon as this was signed, we changed course to the north and seemed to be heading in to port on the Queen Charlottes on a west wind.

18 Oct. - Clear skies and favourable winds. We’ve changed course again – we’re heading back towards Victoria. Running on good winds, we entered the Strait of Juan de Fuca around 6 p.m. Surrounded by mountains on all sides. Wind is westerly. Spotted the Victoria lighthouse at 2 a.m. and dropped anchor about 10 km away. After discussing where to put ashore, the Captain and Jinsaburo decided to wait for dawn and go back to Beecher Bay.

19 Oct. - Today is a beginning and an end. We anchored in Beecher Bay and spent the day fishing and gazing at the mountains. At 10 p.m., sixty-five people in four small boats slipped away from the side of the Sui-an-maru.

(from Bunji Goto’s ship’s log)
From here, the overland and the sea-borne groups separated from the main ship. The sea-borne unit was to row along the coast towards and past Victoria: there were seventeen in that group, including the three women. The overland groups, relying on maps, were to traverse Vancouver Island by skirting north of the City of Victoria and meet the fishing boats from Steveston in Sydney. The last group were the Sui-an-maru’s official passengers so they remained on board. (from Chiyomi Oikawa’s Recollections)

XI  

Vancouver Island

The star-filled sky spread out above the black sea. Kimpei looked into the night sky as he had done every night since leaving Japan. It was no surprise that the stars above Canada were the same as those above Japan but, for some reason, this constancy alleviated his fears. The only proof of being in a foreign land was that the North Star was higher in the sky than in Oinokawara.

The sailors’ rowing skill was something to behold as the boat skimmed smoothly over the calm water bringing them ever closer to land. Up close and at night, the land looked quite different than through a telescope during the day. The massive, black land spread as far as the eye could see from left to right before them. The cliffs they had estimated from the ship to be twenty metres high loomed above them: thirty metres, for sure, perhaps even more than forty.

The boat finally came aground on the shallow beach. Kimpei, following the sailors’ lead, took off his boots, rolled up his pants, and ran ashore barefoot. He had not stepped on land for fifty days; the sand tickling against the bottoms of his feet confirmed their safe arrival.

Happiness and relief washed through his entire body and he wanted to proclaim his happiness. He wanted to yell across the ocean and let his family know that he had arrived safely. Jinsaburo’s strict warnings against making any sound restrained him, however, and he bit back the exuberance building within him. A mysterious tear fell down his cheek as he bounded up the beach. Avoiding the scattered boulders, he came up against the bottom of the cliff. In daylight, through a telescope, the cliff was a deep grey colour. At night it was an imposing, black, rock wall.

The group leader took a roll call at the bottom of the cliff and they watched the sailors row back to the ship, leaving them alone on the beach. As they each regained their land legs, they took off individually to tackle the cliff. It was not a steep, vertical cliff but the darkness made it extremely difficult to find footing. The climb was laborious.

Part way up, Kimpei came across thickly growing vines. He bunched up a handful and pulled; the vines held his weight so he used them to pull himself up. As he climbed, he remembered all the times he had used vines to climb mountains at home. Nearer the top, he could not tell if he was pulling on vines or small trees but whichever it was, it sped the climb considerably. At the top there was a large grassy area although the grass was already half withered and dead.

The rest of the group was still climbing so, despite the warnings against speaking, he leaned close to the edge and whispered loud directions to those below,

“Left is better.”

or
“Don’t go that way.”
Far out from the beach, he saw the lantern hoisted high up on the Sui-an-maru’s mast.
When all had reached the top, they took roll call again and set off as a group across the meadow and into the forest beyond. Soon, the ocean faded from view. They neither saw nor heard any of the other groups. They were alone.
They had no tents so they slept in their clothes - all their clothes - and huddled together for warmth. The night grew colder and sleep was impossible. They wanted to light a fire but finding dry branches in the darkness was an impossible task.
The talking started with low whispers which quickly grew louder. At first, the group leader tried to keep everyone quiet but he eventually gave up and joined the conversation himself. They talked about everything from the hardships aboard ship to their lives at home. Excited and unable to sleep, they decided to find some dry branches despite the darkness.
Once they had gathered some broken branches the arguments began,
“This is fir!”
“No, it isn’t! It looks like fir but the needles are too long.”
Of course, there was no way to settle the argument because they had only touch to rely on, but the arguments continued nevertheless.
Someone lit a match and they had their first close-up look at Canada. In the short time before the match burned out, they saw that the plants around them were not very different from the ones they had known in Japan.
“It’s not a fir but it looks like fir. Therefore, it must be a Canadian fir,” someone joked and everybody laughed. By this time, any reservations about making noise had disappeared and they all talked excitedly in loud voices. Eventually they fell asleep, exhausted, to be awoken only a short time later by the coldness of morning.
As dawn broke, everyone got up and went out exploring. They reminded each other not to stray too far but, in the end, everyone covered a fair distance. Some even came across the other groups.
The group leader was one who strayed quite far and found an apple orchard hidden in the morning mist. It was a huge orchard that seemed never to end. It was harvest time but, seeing no one around, the group leader made a bag from his army jacket and filled it with fallen apples to take back to the others. After fifty days at sea with few fruits and vegetables, the men devoured the apples in silence.
A fir was lit and although they had not found a source of water, they were not too worried; if people lived on this island, there was surely a source of water nearby. There was dried bread for breakfast.
“Hey, I saw some warabi, a mountain ash with red berries, and even some mushrooms,” someone announced as he came back with a handful of mushrooms to show everyone. The mushroom expert in the group agreed that they looked like edible shimeji mushrooms in Japan but warned that it would be best not to eat them, just in case they were poisonous in this foreign land.
“There are oak trees, too,” someone else announced, “but I didn’t see any nara or kunugi. I saw lots of fir, cedar, maples and willows, though.”
Everyone announced his discoveries so everyone else could hear. Kimpei was the last to come back but he brought a big bunch of red scampo (Rumex acetosa) which he carried with both hands. Everyone sprang upon the scampo and devoured it in short order (they had all eaten scampo with salt as children). This was further proof that Canada was almost identical to their hometown. The scampo was a remarkable find for they had been starved for fresh vegetables for so long.

53 Fern or bracken
54 Different kinds of oak in Japan
“This scampo was growing in a marsh so I’ll bet there’s clean water nearby. The marsh was surrounded by trees with yellow autumn leaves, but I wonder why there aren’t any red leaves,” Kimpei said, mostly to himself.

Everyone looked around with a start and found that Kimpei was right; there were green leaves and yellow leaves but no red leaves.

It suddenly struck them that summer had passed them by on the ship and they had been plunked down in the middle of autumn. Nostalgia for the red-leafed mountains of home spread through the group.

“Take us to the water,” someone said, breaking their reverie, and the sixteen of them all stood up at once.

As Kimpei had predicted, there was a clear pond just beyond the marsh. They drank deeply and filled their canteens with water before turning north and setting off again.

Not long after, they came to a busy road: the number of people on the road suggesting they were near a settlement. Having been warned to avoid being seen, the busy road presented an obstacle. As instructed by Jinsaburo, the group leader chose three men and set off to find a safe place to cross the road. They broke branches to show the way for those who followed later.

Kimpei was chosen as a scout so he climbed a tree on a nearby rise to look down on the road. A White girl with blond hair streaming out behind was riding a bicycle along the road. Kimpei gasped. He had never seen a White person before and he suddenly realised how foreign this country was after all.

Eventually, they found a safe crossing and waited for a break. When they were sure it was clear, they hurried across the road and into the forest on the other side. Presently, they emerged from the forest into a large, cultivated field which they thought better not to cross; they made a long detour around it.

The second night on land was spent in the forest with a small fire for warmth. Remembering another of Jinsaburo’s warnings - “Whatever you do, do nothing to sully the reputation of the Japanese. Never steal, even if you think you are about to die of starvation.” - they saved the food they had brought for the next night and ate fallen apples gathered from an orchard along the way.

A light rain was falling when they awoke the next morning.

Later that day, they came to a potato farm and were seen by a very large White farmer. He approached them and, through a series of gestures, offered them work on his farm. By digging a dollar out of his pocket and holding up one finger, he made them to understand he would pay them a dollar a day. The group leader refused in Japanese and they continued on their way.

Shortly thereafter, the group leader and two of the scouts were captured by the police. Perhaps the farmer had tipped the police off.

Kimpei avoided capture by hiding in some nearby bushes but he saw everything, especially that the policeman drew his pistol and threatened the three captives. Suddenly, he realised they were smuggling themselves into the country illegally and that it was a crime. He became morose and lost all desire to go on.

The third night was very cold and a hard frost fell. There was no more food.

With the capture of the group leader, the compass and map were also lost so they had to rely on the sun and stars to keep heading north. That day, they discovered a huge stump covered with 8-12 kilograms of mushrooms that resembled enoki mushrooms except for a slightly lighter colour. The mushroom expert picked two, smelled them, put them in his mouth, and chewed them. This was the same man who told them not to eat the shimeji mushrooms so they watched him expectantly, waiting for his verdict.

“They’re safe to eat.”

The roasted mushroom dinner on the fourth night staved off starvation a little longer.
The forests were a brilliant yellow and Kimpei constantly wondered why the mountains in Canada were so yellow and not red like autumn mountains in Japan.

Finding fresh water was no problem except that they were sometimes seen by White people at the water holes. They had lost all caution and no longer scampere into hiding at the sight of White people. They no longer hesitated even when crossing roads. This small group of army surplus-clad Japanese walked with confidence in front of White people who paid them no heed other than a curious glance.

That afternoon, they came across the railroad and spurred each other along with encouragements that they could not be far from their destination of Sydney.

On the fifth night, with nothing to eat, they drank their fill of water and fell asleep. Their stomachs grumbled all night.

Setting off along the railroad tracks the next morning, they soon came across a group of high-nosed, dark-skinned labourers wearing white coverings on their heads. Kimpei could not know that they were immigrants from India but he did know that their eyes were frightening.

By the time they were discovered by the three policemen, they could barely move. The policemen pointed pistols at them and yelled something so they all raised their hands above their heads as they had been shown by Jinsaburo. They were handcuffed and loaded onto a freight car that came along shortly. On entering the car, they found others from their group who must have been caught earlier that day. All together, there were twenty-six of them in the car.

Kimpei was somehow relieved and overcome with exhaustion close to death. There was no longer any doubt that they had arrived. It was the sixth day since they had landed.

There were some incredibly interesting things on our first exposure to a foreign country, especially for me who grew up in the back waters of Japan. One was the steam whistles that could be heard in the distance. We thought for sure that these were signals of our impending capture. Second was the White girl I saw riding her bike with her golden hair streaming out behind her in the morning breeze. I thought that she must be a heavenly maiden come down to earth. (from Kimpei Goto’s, Recollections of Sixty Years)

Within six days of going ashore, we had found the railway, marched the thirty kilometres to Sidney, and found the piers. There were three of us: Gizo Onodera, Taiji Kumagai, and myself. We looked for the boat that was supposed to meet us but there were only large barges loaded with railway freight cars. We thought, maybe, the boat was at some other wharf so we went looking far and wide. Before we found the boat we were found by the police and arrested. (from Bunji Goto’s diary)
The freight car stopped at the station and Kimpei’s ears were assailed by the busy sounds of the city, many of which he had never heard before. All twenty-six of the captured Japanese were unloaded and marched across the switching yard rails, guarded in front and back by policemen. Once across the tracks, they were in the city of Victoria.

It was then that Kimpei really saw the foreign country for the first time. Right before his eyes was a three-storied, Western-style building with uncountable windows, each lit by gas lights. It was just dusk and the street was full of foreigners. It was just as Kimpei had seen in pictures and photographs: the women wore long skirts and shoes and the men, without exception, wore hats (many of which were dignified top hats). Even the children wore hats. Everyone wore Western clothes and walked around in leather shoes. It was all very strange to Kimpei.

A horse-drawn carriage rattled by. An impeccably dressed man with a drooping moustache sat on the driver’s bench while a poorly-dressed, elderly couple sat in the carriage. It seemed somehow backward that the driver should be better dressed than the passengers.

As they were led close on each other’s heels, many children stopped to look at them with curious eyes. Strangely, however, Kimpei noticed that the adults averted their eyes and pretended not to notice their little group. As Kimpei wondered why this might be, a man with a shaggy, red beard came near them and began speaking at them. He did not wear a hat, nor an overcoat, and certainly not a necktie. He wore only a shirt with broad, blue stripes.

The man stepped in front of them and spat out the word “Jap” with such vehemence it startled Kimpei. On board the ship, they had learned from Jinsaburo that the word was a derogatory word for Japanese. Suddenly, Kimpei remembered that they were captured criminals. His head drooped in misery.

Presently, they turned off the busy station street onto a deserted side street. A large, warehouse-like building loomed before them and the smell of the ocean was strong.

They were taken to the large empty building and shown into a small room where the smell of cooking food wafted into their nostrils. One of the policemen gestured to Kimpei by directing the back of his hand toward Kimpei and drawing his fingers towards himself. Although this gesture was opposite to the Japanese way of beckoning someone, Kimpei understood that he was to go with the policeman. There was no malice in the policeman’s eyes so Kimpei obeyed.

They went to a small room with both a sink and a toilet where the policeman made gestures to indicate washing hands and eating. Kimpei could not understand the connection between the gestures but he washed his hands and face anyway. As he wiped himself with the dirty towel, he could only think that the next step was to be thrown into prison. Of course, he had seen neither a Japanese nor a foreign prison first-hand but he had read in books that foreign prisons were fitted with iron bars.

Kimpei looked up at the policeman with sad eyes. The policeman took him back to the room with the others.

Sounds of food preparation and a delicious smell permeated the room. The policeman made gestures indicating that the other Japanese were to go and wash, as well. As the policeman pointed in turn to Kimpei, the other Japanese, and towards the toilet, Kimpei suddenly understood the eating actions the policeman had made in the toilet. Maybe, just maybe, they would not be thrown into prison after all.

Kimpei said to the others, “He’s saying to go wash up and then come back here to eat. The toilet and the sink are down the hall.”

Kimpei stood up. The others, slowly and hesitantly at first, followed his example and stood up, too. The policeman stood by and nodded vigorously.
Supper was unexpectedly large with a surprising amount of meat. There was bread and butter, and even coffee to finish off. They had been undernourished for so long that they hardly knew where to begin. Without even considering whether the food was good or not, they ate heartily and silently as if in a dream. Only after finishing did they realise that they had eaten Western food. Before long, everyone was talking excitedly, even those who had said nothing for hours. Everything was new to them, even in that stark room: the chairs they sat on, the table, the floor, the high ceiling, and the electric lights that lit up the room so brilliantly.

After dinner, they were taken outside to a different building. As they entered the new building, Kimpei suddenly wondered what had happened to the rest of their group of phantom immigrants. They were not in the new building either. They were ushered into tiny, bare rooms with two sets of three high bunkbeds with only one blanket each. The room was warm and Kimpei fell asleep quickly, repeating to himself that this was not a prison. He slept poorly as he had nightmare after nightmare about being pursued.

The next morning, they returned to the cafeteria for a breakfast of bread, butter, and milk. The bread was piled high in a large basket in the centre of the table. Not sure whether the whole basket was for them or if they were only allowed one piece each, they took one piece each to start. The policeman ignored them so, after a brief discussion, they surreptitiously took another piece each. Then another. Even after three large pieces of bread each there was still some left which they split up. At last, the bread basket was empty although the butter remained untouched as nobody was quite sure what it was. It had been so long since their stomachs were full.

After breakfast, a different policeman came to get them. This new one made exaggerated gestures and even wore his hat backwards in an apparent attempt to soften their mood and reassure them.

“Well, the time has come,” the man next to Kimpei said. “We’re going to prison. First they make you relax then they put you in front of the firing squad. For some strange reason, it seems that foreigners like prisoners to die on a full stomach.”

“That can’t be true,” Kimpei argued. “If that was the plan they would have put us in prison last night. Furthermore, the bread wasn’t just to fill our stomachs because they let us eat as much as we wanted without any interference. Serving bread in a basket is just a foreign custom; I read about it somewhere.”

The rest of the men listened to this exchange in silence. They had all been uneasy but now, even those who had refused to think about it, could not deny the possibility that they were about to be killed. They all looked toward the policeman with eyes full of dread.

Kimpei remembered Jinsaburo’s reassurances,

“If you get caught, be as polite and well-behaved as you possibly can. We will get permission to enter the country. You just leave that up to me.”

Two more policemen joined the one guarding them and they led the Japanese to yet another building, filled with steam, clankling metal, and the smell of chemicals. The building was brightly lit by electric lights even though it was mid-day and the sun shone in through the windows. A flute-like sound was occasionally heard from somewhere further inside. The three policemen left them with some men in white jackets who were apparently waiting for them.

The Japanese were made to stand in three lines with Kimpei at the head of the middle line. One of the white-coated men came toward Kimpei and, by a series of gestures, made Kimpei understand that they were each to strip down and place their clothes in one of the metal boxes piled in front of them. This took a long time to convey.
Kimpei finally removed his army jacket, pants, shirt, and long underwear but not his underwear. The white-coated man indicated that the underwear was to come off as well. The white-coated man was yelling angrily and Kimpei guessed that he was telling them to hurry up.

The now naked Kimpei was pushed into a tiny room and the door closed behind him. Immediately, a chemical rain began to fall from the ceiling. The room was so small that there was no place to escape the shower but by shading his eyes with his left hand Kimpei saw that the shower came from head of a watering pot attached to the ceiling.

Kimpei figured that it was a poisonous shower and he would soon die from it. Instead, a door in the opposite wall opened to reveal a man in a white jacket who gestured for Kimpei to rub his body with the cloth and brush that hung on the wall. His fears somewhat allayed, Kimpei scrubbed himself and soon the chemical shower mysteriously turned into a soapy shower. The softness of the water made all his remaining doubts disappear.

Kimpei realised that this was a Western bath. It had been so long since he had bathed that the dirt kept coming out no matter how much he washed and scrubbed. When he finally finished scrubbing, a warm clear rinse fell from the spout.

Emerging from the shower refreshed, he was handed a large towel and directed into another room where a doctor was waiting to give him a medical check. The doctor was a frightening looking man with a face that had probably never smiled. After the medical check, Kimpei was taken to another room where he waited for a long time. As he waited, he surmised that the next step was to receive new clothes. Suddenly, a new doubt crept into his heart - they were going to get prison clothes and be sent to prison after all.

Before long, however, the metal box containing his own clothes was brought in and set down before him. The box was still hot and when he removed the still-warm clothes, he saw that the lice had been killed and the eggs had turned black. The clothes had obviously been steam sterilised.

So, they were not going to prison after all. Once they and their clothes were sterilised and disinfected, they would be sent back to Japan. But, if they were being sent back, what was the purpose of the medical check? Kimpei knew that ships were quarantined on arrival but did not realise that was exactly what he had just gone through. He relaxed a little more.

Once disinfected, the Japanese were loaded onto a new-style gasoline launch and taken to the naval base in nearby Esquimalt where the *Sui-an-maru* was waiting with everyone on board. Apparently, they had all (overland and seaborne groups alike) been caught, quarantined, disinfected, and returned to the ship.

“We are being sent back to Japan on the *Sui-an-maru* after all,” Kimpei said out loud. All at once, his strength and hope disappeared and his optimism at arriving safely was replaced by misery at the thought of their failure and the prospect of being deported as criminals. At the best, they would go home and act as if nothing had happened; he would return to his job as an assistant teacher in Oinokawara. Strangely, not a single tear fell from his eyes.

The hatch smelled of the chemicals used to disinfect it and all the straw mats had been replaced with benches and enough blankets for everyone. Kimpei sat on one of the benches, his thoughts swirling with memories of the few days he spent wandering around this foreign country.

*We were quarantined like any ship that came from a foreign country…. We were pushed into a small room about five cubic feet in size where a chemical shower fell from what looked to be a watering can spout attached to the ceiling. The warm chemical water*
fell on my whole body; there was nowhere to escape. It only lasted a short time but we were sure it was meant to kill us. (from the Recollections of Chiyomi Oikawa)

XIII  End and Beginning II

All eighty-two were there. Nobody seemed sick or injured but all were subdued and silent. Kimpei’s group of twenty-six was obviously the last to be caught.

“What, they got you, too?” was the extent of interest in their adventures.

Nobody was interested in where each group had gone, how they had been caught, and whether everyone had gone through the same quarantine. Kimpei’s group received nothing but a cursory glance and silence. There were neither deep sighs nor tears. They had gone as far as they could on their own power and strength but that had run out. All they could do was put themselves in the hands of fate. Resignation ran rampant.

They had been down in the hold only a short time when Jinsaburo stuck his head down the hatch and told everyone to gather on deck. They stood reluctantly and climbed the ladder slowly.

On deck, they saw an un-Japanese looking Japanese man standing with Jinsaburo. The stranger was dressed in a completely black Western suit and wore a top-hat. Despite his Western dress, he had an unassuming air about him.

Jinsaburo introduced him,

“This is Mr. Saburo Yoshie from the Japanese Consulate in Vancouver.”

Saburo Yoshie took a step forward, his perfectly polished black shoes shone brilliantly against the background of the deck.

“As Mr. Oikawa has already said, I am Saburo Yoshie from the Japanese Consulate in Vancouver where I work as a clerk.”

He paused and lifted his head to survey the group of immigrants arrayed before him. It was a long, smooth sweep of a gaze and when he had seen all, he continued,

“In trying to smuggle yourselves into this country, you have violated the Statutes of Canada. It was an extremely ill-advised and insolent act and I am here to reprimand you on behalf of the Japanese Consul-General. If you ever try such a stunt again, the consequences will be severe. Am I understood?”

He spoke with a deep, resonant, commanding voice. Everyone stood upright at attention and listened carefully. The Japanese Consul-General was the Japanese Government so there was no arguing nor excuses.

Someone in the back said, “Yes, sir!” but the rest were dead silent. They were positive that Saburo Yoshie was about to tell them they were being sent back to Japan immediately. They stood rigidly, waiting for the decisive word. Instead, he said,

“At ease.”

Suddenly aware of their tense stances, everyone assumed a more comfortable posture.

“As long as you understand that, everything will be fine. I’m relieved and happy that you have all made it safely this far and are finally all back together. I have to admit, though, we were all a little worried about the last group of twenty-six whose whereabouts were completely unknown for five days. We were afraid something unfortunate had happened,” the severe, reproaching tone disappeared and Yoshie’s voice became gentle and conversational.

“You gentlemen attempted to enter the country illegally but that was your only crime. The Japanese Consulate is negotiating with the Canadian authorities on your behalf to get you legal permission to enter
the country. The first steps were already completed when you were taken to the Immigration Office to be disinfectected and given a medical examination. It will take several more days before we can get the proper papers but with them you can go anywhere in Canada with confidence. I’m asking you now to leave everything to us at the Consulate and wait here for just a few more days. I know it is inconvenient but it will be worth it.”

A faint sobbing arose from someone in the back who was unable to keep her emotions in check. Soon the sobbing became outright crying. Everyone turned towards the crying and saw it was Yun Oikawa, the youngest member of the group. She stood there in her ill-fitting army surplus clothes, the pant cuffs rolled up high, her red coral hairpin glinting in the sunlight, and tears streaming down her cheeks. Soon, her older sister, Toyo Oikawa, began crying as well; the other female, Hisayo Suzuki, struggled to keep her tears from showing. Many of the men squeezed their eyes tightly and covered their eyes with their hands.

Saburo Yoshie walked to Yun’s side and put his hand on her shoulder,

“Don’t worry,” he said. “In a few days you’ll be able to go ashore and stay in a Japanese inn where you can relax. Those army clothes must be uncomfortable so I’ll have Western dresses sent to the ship tomorrow for the women.”

Saburo Yoshie turned quickly, said something to Jinsaburo, went down the ramp to the gas launch, and was gone.

In an instant, the atmosphere changed again. Everybody wandered around the deck on the verge of breaking into dance. Whereas they had been silent and morose only moments before, they were now excited and garrulous. There was a sudden interest in asking and telling about each other’s adventures since the night they landed at Beecher Bay.

Kimpei felt uneasy with the rapid shift of emotions and removed himself a short distance away where he could watch and listen to the goings-on.

Eventually, when every story had been told and compared with the others’, the following series of events emerged regarding the six days.

The morning after the overland and sea-borne groups left the ship, the *Sui-an-maru* weighed anchor and was immediately apprehended by a patrol boat. Apparently, they were spotted from a lookout station on shore the moment they dropped anchor in Beecher Bay. The lookout kept a close watch on the ship through a telescope and his suspicions were confirmed when he noticed that one of the four lifeboats had disappeared in the night.

The police boarded and searched the *Sui-an-maru* based on the lookout’s report and found evidence of many passengers in the hold. There was nothing that the Japanese could say to dispute allegations that the *Sui-an-maru* was carrying illegal immigrants and had put them ashore during the night. They were escorted to the naval base in Esquimalt.

Some of the groups lit fires that first night and those fires were reported to the police by several locals. Suspicions of illegal immigration were further strengthened.

The seaborne group had spent the first night on land and then continued along the coast the next day keeping very close to shore. They were caught by the police on the second day, handcuffed in pairs (except for the three women), and taken to prison.

On the third morning, the newspapers ran large headlines about the sixty-five illegal Japanese immigrants and the police stepped up their efforts to find them. By the end of the third day, thirty nine had been arrested but the remaining twenty-six had vanished.

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55 See appendix A
Finally, on the sixth day, the remaining Japanese were found wandering near Sydney, eliminating any possibility that the seventeen Japanese on board the *Sui-an-maru* could claim to be anything but illegal immigrants.

Soon after the first group was apprehended, Mr. Yoshie from the Japanese Consulate in Vancouver arrived in Victoria and began negotiations with the Canadian authorities about granting immigration papers. Jinsaburo Oikawa had a valid passport so he was not considered an illegal immigrant but was put under close watch on the grounds that he was the suspected leader of the group.

Having recounted and compared stories, talk returned once again to their future. There was much doubt over whether they could believe Saburo Yoshie; if they had broken the law, it would not be as easy to get permission to stay as Yoshie had assured them.

“You know,” someone whispered, “it almost looks like Jinsaburo and Yoshie have known each other for a long time. I wonder if the two of them cooked up this scheme together.”

They were supplied with enough food and water that starvation was no longer a worry but the days passed slowly as they waited, staring at the sea.

Finally, one drizzly day, a launch appeared with Yoshie, a Japanese woman dressed in Western clothes, and Jinsaburo. Everyone clustered near the rail.

“Good news, everyone,” Jinsaburo yelled as he stepped off the launch and came up on deck. “We’ve got permission to stay.”

Yoshie strode up the ramp with his chest puffed out, a completely different man than the last time. He smiled broadly at the eighty-two and congratulated them warmly before addressing them in a slow, easily understood manner.

“The three newspapers ran large headlines about you and how you tried to smuggle yourselves into the country. One newspaper was especially outraged and wrote that you were the first group to try this since the founding of the country.

“Well, as of today, you are legal immigrants. Today we will go into Victoria to get your pictures taken and by this time tomorrow, you will each have a legal passport.”

Yoshie then asked a rhetorical question, “And to whom do you owe this favourable turn of events?”

He paused to let them consider it for a moment then continued,

“If you think it was because of my efforts, you are greatly mistaken. I was only acting on orders from Rishiro Morikawa who is the Japanese Consul-General in Vancouver. Consul-General Morikawa is the Japanese Government’s representative in this part of Canada and is here to take care of Japanese citizens. He negotiated with the Canadian Government on your behalf and persuaded them to drop the illegal immigration charges and allow you to enter the country legally. You are not criminals. They worked out a special arrangement whereby you were not really illegal immigrants despite appearances.

“There are several factors behind this special agreement: the good relations between Japan and England, the fact that Canada is in need of labourers, and that they like Japanese workers very much. You are lucky.

“However, Captain Moritarto Nishikiiori, of the *Sui-an-maru* has been charged with two crimes and must pay a hefty fine.”

Yoshie explained that Captain Nishikiiori had been charged with putting illegal immigrants ashore and allowing them to take baggage not cleared by customs. Altogether, he was ordered by the courts in Victoria to pay a fine of $3,075.
“I haven’t told the captain about his fine yet because I wanted to tell you first and suggest that you take care of it for him. I think the captain will be allowed to leave as soon as possible but I’ll leave it up to Mr. Oikawa to explain the details.”

Jinsaburo explained that the fine worked out to $37 each between the eighty-three of them and since it was a lot of money, the Nikka Yoben Company in Vancouver had offered to put up the money until the immigrants found work and could pay it back in monthly instalments. He asked for their approval. No one objected.

The talking finished, Yoshie and the Japanese woman took the three women passengers into the captain’s cabin. The woman was the wife of a Japanese inn owner in Victoria and had brought Western dresses, underwear, and shoes for the women. She came personally to show them how to put the clothes on.

Thirty minutes later the three women emerged in their pretty dresses. Their fellow passengers gazed silently at the transformation for quite some time before all hell broke loose and the three women had to endure the ribald comments from the many, many men.

The whole group left the Sui-an-maru together and took launches to Victoria. Despite assurances that they were legal, they were still surprised when there were no policemen waiting. The group walked down the street with Yoshie (wearing a top-hat) at the front followed by the four women and the men falling in behind. Yoshie had decided on this order for, as Jinsaburo explained on the ship, it was the custom in this country that ladies went first. Custom or not, the men felt this was a gross inversion of the natural order.

As they walked down the street, they were approached by a young, White man who started yelling something at them. Saburo Yoshie responded to the youth in fluent English and although no one had any idea what he said, they knew his voice was raised and his tone serious. The White youth walked away sheepishly.

Kimpei, standing beside Yoshie during the incident, was impressed with the way he stuck up for himself and admonished the foreigner who had insulted them. Yoshie was a man without equal as far as Kimpei was concerned.

“Learning English is my first priority,” Kimpei promised himself.

After having their pictures taken, they went to a Japanese inn for the night. There were many inns and hotels in Victoria because it was a quarantine port; many people from many countries had to stop in Victoria for a medical check before continuing to Vancouver.

The next afternoon, they received their picture passports and Yoshie emphasised how important this document was. Just as they boarded the ship for Vancouver, Yoshie added,

“You are in this country legally so you don’t have to bow down before anyone or hesitate to do anything.”

It was a beautiful steamer and it wove a twisted path through the many small islands. Kimpei stood at the railing, fascinated by the passing scenery. The ship was full and all of the other passengers were foreigners. Kimpei found the foreigners’ faces frightening with their deep set eyes and high noses. To his surprise, one of those frightening foreigners approached him at the ship’s rail. The man smiled at Kimpei and struggled to make himself understood. In the end, all they communicated was that Kimpei was Japanese and the elderly, foreign man was English. Despite the difficulty of communication Kimpei learned one important thing from this queer conversation: foreigners were not as frightening as they looked. The experience strengthened Kimpei’s resolve to learn English as quickly as he could.

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Japanese refer to any non-Japanese as a “foreigner.”
Vancouver was much bigger than Victoria, more Western, and more foreign (if that was possible). About twenty Japanese were waiting when they arrived: some from the Japanese inns where they would stay and some from their hometown who had preceded them to Canada. All of them were dressed like foreigners and the newcomers guessed they had already made their fortunes and assimilated into the White community to the point where they could probably speak English as well as Yoshie and Jinsaburo.

Kimpei wanted to shed his army clothes and change into Western clothes as soon as possible but chuckled inwardly when he realised that changing into Western clothes would not give him the ability to speak English.

Everything he saw and heard was new and he wanted to go slowly and take it all in, one thing at a time. Unfortunately, he was part of a large group that walked straight and fast down a street lined with Western-style buildings stretching far into the distance. Only once did he stop and that was in front of a flower shop with chrysanthemums on display. Looking closely, he saw they were slightly different than Japanese chrysanthemums, but only slightly.

The blooming chrysanthemums reminded him of his home in Oinokawara with the flower garden behind and the daikon field beyond. As he stood in front of the chrysanthemums staring into his mental image of home, his mother appeared in the middle of the field. Kimpei stood motionless in front of the flower shop for a long time.

Every house along Powell Street (also known as ‘Little Tokyo’) displayed the Japanese ‘Rising Sun’ flag that day and Kimpei wondered if it was to welcome them to Vancouver. At any rate, it seemed strange to enter a little Japan in the heart of the large, foreign city full of Western buildings.

The eighty-two were split between sixteen Japanese inns and a representative from each group was chosen. They talked a long time amongst themselves before they finally went off to their respective lodgings.

That evening, Kimpei sat down to write a letter home. Startled when he wrote the date, November 13th, he reached for his diary. Still not entirely convinced, he went to find the inn-keeper to confirm the date.

“Today is the Emperor’s Birthday, isn’t it?” he asked.

“That’s right,” answered the inn-keeper.

“Hence, the flags,” Kimpei said.

“To celebrate the Emperor’s birthday, yes,” the inn-keeper responded and Kimpei returned to his room, somewhat disappointed.

Back in his room, he reread his diary right from the beginning when he left his Oinokawara home sixty-five days earlier on August 31st. When he finished, Kimpei knew that Canada would probably be his home for life. His diary entry for November 13th records (in katakana) the ten or so English words he had learned that day. The last word is ‘house’.

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To: The Honourable Kaoru Hayashi,
    Minister of Foreign Affairs
From: Rishiro Morikawa,
    Consul-General, Vancouver,
    British Columbia, Canada

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57 Japanese horse radish
58 One of the two phonetic Japanese writing systems - used for foreign words.
Regarding: The Incident Involving Illegal Japanese Immigrants Aboard the Sailing Vessel, Sui-an-maru

On the eighteenth of last month the Japanese-registered sailing vessel, Sui-an-maru, sailed into Beecher Bay (25 miles from the Port of Victoria in this Province) and put ashore sixty-five of the aforementioned illegal immigrants in the dead of night. As none of them had the proper papers to enter the country legally, their purpose was to avoid public detection and make their way to either Victoria or Sydney. To this end, they split into small groups and used small mountain roads and railway lines. Having lost their way because of poor directions, they were found wandering in various places and eventually arrested by the authorities on suspicion of breaches to the Immigration Act.

Leading up to said arrests, on the nineteenth of last month (the day after putting the immigrants ashore), the Sui-an-maru was apprehended as it set sail from the aforementioned Beecher Bay by a patrol boat of the Quarantine Office on suspicion of breaches to the Quarantine Act and the Customs Act and ordered to proceed to the Port of Esquimalt to be impounded.

We were informed immediately of the incident by telegrams from both the authorities concerned and from a Japanese national, resident in Victoria. In addition to said direct notice, the local English newspapers carried stories of the unprecedented event and expressed outrage that such a large group of Japanese nationals should enter the country illegally, albeit daringly, in direct contravention of Canadian Immigration, Quarantine, and Customs Acts. In light of the possible evocation of public opinion, Mr. Yoshie (clerk) of our office was immediately dispatched to Victoria to investigate the situation and negotiate with the relevant authorities to effect a satisfactory conclusion.

The results of Mr. Yoshie’s preliminary investigation revealed that there were still twenty-six whose whereabouts remained unknown. Given that they were known to be carrying only two days worth of food, that they had put ashore in an extremely sparsely settled area, and that they were thought to have gone into the mountains, there was the fear that they would perish from starvation if the authorities did not intervene. Mr. Yoshie successfully enlisted the help of the provincial constabulary in effecting a search that happily resulted in all persons being found at last and transported to Victoria.

It was then that the negotiations commenced with an agreement not to imprison them but to put them through a medical check and disinfection sequence and then return them to, and detain them aboard, the Sui-an-maru which was impounded in the Port of Esquimalt. Following this, based on a report submitted to the authorities from in-depth interviews Mr. Yoshie conducted with each of the members of the group, we decided that under the especially pitiable circumstances it would not be in anyone’s best interests to return them to Japan. Given the volatile nature of the incident and the fear that the English newspapers would exaggerate the event and raise public opinion against immigrants stealing employment, it was necessary to proceed very carefully in our negotiations. Mr. Yoshie was able, through a detailed explanation of why they had entered the country illegally, to convince the authorities to exercise clemency in not prosecuting and, in fact, grant legal permission to immigrate. Similarly, the head of the Quarantine Office agreed not to prosecute for breaches to the Quarantine Act.

However, Captain Moritaro Nishikiori of the Sui-an-maru, was charged with being negligent of his responsibilities as contained in Article 47 of the Immigration Act when he put the immigrants ashore and fined $2,275 by the
Furthermore, he was charged with being negligent of his responsibilities contained in the Customs Act when he put such a large number of passengers ashore with baggage that had not fulfilled customs requirements and was fined a further $800. He paid the above fine within a few days and his vessel was released. Officially, this is where the case is closed.

The above mentioned Sui-an-maru is registered to a Mr. Yasubei Mizuno of Nishi-biwa-jima-machi (town), Kasugai-gun (county), Aichi Prefecture and was apparently chartered by Mr. Jinsaburo Oikawa of Masubuchi, Yonekawa-mura (village), Tome-gun (county), Miyagi Prefecture for the purpose of transporting illegal emigrants. The above eighty-three members, none possessing passports, boarded the Sui-an-maru at the Port of Ogino-hama in the Rikuzen district of Miyagi Prefecture. Fifty-three of the eighty-three had documents showing them to be fishermen but the members themselves claim that they paid either Jinsaburo Oikawa or his elder brother Kuraji Suto the amounts entered beside their names on the accompanying document. Furthermore, it was discovered that they were forced, aboard ship, to sign notes promising to pay Jinsaburo Oikawa a further sixty-seven or seventy dollars each in monthly payments once they had secured employment.

It is recognised that Jinsaburo Oikawa is the ringleader of this enterprise and although the Immigration Department has granted him temporary permission to land, they are undertaking an investigation that will possibly lead to a future indictment. Our consulate has begun an investigation of our own.

I, as your humble servant, do hereby submit to you the above circulated report along with an outline of this office’s plans for continuation of the investigation, a written statement by Captain Moritaro Nishikiori of the Sui-an-maru, and a list of the Japanese nationals involved.

Dated at Vancouver on this fifth day of the eleventh month of the thirty-ninth year of the Emperor Meiji’s reign.

(from the miscellaneous file relating to illegal Japanese immigrants to foreign countries in the diplomatic archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
Chapter 4

Long Knife

(Fishing fleet and cannery on the Fraser River)
Starting Out

On 3 November 1906, Jinsaburo Oikawa returned to Oikawa-jima after a year and a half absence.

“Ahh, there’s nowhere like home,” he said over and over during the few minutes it took to cross the river to the island.

“Was Yonekawa that good?” Yaeno finally asked when they reached the island.

“When I say home, I mean this island right here,” Jinsaburo said as he picked up his children, Eiji and Shima, in turn and hugged them. He could not believe how much they had grown while he was away.

“Yaeno,” he said, turning his attention to her, “home is where you live and where your family is. Nowhere else.”

Souemon stood nearby, listening to the reunion and smiling. Jinsaburo turned to him and said,

“Isn’t that right, Souemon?”

Jinsaburo suddenly remembered that Souemon was still single so he added,

“Don’t worry. We’re going to find you a wife this year so you can start thinking of these islands as home, too.”

Souemon gave Jinsaburo a quick rundown of events during his absence. In short, there had been no major problems.

“Actually,” Souemon said, “business has been quite good.”

However, when Jinsaburo looked at the account book he noticed that salt-salmon shipments to Japan were down.

Souemon explained, “There are two reasons for that. One is that there is an increasing number of Japanese copying us. The other is that the dog salmon cost us three cents a fish now so we obviously had to increase the wholesale price which, in turn, resulted in fewer orders.”

“I really want to thank you for taking such good care of everything while I was gone, Souemon.” Jinsaburo was duly impressed with how well Souemon had managed considering the complexity of the operation.

“But it sounds like you had a really tough time of it too, Boss,” Souemon answered. “We got the telegram you sent the morning you left so we had some idea of when to expect you. But, when that day came and went without any word, we began to worry that something terrible had happened.”

(The islanders either called Jinsaburo danna or “boss”; Souemon liked the sound of “boss”) “No doubt about it, we faced disaster a number of times but it was a 200-tonne ship,” Jinsaburo answered calmly although the memories of raging ocean storms swirled in his head.

“It turned out that we couldn’t land on the Queen Charlotte Islands, after all,” Jinsaburo’s voice faltered slightly. “Nevertheless, I’m not giving up on that so easily.”

Souemon knew about the Queen Charlotte plan and admired Jinsaburo’s ambition and persistence.

One of the first things Jinsaburo did was walk around the island to see how things had progressed in the past year and a half. The island was about one-third cleared and the cleared areas had been turned into fields. There were several new log houses.

In his absence, production of polished rice (for eating), fermented rice (for sake and soy sauce), sake, and soy sauce had increased, as had the number of customers. In particular, sales of fermented rice were up significantly, indicating that Souemon Sato had good business sense and could act as more than just Jinsaburo’s agent and translator. Furthermore, between Souemon and Masutaro Miyakawa, business with the local foreigners continued without any troubles whatsoever.
Masutaro Miyakawa performed any task given him with diligence and loyalty and never once criticised or complained about the running of Oikawa-jima. Neither, however, did he offer any suggestions or proposals to improve the enterprise; he was a man without ambition.

Finally, due to everyone’s efforts, the Oikawa-jima fishing company was in better shape than when Jinsaburo left.

Later, when he and Yaeno were alone, he remarked, “That pair of Souemon and Masutaro is a good one, isn’t it?” Then, remembering that Yaeno controlled the purse strings, he added, “But it’s really due to your money management that the colony is doing so well.”

Yaeno had a good head for figures and, despite a lack of formal training, gradually took over the account-keeping from Jinsaburo. She quickly learned the various types of accounts and accounting procedures and even undertook the banking in New Westminster although Souemon or Masutaro always accompanied her on these horse-and-buggy trips. As long as Yaeno held the key to the Oikawa-jima money vaults (so to speak), the colony was in good hands. Over time, she learned how to compensate for and change Jinsaburo’s sometimes careless money habits.

“I know that everything will be fine here if I leave you in charge,” Jinsaburo remarked casually and was totally caught off guard by the torrent of emotion it evoked from Yaeno.

Yaeno told him about how difficult things were for her and the women while he was away. How it was hard enough to do her own things without the men asking her to do their things, as well. She passionately listed off all the problems one by one before finally concluding,

“For all our sake, I wish you’d settle down a bit. Especially for the children.”

On November 5th, two days after the phantom immigrants arrived in Vancouver, a number of islanders went to Vancouver to bring all eighty-two immigrants to Oikawa-jima for a visit. As it was the first time most of the newcomers had ridden a train, they split into smaller groups for the ride to New Westminster where they got off and walked to the island.

When they arrived, there was a huge welcoming party with all the sweet mochi they could eat and all the sake they could drink. Unfortunately for the big drinkers, they had to report to their new jobs the next morning and were unable to drink as much as they may have wished. After the party, there was a tour of both islands (Oikawa-jima and Sato-jima) and as detailed an explanation of the fishing operation as was possible in the off-season.

As the time to catch the train back to Vancouver drew near, Jinsaburo gathered everyone together.

“We have been through a lot together but the time has come for us to go our separate ways and start our various new labours,” he began as he looked out on the eighty-two new immigrants who stood before him in their new Western clothing.

Nobody wore the army surplus clothes they had received on board the ship. The Nikka Yoben Company had outfitted those who were setting off to work on the railway (the majority of the newcomers) with civilian clothes (Western suits), shoes, bed clothes, and cold weather wear on the understanding that the cost would be taken from their salaries on a monthly basis.

The three women and the handful of men remaining on Oikawa-jima were similarly provided with civilian clothes (including neckties and hunting caps) although it was Jinsaburo himself who put up the money. Naturally, nobody was perfectly comfortable in such strange clothing but they were thankful.

“Obviously, I’d like you all to stay here and work for me but that isn’t possible at the present time for a variety of reasons. Nonetheless, once you fulfil your one year obligation to the railway, you are free to do as you please. If you want to continue with the railway, that is fine. If you want to come back to the island,
that is even better. We only have work here during the summer but you can work in the nearby lumber mills during the winter.

“There are plenty of jobs in Canada so there is nothing to worry about. If you don’t come back next year, come the next, or the year after that. You are welcome here anytime, especially when you are at loose ends. We have room to stay, lots of food, and the companionship of fellow villagers. I want you to think of this as your hometown in Canada.”

Everybody, including the islanders, stood in the pouring rain to listen to Jinsaburo’s speech. They all knew that the “variety of reasons” meant that the immigrants had only been allowed to stay because the country was looking for Japanese labourers to help build the railway. Through negotiations between the Canadian Immigration Office, the Japanese Consulate, and the Nikka Yoben Company, it was decided that the phantom immigrants would work a minimum of one year on the railroad in exchange for permission to stay in Canada.

Solemn promises of, “We will be back next year,” arose from the crowd.

Kimpei Goto swore under his breath about his new Western-style boots because the calluses from his old army boots were of no use. He dragged his blistered and sore feet to the small boat that ferried them to the river bank. Halfway across he looked back and saw the three women standing on the dock waving farewell. They looked so comfortable in their Western dresses but Kimpei felt betrayed: a farewell from kimono-clad women would have been preferable. He looked down at himself and suddenly realised that he too was dressed in Western clothes. It was a strange feeling.

Yasuemon Iwabuchi met them at the New Westminster station explaining that he wanted to see them on their way to their far away jobs. Kimpei did not know Yasuemon himself but sat next to him and soon learned that Yasuemon had known his father well, if comments like, “Your father, Kichiji, was quite a drinker, eh?” were any indication.

“It’s too bad you have to work on the railroad for a year but that’s the way it is. When your year is up, you should get a job as a house-boy to learn English and then join a foreign company. I studied English every day as a house-boy and every night I went to an English school. Now I can speak both English and German.

“If you come with the idea of living here until you die, you will do well. If you come here only to send money home, you will end up degrading yourself and your values. If you only dream of a Gorgeous Silk Homecoming, you will not get respect from anybody and will be treated with scorn. On the other hand, if you learn to speak other languages fluently, foreigners will treat you with respect and as one of their own.

“But,” he said suddenly, “I suppose you’re wondering what I do for a living. You would never guess in a million years so I’ll tell you. I’m an interpreter for a German doctor who has just arrived in Canada and can’t speak any English.”

With this new information, Kimpei looked more closely at Yasuemon and noticed that his clothes were much better than those of any Japanese he had seen yet in Canada. Besides the clothes, his white face and clean hands gave further evidence that this man was not a labourer.

“Do you understand, Kimpei? If you learn English, you can become a Canadian.”

As he spoke, Yasuemon secretly slipped a five dollar note into Kimpei’s pocket.

II Avalanche

They were all lined up in front of the Japanese hostel when Mr. Yamamoto arrived. Mr. Yamamoto was the Nikka Yoben Company representative assigned to accompany them to the Vancouver train station. He
wore a nice Western suit but his actions and speech resembled a labour contractor more than a businessman. This roughness was a relief to the immigrants.

As they entered the train station, someone said,
“One thing is for sure, everything here is a lot bigger than at home.”

The size difference began with the bigger body sizes of the people and was apparent in everything, even the size of the station and the interiors of the passenger cars. A few of the men had ridden trains in Japan and they commented on the roominess of the Canadian train.

The train left at exactly 15:15.
“Well, I wonder where they’re taking us now,” someone else said with a long sigh.

Every single one of them was worried sick. Worried because they had to rely on the unfriendly Mr. Yamamoto and not Jinsaburo Oikawa or someone else from their hometown. They also worried about their substantial debts and whether they could ever pay them off even with a lifetime of work. Before even reaching Vancouver, each person was one hundred dollars in debt from the extra money they were forced to promise on the ship plus each individual’s share of the Sui-an-maru’s fine. In addition, they owed the Nikka Yoben Company another $30 for clothes, bedding, and lodging in Vancouver. In all, each man owed about $130 or 260 Japanese yen. It was a huge amount considering that that much debt in Japan could never be paid off in one lifetime.

To make matters worse, they had not actually worked a day yet and some wondered if they really would get the $1.50 a day they were promised. To be sure, no one had said anything to the contrary, not Jinsaburo, nor Mr. Yamamoto, nor the inn-keepers, nor any ordinary Japanese they had met in Vancouver; perhaps everyone was just trying to protect them from the reality.

“Where in the world are we going?” someone asked Mr. Yamamoto who answered brusquely,
“To the middle of the Rocky Mountains where there is nothing but mountains. Mountains to the left and mountains to the right.”

The questioner persisted, “I mean, what is the name of the station where we get off? Surely you can tell us that, at least.”

“Enderby.”

The name of their destination, Enderby, passed quickly down the car.

Soon after leaving Vancouver, they entered the mountains and settled in for a long train ride. The train snaked through deep canyons and travelled through forests for hour upon hour. Occasionally, they stopped at small stations in tiny, forest clearings made especially for the stations.

Eastward, forever eastward, they went. After dark, all they could tell for certain was that they were surrounded by mountains. Once, they stopped for more than an hour at a dark deserted station where they ate a meal of bread, butter, and canned beef washed down with water.

When morning came, the steam engine was still running through mountains that looked no different than those of the previous night. It was cold and they saw towering, snow-capped mountain peaks all around them although the land itself was buried under metres of snow. The train travelled through endless evergreen forests of fir and pine. Willows lined the rivers, marshes, and lakes but the leaves were brown and had fallen; it was already winter here.

The land they saw from the train window was an endless desolate wasteland with but a few scatterings of human habitation. In fact, the only signs of life they saw were rabbit and squirrel tracks criss-crossing the snow.

“I’m starting to regret ever coming,” someone said with a note of despair creeping into his voice. With every passing mile, they felt their future being swallowed by the dark forest.
They stopped for a long time at another station although there were so few houses that one could count them on two hands. The only impressive house features were the chimneys, each of which emitted a purplish smoke.

They changed trains once and left their passenger car for a boxcar. Three hours later, they arrived at the branch line station of Enderby where they were split into two ‘camps’: the Hamano Camp and the Ono Camp. The first requirement of their new job was to learn that ‘camp’ was railway talk for a ‘group’.

They were accommodated in windowed boxcars that they shared with other Japanese labourers who worked either on the railway itself (laying track) or in the lumber yard that cut the ties. The new immigrants were assigned to neither of these jobs.

The following morning, they rode a flatbed railcar as far as it could go and then walked deep into the mountains to where the end of the railway met the forest. They were assigned to the front line of construction and were responsible for cutting trees to make way for the track bed. That night, they got their first day’s pay from their foreman, Mr. Hamano.

Pay was given out on a daily basis and started at $1.05 per eight hour day for the first month. Once they got used to the job, they would get $1.35 per day for the second month and $1.50 per day from the third month on. Despite having been in Canada for some time, they were surprised when they actually held a dollar in their hand for the first time. When they realised that they could pay off their debts with a little hard work after all, their faces lit up and they relaxed.

Money was a novelty to many of these men and they spent their first few wages on tobacco and daily necessities that were sold at the special store set up for the Japanese labourers. Soon, however, they settled down to saving money. Food was the only major expense; it cost five or six dollars a month but was all Japanese food: rice, miso soup, soy sauce, tofu, different kinds of seaweed (wakame and hijiki), onions, dried foods, and salted fish.

Kimpei, being the youngest, was assigned to miscellaneous camp duties while the others set off into the mountains each day with their axes on their shoulders. From December, they began working the night shift in the lumber mill making ties, as well as clearing the forest.

Bunji Goto racked up 450 hours of work that first month. An average of fifteen hours of work a day left little time for sleep but he was able to save $58.50. He soon realised that such a pace was an unreasonable strain on his body so he slowed to eight hours a day in January. Still, he suffered a spell of exhaustion in February and was laid up for ten days. It took some time to figure out just how much physical labour their bodies could bear.

They worked hard through the long winter and wrote letters home for recreation. They lived for the day when they paid off the last of their debts and could start sending money home. Never having had the possibility to make so much money, they were dazzled by the prospect.

Spring came and the rhododendrons bloomed. Some men picked the blossoms and used them to decorate their boxcar dormitories to remind them of home. They began taking one day off a week to rest their bodies and spent that day relaxing at nearby rivers and lakes. Somebody found primroses and brought them back to the camp.

Summer came and hydrangea-like flowers bloomed all around.

After several months of falling trees on the front-line, they were moved to the actual building of the track-bed and laying of rails. They worked in a daze with only three objectives: pay off their debts, send money home, and save enough to buy a fare home.

By fall, they had finished their compulsory year of labour, paid off all their debts, and were sending money home each month. Things were going well. They moved further inland and further into the mountains. The leaves had already changed colour; the maples were a brilliant red and the other trees
shining yellow. The bright red, mountain ash berries sparkled in the sunlight. One night it snowed and the temperature plunged. Winter was back.

Near the end of December, the mainline was hit by a serious avalanche and forced to close. Because of the urgency to reopen it, the Hamano and Ono camps were ordered to leave the branch line construction and help with the snow removal operation. They were transported to the site in boxcars.

The avalanche had occurred in a steep, narrow valley where the railway ran along a raging mountain torrent and the forested sides of the canyon rose almost straight up on either side. The avalanche had shaved off a large section of forest and dumped a huge pile of earth, sand, and trees across the rails. The avalanche warning sign at the entrance to the valley indicated that avalanches were a common occurrence in that area although the avalanche had come down in three different places along the two-kilometre-long canyon and the tunnels and sheds had proved ineffective against such an unusually large avalanche.

The Hamano/Ono camp was assigned to the far eastern end of the valley where they were to remove all the dirt, trees, and snow from the tracks and haul it down to the river which was a solid mass of ice.

“This is too dangerous,” a man from Aomori Prefecture said as soon as they arrived. “If any more snow falls, there will more avalanches.”

Coming from Miyagi Prefecture in Northern Japan, the Sui-an-maru men were not completely ignorant of snow but they had no experience with this amount of snow nor with avalanche conditions.

“Well then, you’ll just have to finish the job before it starts snowing again, won’t you?” the Japanese foreman said, hinting that they should work furiously until exhaustion set in.

It was not so simple, however. For one thing, it was extremely cold. For another, they had to enter the valley from the western entrance so it was a long trek back and forth to their boxcar accommodations.

Even after three days of hard work by the five hundred men assigned to the clean-up, they were only a third of the way through the pile of debris when it began to snow again. They took one day off but were ordered back to work the following day.

One of the Aomori men assessed the situation, “It is too dangerous to work today. It will be at least three days before the new snow sticks to old snow beneath it and there is just too much risk of more avalanches until then. I don’t think we should go in.”

“Hey. boss!” someone said, “Did you hear what Tsugaru said? I think we should listen to him and not work today.”

The foreman went and consulted with the other foremen.

“We talked it over and if it gets dangerous, we’ll stop,” he reported back. “Until such time, we’ll get as much work done as possible, okay?”

“You foremen know nothing about the dangers of snow,” Tsugaru said but argued no further. In that world, the foremen were gods and their word was law.

Tsugaru addressed the men in his group, “Everything is still frozen so it’s safe enough for now. But when the sun comes up and beats down on the new snow, the top layer will probably slide off and become an avalanche. Do you understand? When I yell “RUN!”, you better put your head down and get the hell out of there as fast as you can. Make sure you’re right behind me if you value your life.”

They may not have experienced deep snow and avalanches but, unlike those from places where snow never fell, people from the Tohoku region had an intuition about the dangers of snow.

It was so cold that their breath froze on their hat brims and formed little icicles that hung down over their foreheads. Before long, the sun came up over the mountains. The whole valley lit up in a dazzling whiteness and the snow started to tumble off the tree branches. The sun beat down on the new snow.

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60 For some reason, the Japanese overseas often referred to each other not by name but by the region they came from (e.g., Tsugaru in Aomori Prefecture or Geishu in Hiroshima Prefecture).
Tsugaru stopped working and fixed his gaze on the mountainside. The foreman saw this but said nothing for he, too, was worried about an avalanche.

The sunlight reached halfway down the steep slope. A few, fist-sized clumps of snow broke away and rolled a short distance. Tsugaru called to the foreman,

“It’s going to happen anytime now. It’s time to stop work.”

At the very instant the foreman turned to look, a horizontal line appeared along the slope above.

“AVALANCHE!” Tsugaru yelled. “RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!”

He took one quick look and ran to the east.

Most everyone followed him in an instant but twenty or so men turned to see what they were running from.

The horizontal line grew larger and the snow rose above the surface. When the twenty men realised that it was an avalanche, they started to run. A deafening roar echoed through the valley and a cloud of flying snow obscured everything. In a matter of seconds, the roar died away and the snow settled. The valley was peaceful again, covered in a white shroud of new snow.

Looking closer, however, one saw arms and heads sticking out above the whiteness; some men were too slow. Cautious of further avalanches, those who had escaped tried to rescue those who had not. They pulled sixteen men out alive but three were already dead by the time they dug them out of the snow.

Thanks to Tsugaru’s timely warning, none of the Sui-an-marù group was caught in the avalanche but they saw men die before their eyes and realised the dangers of their job. Naturally, they quit for the day and headed back to the boxcars. Nobody spoke. Their eardrums felt ripped to shreds from the avalanche’s deafening roar and the swirling snow still clouded their mental vision.

It was the next morning before anyone spoke about it.

“It doesn’t matter how much money you make, if you die making it.”

Since they had fulfilled their one year obligation and paid off their debts, there was no reason, nor obligation, to continue working on the railroad.

Many Japanese had passed through the railway camp during the year with interesting stories. One was that $1.50 a day was the base wage for Japanese labourers and could be made anywhere. Stories of higher-paying jobs abounded. For example, some jobs paid by the log or by how many trees one cut in a day; it was realistic to expect three dollars a day from these jobs. Apparently, such wages could also be made doing farm labour during the farming season. Of course, there was no way of knowing if all the stories were true but everyone believed that more money was to be made by those smart enough to keep moving between high paying jobs according to the season.

The Sui-an-marù men had changed a great deal since they had stood on Oikawa-jima and swore that they would be back after their year on the railway. They had gained both experience and confidence, the confidence of enduring a year on what was said to be the hardest job in Canada - the railroad. They were sure they could go anywhere and do any job. Granted, Oikawa-jima offered the security and comfort of people from home but it did not offer the wages that could be had elsewhere. What to do next was a constant topic of conversation.

“When we went to Oikawa-jima and Sato-jima last year we heard that $1.50 a day was the going wage. Since then we’ve heard story after story of jobs that pay $2 or $2.50 a day. It would be a such a waste if we didn’t at least try to find these jobs.”

“You’re right. Besides, Ojin said we could go to the islands whenever we were at loose ends and not sure what to do. I think we should try to find the high-paying jobs and save lots of money first,” were typical of the conversations that took place.
Over the course of the year, the men had naturally formed smaller cliques of like-thinking individuals. Many of these cliques decided to leave the railroad together and go into Vancouver to look for better paying jobs.

Kimpei Goto decided to go to Vancouver and work as a house-boy so he could pursue his major goal in coming to Canada: learning English. He wanted to converse with the locals and learn about their culture but had not even picked up a newspaper in the past year. He was quite disappointed with himself and vowed to make a more concerted effort.

The prospect of working with fellow villagers outweighed the lure of more money for some men and they went straight to Oikawa-jima where Jinsaburo welcomed them with open arms.

We left on the 3:15 p.m. east-bound train to start our jobs on the railway. At 11:15 a.m. the next day, we arrived in Enderby where we were assigned to work with the Hamano gang. Actually, the Hamano gang was divided in two with our arrival and the new half was called the Ono gang; we were split between the two. The next day we touched foreign money for the first time when we each got $1.05 for our day’s work.

At the end of November, our wage went up to $1.35 a day. I worked 208 hours that month.

December - worked 450 hours and made $58.50 (paid $6.04 for food).
January, 1907 - worked 270 hours, made $35.10, spent $6.77 on food.
February - 185 hours, $27.05 in wages, $4 on food.
March - 210 hours, $38 in wages, $6.86 on food, $3.80 on misc. items.

(from Bunji Goto’s diary)

**III Deal**

Despite being the acknowledged ringleader of the Sui-an-maru incident, Jinsaburo was never summoned to court and nothing more came of the matter once Captain Nishikiori had paid the fine. In fact, as soon as the ship was released, Jinsaburo loaded it with salt-salmon and sent it back to Yokohama. The ship hit a strong head-wind (westerly) and had a stormy passage but it arrived safely in Yokohama at the end of December.

From the beginning of 1907, Jinsaburo began meeting Goro Kaburagi and Saburo Yoshie more often in Vancouver. Saburo, in turn, visited Oikawa-jima quite often and never forgot to bring along something for the Oikawa sisters; rumour had it that he was sweet on the older sister, Toyo. Unfortunately, Toyo was already engaged to the man who was supposed to have come on the Sui-an-maru but fell ill shortly before they departed. He had remained in his sick bed ever since and Toyo thought of nothing else but his health.

Jinsaburo, Goro, and Saburo made a strange combination for although Jinsaburo and Goro were about the same age, Saburo was much, much younger. That they got along so well was because they were each
driven by strong visions. Their occasional meetings in Japanese restaurants on Powell Street were punctuated by heated discussions and the occasional argument.

Saburo’s ideal was to entice many Japanese to Canada and raise their status to equality with the Whites. “As it stands now, even if we Japanese become naturalised in Canada, we still can not vote. The only way to remedy this racial discrimination is to bring many more Japanese over and get them into every occupation so we can demonstrate our value and our excellence,” Saburo asserted. He fervently believed that if many Japanese came as labourers, were naturalised, and made contributions to society, they would surely be granted suffrage.

Goro Kaburagi argued that, “the reason we Japanese are discriminated against is that we don’t speak English and don’t have a religion. If we all learned English, ate bread, and went to church, the Whites would stop discriminating against us.”

Jinsaburo always added, “That’s why I want to build a Japanese society centred around a church on the Queen Charlotte Islands.”

Granted, Jinsaburo’s idea was a combination of suggestions originating with both Goro and Saburo but it had long since become Jinsaburo’s idea and he brought it up whenever an opportunity presented itself.

During one of their meetings, Saburo reported, “I’ve heard that a small group of Japanese fishermen have already settled in the northern part of the Queen Charlottes.”

On hearing this, Jinsaburo began to fret and worry even more. He was afraid of losing the opportunity if he did not act quickly but there were just so many considerations. Lion Island (Oikawa-jima and Sato-jima) was quickly reaching its saturation point and Jinsaburo was anxious to extend his version of Utopia beyond just people from his home town of Yonekawa. If the Queen Charlottes were acceptable, he wanted to move everyone up there.

On the other hand, moving everyone and deserting the fields and buildings they had worked so hard to clear and build would be such a waste. Of course, he could leave the colony in someone else’s care and go up to the Queen Charlottes himself but there was little that he could accomplish single-handed. It was a terrible dilemma.

The next time they met, Saburo had more bad news. “The Canadian Government recognises the value of Japanese workers and knows that, although we mostly come as simple labourers, we are intelligent, efficient, and reliable. As far as the Government is concerned, there can never be enough Japanese workers coming to Canada.”

“However,” he continued, “there is a lot of opposition to the Government’s position due to the anti-Japanese storm raging south of the border in the USA that is blowing over into Canada. The White men’s unions and labour organisations are claiming that the Japanese are robbing them of their jobs by working for lower rages. In reality, the real reason behind the movement is simple racism and it is never more powerful than during election campaigns. This anti-Japanese feeling is coming across the border and spreading like wildfire. It’s no longer a spark, it’s a flame. I’m afraid that immigrating from Japan is going to become extremely difficult.”

“What you’re saying,” Jinsaburo remarked, “is that we had better think quickly about our short range plans.”

“Just realising things could change dramatically in the next two or three years is enough for now, but we mustn’t rule out the possibility that the immigration laws could change much sooner, perhaps even by the middle of next year,” Saburo said with concern evident in his voice.

“So, what should we do?” Jinsaburo asked.
“There is only one thing to do and that is to get as many Japanese over here as soon as possible,” Saburo answered. He went on to describe the anti-Japanese incidents in the United States and outlined the signs that suggested it was spreading to Canada, including the various ways Japanese were discriminated against in Canada.

Worry showed in Jinsaburo’s eyes.

“Do you think we have enough time if we do it this year?” he asked.

“I don’t know what will happen. There won’t be any problems with emigrants leaving Japan because the threat of war with Russia is over. The Japanese government isn’t concerned about young men leaving the country,” Saburo answered, then continued,

“What would you think, Mr. Oikawa, of going to Japan right now and bringing back maybe four or five hundred people? You could start your own travel company and I’ll do everything I can to help you find immigrants and process them once they come. In fact, I’ve brought along a man I think you might like to meet. He’s waiting in another room right now.”

As if on cue, someone began singing in the room across the hall - a party was coming to a climax.

“Don’t make up your mind until you’ve carefully considered what he has to say, Jinsaburo,” said Goro Kaburagi, who had been sitting quietly through the whole conversation. Goro announced that he had other appointments and left.

Saburo fetched the man whom he introduced as Mr. Ozaki from the Nikka Yoben Company. Mr. Ozaki was not the president of the company but he was said to be the most influential and important of the managers. Jinsaburo had heard his name often.

Jinsaburo thanked Mr. Ozaki for Nikka Yoben’s assistance during the Sui-an-maru affair to which Mr. Ozaki replied,

“No, we should be thanking you for increasing our profile and reputation with the CPR.”

He continued, “The CPR is building railways on a grand scale and they need a lot of Japanese labourers. I know that you want to build a Utopia here for Japanese people so I propose that you bring more Japanese to Canada. They can work half the year on the railway and fish off the Queen Charlottes for the remainder. Of course, they will be laying the foundation for your Utopia at the same time.”

Mr. Ozaki spoke so straight-forwardly that it was obvious he and Yoshie had discussed the plan at length.

“Well, Mr. Oikawa,” Mr. Ozaki pressed, “can I count on your agreement in principle?”

Jinsaburo noticed an unexpected sharpness in Ozaki’s gaze.

“In principle, yes,” Jinsaburo answered, deliberately vaguely.

Ozaki clapped his hands and ordered the waitress to bring food and drink.

“Please, let me pay for dinner and drinks tonight as a gesture of goodwill. Let this be the first step although that is all I will commit to now. I doubt that this will be the last time we have dinner together,” Jinsaburo offered, not because he distrusted Ozaki or thought him a sly fellow, just that he had taken to heart Kaburagi’s advice about not jumping into things without doing research first.

Jinsaburo became more unsettled and was so full of nervous energy that he could not sit still. He realised that if he did not heed Saburo Yoshie’s warnings and predictions, his dream of a Japanese Utopia in Canada would never be fulfilled. He met with Yoshie and Ozaki many more times.

In July, Jinsaburo went to the Queen Charlotte Islands and discovered there was a large population of Natives and Whites in the northern town of Masset and in the central town of Queen Charlotte but there

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was practically nobody in the smaller towns scattered around the island. Furthermore, there were only a handful of Japanese fishermen and nobody at all lived in the southern regions which were covered with luxuriant, virgin forest.

At the end of July, he returned to Japan yet again to persuade more fellow villagers to go to Canada. On arriving in Yokohama, he went to see his son, Taijiro, who had followed Jinsaburo’s instructions to form the Japan Trust Company Limited as a father and son partnership. The new company was a travel agency and handled all the passages that they had formerly entrusted to other agents. For the time being, the Japan Trust Company operated out of the Eibei Shokai Company offices.

Jinsaburo and Taijiro set out together for their home town where they made a concerted effort to attract emigrants. They pointed out that the voyage could be made legally so there was no need for the secrecy of the last trip. The fare was set at sixty yen with the total cost, including miscellaneous charges, being eighty yen.

Things were much easier than before because of the successful Sui-an-maru voyage and because everyone was receiving money from Canada. Nearly half of the Sui-an-maru group had already paid off their debts and even those who had not were able to send something home. When converted to Japanese currency, the bare minimum was twenty yen a month while some were sending home thirty to forty yen a month. Thus, other villagers were keen on making the voyage despite the difficulties.

Those who truly realised the hardships, however, were few. Few knew that their men had shed blood for the money they sent home. Few knew that their men economised on their own food in order to send money to their loved ones. Few knew of the competitions over who could send home the most money: competitions so consuming that men worked until they went crazy, collapsed from exhaustion, or even died rather than suffer the humiliation of sending home too little money.

In the midst of this enthusiasm about going to Canada, Jinsaburo received a telegram from Saburo Yoshie reporting on the anti-Japanese incident that had taken place in Vancouver. There had been many injuries and Yoshie advised Jinsaburo to give up on the immigration plans and return to Vancouver as soon as possible.

Jinsaburo was petrified by the news in the telegram.

By 1908, the CPR had 4000 Japanese railway navvies in its employ. After checking with the Canadian Government and consulting with the clerk at the Japanese Consulate, I decided to form the Japan Trust Company to attract Japanese immigrants to Canada. (from Jinsaburo Oikawa’s diary, Chapter 10 - “Smuggling Ship”)

Once his original plans were well under way and established, Mr. Oikawa turned his attention to the Queen Charlotte Islands. He said nothing of it to any of us but when rumours started circulating, I confronted him. He said that if the Canadian Government gave him permission to clear land on the Queen Charlottes, he would go ahead and buy some. In the more likely event that he could not get permission to buy land, he would lease it.
Then, once he secured permission for about 300 Japanese labour immigrants, he planned to find the best spot on the islands to build accommodations and a large church for which they would request the Canadian Government to send a minister. Jinsaburo would ensure that all 300 of them observed the laws, regulations, and customs of this country. Once they had built their truly Christian community, they would begin clearing the land. Eventually he planned to negotiate with the Canadian Government to allow him to bring more immigrants to the island and thus help solve Japan’s overpopulation problems. (from the chapter, “About Jinsaburo Oikawa” in Souemon Sato’s Recollections)

IV Riot

There were no concrete signs anticipating the Vancouver incident even on the day before: no demonstrations of any size and no placards carried through the streets. In hindsight, there were latent signs of unrest but these were obscure. Perhaps, the newspaper articles reporting anti-Japanese activities in the United States affected public opinion, but it was highly unlikely.

Anti-Asian, particularly anti-Japanese, movements began in the United States as early as 1900 in California but soon spread to other states. In general, the organisers and most vocal supporters of the movement were Irish immigrants who had the backing of the labour unions. In 1907, the United States government took steps to stop immigrants entering the continental USA by way of Hawai‘i, Canada, and Mexico.

Until then, Japanese immigration to the USA had generally gone through Hawai‘i and workers who could not find work there were allowed to carry on to the continental United States. With the outbreak of anti-Japanese movements, many had gone back to Hawai‘i to wait out the trouble. Japanese labourers were in high demand on the mainland and anyone who managed to get there got a job quickly. When entry to the United States was forbidden, many Japanese went immediately to Canada.

On 24 July 1907, the Cumeric landed at the Port of Vancouver with a full load of 1177 Japanese immigrants, all with proper passports and documentation so the Canadian government could not refuse them entry. The sudden influx of a thousand Japanese immigrants was a frightening prospect to the citizens of Vancouver and the newspapers reported the event in big headlines. Sensing a crisis (or opportunity), the leaders of the fledgling anti-Japanese faction in Vancouver contacted their colleagues in Seattle and San Francisco for help in organising a demonstration and invited an expert from Seattle to teach them the ABC’s of demonstrations.

The first step was the formation of the Asian Exclusion League that collected dues from its members. They did not advertise themselves with overtly racist slogans like “Canada for Whites Only” but with less inflammatory slogans like “Creating a Paradise for Whites.” Such apparent moderation attracted many members and the membership grew quickly. By the end of August, there were two to three thousand members, chapters in most towns, and a league newsletter.

On Saturday, September 7th, the League organised a huge afternoon rally. Roughly 5000 demonstrators with placards gathered in the city centre and began to march. The placards displayed slogans such as “Canada for Whites” and “Canada Belongs to the White People” but there were few extremist slogans to be seen. The organisers kept a close eye on the demonstrators because they had been trained by the Seattle
expert to be very restrained, almost virginal, in the beginning. They put the executive of the Asian Exclusion League at the front of the procession, followed by several Vancouver celebrities in carriages bearing slogans like “A White Canada.”

They drew up in front of the city hall and stopped. The organisers had planned a speech rally at seven o’clock after which a series of resolutions regarding the exclusion of Asians was to be presented. However, there were far more demonstrators than expected and they could not all enter City Hall so the crowd turned back towards the city.

This was just the opportunity the organisers had been waiting for. They hoisted huge, secretly prepared, placards with extreme slogans such as “Chase All the Asians out of Canada” and “Asians Pollute the Purity and Holiness of Canada.” They handed out many of these placards to replace the less extreme ones.

Until this time, there were no placards specifically directed against the Japanese but, all of a sudden, voices started chanting “Japs! Japs! Japs!” from within the crowd. The organisers, having started the chanting from within the crowd, emerged at the front and began leading the throng northward into town. It soon became clear that they were heading for the Japanese area around Powell Street.

On the way, they had to pass through Chinatown with its many restaurants lining the street. The organisers picked up rocks and hurled them through the restaurant windows encouraging others to follow their lead. What had started as a peaceful demonstration turned into a riot. The crowd, fired up from throwing rocks through windows began chanting: “Kill the Japs! Kill the Japs!”

The chanting rushed through the evening streets like an angry storm. There was no calming the crowd now; they were a frothing wave descending on the Japanese on Powell Street. They picked up rocks and threw them at the Japanese houses. The Japanese were caught totally off-guard by the angry mob that went up and down Powell Street twice: hell-bent on destruction.

The mob left as suddenly as it had come.

Saburo Yoshie, clerk at the Japanese consulate, came galloping up the street wearing a white headband.

“The mob is coming back.” he yelled. “Hide your women and children and prepare for battle.”

Admittedly, “prepare for battle” was not a calm statement but given the urgency of the situation it seemed appropriate as Yoshie had just come from Chinatown where the mob was looting the stores and restaurants it had vandalised on its way to Powell Street. Fortified by food and alcohol, the mob grew more aggressive.

Few, if any, Japanese knew of the anti-Japanese demonstration that afternoon so the angry mob that descended on and attacked them that evening was a complete and utter shock. That initial shock, however, soon turned to fury and they prepared to fight back should the mob return. Barricades were erected at the ends of the streets. Buckets of stones were gathered from the gravelled streets and carried to the rooftops. The men tied on headbands while grabbing clubs and poles. Lookouts were posted to the rooftops.

One of the mob participants came to look at the changed character of Powell Street and threatened that the mob would return. When he informed the mob of the Japanese preparations, a voice rose from the midst,

“If it’s a fight the Japs want, let’s give it to them!”

About five hundred of the original mob came back to continue the quarrel.

The mob was met by rocks hurled from the rooftops which only served to excite them further. Twenty Japanese emerged from their houses with swords, split into two groups, and hid in alleys along both sides of the street intending to spring out and kill anyone who intruded into their street.

“Don’t kill anyone but make sure they feel the backs of your swords,” Yoshie’s voice rang out into the evening streets from his rooftop position.
The number of Japanese with clubs and other weapons swelled. The mob, which had temporarily retreated in the face of a barrage of rocks, made a charging attack. Japanese with swords sprang from the alleys, swords flashing white in the darkness. At the sight of swords, the mob retreated once again although they could not retreat as fast as the policemen who had finally arrived on the scene.

The mob came back armed with weapons: wooden sticks, iron bars, and even some pistols. Those with pistols were quickly set upon by the Japanese and knocked out.

When the two sides finally clashed, there were many injuries on both sides. When a Japanese was injured, somebody emerged to carry him back to safety and quickly return to the fray with reinforcements and renewed vigour.

The mob had an overwhelming advantage of numbers but the Japanese were protecting their homes; with a final, all-out effort, they repelled the invaders. The mob retreated, leaving their injured where they fell. The police, who had returned on horseback, moved in to separate the two groups and protect the injured.

With the mounted policemen back on the scene, the mob quieted although the atmosphere remained charged and tense through the night until dawn.

There were no fatalities on either side but there were many injuries: serious and slight. Ironically, perhaps, Chinatown sustained much more damage despite putting up no resistance and leaving their lives and property to the mercy of the mob.

The next day, news of the riot was splashed all over the newspapers. Many stories commented on the martial tendencies and war-like nature of the Japanese race although nothing was written about the role of the demonstration’s organisers who had been right out front, leading the mob.

The most unfortunate outcome of the event was that Canadian public opinion toward the Japanese deteriorated seriously. Those who knew nothing of the event were induced to hatred of the Japanese and even those who had never uttered an anti-Japanese word in their lives began looking askance at any Japanese they met.

The Japanese community petitioned the Canadian government for compensation and received it although the government concomitantly pressured the Japanese Government to sign the Lemieux Agreement limiting the number of Japanese immigrants to four hundred a year. In other words, the riot had given the Canadian Government the opportunity to enact anti-Japanese legislation and effectively ban Japanese immigration.

In the spring of 1908, just as the Lemieux Agreement was ratified, Saburo Yoshie and Yun Oikawa were married at Goro Kaburagi’s church. Everyone agreed that Yun truly looked like an angel in her snow-white wedding dress.

After Yun married and left Oikawa-jima, her sister, Toyo, became more and more restless as her fiancé’s journey to Canada was delayed again and again. Even after he recovered from his severe illness, the doctor refused to let him sail for Canada. Then, just as he recovered completely, the Lemieux Agreement was ratified, making his immigration almost impossible. He wrote Toyo, begging her to return to Japan to marry him. In 1910, she returned to Japan with Jinsaburo to get married.

V Betrayed

The Lemieux Agreement was hurriedly passed in 1908 although by that time, four months had elapsed since the riot. With this anti-Japanese Law, Canada demonstrated its capacity for unilateral action. Within
the Agreement, however, was a provision that Japanese already in Canada would get preference in sponsoring relatives to immigrate. This was good news for Jinsaburo who had considered abandoning his newly-formed Japan Trust Company but was able to legally bring fifty of his townspeople to Canada that year through his company.

Furthermore, the Lemieux Agreement did nothing to dampen his dream of building a Utopia; his ardour for this project burned as strongly as ever. With this in mind, he returned to Yonekawa again in 1910 and enticed thirty relatives of those already in Canada to return with him. He knew he was nearing the bottom of the barrel as far as relatives went but, if he was to realise his dream of a Utopia on the Queen Charlotte Islands, he needed at least three or four hundred people and he wanted people from his own village.

A few days after returning to Canada, he met Saburo Yoshie at a Japanese restaurant in Vancouver.

“When you get right down to it,” Jinsaburo said suddenly, “there is only one solution to all our problems.”

Yoshie had become somewhat accustomed to Jinsaburo’s habit of starting an argument with the conclusion but this one made no sense whatsoever. He sat quietly and waited for Jinsaburo to elaborate, racking his brain trying to figure out what Jinsaburo was leading up to.

Eventually Jinsaburo continued, “The day I throw away my dreams is the day I discard my identity.”

Yoshie knew then that he was referring to his dream of building a Utopia on the Queen Charlotte Islands.

“Sure, but realising that dream requires breaking the law, remember?” Yoshie reminded him.

“I know, I know,” Jinsaburo said, “but last time we only used a 2-tonne schooner. This time, I’m going to charter a big steamer and take many more people to the Queen Charlotte Islands.”

“I recall the plan quite clearly because you and I and Mr. Ozaki from the Nikka Shoben Company had it all worked out before the Lemieux Agreement was signed,” Yoshie interrupted. “The plan was that everyone worked six months on the railway and six months fishing off the islands. But, that was before the Lemieux Agreement. Surely you’ve given up on that idea? It’s impossible.”

“Not at all,” Jinsaburo responded. “That plan was based on the premise the immigrants could come legally, remember? That’s why I started the Japan Trust Company. True, the rules have changed but that only means we change the plan. The only option now is another immigrant smuggling operation like the Sui-an-maru. I think we can bring five hundred people without any problems. The biggest problem is getting them papers once they’re here and that’s where your assistance is crucial.”

Yoshie could not believe what he was hearing and the disbelief showed. He thought back to the Sui-an-maru affair. There were no restrictions against Japanese immigration then and the immigration officials had been sympathetic. Even so, they were lucky to get away with only a fine. Now that there were formal restrictions and laws against Japanese immigration, things could get serious. Yoshie was a diplomat and could not afford to get involved.

“I realise that you are a diplomat and I don’t expect you to give us the assistance that you did last time. However, I would like you to be a behind-the-scenes man, at least until you feel the risk is too great,” Jinsaburo said, predicting Yoshie’s concerns.

“What’s your plan?” Yoshie asked. He could not just dismiss Jinsaburo out of hand.

“First, we drop a hundred men somewhere on the Queen Charlotte Islands where they stay a short time and change clothes. Then, the Nikka Shoben Company takes them off to work on the railway. We wait a bit. Then we drop another hundred off on the islands, and so on. They can work half the year on the railway and the other half fishing on the islands. Soon nobody will even wonder where they came from.”

“You’re still smuggling them in without passports and that’s illegal immigration,” Yoshie objected.
“There are many illegal immigrants now as it is and that number will only increase in the future,” Jinsaburo countered.

Yoshie fell silent. “Perhaps,” he thought to himself, “it could work. But even if it did, would all that work necessarily get Jinsaburo any closer to his dream of a Utopia?”

“It’s more possible than you think,” Jinsaburo continued. “The path opens before us. I want you to meet with Mr. Ozaki from Nikka Shoben for me and act as a go-between. If the CPR still wants Japanese labourers, maybe Mr. Ozaki can get them to make a private deal with the Immigration Department. All I want from the Japanese Consulate is silent consent.”

“So, he thinks it’s that easy, does he?” Yoshie thought. He was thinking of a polite but firm way to tell Jinsaburo that his proposition would require the Consul-General to take an unacceptable position and Jinsaburo should forget the whole thing when, all of a sudden, Jinsaburo knelt down on the floor before Yoshie, both hands flat in front of him and his forehead touching the red carpet.

“Mr. Yoshie, I beg you. This is the only favour I’ll ever ask you. I don’t want to cause you any trouble. All I ask is that you talk to them,” he begged.

Seeing Jinsaburo splayed on the red carpet like a supine spider, the image of a woodblock print depicting a samurai committing ritual suicide appeared before Saburo’s eyes. A shiver ran down his spine.

“Well, if you put it that way, I’ll talk to Mr. Ozaki but I am not comfortable with it and I can’t promise anything,” Yoshie said very guardedly and with more caution than he had ever displayed.

He knew that the odds were extremely slim.

Jinsaburo returned to Lion Island to await word. He could just picture the eagerness with which Mr. Ozaki of the Nikka Shoben Company would receive the proposition. Jinsaburo could imagine him hurriedly making the rounds of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company and the Canadian Immigration Office.

“It won’t be long now and my dreams will become reality,” he whispered to himself.

Jinsaburo was happier than ever.

About a week later, word came from the consulate for Jinsaburo to proceed there immediately and with all due haste.

“That was just a little too quick,” he thought. He had estimated at least a month for the matter to make its way through the official channels. A tinge of worry crept into his mind.

He arrived at the Consulate precisely at the time indicated on the summons, ten minutes before eleven in the morning, and was immediately ushered to the Consul-General’s second-floor office.

The wide stairway was gorgeous and he climbed slowly. The Consul-General’s office was at the top, on the right.

Besides the Consul-General himself and Jinsaburo, only Saburo Yoshie was present in the room. Yoshie looked pale as he cast Jinsaburo a sad glance and directed his gaze to the floor. Jinsaburo was somewhat taken aback; he had only ever seen a vivacious, vital Yoshie.

The Consul-General greeted Jinsaburo perfunctorily and came straight to the point.

“We have received some, shall we say, information that you are planning yet another foray into the illegal smuggling of immigrants by leading a group to the Queen Charlotte Islands. Whether you know it or not, this is in direct contravention of the Lemieux Agreement. Furthermore, we have it on good authority that the Canadian authorities have authorised the Coast Guard to open fire on any such vessels that approach the Queen Charlotte Islands.

“Of course, this information is unconfirmed and unsubstantiated but if it is true, I wish to inform you that it would result in a serious diplomatic incident between Japan and Canada and there is no guarantee
that we could protect you from being deported. Now, I did not summon you here today to conduct an investigation, I merely wished to warn you that information about your plans has reached our ears.”

The Consul-general’s face revealed nothing each time he used the word “information.”

“May I ask the Consul-General a question?” Jinsaburo dared, despite Yoshie’s almost imperceptible shake of the head.

“As long as you realise there are some things I am not at liberty to answer.”

“Can you tell me where you got your information?”

“No, that is something I definitely can not tell you,” the Consul-General answered.

“What do you, personally, think of the Lemieux agreement?” Jinsaburo continued.

“I think it is regrettable. However, it is our duty to enforce and abide by agreements made between sovereign nations. The honour of Japan is at stake here. We have been told that any illegal immigrants will certainly be turned back as soon as they land, whether they are only a hundred or a thousand. Accordingly, this Consulate has suggested to the Japanese government that it take all necessary steps itself to stop any illegal immigrants before they even leave Japan.”

The Consul-General rose from his chair and stood with both hands flat on his desk. He concluded,

“Mr. Oikawa, the days of phantom immigrant ships are over. The Japanese who are here already must concentrate on co-operating with their neighbours, studying hard, and assimilating into the local population. I will say it once more, Mr. Oikawa, the days of phantom immigrant ships are over. Good day.”

Jinsaburo emerged into the Consulate gardens in an absentminded daze. He had no recollection of leaving the Consul-General’s office or descending the highly polished staircase. The Consul-General’s last words reverberated through his head, blocking all other thought.

The dogwoods were in full bloom but never had this beautiful sign of spring been so bereft of pleasure for Jinsaburo. Looking back along the row of three blooming dogwoods, he saw the two-storied, wooden Consulate: sombre and foreboding. Although only lightly reproached by the Consul-General, Jinsaburo felt abandoned by Japan itself. He was only trying to raise the consciousness of his own countrymen but he had been betrayed by his native land.

Jinsaburo wandered the streets of Vancouver aimlessly, oblivious to the sights and people around him. The number of motor cars had increased rapidly but even this escaped his notice. He only had eyes for the blooming dogwoods, in front of which he stopped often. These symbols of the Canadian spring were the only things that could pull him out of his reverie, if only temporarily.

VI  Busted

Jinsaburo tried hard to hide his disappointment from everyone on Lion Island and when Yaeno asked why the Consul-General had summoned him, he replied only that,

“He had some general words of caution and advice to me as boss of the island.”

He turned toward some nearby men, “I want everyone to gather round as I have some important things to say.”

Everyone knew that the Boss had been summoned to the Consulate so they were worried and anxious to hear the reason.

“No matter where you are, in Canada or Japan, a summons by the Government is not a good thing,” someone said and everyone agreed.

When everyone had assembled, Jinsaburo stepped to the front and began with an explanation of the Lemieux Agreement followed by,
“The number of Japanese in Canada will not increase as rapidly as in the past. Even if many want to come, they will not be allowed because of the Lemieux Agreement. We are in an enviable position because of our chance to work so let us make the best of it.

“From now on, the anti-Japanese movement in Canada will become stronger because of events in the United States; there will be more and different kinds of pressure on us as Japanese. There are a number of ways to deal with this pressure. First is solidarity. Second is not showing any weakness before the hairy barbarians. Said another way, it means not doing anything to attract their attention. As long as you are on our islands, you are safe because we are all Japanese, but once you set foot off the island, it is the hairy barbarians’ world. You must be more careful than ever about things like urinating in public and being appropriately dressed whenever you go anywhere.”

Apparently, Jinsaburo was finished. The islanders looked around in wonder, surely the Consul-General had not summoned Jinsaburo for such mundane matters.

Jinsaburo betrayed no emotion. There were no signs of a setback nor any hint that his dreams of building a Utopia had collapsed.

The next day, Saburo Yoshie came to the island and Jinsaburo rowed over to the north bank to pick him up.

“I suppose you were pretty shocked yesterday,” Yoshie said. “Truth is, it caught me by surprise, too, and there was nothing I could say at the time.”

Yoshie had come to make his excuses.

As promised, Yoshie had approached Mr. Ozaki of the Nikka Yoben Company with Jinsaburo’s proposal. It turned out that the anti-Japanese Lemieux Agreement had been pushed by the Legislature against the wishes of businesses and the Immigration Department who both wanted more Japanese immigration. Mr. Ozaki went to the Canadian Pacific Railway with the good news.

This is where things deteriorated. One of the CPR officials took the proposal to the Immigration Office. Unfortunately, he had not done his homework and approached the official that was most rigid about adhering to the letter of the law. Not surprisingly, the ‘information’ was brought to the Consul-General’s attention and he immediately divined Yoshie’s involvement in the matter. Without consulting Yoshie, or even informing him ahead of time, the Consul-General summoned Jinsaburo. And that was where things stood.

“Surely you must be ready to give it up now?” Yoshie said to punctuate the conclusion of his explanation.

Jinsaburo silently handed Yoshie the oars and said,

“I have caused you enough trouble so let’s not talk about this matter any further.”

Jinsaburo said no more and his face offered no expression. There was a long silence. The wind caught the spray off the oars and splashed it in their faces.

“I will put my heart into Lion Island from now on,” Jinsaburo finally said.

Jinsaburo did not say he was going to build his Utopia on Lion Island, only that he would put his heart into the Lion Island colony.

Yoshie had never heard Jinsaburo so despondent.

It rained the day after Yoshie’s visit but the weather turned fair after that. The spring salmon season was upon them.
Jinsaburo liked alcohol well enough but had never let it take control of his body even once. He did not forbid alcohol on the island outright but often preached against its evils and made it clear that anyone caught visiting the gambling houses in Steveston or Vancouver would be banished from the island forever.

Despite the crumbling of his grandiose dream, Jinsaburo still carried the flame of his earlier dream and saw it being realised before his eyes. One positive outcome of the Consul-General’s lecture was that Jinsaburo refocused his attention on his own island once again after a long mental absence. Since Sato-jima had officially separated, he was responsible only for his own island but, since everyone was from the same town, the connections between the islands were strong.

The only year-round projects on Oikawa-jima were the production of sake, soy sauce, rice bran, and polished rice which he had entrusted to the various managers. The remaining inhabitants lived on the island from June to October while they worked the fishery; they worked in nearby lumber mills or cleared trees in Sunbury during the winter.

Oikawa-jima’s monopoly of the salt-salmon business came under pressure when other Japanese saw the profits to be made. With the appearance of competition, the price of dog salmon was driven up and the market became tighter. Competitors also encroached on the salmon roe business and even Souemon Sato started competing with Jinsaburo. Many predicted the end of Jinsaburo and his dreams.

“My special talent is finding business opportunities that others can’t see. If others decide to imitate me, there is nothing I can do and there is no sense complaining about it,” Jinsaburo said magnanimously.

Neither did Jinsaburo try to stop Souemon Sato from entering the business. In fact, when Souemon came to apologise for competing with him, Jinsaburo said,

“There’s nothing to feel guilty about. Your decision to get involved only shows how right I was in the first place.” He laughed.

Jinsaburo turned all his attention to clearing the island which they had been cleared only enough to build houses, workshops, some gardens, and a road around the island. Originally, they thought that preserving the trees for fuel and building materials was the most prudent course, but later decided that the island could be used most efficiently if it were cleared completely. All of the buildings and fields occupied only a tenth of the island area so there were 10 remaining hectares to be used for fields and gardens.

By 1911, the whole island was cleared and producing vegetables for the Vancouver market. Since most of the islanders were originally farmers, they produced a good yield and marketed their harvest wisely by selling the best vegetables separately at higher prices.

During the summer, farmers from all over the Fraser Valley flooded into Vancouver with fresh vegetables so it was hard to compete and make any money. Therefore, the islanders concentrated on vegetables that kept well into the winter, such as cabbage and carrots, which they loaded on horse-drawn carts and took to the winter markets. They also supplied Little Tokyo with hakusai (bok choy), pumpkin squash, and daikon (horseradish). Oikawa’s takuan (pickled daikon) became well-known and sought after by the Japanese.

In 1911, the population of Oikawa-jima fluctuated between seventy in the off-season and a hundred during the busy fishing season. Many islanders had sent for their wives and families so there were seventeen couples on the island. These couples lived in smaller log cabins they built themselves, although the number of raft-houses was increasing. The houseboats floated in the river and were connected to the land by steel cables so they would not be carried away by the current.

Jinsaburo built a 2-metre-high dike around the island’s perimeter to prevent the river washing over the island during its periodic flooding. Due to his foresight, the island did not once suffer flood damage while Jinsaburo lived there.
Oikawa-jima was a calm, peaceful place and most men from Tome-gun who came back to Vancouver from railway or logging work in the interior were sure to stop there. Whenever visitors came, there was a big gathering in the main cookhouse where they drank and sang folksongs well into the night. Jinsaburo always gave his countrymen a warm welcome and fed them well. Even if they stayed a week or ten days, Jinsaburo never charged them for accommodation although he charged them for their food if they stayed longer. The sake was free because it was made right there on the island.

The sake is all home-made so drink as much as you like,” Jinsaburo would say. “I only ask that you stop drinking by ten o’clock.”

Everyone knew that the time restriction was because Jinsaburo feared a repeat of the terrible fire that had erupted while he was away in Japan. Given this, the visitors were more than happy to oblige. To be sure, many of the visitors were from Tome-gun but natives of other parts of Miyagi Prefecture and even other parts of Japan often came, as well.

Oikawa-jima sake was originally intended only for the islanders and Japanese fishermen living nearby along the Fraser River. However, when word got out that they were making a cheaper, tastier sake than what was imported from Japan, they had to step up production many-fold. Soon, Japanese were coming from all over to buy large quantities of sake and many local Whites who had Japanese friends were drinking it, too.

The Oikawa-jima sake brewery was raided by local police in September, 1911.

A new-style, gasoline-powered launch loaded with policemen roared up to the island and landed. Stepping off the boat, one of the policemen informed them that they were conducting a search of the island on suspicion of secret, and illegal, alcohol production.

Masutaro Miyakawa was designated as interpreter.

When the police entered the brewery building and saw their suspicions confirmed, the Constable asked, “What is the sake made from?”

At this point, the value of Miyakawa’s English ability was negated by his overly serious, overly honest, Christian nature (in fact, his only vices were afternoon naps and the odd pipe of tobacco).

“The sake is made from rice, sir,” he answered honestly.

“Right then,” the Constable announced impatiently. “I hereby order all of the rice on this island seized and confiscated and the illegal sake production facilities closed and sealed shut.”

He then added angrily, “Bring forth all the rice on this island immediately. Failure to do so will result in a very thorough criminal investigation.”

Jinsaburo, who had been silent during the whole episode, spoke up and said, in very broken English, “Two types rice. Big and small. Sake use big only.”

The Constable nodded.

“Well, then, show me this big rice.”

Jinsaburo led him to the storehouse and opened a bag.

“Aren’t these soy beans?” the Constable asked suspiciously.


“All right, then,” the Constable boomed, “Seize all of this so-called big rice.”

The police took the five bags of soy beans and sealed the sake brewing building shut.

Of course, the storehouse was filled with food rice and the colony would have suffered immensely had their main source of nutrition been confiscated.

Jinsaburo’s quick thinking had saved their rice for the time being but he suspected the police would soon learn that sake was not made from soy beans, after all. Worried that they would return to confiscate
the rice, Jinsaburo split much of the rice amongst the island households and took the remainder over to Sato-jima for safe keeping.

Then, he contacted Yoshie Saburo at the Consulate in Vancouver.

An answer arrived the next day:

Dear Jinsaburo,

The police called it ‘illegal production of alcohol’ or ‘moonshining’ and they’d known about it for some time. However, they were willing to ignore it at first because it wasn’t Western-style alcohol, you weren’t selling large quantities, and you mainly sold to other Japanese fishermen. However, they received a tip-off or a complaint and were sort of forced into taking action.

Of course, the Constable knew that sake isn’t made from soy beans but when he saw how much rice they would have to haul away, he feigned ignorance and pretended to be content with five bags of soy beans.

Incidentally, I thought you might like to know that the informer was Japanese so be careful lest it happen again.

Yours truly,

Saburo

It was a quickly scrawled note but it was enough. The part about the informer being Japanese shocked Jinsaburo.

“You come all this way to a foreign country and you can’t even trust your fellow Japanese,” Jinsaburo muttered to himself. “What is the world coming to?”

He let out an unusually long, deep sigh.

The day sake production was halted was the day that dark clouds began to gather over Jinsaburo Oikawa and his future, although the dark clouds were more visible to the islanders than to Jinsaburo himself.

Soon thereafter, Jinuemon Sato came to pay a visit.

“We heard rumours that the informer was Japanese so I came to assure you that it wasn’t one of us. We may compete with you but we’re fellow villagers first and foremost. Nobody on our island has a mean streak so bad they would squeal on one of our own,” he said emphatically.

“I know, I know,” Jinsaburo reassured him, gripping his shoulder. “I didn’t even suspect you for a moment, but let’s promise to co-operate more in the future.”

VII Tragedy

In May 1912, Michie came to the island for a visit. He had graduated from University and was working in Toronto,
“You’re twenty-six now, Michie, and I am proud of you for choosing your own path,” Jinsaburo said to prove he had no intentions of forcing his son to return to Oikawa-jima.

“You’re not coming back to live with us?” asked ten-year-old Eiji, the disappointment obvious in his voice. He idolised his older brother.

“You’re here, aren’t you?” Michie replied as he stroked his younger brother’s head. “I hear that your English is fantastic and you’re a great student. You will be Dad’s successor. I leave the island in your capable hands.”

Michie attended the local elementary school where he had many White friends; not only could he speak English as well as them but also could he read and write, too. He was especially good at arithmetic and all the teachers said he was one of the brightest pupils at the school. Jinsaburo had purposely enrolled Eiji to be educated in English so he could eventually succeed him. Jinsaburo knew that, without a doubt, the key to living and being successful in Canada required the ability to speak English fluently and naturally. He was pleased with Eiji’s progress and the promise he showed.

As much as Eiji liked school and studying, he also liked helping out on the island. He especially liked machines and whenever he rode in one of the gasoline-powered boats, he asked incessant questions of the adults. Whatever tools the adults used, he wanted to use. He burned with curiosity and the desire to learn.

Jinsaburo relied on Eiji to continue his dreams. He saw himself in young Eiji and was convinced that Eiji would accomplish his dream of building a Utopia on the island for their fellow villagers.

A month after Michie left, and just before the annual spring-salmon run, Eiji’s younger sister, Shima, was playing at her friend’s house at the other end of the long, narrow island. Shima was only six years old and it took her almost twenty-minutes to walk across the island; however, there was only one road and no danger of her getting lost. She walked that road almost every day.

As dusk approached, Yaeno called to Eiji and asked him to go meet his sister and walk her home. Eiji answered enthusiastically and ran out of the house. Immediately, the sailboats tied to the dock caught his eye. The sails were down.

The dock on Oikawa-jima was under the pier. During the peak fishing season, there were tens of boats tied there: gasoline-powered boats, row boats, and sailboats. Eiji had ridden in sailboats many times but had never taken one out alone despite his desperate desire. He was always told it was too difficult for a child.

A breeze, not too strong, blew from upstream and the evening sky reflected in the river. He saw a white-sailed boat on the river, gliding over the golden ripples. He could just picture himself out there, alone in a sailboat.

He pictured how surprised everyone (his sister, her friend, and all the adults) would be if he took the sailboat to pick her up. He could tie it up there and walk back with Shima along the road. The thought of actually taking the boat out alone for the first time, however, scared him.

“There can’t be anything wrong with just hoisting the sails while the boat is tied to the dock,” he rationalised as he walked down the dock and jumped into a boat.

The sail went up so smoothly when he pulled on the rope. Suddenly, the sail filled with wind and the boat strained against its ties to the dock. Eiji desperately wanted to let the boat run free with its sails full of wind, not tied to the dock.

He dropped the sail and the boat returned to a state of calm. There were oars in the boat. He had used oars before. Of course, he could not row as well as an adult, but he did know how to use them. He had rowed many times, in fact.
“No problem,” he reasoned. “If it gets too dangerous, I can just lower the sail and row back to the island.”

Unusually, there was not a single adult on either the pier or the dock so he untied the boat, grabbed the oars, and rowed out into the river. When he was far enough out, he raised the sail.

The wind stopped, completely.

“What is this?” he muttered to himself. “This is boring without any wind.”

Just as the words left his mouth, the wind picked up again.

“That’s more like it,” he said and hurriedly swung the sail around to catch the wind.

A sudden, strong gust caught the sail. It fluttered crisply and billowed out, filled with air. For one brief moment, Eiji thought how beautiful the sail looked. Then, the boat pitched violently on its side as the sail caught the full strength of the gust. Eiji was thrown overboard.

When he bobbed back to the surface, he sighted the pier and tried to swim to it but his trousers soaked up water and weighed him down. His shoes and sweater weighed him down even more and made it that much more difficult to move. His luck worsened as he realised that the tide was going out; the combination of the river’s downstream flow and the ebbing tide carried him further and further from the island. The island grew smaller every time he looked up.

Shima waved to her friend as she left their house. There was only one road and no way to get lost so she did not need anyone to take her home.

The cottonwoods lining either side of the road were practically the only trees left on the island and the strong head-wind blew the white, cotton pollen into her face. The swirling cotton was like a blizzard and the pollen got into her mouth, her eyes, and her ears. She thought she heard Eiji’s voice.

“Yay, Eiji’s coming to meet me,” she thought happily and spun all around to find him. He was nowhere to be seen.

The cotton fluff assaulted her as if trying to prevent her from going home. She started to cry and wished her brother would come to walk home with her.

The gusts worked into a steady wind and then died altogether. Shima’s face was all scrunched up and her eyes were red. She could not wait to get home and tell her Mom and brother all about the malicious wind and cotton fluff.

Yaeno stood at the front of the big house, her normally happy face looked worried and tense.

“Where’s your brother?”


Yaeno’s face fell and she ran for the pier calling Eiji’s name. Suddenly, she turned around and flew back to the main house where the seventy-odd men were eating in the dining room. Within seconds, all the men came bolting out of the big house, en masse.

Oikawa-jima was in an uproar. All they knew was that Eiji was missing, he had gone to meet his sister, and it had been thirty minutes.

The islanders split up into boats and scoured the area. The Sato Islanders launched all their boats to join in the search.

An hour later the capsized boat was found floating downstream but there was no sign of Eiji as darkness fell. It was a long night.

Eiji’s pitiful little body was found the next morning.

It was not long before all the Japanese along the river learned of the tragedy. A constant stream of boats pulled up to the Oikawa-jima dock carrying visitors coming to offer their condolences.
Jinsaburo did not cry in front of the visitors. He greeted everyone with a polite bow but remained silent even when directly asked a question. Yaeno was in bed, sleeping, still in shock. Shima could not understand why her brother was dead. None of the adults told her the truth so she stood in wide-eyed wonder as hundreds of boats and even more people came to the island.

Shima only learned the cause of Eiji’s death after the funeral when all the guests had gone home and the three family members were left alone. The sadness at losing her brother sunk to the depths of her heart and, even at that young age, she reproached herself for his death.

“If only I’d come home just a little earlier, my brother would still be alive,” she thought. The hurt was unbearable and she carried it through her whole life.

Eiji’s death was a terrible blow to Jinsaburo and Yaeno. Shima often heard people saying how much Jinsaburo had suddenly aged. Jinsaburo’s dream of passing his vision to his son had disintegrated, swallowed up by the Fraser River. His life was no longer worth living; his spirit dead.

Jinsaburo was fifty-eight years old that year but aged at least ten years with Eiji’s death. He became emaciated and wasted away before everyone’s eyes.

VIII  Confrontation

In August 1914, the outbreak of the First World War coincided with the winds of depression that swept across the whole of Canada. The price of fish plummeted. Fishermen were forced to either catch more fish or be more selective and only take the higher-priced sockeyes in order to maintain their incomes.

Furthermore, fishing licences were restricted to Canadian citizens, naturalised foreigners, and foreigners born in Canada. Few Japanese fishermen were naturalised citizens so they could not get licences of their own and were forced to work under contract to the fishing companies. All the fishermen on Oikawa-jima and Sato-jima worked on contract.

Eiji was born in Canada so Jinsaburo had looked forward to the day that he could get a licence in Eiji’s name and become a real fisherman. Eiji’s death eliminated that possibility and when the fishing season came around, Jinsaburo worked with little of his usual energy and enthusiasm. In fact, he left much of the work to the others.

One day, one of the islanders came to him.

“Boss, there are White men encroaching on our fishing grounds and dropping their nets right under our noses. We don’t know what to do but if we don’t do something, we’ll lose our fishing grounds.”

In 1914, there were about fifty boats working out of Oikawa-jima during the peak fishing season: some owned by Jinsaburo and some leased from the fishing company. Most were rowboats worked by one or two men but there were a few powered by gasoline engines that required three men.

Fishing zones were decided by the fishing companies. In the case of the Oikawa-jima and Sato-jima islanders, they were allotted the areas adjacent to Sato-jima (officially Lion Island), Oikawa-jima (officially Don Island), and Annacis Island that was just upstream (to the east) of the two islands. Of the three islands, the area around Annacis Island was, by far, the best fishing ground.

On the designated fishing days, the fishermen sat in their boats waiting for the flare or siren to signal the start of the fishing time. When it sounded, there was a flurry of activity as everyone threw their nets into the river simultaneously. Government inspectors watched very closely and there were severe fines for those who broke the rules.

Every morning, Jinsaburo reminded his men, “We are Japanese so we have to be very careful to obey all the rules. Whatever happens, even if the Whites do something, do not retaliate.”
Because of Jinsaburo’s daily reminders, the Japanese fishermen around Oikawa-jima had a superb reputation with the government inspectors and fishing companies alike. There had not been a single incident since they had settled on Oikawa-jima and Sato-jima despite a few occasions when wandering White fishermen had tried to fish the waters off Annacis Island; a simple protest to the fishing company always solved the problem.

This time, however, there were about ten boats gathered and the numbers indicated they were not just wandering fishermen. There was a strange feeling in the air.

An hour before opening, fifteen boats full of White men had gathered and secured the best fishing area around Annacis Island. They waited for the opening signal.

Masutaro Miyakawa roared over in the gasoline-powered boat to negotiate.

“This area has been Japanese fishing grounds for more than twenty years so please go somewhere else,” he announced in fluent English as he wove in and out of the gathered boats. Twenty years was a bit of an exaggeration but it had been fifteen years at least.

“Is that so?” a White man answered. “Well then, show us your fishing licences to back up your claim. But, you can’t, can you? You don’t have licences because you’re Japs. This isn’t a Jap river, this is a Canadian river and we have licences that let us fish anywhere we please.”

“That may be so but the custom is to divide the fishing areas by mutual agreement and we have had the fishing company’s permission to fish here for the last twenty years.”

A roar of laughter arose from the White men’s boats.

“Twenty years, eh?”

“Ooooh, permission from the fishing company.”

The White fishermen mocked Miyakawa’s words and ignored him.

In the very middle of the fifteen boats was what looked to be the boss’s boat so Miyakawa headed toward it, hoping that talking directly to the leader of the renegade fishermen might produce some results.

The ‘boss’ did not look like a rascal. In fact, he was slightly built for a foreigner and looked rather shabby. As Masutaro drew near, the boss suddenly drew a pistol from his hip and fired two shots: not warning shots fired into the sky or into the river but two shots fired directly at Miyakawa.

Judging that it would be dangerous to approach any closer, Masutaro quickly turned the boat around and headed back for Oikawa-jima to report to Jinsaburo.

Jinsaburo sat in his office staring intently at a picture of Eiji that hung on the wall. In the picture, Eiji stood on a boat with his right arm jutting toward the sky. Jinsaburo remained in a trance even while Masutaro started to relate the story.

“What? A hairy barbarian shot at you?” Jinsaburo exclaimed as he jumped to his feet. Fury momentarily crossed his countenance but he quickly regained his composure. He asked Miyakawa to tell him the story once again from the beginning, with all the details.

Jinsaburo looked out of his office window at the muddy Fraser, so calm it looked like it had stopped flowing. He followed Miyakawa’s pointing finger and saw the long line of White men in fishing boats strung halfway across the river from the north shore. They were positioned in such a way that when the signal to start fishing sounded, they could quickly drop their nets and take in all the fish going upriver.

“Masutaro, you go to the cannery and tell them about the incident. Those White bastards started it and it’s on our honour as Japanese to respond to the challenge. I’m going to slice the leader of those hairy barbarians in two with a single stroke.”

Jinsaburo spoke with no hint of excitement in his voice. Miyakawa had never heard the expression “slice him in two with a single stroke” and was caught off guard. Suddenly, he realised that Jinsaburo was
going to take on the hairy barbarian with his Japanese sword. A sword is no match for a revolver so Miyakawa knew he had to stop Jinsaburo.

“Don’t just stand there, get to the cannery and inform them of what’s going on,” Jinsaburo ordered Miyakawa.

Jinsaburo disappeared into the next room and emerged shortly with a black-sheathed sword which he placed on the desk while he rolled a hand-towel into a headband.

“I don’t want anyone to come with me. I’m going alone,” he said as he strode out of the house.

From the midst of the worried islanders who had gathered, he chose the one most adept at handling the gasoline-powered boat. They jumped in the fastest boat and Jinsaburo settled himself in the middle.

Jinsaburo turned to the driver, “Now, just relax and listen carefully to what I have to say. The enemy is arranged in a line. First we’ll pull up alongside the boat on this end, the north end. If that is the boss’s boat, I’ll slice him in two and we’ll make a quick getaway. If it’s the wrong boat, we swing around to the other end, the south end. All right? Start the engine.”

Jinsaburo spoke calmly. His driver gave a nod of understanding, fired up the engine, and they started off.

When the others realised Jinsaburo was going out to duel with the pistol-waving, hairy barbarian, the islanders went into a frenzy. They ran to the dock to talk him out of it but saw it was futile. Someone ran to fetch Yaeno while someone else jumped in a boat to bring Souemon over from Sato-jima.

Jinsaburo refused to listen.

“If this island is going to survive, I have to do this,” he said as he got into the boat.

Souemon arrived just as they pulled away from the dock. Jinsaburo yelled to him,

“If anything happens to me, promise me you’ll take over.”

Souemon offered to go along but Jinsaburo told him not to follow.

Jinsaburo knelt in the middle of the boat with his back as straight as an arrow. He took off his sweater and was left wearing only one shirt. He placed the sword to his left and closed his eyes, remembering.

As a child, he had learned kendo at Shuto’s dojo. His teacher, Manto Shuto, was a master of the style called iainuki which was a form of lightening-fast sword manipulation. He remembered putting on his armour and practising with a bamboo sword but he had always wanted to learn iainuki from a sitting position with a real sword. The master, however, only taught them with a bamboo sword, so he had to wait until he was fifteen to use a real sword.

When he was older, he participated in a sword demonstration at the Hachiman-jinja shrine’s autumn festival. Giving a long, piercing “kiai!” scream, he drew his sword and slashed out toward the trunk of the thousand year old cedar tree. Of course, he checked the sword just millimetres before it hit the trunk but he still remembered the exhilaration, as if he had actually continued the stroke right through the thick trunk.

“Boss, we’re almost there.”

The driver’s voice brought him back to the present.

“Continue at full speed and be alert. We are Japanese. The hairy barbarians started this quarrel and we won’t back down. Got that?”

Jinsaburo repositioned himself into a sitting, fighting posture; he was ready to attack.

They drew closer to the White men’s boats. They could hear them chattering.

Jinsaburo searched for the enemy leader. Suddenly, their boss stood up in response to Jinsaburo’s approach, his pistol in his right hand.

“Victory is ours. Japan is victorious,” Jinsaburo yelled out.
A strange thing to say given the situation but it did not seem strange to the driver. This was a war between Japan and the hairy barbarians. The driver wondered where Jinsaburo got the confidence to yell out “Japan is victorious” but he did not doubt victory for an instant.

Jinsaburo declared his confidence in victory when he saw his rival’s unstable position. There was little chance of shooting accurately while standing in a rocking boat and the ‘boss’ made an easy target for Jinsaburo’s sword. The enemy grew larger. The White man levelled his pistol at Jinsaburo.

Firing the pistol, however, was too dangerous. The chances of missing and hitting one of his own men were too high. He waited until Jinsaburo came still closer and their boats rubbed against each other.

The firing of the gun and the drawing of the sword were simultaneous. By either good or bad luck, the White leader’s boat suddenly rocked and the sword cut only air. Jinsaburo’s boat drifted past the other boat so they turned to come back for another pass.

The White man had no idea that Jinsaburo was armed and when he saw the gleaming sword flash above Jinsaburo’s head, he froze in terror. He wondered briefly where it had been concealed and how it had been drawn so quickly.

Seeing Jinsaburo coming back, fury on his face and sword drawn high, the rival boss realised that he was about to be sliced in two.

To the White boss, the long Japanese sword looked like a long knife. He was amazed at Jinsaburo’s skill and thought it was magic. The figure coming toward him with the sword poised above its head was surely the image of Bushido which he knew from propaganda during the Russo-Japanese War. The warrior spirit of Bushido had given the Japanese victory over much-larger Russia. He had seen and heard all the propaganda about the mysterious, Japanese Bushido and hara-kiri. He was afraid.

“He’s going to kill me and then commit hara-kiri in the name of Bushido,” the White man thought to himself, sure that he would be sacrificed in that most ghastly Japanese disembowelling ceremony right there on the boat. The rival boss threw his pistol into the river and jumped overboard on the opposite side to Jinsaburo’s approach.

“Get out of here,” Jinsaburo yelled, still waving his sword above his head.

The boss was plucked out of the water by another boat and they sped downstream at full speed. The other fourteen boats followed closely.

Just then, the fishing company’s boat arrived on the scene.

The story of Jinsaburo vanquishing his pistol-waving rival with only a sword quickly spread up and down the length of the river.

The renegade, fishing bullies never returned.

 IX  Decision

Jinsaburo sent Shima to live with the Kaburagi’s in Vancouver and enrolled her in the Japanese school there. Eiji had attended the local White school but Jinsaburo decided that Shima needed a proper, Japanese, girl’s education.

Still very young, it was hard for Shima to live away from her family. She did return to Oikawa-jima every Saturday but she had to be back in Vancouver by Sunday evening, so time was short. Many times, she pointed out that she could live at home if she went to the nearby White school but Eiji’s death was somehow a barrier to this suggestion. Of course, there was no connection between the White school and Eiji’s drowning but Jinsaburo’s whole attitude toward English changed dramatically with the loss of his son. Whereas he previously exhorted everybody (his own family and anyone else) to speak English constantly, he stopped bringing it up.
Her father’s changed attitude toward English was not the only thing puzzling to Shima; she began to notice that everything about him had changed. He had become reticent. He no longer gave his rousing speeches to the men gathered in the dining hall. He no longer called out authoritatively after the fishing boats leaving from the dock to go fishing.

In the spring of 1915, she first heard someone say, “Old Man Jinsaburo has sure put on the years lately, eh?” and it bothered her.

Shima ran to the house and into Jinsaburo’s office where he stood at the window gazing out at the Fraser. To be sure, he looked every bit his sixty-one years from behind and there was certainly justification in calling him an old man. However, to hear her father referred to as an old man troubled Shima greatly. She left the office to find Yaeno.

“I hate people that call Dad an old man,” she said, her face red with anger.

“Well, it is true that your father has aged a lot since Eiji drowned.”

“He has not gotten older,” Shima replied. “It was only last year he chased those bad men away with his sword.”

“You’re right, dear. It’s not right that they call your Dad an old man,” Yaeno said but even 11-year old Shima knew she was being patronised.

Shima heard “Old Man Oijin” more and more frequently. One day she overheard two men talking.

“We can’t make sake anymore and the salt-salmon business is finished. If we lose the rice polishing, the island will be deserted. Of course, it will be okay during the summer fishing season but the off-season is going to be very difficult. It must be driving Old Man Oijin crazy with worry.”

The economy went bad when the war broke out and, to make matters worse, as the number of competitors exporting salted salmon increased, the price of dog salmon went up. There was no longer any profit to be made so they were forced to shut down the business. Shima knew all of this but one night she overheard Jinsaburo tell Yaeno that the island would not survive if he did not find some new venture. Shima continued to go to the Japanese school but she worried about her home constantly: ‘home’ being the entire island to her.

One day at the Japanese school, they had to write a report entitled “My Home.”

*There are about one hundred people at my home. Sometimes there are sixty people and sometimes there are seventy people. Everybody eats together in the big dining hall.*

Shima suddenly stopped writing as she realised that the number of people eating together in the big dining room had decreased drastically of late. An image of just three people (her father, her mother, and herself) sitting alone in the middle of the big room floated into her consciousness. She had a brief glimpse into the changes occurring on her island birthplace.

One Saturday night, she heard her parents whispering late into the night. Taijiro’s name came up often and it sounded like they were talking about him returning to the island from Yokohama. Yaeno argued vehemently against the idea.

“If your son, Taijiro, comes back to the island, we’ll go back to Japan,” she said.

Shima was stunned. She had never heard of this Taijiro who was apparently her half-brother. She wanted so badly to ask her mother but it seemed such a touchy subject that she never did.

Back in Vancouver, Mr. Kaburagi noticed her troubled expression and asked what was wrong.

“If we’re going back to Japan,” she answered sadly.

Shima was born on the island so that was her home; the thought of leaving it made her sad.
Goro fought hard to conceal his surprise.

“You’re father is a very important man and there are many people who depend on him here. You won’t have to go to Japan, so don’t worry,” Kaburagi comforted her that night but went straight to Oikawa-jima the next day and confronted Jinsaburo.

“I was going to tell you when I knew for sure but, basically, Taijiro is going to come and take over for me,” Jinsaburo said, his voice old and weak. He went on to say it was time for him to think of a successor.

“Getting Taijiro to take over is a good idea but there is no need for you to return to Japan. Rather, you should become naturalised in Canada and be buried here. If you do it, everyone on Lion Island will follow your example and settle down. You are Lion Island; if you go back to Japan, the island will not continue as it is. You can’t let all those years of hard work go to waste.”

Jinsaburo listened politely but then said he had absolutely no desire to be naturalised in Canada.

“You? He who wanted to build a Utopia on the Queen Charlotte Islands? What’s gotten into you? When did you become so passive and lethargic?” Kaburagi tried to get a spark out Jinsaburo.

“You …,” Jinsaburo started. For a brief moment there was a flash of the old energy in his eyes as he fixed Kaburagi in his gaze. It soon disappeared and the passivity returned. Jinsaburo turned to stare out at the Fraser.

“You just can’t understand how I feel. That river, the Fraser River, killed my Eiji and it has become a hateful thing to me. I am afraid every time I look out at it. I know it’s already been four years since Eiji died but my sadness just won’t go away; it just increases and becomes harder to bear. I spend my days remembering the times when Eiji was alive. As long as I can see that Fraser River, Eiji’s ghost won’t disappear,” Jinsaburo’s words swelled up from the depths of his being.

“If that’s how you’re feeling, Jinsaburo …,” Kaburagi started to speak but stopped. If it had been anyone other than Jinsaburo he would have used the opportunity to invite him to accept Christ into his heart. In the end, he said nothing about religion and asked Jinsaburo how many people were on the island.

“There are a hundred now but that will drop to about half once the fishing season is over. If you include another twenty visitors coming and going, there will be seventy,” Jinsaburo answered.

Kaburagi smiled involuntarily; Jinsaburo’s numbers matched those in Shima’s school report.

“This island isn’t yours alone; it belongs to everyone you enticed to come from your hometown. But, the people will only stay, and the island will only survive, as long as you are here. Times may seem tough now but things will improve once the Great War is over,” Kaburagi tried everything to convince Jinsaburo to stay. He threw in the part about times improving after the war as he recognised that a major impetus for Jinsaburo’s dissatisfaction were the ‘hard times.’

The spark did not return to Jinsaburo’s eyes. Eiji’s death had entered his heart and changed him forever.

Kaburagi thought back to the ‘Long Knife’ incident of the previous summer and realised that it was not the real Jinsaburo who had acted but the aggrieved father of the dead Eiji. Perhaps the sadness of simultaneously losing both Eiji and his own dreams for the future had transformed into anger directed at the renegade White fishermen. Alternatively, his foolhardiness in fighting a pistol with a sword may have been an attempt to fight back against the river for taking his son. Of course, there was also the possibility that Jinsaburo only desired to die and follow his son. Whatever, Eiji’s death had been a severe blow to Jinsaburo.

“So I guess I haven’t persuaded you to change your mind, then?” Kaburagi said and looked up to the sky.

The end of the fishing season was approaching and soon the rainy season would begin. A light drizzle fell from the cloudy sky.
When I first started picking up scrap dog salmon to salt-preservative and export, many of the local Japanese kept a watch on how successful it was. From Meiji 36 (1903), the number of competitors increased rapidly and competition became fierce. Below is the amount exported in various years.

Meiji 30 (1897) - 300 tonnes
Meiji 31 (1898) - 1100 tonnes
Meiji 32 (1899) - 2000 tonnes
Meiji 33 (1900) - 3500 tonnes
Meiji 34 (1901) - 2000 tonnes
Meiji 35 (1902) - 4000 tonnes
Meiji 36 (1903) - 6000 tonnes
Meiji 37 (1904) - 8000 tonnes
Meiji 38 (1905) - 7000 tonnes
Meiji 39 (1906) - 6000 tonnes
Meiji 40 (1907) - 6500 tonnes
Meiji 41 (1908) - 5000 tonnes
Meiji 42 (1909) - 4000 tonnes

After this, the tonnage goes down significantly so that in the first year of Taisho (1912) and Taisho 2 (1913), we essentially exported nothing. The most significant reason was that more people started buying up dog salmon which had always been considered the lowest of salmon and unfit for human consumption. The result, predictably, was that the price went up.

In the beginning, we could get them for a penny a piece but the price went up to two cents the next year. By the third year, we had to pay between 3 and 5 cents a piece. In Meiji 33 (1900), the price ranged from 3 to 7 cents. By Meiji 44 (1911), the low was 6 cents and the high as much as 11 cents. After this, the price continued rising to the point that it was no longer profitable to export to Japan.

Only salmon roe stayed free because it never caught on as a food in the West. The roe was free and the salt was very cheap so we only had to pay for the packing and shipping. We shipped about 200 tonnes a year to Yokohama and had to pay a customs
In 1916, Taijiro Oikawa came to Oikawa-jima by himself. He was able to enter the country legally and without problem because he had lived in Canada before and was a member of Jinsaburo’s immediate family. He was thirty-eight years old, in the prime of his life, and had a family. Of course, he wanted to bring his family but he came alone out of consideration for his step-mother, Yaeno, who was four years younger than he.

For most of the eighteen years since Taijiro left Canada, he had been running Eibei Shokai in Yokohama; he left that in charge of his co-manager when he left. More accurately, complete control of the company was left to his co-manager.

Jinsaburo had started Eibei Shokai in 1903 to handle his salt-salmon and roe exports from Canada. At first, the company expanded into other goods and made good profits but when the salmon business went bad, the company went downhill rapidly. The only thing it had imported continuously since starting was salmon roe but that was not a year-round enterprise: in fact, the season was very short. The company survived on other imports and exports but even Jinsaburo’s few trips to Japan to stimulate business were futile.

Originally, Jinsaburo put up two-thirds of the company’s capital but, over the intervening thirteen years, most of the stock had passed into the co-manager’s hands. The name, Eibei Shokai, remained but the founder’s influence had diminished to almost nothing.

The loss of control was Jinsaburo’s fault, not Taijiro’s, and Jinsaburo knew it well. He had borrowed money from the partner to pay off the debts incurred in the Hiroshima Immigration Company fiasco and from the start-up of their own immigration agency, the Japan Trust Company. To repay these debts, Jinsaburo transferred ownership of Eibei Shokai stock to the partner. Part of the reason for summoning Taijiro to take over Oikawa-jima was repayment for his many years of hard work in Yokohama.

When Taijiro arrived in Vancouver, the first thing Jinsaburo said was,

“I’ve been waiting for you. I want you to take over for me.”

There were no doubts about Jinsaburo’s intentions.

Whatever their real feelings about Taijiro taking over, the islanders put on a good show of acting pleased. Jinuemon Sato announced that he too was leaving the island to his children’s care and was returning to Japan like Jinsaburo.

“After all, the Meiji Era has given way to the Taisho Era,” he said in reference to the change of Emperors in Japan.

From 1916, Taijiro was the master of Oikawa-jima and Jinsaburo became known as ‘Old Oijin’ or ‘grand master’ to distinguish him from the ‘young master.’ Some, like Souemon Sato, could not bring themselves to call him anything but ‘boss.’

Jinsaburo stayed on the island for a year after Taijiro’s arrival to show him the ropes. In February 1917, he finally set a definite time for his departure: May of that year. Only Yaeno, Shima, Goro Kaburagi, and Souemon Sato knew that the real reason for Jinsaburo’s return to Japan was his inability to get over the shock of Eiji’s death.

News of Jinsaburo’s imminent departure spread quickly through Vancouver and to wherever Miyagi-ites had gone throughout Canada. Of the original 82 who had come over on the Sui-an-maru, two had died.
and twenty-one had already returned to Japan. Of the fifty-nine still in Canada, only sixteen sent word that they could not attend his farewell party in April 1917 on Oikawa-jima.

The war that started in July 1914 spread a little more each year until the United States finally declared war on Germany in April 1917 and almost the whole world was involved. One impact of the war was an economic depression in Canada and an economic boom in Japan. Japan’s boom was based on exports to its allies and, despite belated attempts to curb war-profiteering by legislation, those years were known as ‘The Age of the New Millionaires’ in Japan.

Given this, there were many rumours that Jinsaburo was returning to Japan to take advantage of that economic climate. However, most of the Japanese who came to wish him farewell figured that, like most Japanese his age, he simply wanted to return to his birthplace to die.

The farewell party was supposed to take place in the big house but more guests came than expected and the party spread outside into the yard. By this time, the island was completely cleared and there were no old growth trees left. The western side of the island was built up with houses and small factory buildings while the eastern side was all fields except for a few houses.

All the women on both Oikawa and Sato Islands joined forces to prepare the party. It was late spring and the grasses were just sprouting so they gathered new mugwort to mix into the mochi. There was homemade sake, too, that had not been seen on the island for quite some time.

In all, two hundred guests came to the farewell party including Goro Kaburagi and Saburo Yoshie from Vancouver. Yoshie brought his wife Yun (one of the original immigrants) and she pitched in to help despite being dressed in a pretty Western dress.

Kimpei Goto arrived about an hour late; he had heard about the party during one of his trips to Vancouver.

“And who might you be?” Jinsaburo asked Kimpei when he greeted him.

“Kimpei Goto, sir. I came over on the Sui-an-maru with you.”

Jinsaburo’s eyes lit up with excitement.

“That Kimpei Goto?” he asked.

Kimpei laughed, “One and the same. I was only a seventeen-year-old boy then. Now I’m twenty-eight.”

“How’s your English?” Jinsaburo asked, remembering that Kimpei had planned to melt right into White society.

“Well, I have learned to read, write, and speak pretty well. In fact, I’m a naturalised Canadian,” he answered proudly.

“You must have worked really hard,” Jinsaburo’s eyes sparkled.

“I sure have. I have done almost every job I could. Most recently, I’ve been working as a boy in a White restaurant.”

Kimpei wanted to add that he had already overcome the language barrier in this country but he noticed that Jinsaburo had fallen silent, so he said nothing.

“It has to be said that you are a fine example of a Japanese man,” Jinsaburo finally said. “I once had a star to guide me and my ambitions, but my star has fallen.”

Jinsaburo’s last words were barely audible.

Just then, someone worked his way between them to speak to Jinsaburo. It was a long time later the Kimpei realised that Jinsaburo’s ‘fallen star’ was Eiji.

About half of the original members from the Sui-an-maru were present: many had brought their families over: all had sent money home every month without fail: all had been successful.
“Hey, Kimpei!” someone yelled. “Sing sansa shigure for us. You know, the one you sang on the ship on the way over.”

A stump was rolled up and Kimpei was, more or less, forced to stand on it and sing.

Sansa shigure ka, kayano no ame ka
Oto mo sede kite nurekakaru
Shogaina

Everything was silent except for the sound of the women sniffling back their tears. Kimpei’s singing transported them back to the dark hold of the Sui-an-maru and the desperate longing they had for their hometown. Some of that longing returned in a flood with Kimpei’s singing.

Kimpei sang the whole song through once and there was thunderous applause when he finished. Before the applause had even died away, everyone was begging him to sing more Tohoku folksongs.

Jinsaburo shook hands with almost everyone and was thanked by everyone. People from Tohoku are not known for eloquence but they thanked him from the bottoms of their hearts.

“Thanks to you I’ve been able to help my people at home more than I could have imagined,” and

“Because of you, I’ve sent money home every month,”

and

“Pretty soon, my wife and I are going home and it’s all due to you.”

The expressions were different but the sentiments were the same. They all owed Jinsaburo a debt of gratitude they could never repay.

Jinsaburo bowed politely to everyone and answered with variations of “Is that so?” or “That’s wonderful.”

A thought crossed his mind.

“Maybe this is Utopia after all. If it’s not, it sure is close,” he said to himself under his breath.

Just then, Goro Kaburagi came up and said in a low voice,

“You’re a great man, Jinsaburo Oikawa. Even while you concentrated on your real dream of creating a Utopia elsewhere, you never lost sight of the people you brought to Canada from your home village. Your heart carried the Golden Horse across the ocean and it has settled here. That is good. You have planted the seeds for many futures. You are a great pioneer.”

Goro left, not waiting for an answer.

Jinsaburo’s body ached with the sadness of parting as he said farewell to each and every person. His face belied his pain and soon his efforts were not enough to maintain the poker-face he tried so hard to show. He straightened up and looked straight ahead.

Souemon, a little drunk, approached Jinsaburo.

“I’ll be lost without you,” he said, wiping away a tear. “I won’t know what to do.”

Taijiro watched from a distance and took special note of Souemon’s bowed head.

The party went on even after it became dark. However, at precisely ten o’clock, the party ended. Jinsaburo’s ten o’clock rule was enforced even at his own farewell party.

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62 Loosely translated: “Light rains and heavy rains come without a sound and get one soaked. It just is!”
He was a great pioneer. Whenever I remember his parting words on his return to Japan—‘I am overwhelmed with sadness because I no longer have the health nor the successor to make my dreams a reality’—I respect him anew as a great entrepreneur, a pioneer in Canada, and my own benefactor. At the same time, however, I can not help but pity him as he must have died with many regrets, especially as he never saw his lifetime ambition come to fruition. (from “About Jinsaburo Oikawa” in Souemon Sato’s Recollections)
Epilogue

Hirobuchi Swamp

(“Meiji 36nen, 12gatsu, 13 nichii. Oikawake ichidou satsuei”
trans: 13 December 1903. Photo of Oikawa group.
Oikawa Jinsaburo is on the right)
I  “Return”

Shima cried as the ship left Vancouver; she was not sad about going to Japan, but sad to leave Canada where she had been born and raised. The many people who came to see them off stood on the dock waving little Rising Sun flags. The multitude of flags made her eyes hurt; everything went blurry.

“I don’t want to go to Japan,” she finally said.

She never used expressions like ‘go home to Japan’ or ‘return to Japan’; Canada was her home. She knew well enough that the whole family would never come back, so she made a solemn, personal promise to return after only a short stay in Japan. She told her mother about her promise.

“You’re thirteen now, Shima. You’re not a baby anymore,” Yaeno scolded Shima even as she wiped tears from her own eyes.

Yaeno had come to Canada when she was 16, so she had lived in Canada for her own adult life. She had married in Canada; she had given birth to and raised two children in Canada; and she had been the master’s wife on Oikawa-jima. Leaving was harder for her than for Shima.

“We’ll come back someday, Mom,” Shima said, convinced that it would not be long.

“Yes, dear. We will be back and not too long in the future,” Yaeno answered, despite knowing that they would not. She did not want to argue with, or disappoint, Shima.

Shima turned to Jinsaburo.

“Dad, we’ll be back, right?”

“Mmm,” Jinsaburo answered noncommittally.

“Promise me we’ll come back,” Shima pressed but Jinsaburo did not answer.

Jinsaburo was far away in his own thoughts, silently paying his last respects to this country of so many memories. Shima wondered why he was not crying. There were many other people returning to Japan and every single one of them was crying. There was even outright bawling amongst some of the women. In the middle of it all stood her father, dry-eyed, staring into the distance and scowling. Shima suddenly realised how hard he was fighting to stand tall and contain his sadness. She decided not to bother him anymore and wiped her tears with her handkerchief.

As the waving crowd grew smaller and indistinguishable from the shrinking city, the image of the Japanese School in Vancouver floated into Shima’s mind’s eye. She saw Goro Kaburagi’s Western-style house beside the park and the slightly sloping hill she walked along every day to reach the Japanese School at the bottom.

From the back of the school, one could see the ocean and the mountains beyond. She remembered snow falling on the mountains at the end of November and lasting until spring. She remembered the autumn mountains, mottled with a powder of yellow leaves.

“Just a few days ago, I was in school,” she thought and could hear the frogs croaking in the nearby pond when the classroom window was open. She remembered her last day of school and recalled her friends’ faces one by one as they bid her farewell. She lifted her handkerchief once more to dry the unstoppable tears.

Once the ship reached the open Pacific, it steered straight for Japan. At night, all on-board lights were extinguished for fear that a German submarine might mistake them for a warship and fire torpedoes. All passengers were aware of this danger but soon forgotten it as the days passed without incident.

Shima, sad for the whole nineteen day voyage, spent every day reminiscing with Yaeno about school, about Vancouver, and about Oikawa-jima. When they finally sighted Japan, the Canadian-born Shima felt
they were entering a foreign country. The approach to Japan brought new expectations and new fears, as well.

The first thing Shima noticed when they disembarked at Yokohama was the incredible number of people. She was shocked that they all wore pyjamas in the middle of the day and in the middle of the street. Of course, they were wearing *kimono*, not pyjamas, but Shima had never seen a *kimono*; she had only seen the *kimono*-like bed-clothes that Jinsaburo wore on the island. All the men in Yokohama wore hats on their heads and *waraji*\(^{63}\) or *geta*\(^{64}\) on their feet. There were a few men wearing Western-style suits but these were rare. The women, for the most part, wore Western-style dresses. Everything was so new that Shima forgot all about Vancouver for a time.

They took lodging in Yokohama and visited Taijiro’s home the next morning. There, Shima met her half-sister who was younger than Yaeno, and her nephew who was the same age as Shima. Having only recently learned of their existence, Shima felt rather strange.

Jinsaburo suggested to his daughter-in-law that maintaining two households (one in Canada and one in Japan) was expensive so she should think about going to Canada. Jinsaburo spoke in an uncharacteristically reserved manner while his grandson, Shima’s nephew, looked up at him with awe.

“I don’t know. We’ve lived in Yokohama for so long now. To suddenly pick up and leave for Canada …” the daughter-in-law said hesitantly. Obviously, she had no desire to go.

Yaeno’s face was unusually hard-set and she was silent for the whole visit. Shima, too, sat quietly and still.

Jinsaburo dropped Yaeno and Shima at the inn and rushed around Yokohama meeting old acquaintances. He returned to the inn at the end of the day, exhausted.

“Well, Japan has sure changed,” he said but did not elaborate.

Suddenly, his expression softened and he turned to Shima.

“So, what do you think of Yokohama? Do you like it?” he asked.

Shima nodded vigorously. She and Yaeno had spent the day wandering around the city, taking in the sights. Shima was excited to tell about all their adventures and the words spilled out in a torrent.

“I think it’s good that they don’t speak English in Yokohama,” she concluded seriously.

Jinsaburo spent three days in Yokohama visiting everyone he knew. He was amazed at how many men sported gold watches and chains. However, rumour had it that such men were all war profiteers.

“That one there, he exported match sticks but only half the matches had the chemicals on the ends; the rest were just plain sticks,” and

“He made his fortune by exporting shirts without sleeves,” were just some of the many rumours Jinsaburo heard. It seemed that every fortune had been made by unscrupulous business practices.

Jinsaburo decided to postpone the trip to Tokyo and they went straight home to Yonekawa instead. Their entire luggage was sent ahead to Yaeno’s family home in Masubuchi.

Yonekawa had changed little over the years but there were big changes in store for Jinsaburo on his arrival. In particular, he was somewhat surprised to learn that most of the property in his name had passed into other hands.

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\(^{63}\) Straw sandals

\(^{64}\) Wooden sandals
During Jinsaburo’s last visit in 1910, Juntaro Onodera, his nephew, asked him to co-sign a bank loan to expand the silk-reeling factory. Of course, Jinsaburo could not refuse because Juntaro was his nephew; the factory was the family business; and, after all, Jinsaburo had started the whole thing.

Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, the factory went bankrupt and the estate, which had been put up as collateral, was lost. The factory that stood on their family land was dismantled, taken away, and the site was turned back into a vegetable plot. As well, most of the family’s forest plots and rice paddies were repossessed as well.

Although obviously disappointed, Jinsaburo did not complain nor blame his nephew outright. There was nothing to be done; Jinsaburo had guaranteed the loan.

“All that’s left is the house and the small fields around it. You can use the house until we can build you another one in the field out front,” Juntaro offered, but only out of obligation.

Jinsaburo was silent as he gazed around his birthplace. He looked up at the great, chestnut main-beam that supported the whole structure. It was covered with the soot of many years.

“Don’t be ridiculous. I should thank you for saving as much as you did, especially the house.” Jinsaburo stood up and left.

Yaeno and Shima stayed with her family for three months while Jinsaburo went to Tokyo to meet old acquaintances and look for new work.

The downtown area of Tokyo (Shitamachi) had industrialised rapidly during the Great War and was a jungle of factories and a forest of chimneys. There were many rich people but little evidence that the new wealth had improved the lot of the general population. True, there were many jobs to be had but rising inflation ate up wages quickly. Additionally, the Tohoku crop failures of 1913-1914 had driven huge numbers to Tokyo looking for work; there were too many workers even for the plentiful jobs.

“There’s all this talk about a wartime economy but it looks like an over-inflated balloon to me,” Jinsaburo muttered to himself.

Jinsaburo visited many businesses but they all appeared ready to fail at any moment and cause a downward economic spiral in the process. He was offered many partnerships, but only if he was willing to contribute his own money as capital. Most of the offers, however, came from businesses that would collapse under a breath of bad news.

Jinsaburo rented a house in Hakosaki-machi while he contemplated his future. Ultimately, he wanted to establish a trading company specialising in American and Canadian trade, but that had to wait until after the war. He had no desire to join forces with a war profiteer so there was little for him to do in the meantime. With money to last a year or two, there was no need to rush into anything although he did have to be prudent.

In the fall of that year, Jinsaburo returned to Masubuchi to move their belongings to Tokyo.

When the people of Yonekawa heard that Jinsaburo was in town, they came in droves to ask about their relatives in Canada. On learning that Jinsaburo would not return to Canada, they said things like, “It figures, he’s old,” and left it at that with no further concern.

Jinsaburo left his hometown for the last time at the beginning of November, just as the days began to shorten and the nights grew colder. He took family down the Kitakami River to Ishinomaki by boat to meet some old friends there before continuing on to Tokyo.

As the boat floated along the Kitakami, Shima stared in wide-eyed amazement. Her first big surprise in Japan were the kimono. The second was the beauty of her ‘native land’ as she saw it through the train window coming up from Yokohama. The third was the beauty of the autumn leaves. As they floated
downstream, Shima was mesmerised by the fall colours and wondered why they were mostly red, unlike Canada where the fall leaves were mostly yellow.

Yaeno turned to Shima and said, “Take a good long look and remember autumn in your hometown. You won’t see anything like this in Tokyo.”

“But there are schools in Tokyo, right?” As it left her mouth, Shima realised the strangeness of the comment, but it revealed her preoccupation with settling in her new school as soon as possible.

II  Friends

Jinsaburo’s Ishinomaki friends came to meet them at the pier and greeted them warmly. As they were friends from before Jinsaburo went to Canada, conversation turned naturally to the ‘old days.’ In particular, they talked about the various silk-related enterprises Jinsaburo had before leaving for Canada: buying, sorting, and shipping to Yokohama. When he told them that he was off to Tokyo to find his fortune, they tried to persuade him otherwise.

“Look, the war is almost over; you should wait. The wartime peak is past and will only get the dregs if you go now. Jinsaburo Oikawa, you’ve always been good at spotting opportunities others have missed; that’s where you’ve made your money. Stay here for a while before you rush off to Tokyo and I’m sure you’ll find something to do.”

There was general consensus among his friends that he should stay in Ishinomaki but he had his heart set on going to Tokyo. Besides, he already had a house rented there.

One of the friends acted as spokesman for the whole group, “How about giving it a month here and we’ll try to find you a job. It’s the least we can do after all you’ve done for us.”

Jinsaburo could hardly refuse such a generous offer. He did not have a job waiting for him in Tokyo and his future was uncertain no matter where he went. In particular, his friends’ prediction that the Tokyo economy would fail with the imminent end of the war, had struck a chord. Jinsaburo wondered what would become of Tokyo if the smokestacks in the Shitamachi district suddenly stopped spewing. He decided to accept their offers of goodwill.

“I have a house in Kakeyama that I’m not using right now. It’s small but you are welcome to use it for the time being,” one of them offered.

Their offers to help one who had been away so long in a foreign country warmed his soul. He recognised that he no longer understood Japan and needed help readjusting. Coming home had been a good decision after all.

Kakeyama, about ten kilometres north-west of Ishinomaki, was already a suburb of that city. The house was near Kakeyama station on the Ishinomaki Rail Line and his friends had it set up with all the necessities. They even introduced him to the neighbours as a successful businessman returning from America.

Jinsaburo, not the type to stay indoors, was up early the next morning to explore the neighbourhood. He did his best thinking while walking.

It was not long before he came across Hirobuchi swamp, obscured by the morning mist. The withered lotus leaves floating on the smooth-as-glass surface lent a late autumn melancholy to the swamp. Several boats were already out and Jinsaburo’s gaze went from one to the next as he estimated the swamp’s area at a thousand acres or more. Apparently, the swamp was quite shallow as the boats were propelled with bamboo poles and the luxuriant cover of lotus leaves reached far into the middle.
Several boats came in to shore full of creel and fresh-water shrimp, as well. Jinsaburo rushed home to ask the neighbours about fishing on the lake. He learned that many of the local farmers fished as a sideline and there were a few who almost supported themselves by drying and shipping fresh-water shrimp to Gumma and Nagano Prefectures. In addition to shrimp, the swamp supported carp, Crucian carp, and eel.

Jinsaburo had no intentions of staying long in Kakeyama and knew that he would have to visit many, many people when he finally reached Tokyo; it seemed prudent to have a good supply of tsukudani to use as small gifts. Surely, Tokyo-ites would appreciate tsukudani made from Hirobuchi Swamp shrimp as a souvenir. If nothing else, making tsukudani would keep him occupied.

The neighbour introduced him to a local fisherman with whom he negotiated to buy shrimp cheaply. He built a small shack on a vacant piece of land near the swamp, borrowed a big pot for simmering, and began making tsukudani. Of course, he had no experience whatsoever but he was happy just experimenting for the time being. Soon, he had both Yaeno and Shima helping him. Jinsaburo came to enjoy Kakeyama very much despite his plans to move on shortly.

Once started, he went at his new job fervently zealously, fixated on making tsukudani that everyone would praise. He pestered Yaeno with orders for more sugar, more soy sauce, and more vinegar-sake and gradually worked up to larger and larger batches. He tasted each batch himself and solicited opinions from anyone and everyone who happened by. After two weeks, he had achieved the perfect taste; he borrowed a boat and equipment to catch his own shrimp.

When the Ishinomaki friends heard that Jinsaburo was making tsukudani out of lake shrimp, they all agreed that he was back in form. However, they worried because tsukudani was made everywhere and the competition was fierce. Finally, one of them went to see what Jinsaburo was really up to.

"OK, so you’re making the tsukudani to take to Tokyo as omiyage. I just don’t understand why you’re making so much,” the friend asked.

“What’s to understand? Tsukudani lasts forever. Is there anything wrong with stocking up for our own use in Tokyo?” Jinsaburo laughed.

The friend returned to Ishinomaki and reported that Jinsaburo still planned to go to Tokyo.

Jinsaburo was very comfortable in boats but the swamp was nothing like the Fraser River. The water was so calm and the boat responded so easily that there was no challenge whatsoever. After several times out in the boat, Jinsaburo realised that the swamp never changed.

“This isn’t even a swamp, it’s more like a puddle,” he said to himself. “As a matter of fact, if all the water was drained, it would make very good land for rice paddies.”

He pictured a thousand acres of rice paddies.

The more he thought about it, however, the stranger it seemed. He asked local fishermen, farmers, and anyone else whether there had ever been plans to reclaim the swamp. He was answered with shrugging shoulders, tilting heads, and sucking teeth.

Almost a month had passed since their arrival in Kakeyama. It was December and the swans, ducks, and geese were gathering in Hirobuchi Swamp. The great flocks were absolutely silent when they landed but rose like thunderstorm if they were startled and all took off at once.

Jinsaburo stood still and listened as the sun sank behind Kakeyama mountain. Suddenly, several hundred startled swans took off noisily. At the very instant the swans became airborne, the sun emerged...

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65 Snacks with a thick, soy-flavoured sauce
66 Souvenirs
from behind the clouds and its rays spread across the flat surface of the swamp, dyeing it a deep red. Above, the whole flock of swans was tinted a brilliant yellow. It was an amazing sight.

“So my idea to colour Hirobuchi Swamp with golden rice wasn’t just a dream after all,” Jinsaburo said out loud as he followed the swans fading into the distance. Jinsaburo decided, then and there, to reclaim the swamp with the passion that it deserved.

He stopped making tsukudani and spent every day, from dawn until dusk, paddling around the swamp taking depth measurements with a weight attached to a string. He had decided that the first step to an accurate plan was a map with depth measurements.

When his Ishinomaki friends heard of his strange doings, they paid a visit.

“There has been talk of reclaiming Hirobuchi Swamp since the middle of the Meiji Era. In fact, the Prefecture is working on it right now. It’s not worth your efforts because they are going to start work on it anytime now,” they warned him but Jinsaburo was not swayed.

“Governments always talk about doing things but never actually do anything. If I present them with a concrete proposal, they will be forced to act on it. I’m not doing this for personal profit, I’m doing it for the sake of everybody.”

Not only did Jinsaburo refuse to give up his individual research and planning but also did he refuse to consider the job offers and ideas that his friends had brought along. He was convinced that he had been called back from Canada to reclaim Hirobuchi Swamp.

Winter came and the small, field puddles created from the Kitakami River’s overflow froze over. Indeed, even the edges of Hirobuchi Swamp froze although the middle remained open. Jinsaburo’s friends decided that his single-mindedness had become bull-headedness so, although they feared for his failure, they eventually left him to his project.

At the beginning of 1918, the price of rice shot up to unprecedented highs and, with Germany’s defeat becoming more and more apparent, the smoke from Tokyo’s wartime factories began to thin out. In August, Japan invaded Siberia as part of an international effort to interfere with the Russian Revolution of November 1917. When the news that Japan was sending troops to Siberia leaked out, the price of rice shot up again. The government tried to suppress the growing opposition to its deployment plans but the Great War ground to an end in November and the economy failed.

Jinsaburo was greatly relieved that he had not gone to Tokyo, for he surely would have been destroyed by the fierce storm of economic collapse. To be sure, he recognised that great changes represented opportunity, but he gave up on Tokyo. At the end of 1918, Jinsaburo dedicated the rest of his life to the reclamation of Hirobuchi Swamp and went to Tokyo one last time - to cancel the lease on the house and bring his belongings back to Kakeyama.

With their future settled, Shima was enrolled in a girl’s school in Ishinomaki. The daily train journey was a hassle but she settled in quickly and looked forward to every day.

Yaeno, however, was troubled by her husband’s total involvement in an unprofitable enterprise and his total lack of concern for the family finances. The money they had brought from Canada was running out quickly so Yaeno decided to support the family herself. The idea of working was completely her own but she was unsure of what she could do. All she knew was that she had to find something soon.

Yaeno longed for their life in Canada and thought about it constantly. She never mentioned it when Jinsaburo was around but she and Shima reminisced about Canada whenever they could.

In 1919, one of the Ishinomaki friends offered the ground floor of his house which Yaeno renovated into a small shop to sell alcohol and some food items. She decided on the name America-ya (American
House) and was adamant about it although her friends suggested she stick to a more traditional name like ‘Oikawa-ya’ or ‘Oikawa’s Sake Shop.’

For some reason, the novel name caught on and despite its small size, Yaeno made enough to support the three of them.

In 1918, Governor Hamada announced plans to reclaim Hirobuchi Swamp and use any profits from the undertaking to create a social relief fund. Consultations over alternative water facilities were initiated with the Association of Water Facility Users which represented those who relied on Hirobuchi Swamp and the Maeyachi and Wabuchi Reservoirs. Once consensus was reached, the November 1918 Regular Session of the Prefectural Assembly announced that ¥400,000 would be allocated to the project over four years and application was immediately forwarded to the Ministry of the Interior for approval.

(from The Fifty Year Anniversary of the Reclamation of Hirobuchi Swamp published by the Hirobuchi Land Improvement District of Kanan Town, Miyagi Prefecture and edited by Fumio Onodera)

III  Rejection

From the end of 1918, Jinsaburo completely gave up all work related to home and spent every day rowing around Hirobuchi Swamp.

Hirobuchi Swamp was originally a low-lying basin surrounded by hills. In 1662, the Sendai-han undertook to build a large dike around the perimeter and create a large reservoir for irrigation. Because the swamp was surrounded by forested hills, the swamp was beautiful in every season. In spring, the reeds along the edges shot up in a sudden show of greenery. As the water warmed, various water plants such as kingyomo, ebimo, yanagimo, and tanukimo sprouted all over the lake. A little later, the green leaves of the hishi (water chestnut), hitsujigusa (water lily), and junsai (water shield) floated on the surface. In late July or early August, the north end of the swamp was ablaze with blooming lotus flowers and, as these finished, the season for harvesting water chestnuts began.

Every day, boats full of young men and women appeared on the lake to gather water chestnuts and a lively banter of singing floated from boat to boat.

Don’t let your daughters harvest water chestnuts,
For then they’ll have water chestnut babies.

Water chestnuts are black and thorny.

Don’t get a water chestnut picker to choose your wife,
Or your wife will sprout thorns all over.

As Jinsaburo floated amongst the boats of the young people picking chestnuts and singing merrily, he dreamed of the day their songs would be replaced by the songs of rice planting.

Using a reference map, Jinsaburo began by making an exploration of lake’s features, especially its depth. On the whole, the swamp was shallow at the western end and deeper to the east with a difference of

67 hornwort, water caltrop, curly pondweed, and bladderwort
one or two metres. As he progressed, however, he found there were some surprisingly shallow spots in the middle and some deep spots around the edges.

To survey in more detail, Jinsaburo used special surveying poles, a tape measure, and a plumb bob. His first problem was that his map had no accurate measure of the swamp’s height above sea level. However, the map did have a reference point showing the nearby Kitakami River bed’s height above sea level. Using that point and traditional surveying techniques, Jinsaburo determined that the swamp bed was roughly the same height as the river bed. Since the Kitakami River flowed to the sea, Jinsaburo concluded that the swamp would drain easily if a canal was built south towards the ocean.

Near the end of 1919, Jinsaburo took his completed map to the Engineering Department at the Prefectural Office. He had hoped to meet with the head of the department but was met by a young official instead.

The young official took one look at Jinsaburo and said, “Have you a name card?”

Jinsaburo did not. He was handed a piece of paper and told to write his name, age, and address.

When he finished, the official said, “You are obviously not a landlord so you must be a tenant representative.”

Jinsaburo, not quite understanding the meaning of this, introduced himself as neither a landlord nor a tenant but an entrepreneur who had recently returned from America (marking the first time Jinsaburo used the term his Ishinomaki friend had used in reference to himself).

“Oh-ho, is that so? Well then, Mr. Recently-Returned-from-America-Entrepreneur, what exactly is your business regarding Hirobuchi Swamp?”

Jinsaburo noticed that the official sported an untidy, scraggly beard that he stroked constantly throughout the conversation.

Jinsaburo brought out his map of Hirobuchi swamp with the water depths and proposed canal route drawn in black and vermilion.

“What is this?” the official asked.

“A plan to reclaim Hirobuchi Swamp.”

“Did you draw it yourself?”

“Of course.”

“This is impressive, indeed,” the official remarked and asked Jinsaburo to wait just a moment as he left the reception room. Reception room is, perhaps, a lofty title for the old, draughty storeroom converted with a few chairs and a table.

Suddenly, five men wearing stiff-collared, Western-style suits appeared in the doorway. A slightly greying man snatched up the map that lay in front of Jinsaburo and looked at it intently for a time. He placed it back on the table.

“Did you do this on your own?” he asked.

“Yes, it took me two years,” Jinsaburo answered.

The man nodded deeply and said, “We understand your reasons for wanting the swamp reclaimed as quickly as possible. Our plan was approved by the Prefectural Assembly and forwarded to the National Government but was returned as unsatisfactory. We are working on a new plan even as we speak so I ask you to be patient just a little longer. The swamp will be reclaimed, no matter the opposition.”

The greying gentleman gave a perfunctory bow and left the room. Apparently, he had assumed Jinsaburo was a representative of the faction promoting the reclamation of Hirobuchi Swamp. He further assumed Jinsaburo had merely come to petition the Prefectural Government to speed up the process.

With a flourish, they were gone. Only one young official remained behind with Jinsaburo.
“Would you mind if I had a look?” he asked as he picked up the map and perused it.

“We are deeply grateful and indebted to you for your work, especially since you did it all on your own. Unfortunately, we could not use this proposal for the actual construction because it is not precise enough. This sort of work needs accuracy to the nearest centimetre.

“Then, even if it is determined that drainage is physically possible, there remains the matter of negotiations with the locals. For example, we have to find an alternate water source to irrigate the fields and rice paddies that rely on Hirobuchi Swamp. An even bigger problem is the opposition presented by the local landlords. You see, if we reclaim the swamp and build new rice paddies, the land owners are afraid that their tenants will all flock to the new paddies and leave the landlords without tenants. Right now, it’s the landlords’ protests that are holding up the project.”

When he finished speaking, the young official slowly slid Jinsaburo’s plan back across the table.

Jinsaburo felt as though he’d been beat about the head with an iron hammer. He had gone out of his way to bring his proposal to the Prefectural Office but left feeling ganged up on and made a fool of. The young man’s attempt at an explanation did little to soothe him.

Jinsaburo returned to the Kakeyama house and said to Yaeno,

“Those Prefectural officials took one look at me and treated me like a crazy old man. They didn’t even listen to me. The atmosphere in the Prefectural Office is nothing like it used to be.”

(Jinsaburo was referring to his visit with Governor Matsudaira forty-odd years before).

Yaeno did not console Jinsaburo, although she agreed that the Prefectural officials had been unnecessarily harsh in dealing with a man who had spent two years of his life preparing the proposal.

“Maybe you just don’t understand Japanese officials like you understand Canadian officials,” she said, wanting to say something to lift his spirits.

“Perhaps,” Jinsaburo replied, lifting his bowed head ever so slightly to look at her.

Seeing a chance, Yaeno grabbed his arm.

“Hey, let’s go back to Canada. We still have enough money for the three of us to get there.”

Jinsaburo said nothing. Yaeno had never seen such sadness as she saw in his eyes.

“At least 1918 is almost over,” he finally mumbled.

When the Ministry of the Interior received the Prefecture’s plan to reclaim the swamp, they studied it in detail and determined that it would cost more than ¥3,000,000 just to build a canal from the Kitakami River near Yanaizu to provide replacement irrigation; the cost of building new paddies was additional to that sum. They turned it down.

However, an alternative plan was drafted that proposed a canal from the river further downstream near Oiri in Maeyachi and using a pump to raise the water out of the river. This plan would cost only ¥1,217,700 and would be completed over nine years starting in 1920. The new proposal and budget were approved by a special session of the Prefectural Assembly in June, 1920.

(from The Fifty Year Anniversary of the Reclamation of Hirobuchi Swamp published by the Hirobuchi Land Improvement District of Kannan Town, Miyagi Prefecture and edited by Fumio Onodera)
Although the Prefectural Assembly approved the revised Hirobuchi Swamp Reclamation Proposal in June 1920, the new budget required approval and the area had to be re-surveyed; it was not until the next year that the actual construction finally began. The first tasks were to build a drainage canal and install the pumping system to provide replacement irrigation. The water remained although its fate was sealed.

Jinsaburo read in the newspapers that the reclamation had begun. When there was no apparent change in the swamp, he decided to visit the Prefectural Office again to prod them along. He bundled together a *furoshiki* containing his old plan, a new set of proposals he had prepared, and some construction machinery catalogues from Canada and the United States.

Jinsaburo was met by the same young engineer as the last visit. The young man looked through the catalogues and pictures.

> “These are very interesting and a great reference. They would certainly make big projects much easier; unfortunately, we can’t use them in Japan. There are too many people unemployed due to the post-war recession so mechanisation on this scale would be not only unnecessary but also unpopular.”

He glanced up for a moment and saw a disappointed Jinsaburo.

Next, he picked up Jinsaburo’s new proposal and examined it.

> “How long did this take?”

> “I worked on it for six months after my last visit here,” Jinsaburo replied.

> “So, you had it completed before the Prefecture announced its new construction proposals. Is that correct?” the engineer looked up to confirm this.

Jinsaburo nodded.

The young man continued, “Then this is quite amazing. You, working on your own, came to the same conclusions as our department, except that our proposal took several professionals a longer time. It appears that you have placed the pumping station, the irrigation canal, and the drainage canal in essentially the same spots as we did.”

The young engineer went on to say that the summary plan the Prefecture made public was not nearly as detailed as Jinsaburo’s work so his proposal was farsighted and impressive. In fact, excitement showed on the younger man’s face as he spoke.

> “So, can the Prefecture use my proposal?” Jinsaburo asked hopefully. The young engineer’s words had given him new confidence.

> “Unfortunately not. You see, we’ve already drawn up all the plans and they’ve been approved. We are in the construction phase already so, as impressive as your plans are, we have no use for them.”

For some reason, the young man chose his words carefully to avoid any hint of criticism.

> “I want you to have them anyway. Just for reference,” Jinsaburo said with strong voice.

> “I don’t know how to thank you. I am very grateful.”

The young man received Jinsaburo’s offering and spread out a detailed map of the Prefecture’s plan in return. He gently slid it across the table towards Jinsaburo.

> “Here, have a look at our plan. As you can see, it’s almost identical to your own.”

The young engineer had been interested in this strange old man since his last visit so he accepted Jinsaburo’s unsolicited (and quite useless) plan graciously, but only because he admired Jinsaburo’s ardour and zeal.

> “Have you ever heard about Taihei Saito from Maeyachi in Monou County? He started advocating the reclamation of Hirobuchi Swamp in the early Meiji Era,” the young man asked.

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68 A large piece of cloth tied around articles to make a bundle.
Jinsaburo knew nothing of this man so the young engineer told him the whole story.

Beginning in the early Meiji Era, Taihei Saito spent every day on the swamp in his small boat, charting its shape and depth from one end to the other. He used his data to prepare a proposal for reclaiming the swamp.

“He went everywhere with his plans and data wrapped in a furôshiki. He made many trips to the Prefectural Office petitioning for swamp to be reclaimed but they never took him up on it. Sadly, he eventually became a bit of a joke: a raving old man. But, he lived until 1910 and 82 years of age. Quite literally, he never gave up on his dream; it was always in his hands, wrapped in that furôshiki.”

The young engineer paused.

“He carried his dream around in a furôshiki,” Jinsaburo mumbled. It was so real to him that he could picture Taihei in his mind.

“You came here carrying your dream in a furôshiki, too. Except that your dream is on the verge of becoming true. In a very short time, Hirobuchi Swamp will be transformed into 800 hectares of beautiful rice paddies.”

Jinsaburo wondered why the young engineer was telling him this story. Was it because he saw Jinsaburo as a pitiful old man like Taihei Saito? Or did he see Jinsaburo as a reincarnation of the old man come to finish the job? Jinsaburo’s own empathy for the old man who carried his dreams in a furôshiki was so strong that he himself wondered if he was a reincarnation.

“Am I really as deranged and obnoxious as Taihei Saito?” Jinsaburo asked out loud.

“No, no, not at all. Without using modern equipment and techniques, you came up with as legitimate a plan as we did using them. That is proof that you are not deranged. You are as realistic and modern as they come.”

“Thank you very much,” Jinsaburo responded. “By the way, do you mind if I ask you your name?”

The Prefectural Office had already closed for the day and was as quiet as a deserted temple.

“I’m Roppei Sato,” the young engineer answered as he handed Jinsaburo his name card.

As Jinsaburo studied the card, he suddenly remembered his visit to the Prefectural Office and meeting with Rokuemon Sato over forty years before. The kanji was similar so he asked.

“Would you be related to Rokuemon Sato, by any chance?”

The words had barely left Jinsaburo’s lips before Roppei answered, obviously shocked.

“Rokuemon Sato was my grandfather.”

Roppei’s answer transported Jinsaburo back forty years. He told Roppei how his grandfather was the most knowledgeable man in Miyagi regarding silk-reeling. He also told about his own connection to Rokuemon.

“Really? I had no idea.”

Roppei asked Jinsaburo to wait a few minutes while he quickly tidied his desk. When he returned, he invited Jinsaburo to join him for dinner. Jinsaburo refused at first because he did not have enough money to pay for both their dinners. However, Roppei insisted on treating him and even paying for a room for the night since Jinsaburo would miss the last train. In the end, Jinsaburo accepted the dinner invitation although he insisted on staying with a Sendai relative.

They went to a small restaurant where, over dinner, Jinsaburo told an enraptured Roppei all about his dealings with Rokuemon and how he ended up going to Canada. When he got to the part about smuggling everybody aboard the Sui-an-maru, Roppei set down his glass of sake and leaned across the table.

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69 Chinese characters
That evening, after dinner, Jinsaburo felt more content than he had for a long time. He had poured out his soul to the young engineer and felt unburdened.

The next day, he returned home and told Yaeno all about it.

“The Prefectural Office deigned to receive my humble proposal.”

Yaeno listened quietly and wondered why he was using such old-fashioned grammar.

“They’re doing it. They’re using my proposal to make 800 hectares of beautiful rice paddies.”

Yaeno said nothing other than the odd encouragement like “that’s wonderful” and “so your toil and efforts paid off after all” which she interjected from time to time. She knew full well that the reclamation was already well underway due to the efforts of the National and Prefectural Governments. She knew that there was no reason for them to have “deigned to receive his humble proposal” but she did not contradict her husband.

“It’s better to let him believe it,” she thought as she suddenly noticed how old he had become. She shuddered when she realised she would have to compensate for that in the future.

“He is not old and feeble,” she rebuked herself. “He has many good years left. If only I could get him away from this narrow-minded, stifling Japan. It would do him a world of good to go back to Canada where he could strut around as boss of Oikawa-jima and regain his old confidence.”

Their money had almost run out and even day to day living became a challenge. Yaeno often reminisced about Canada. She remembered the spring-time when the white cottonwood fluff floated on the wind and gently fell into the Fraser River teeming with spawning salmon. She remembered the 55 to 65-day long summer fishing season when the men were out on the river for the whole opening, be it Sunday, the middle of the night, or in the pouring rain. She remembered the soft, autumn rains and recalled the men going off to work in the nearby sawmills, the image of their receding backs associated with the coming of the long, cold winter.

She remembered Sundays most clearly. Every week, she donned her long, Western-style skirt with the white blouse, put on her hat and, carrying her parasol over one shoulder, walked hand-in-hand with Shima to the church in New Westminster.

Jinsaburo felt deeply indebted to Roppei Sato for his hospitality and resolved to return the favour somehow. Since his present financial circumstances would not allow it, he wrote three letters to Canada. The letters were addressed to people on Oikawa-jima to whom he had lent money many years back. In all, he was owed about two hundred dollars.

A long time passed without any reply. Then, in late 1921, a letter arrived from Taijiro. Taijiro wrote that Jinsaburo’s letters had not only insulted the recipients but also made him, Jinsaburo’s successor, lose face in front of everyone. If Jinsaburo had bothered to find out anything about the situation in Canada, he would never have written the letters. The post-war depression in Canada was making life difficult for everyone, Japanese and Whites alike.

“It’s a reprimand from Taijiro,” Jinsaburo told Yaeno when he finished reading the letter.

Jinsaburo replied cryptically to Yaeno’s questioning about Taijiro’s reprimand, “It seems Canada is worse off than Japan.”

And that was that.

V Finale

The water began draining in 1922.

“Look Yaeno! The water is draining just like in the plans I prepared.”
Jinsaburo watched as his dream came true. Of course, all the work he had put into surveying and drawing up plans really had no impact at all but he needed to believe he was instrumental in the realisation of his final dream.

In the spring, Yasuemon Iwabuchi, came for a visit. Yasuemon had returned from Canada in 1921 to marry and settle down in his birthplace. Jinsaburo wanted to show Yasuemon the swamp so he suggested that they take a walk rather than sit in the house.

Enough water had drained from the swamp that shallow sections poked up as little islands. As the wind blew dust from the sun-dried, former swamp bed, Jinsaburo said to Yasuemon,

“Soon this will be 800 hectares of rice paddies. It’s my final project.”

Yasuemon Iwabuchi had gone to Canada with Jinsaburo in 1898 but had never ended up on Oikawa-jima. Instead, he travelled continually and assimilated into White society: learning to read, write, and speak almost fluently. However, he was the oldest son and when duty called, he returned to Japan to continue the family line and take over the family lands. It meant throwing away all he had done it was his fate. Despite it all, he had changed little; he still spoke little of himself and always smiled.

Yasuemon responded to Jinsaburo’s explanation of the swamp with polite rejoinders such as, “the reclamation of Hirobuchi Swamp is a big project even for the legendary Oijin to undertake.” All the while, however, he wondered why Jinsaburo asked nothing about Canada and what had happened since he left.

After all, why else would he have invited Yasuemon down for a visit?

Yasuemon finally decided that Jinsaburo really wanted to know but was hesitant to bring it up.

“I don’t have any visions or dreams like you but if I weren’t the oldest son, I surely would have stayed over there forever,” he said, creating an opening to talk about the changes since Jinsaburo’s return to Japan in 1917.

“People have been drifting away from Lion-jima ever since you left. I figure there will be nobody left in two or three years,” Yasuemon expected the news to surprise Jinsaburo but it seemed not to.

Never having lived on the islands, Yasuemon could look at the situation objectively and make his predictions with confidence. That he had used the term “Lion-jima” signalled that he was referring to both Oikawa-jima and Sato-jima. Apparently he expected Sato’s island to be deserted soon as well.

“When you and Sajin (Sato Jinuemon) both left one after the other, it was as if the islanders lost their anchors,” Yasuemon paused to search for the right words to continue.

“But, then again, times have changed. There is the depression and, above all, there is an attitude that we Japanese no longer need to live in an isolated group. It all started when one or two families moved over to Sunbury when their kids reached school age. School was always a problem for your islanders because there was no Japanese school nearby and even the White school was hard to reach from the island.

“Once they moved to shore and built new houses, they settled in quickly. The kids learned to communicate with the Whites and, seeing how easy it was, the adults soon followed. Everyone can communicate quite well now. I think things will go well for them.”

Jinsaburo listened with a look of satisfaction. He was pleased that the Japanese no longer felt the protective need to live together on Lion-jima. It was only natural that they would assimilate into White society after a time.

“After all, Oijin, you always said that the Japanese had to adopt White culture if they wanted to be treated equally. That is exactly what’s starting to happen. The desertion of Lion-jima might even be a good thing, eh? Even though you left, your spirit lives on in those who remain in Canada,” Yasuemon paused to look at Jinsaburo’s face. He became flustered when he saw Jinsaburo’s eyes welling with tears; he changed the subject.
“Oh, yeah, Jinuemon Sato was asking after you and wanted to know how you were doing. When he came back from Canada, he was elected Mayor of Nishikiori Village. He’s just like you in that he can’t bear to be inactive for any length of time.”

Uncharacteristically, Yasuemon continued talking; trying to hit on everything he thought might interest Jinsaburo. He saved the best for last.

“Do you remember young Kimpei Goto who went over on the Sui-an-maru? The year after you left, he came back to Japan to get married and they went straight back to Canada to start a small boarding house. Actually, I recently heard his wife runs the boarding house because Kimpei is an insurance agent. He is the most fluent in English of any of us so I’m sure he’ll be successful.”

Yasuemon had exhausted his news of people but he had one more thing to add,

“I sat down one time and tried to count all the people that went to Canada through your efforts. You might be surprised to learn I counted over four hundred, although you probably only know half of them personally. That’s quite remarkable, you have to admit.”

Yasuemon left and Jinsaburo stood for a long time staring into the waters of Hirobuchi Swamp. He wondered why Yasuemon had gone on and on about Canada and the people still there.

“Perhaps he somehow knew that I still see the Fraser River in my mind’s eye whenever I close my eyes,” Jinsaburo said silently.

The Fraser River and Hirobuchi Swamp were both great depositories of water. The only difference was that the Fraser would flow for all eternity while Hirobuchi Swamp would disappear in his lifetime.

“And when it finally drains away to nothing, my life-long connection with water will come to an abrupt end.”

He shuddered.

By 1923, the swamp had almost completely drained although there was still lotus in deeper places. When the lotus sprouted, all the locals converged on the swamp to dig for the roots. Shima was home on a school vacation so the three Oikawa’s went down to the swamp. Yaeno and Shima wallowed in the mud to dig for lotus root while Jinsaburo sat on the bank and watched the pitiful roots being ripped from their nurturing soil. He could empathise with them.

His final dream had been to see the swamp drained and replaced with fertile rice paddies but when he saw the fish writhing in agony and the swamp flora drying out and dying, he was overcome with remorse and guilt. In the autumn, great flocks of swans congregated for the winter but, on discovering that more than half of the swamp had disappeared, took wing and flew away in their separate groups, never to return. By the summer of 1924, the swamp had all but disappeared except for a few puddles from the Kitakami River’s overflow in the monsoon season.

Taijiro returned to Japan that year and informed Jinsaburo that the last of the Lion Island Japanese had moved away from the island. He did not rationalise the desertion nor make excuses. Jinsaburo listened to the inevitable news with detachment and did not once complain or berate Taijiro.

“It’s going to be tough for you, isn’t it,” he said as Taijiro prepared to leave the next morning.

Taijiro, with a wife and children to support, was worried that jobs would be difficult to find in Japan, especially since he was just returning from Canada. As much as he wanted to, Jinsaburo was in no position to help them because he himself was dependant on Yaeno for their living expenses.

Jinsaburo watched as Taijiro’s figure disappeared into the distance. He wondered if the coincidence of Taijiro’s return with the final death of the swamp was a significant sign. If it was, there were two possibilities: the end of his Canadian dream coinciding with the fulfilment of his dream to reclaim the
swamp or the end of his Canadian dream coinciding with the death of Hirobuchi Swamp. He chose to see the latter and was depressed.

In early 1925, the little ponds left from the Kitakami River’s overflow had frozen over and Jinsaburo decided to cut some ice and build a small underground ice-house for their own use. Of course, this was no big undertaking for the man who had started the Masubuchi Ice Company and had sold natural ice all over Miyagi those many years ago.

One very cold day, Jinsaburo grabbed his saw and straw sandals to check the quality of the ice (ice from bigger bodies of water have few impurities, but ice from little ponds has much). As he headed out towards the middle of the completely frozen pond where the ice was pure and transparent, he noticed a strange feeling of lightness, as if he were floating above the surface of the pond. He slipped slightly and began to feel a little dizzy.

All of a sudden, his left foot shot forward, his straw sandal flew off, and he fell backwards, hitting the back of his head on the ice. It was not painful but when he sat up his vision was dim and blurred. It was a new experience and when he got his breath back, he stood up slowly.

His head felt vacant.

Leaving his saw where it fell, he made his way home to lie down, sure that he would feel normal after a little rest. However, this was not the case as his whole right side felt strange even after a lengthy rest.

Pale-faced, Yaeno called the doctor who came straight away. The doctor said that Jinsaburo had suffered a slight stroke and would be fine by spring if he took it easy. The doctor confirmed Jinsaburo’s age and shot Yaeno a stern look.

“He’s in his seventies; he should be more careful,” he said.

It was not a serious stroke but Jinsaburo’s right side was partly paralysed and he could not use his hand to write. When he tried using his left hand, he found it much more difficult than he expected.

“I want to write down my experiences,” he decided one night, “for posterity.”

To an outsider seeing the intensity and effort with which he worked, it would appear that Jinsaburo was progressing rapidly with his project. In reality, he spent most of his time erasing illegible words and rephrasing his thoughts.

As the doctor had predicted, his health improved somewhat with the coming of spring and he was able to make better progress on his book for a short time. Soon, however, he had to resort to dictation as he lay in bed; even this became more difficult as he gradually lost control of his mouth.

One afternoon, Yaeno went to Ishinomaki to pick up stock and left Shima in charge of both the store and Jinsaburo who was sleeping on the second floor. Shima had particularly noticed Yaeno’s tone of voice when she asked her to look after her father.

For a short time around noon, the store got quite busy and then became silent again.

Shima looked outside at the blustery day and watched the wind scatter plum blossoms around the garden. She thought how much the blossoms looked like cherry blossoms, although cherries did not bloom until the twentieth of April in those parts. The drifting blossoms also reminded her of that winter day when her father mentioned he only wanted to live long enough to see the cherry blossoms once more.

A sudden stab of anxiety hit her and Shima raced upstairs. Her father was asleep in his bed. Asleep with the peacefulness of the eternal.

Jinsaburo Oikawa passed away on 4 April 1927 at the age of seventy-three. The reclamation of Hirobuchi Swamp was completed that same year.
Jinsaburo Oikawa returned to Japan in his old age but did not enjoy good health; he passed away in a temporary abode in Kakeyama, Monou County on 4 April, 1927.

Jinsaburo Oikawa was a man with few peers and his hard work and effort will live forever through his influence on sericulture, silk-reeling, ice, charcoal, and international expansion.

He exerted himself for the benefit of his village and his country. His accomplishments were many. It was a matter of course that the village elders would erect a stone monument to his memory on the grounds of Kessokuji Temple. (from The History of Yonekawa Village, Tome County)

THE END
The plane took off from Narita Airport at 6:30 p.m. Given the eight hour flight time, we would arrive in Vancouver in the middle of the night Japanese time. I knew that I should get some rest but I always get restless when I fly and have difficulty sleeping.

Somehow, the hours slipped away and, although the stars still shone in the western heavens, the bright light of dawn began to fill the eastern sky. I could not see the western sky directly from my seat so I went to the rear of the plane; looking out the windows on each side in turn, I watched the sky in transition from darkness to dawn.

It suddenly struck me that watching the dawn from a mountain top is quite different than watching it from a plane, with the altitude and the vastness of the ocean below significantly altering perspective. On a mountain top, dawn seems to be running after the darkness, endlessly chasing it. From a plane high above, however, the overpowering expansiveness of the starry night sky seems to surround dawn and confine it.

At any rate, morning arrived and I had not slept. As the plane approached the continent, I looked down on Vancouver below.

Before leaving Japan, I had gathered as much information about Canada as I could and had pored over maps of the Vancouver area. As the plane prepared for its final approach, I knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that the great, wide river below me was the mighty Fraser. But where was the Lion Island where America Oijin (as Jinsaburo Oikawa was called) tried to build his Utopia? I leaned closer to the window and peered out intently. I knew that it was somewhere in that great river below because I had learned the maps of the Fraser River by heart. In that fleeting instant before touchdown, however, I could not pick out Lion Island; there were just too many islands. The plane landed.

We left Japan at 6:30 p.m. on November 8th, 1978. On that same day at 9:40 a.m., we arrived in Vancouver, nine hours earlier than leaving. When Jinsaburo Oikawa first came to Vancouver in 1896, it took him just over twenty days by steamer. When he returned in 1906 with 82 people from Miyagi Prefecture stowed away on the sailing ship, Sui-an-maru, it took an incredible fifty days. Such thoughts swirled in my head as I completed my immigration papers and stepped outside to find Mr. Michio Kubodera, manager of Japan Airline’s Vancouver office, waiting for me. He escorted me to his car where Mr. Shinichi Hirota of Kodansha Publishing was waiting and we headed straight for our downtown hotel.

“The weather turned nice just for you; it was raining constantly until yesterday. Once November comes we get into the wet season and the days are quite dreary.”

During my stay in Vancouver, I was to hear Mr. Kubodera’s first words many times from many people. Actually, I had researched the Canadian climate myself before I left and learned that there are extreme climatic differences on either side of the north-to-south barrier created by the Rocky Mountain range. In Vancouver (west of the Rockies), the rain starts to fall around mid-October and by November the wet season is in full swing until the next March. The actual amount of rainfall is not so great but the sun is
seldom seen after November. Having done my homework, I had come prepared for cloudy, damp days; I never dreamed the weather might be so fine as it was that day.

The clear, dry air in Vancouver afforded an unlimited vista of a city tinged yellow with autumn leaves. The yellow leaves of the maples lining the streets, the white birch in gardens and parks, and the scattered poplar and aspen glistened as if wet, creating a scene of incomparable beauty. The only contrast to the yellow were the red, cherry leaves more reminiscent of the brilliant red of Japanese maples than the subdued red of Japanese cherry trees. The sky was not just blue, either, it was cobalt blue. I asked Mr. Kubodera to stop the car so I might get out and enjoy a little of this wonderful Canadian autumn day.

“If of course, you never know what tomorrow will be like.”

Mr. Kubodera’s uncertain words made me realize that I would have to use this good weather, however short, to its full potential.

The hotel was built on a rise overlooking Burrard Inlet and had good views of the harbour below and the city of North Vancouver on the opposite shore, sandwiched between the inlet and the mountains beyond. Many ships lay anchored in the harbour.

In the lobby, I was met by my guide and interpreter, Mr. Kumihisa Itoh, whom Mr. Kubodera had contacted before my arrival. Mr. Itoh had graduated from university in Japan and was in Vancouver to doing post-graduate studies in architecture which he would finish the next spring. He planned to join a construction company after graduating.

I gave Mr. Itoh a brief background to Jinsaburo Oikawa and explained that the purpose of my visit was to gather data for a book about this Meiji pioneer, nicknamed America Oijin.

Mr. Itoh listened intently to my story. When I finished he stood up abruptly and said,

“I see. Well then, if we are going to do this properly we have much to see and do. It will probably rain tomorrow and there are places we should visit while the weather holds.”

Despite Mr. Itoh’s concern about the weather, our first stop was to meet the Japanese Consul-General, Mr. Yukio Nomura, at the Japanese Consulate. I outlined what I knew about Jinsaburo Oikawa and asked some questions I had prepared beforehand regarding such things as the location of the consulate during the Meiji period and whether there were any pictures from that time. It turned out that the Consulate had been completely removed to Japan during World War II and any information from that period was lost.

However, when we returned to our hotel that evening, we found that two or three articles waiting along with Mr. Nomura’s business card. Among the items was a copy of a booklet edited by Rokuro Goto and entitled Stow-aways to Canada.

When Rokuro Goto’s brother, Kimpei, was eighteen he came to Canada as part of Jinsaburo Oikawa’s group of phantom immigrants aboard the Sui-an-maru. He had naturalised and moved to Toronto after the war where he lived the rest of his life. Rokuro Goto had combined his brother’s memoir’s, My Sixty Years, with a novel by Seiki Shuto, Stow-away to Canada: A Novel, and published the resulting 76-page booklet in 1966 at his own expense. I now had a copy of that booklet thanks to the Consul General, Mr. Nomura.

As far as information on the Sui-an-maru went, this book turned out to be the best. I read it so many times that I practically know it by heart. The other two small volumes sent by the consulate about the Japanese living in Canada were also useful references for general background. Needless to say, I am deeply indebted to the consulate for their assistance.

Leaving the consulate, we drove to Stanley Park in Mr. Itoh’s car. I was filled with admiration for, and jealousy of, a city that had such a large section of virgin forest preserved in its midst. As we walked through the park, I was amazed at Mr. Itoh’s extensive knowledge of plants and trees. It turns out that he had worked as an interpreter for a Japanese timber buying company and had acquired such specialised
knowledge from his time spent tramping about the forest. I, too, have a great interest in plants and we strolled amid the deep colours of the autumn forest until it got dark. I was forever asking what that tree was called or what this plant was; the names rolled off Mr. Itoh’s tongue: Red Cedar, Douglas Fir, Hemlock, Oak, Dogwood.

We left the park, drove across the Lion’s Gate Bridge, and drove up into the mountains behind North Vancouver. It was quite dark by the time we reached the top; looking down on the lights of Vancouver across the inlet was truly a beautiful sight. Despite Mr. Itoh’s warning that it was sure to rain the next day, there was not a single cloud in the sky to support his claim. The almost full moon was clearly visible over the city below. I must have been more exhausted than I thought for I slept soundly that night.

I awoke early the next morning to the sound of the ferry weighing anchor as it prepared to leave the harbour below my window. Across the inlet, the ski-run lights on Grouse Mountain had already been extinguished. The snow on the summit of aptly named Lion’s Head sparkled in the morning sun and a thin layer of mist covered the surface of the water in the inlet. I opened the window for some fresh air and was blasted by a cold wind that cut right through my body. I guessed the outside temperature to be between five and ten degrees Celsius, but the weather was fine.

Mr. Itoh arrived at nine o’clock as arranged and said, “I just can’t believe this great weather we’re getting all of a sudden. You must have brought it with you.”

“However,” he continued, “this weather probably won’t hold up past today so we should go up the Fraser River while it’s still nice. We may even see some salmon.”

He explained how the mountain roads are very treacherous when it rains and it is only possible to explore the beauty of the back-country mountains and valleys when the weather is nice. It did not take much to persuade us of the wisdom of this plan.

We left Vancouver and gradually worked our way upriver, passing through forests of cottonwoods lining the riverside. The trees overflowed with yellow autumn leaves. Along the way, we often stopped to collect information and take notes. On one such occasion we stopped in at a farm and met the Clarkman family who had immigrated from Holland in 1925.

The family of five runs a profitable operation with forty-seven head of dairy cattle and fifteen acres of crops. Potatoes, cauliflower, broccoli, and asparagus grow well in the Fraser Valley but corn does not, apparently because of the short sunlight interval. There were apple trees in the garden with fruit slightly smaller than Japanese apples. Yellow-leafed horse chestnuts and dogwoods stood side-by-side and there was a Chinese plum, with the deepest purple leaves I have ever seen, standing guard beside the silo.

As I scribbled frantically to fill my notebook with the sights and sounds, Mr. Hirota busily snapped pictures beside me. The weather was perfect and the roads were clear; I remember thinking how this research trip was apparently destined to be successful.

As we drove further into the forest, the road worsened and the yellow leaves gave way to dark, luxuriant, needle-leaved trees that blanketed the mountains as far as we could see. The diversity, however, caught me by surprise. From afar, an evergreen forest seems to be a vast expanse of only one kind of tree: to see an entire mountain blanketed by that one variety is quite a fantastic sight. In reality, the apparent uniformity is an illusion created by both distance and autumn. As one gets closer, one sees the many types of evergreens (firs, hemlocks, and red cedars) as well as the many deciduous trees that have already dropped their leaves and whose bare trunks and branches are hidden by the evergreens.

One hundred and seventy kilometres up the Fraser River, the narrow road was lonely and covered with fallen leaves; we rarely met another car or saw other humans. The road more or less followed the river:
sometimes going towards it and sometimes turning away. The river became narrower until it was a rushing, mountain torrent. Finally, we came to the end of the narrow gravel road and were forced to walk.

The distinctive scent of evergreen sap filled our nostrils as we walked along a trail through the forest. We could not see the river but our ears told us we were nearing some rapids. Seagulls screeched and circled above us and, at first, we were mystified that there were seagulls this far into the mountains. When we broke into the clearing by the river, however, the reason was obvious.

After the darkness of the forest canopy, the sudden brightness of the clearing by the river was a shock to our eyes. Looking up, we saw a large flock of gulls swooping and soaring above in a boisterous dance. The river was about five metres wide. The bank consisted of stones and huge boulders deposited by generations of raging spring run-off. As we stood on the bridge across the rapids, a strange odour wafted up from the river below: the reek of decaying flesh. Scattered along the banks were the decaying corpses of salmon that had been dragged out of the water by the gulls. The shallow water was littered with remains the gulls had yet to eat.

Shifting my attention to the stream itself, I saw the salmon gathered into groups of ten or twenty, each making a desperate effort to fight the current. Along the river’s edges, the salmon were so thick that I could barely see the bottom. The dorsal fins of the thrashing, jostling fish protruded through the surface of the shallow stream. There were salmon with white heads, salmon with white bodies, and salmon with completely red bodies; all were white around the mouths. They were huge - sixty or seventy centimetres from tip to tail. At first, I was puzzled but understood when I looked closely.

There were both males and females. The males used their tails to dig a hole in the sand for the female to deposit her eggs. After the eggs were laid, the male deposited his milt (sperm) over them and covered them with sand. During this process, the surrounding water turned muddy white as there were so many salmon digging holes and burying eggs in such a narrow area that the sand was constantly churned. My research told me that salmon had fixed mates but the sheer numbers of salmon jostling past each other in such a small space made it impossible to keep track of who was with whom in this solemn ritual.

As we watched, each ‘finished’ salmon turned and was carried downstream by the current. Suddenly, its body would bend into an “S”-shape and it died. Once the procreative duty was complete, males and females alike, died quickly.

The fish were not white from head to belly when they first started upriver from the ocean. According to Mr. Itoh, their scales wore off in the several days that it took them to make their way upstream. Despite their pitiful appearance, they were still majestic; in fulfilling their duty to the next generation, they offered their lives. What a severe law of nature that dictates that should gather in the very spot they had been born to procreate and die. I sighed and wished I could somehow convey my deepest respect to these noble creatures.

In 1896, Jinsaburo Oikawa came to Steveston on the lower Fraser and saw the salmon starting on their journey. Knowing him, he probably visited the upper river two or three times. Now, here I was, watching with my very own eyes the same spectacle as he must have done. What did he think when he saw it?

A single pine-cone floated by, bobbing in the current.

The weather was fine the next day, too: no wind and not a cloud in the sky.

“Now I’m convinced that you brought this unseasonal weather with you from Tokyo,” Mr. Itoh said with a laugh that seemed to belie a conviction that the weather would soon turn foul.

We decided to visit Lion Island while the weather held.

Lion Island was clearly marked on the 1:50,000 scale map I bought in Vancouver. It is a small (600 metres long by 150 metres wide), uninhabited island about 17 kilometres upstream from the mouth of the
Fraser River. Don Island beside it is the same shape and about 800 metres long by 200 metres wide. Just upstream from these two small islands is the much bigger Annacis Island (five kilometres long by one kilometre wide). The Fraser River is about two kilometres wide at this point. We were convinced that this was the same Lion Island where Jinsaburo Oikawa and the 200 or so people from Miyagi had lived; however, we had not yet learned that they had a connection with Don Island. The weather was still fine when we reached Lion Island.

Lion Island is about 30 km from Vancouver by car. Standing on the north bank of the river and looking south, we saw Mount Baker in the far off distance. Its resemblance to Mount Fuji is remarkable; the snow at the top shone brightly in the morning sun. To the north was the same Grouse Mountain that I had seen every morning from my hotel window, except that it seemed more imposing from this distance. The Fraser shone as if its surface were covered with oil.

Almost all of the grass along the river bank had withered except for the still-blossoming thistles and one out-of-season horsetail that stuck out above the grass and thistles. Cat-tails grew in the ditch at the bottom of the bank. Among the cottonwoods that grew along the ditch was one tree with leaves so yellow, it almost hurt to look at.

There was a marina on the shore opposite Lion Island with thirty yachts and motorboats tied up to its docks. Mr. Itoh went to the office and discovered that we were not mistaken about the identity of the island. However, since it was uninhabited, the only way to reach it was by boat. If we were willing to wait for a sailboat that was due shortly, the owner would probably agree to take us over to the islands. We decided to wait.

Lion Island is about 100 metres offshore, so I scanned it with binoculars and added to my notes while we waited. The vegetation on the island was limited to several firs and cottonwoods, that looked to be no more than thirty years old, and a thick growth of shoulder height bushes that grew everywhere. The island was flat but gave no indication that it was ever submerged.

The eroded banks of the island showed a cross-section of the sedimentary layers and one could clearly see how deeply the roots of the bushes grew into the ground. The tide had just gone out so there was a still-wet section of the bank above the level of the river. It appeared that the island stood about 1 metre above the water even at high tide. Notwithstanding the tidal effect, the ocean smell was faint since the island is quite far inland.

On the island’s visible west side, countless poles were driven into the ground with planks on top; perhaps it had been a factory, built in the cannery style, for the production of salt-salmon. In the centre of the island, I saw concrete blocks and what looked to be the remains of demolished buildings through the binoculars. There were massive stumps all over the island that must once have been part of gigantic trees three or four arms’ lengths around. These massive trees must have grown thick and luxuriantly when Jinsaburo Oikawa and his settlers first came to the island.

A little further upstream and the same distance from shore was Don Island. Sure enough, when I trained my binoculars on the west side of Don Island there were stakes there as well. There were also the remains of building, concrete blocks, and at the south end, a place where sand had been piled up. The island was covered with bushes and there were only a few firs and cottonwoods, just like on Lion Island. There were even the same massive stumps.

As the islands were almost identical except for the size, I consulted the map once more and had Mr. Hirota pace out the measurements to make doubly certain we knew which island was which. Since Lion Island was parallel to the river bank it was possible to approximate the size by pacing out the same distance on the shore. Mr. Hirota found that Lion Island was about 600 meters long and Don Island about 800 metres, exactly as the map had indicated; we had not mistaken them for each other after all.
I moved along the bank to where I could see Don Island better and scanned the island intently. Half-hidden in the bushes was a fence with a gate; I was startled to see that it was not a Western-style gate but clearly a Japanese-style garden gate. There were not supposed to have been Japanese on this island. My heart pounded with excitement as I told Mr. Hirota of my discovery and handed him the binoculars to confirm what I saw.

“The two islands are very similar right down to the stumps,” he nodded in agreement, “perhaps because the trees were cut by the same Japanese settlers.”

Two friendly looking men and a young boy arrived at the marina in their small sailboat. Mr. Itoh told them of our desire to visit Lion Island and they offered to take us over to the island for about twenty minutes. Mr. Itoh introduced me to them by explaining that I had come from Japan to write a novel about the Japanese pioneers who had come to the island about sixty years before. I shook hands with all three; the last, small hand shook mine vigorously.

We set out for the island but as we drew closer the water became shallower and the propeller made horrible noises as it kept catching on something. We made every effort to get ashore but, in the end, we settled for circling both Lion and Don Islands. Despite not getting to walk on the islands, I was happy to have seen the islands from all sides and up close.

As we parted, the owner of the boat, Mr. John Meister, turned and said, “The water around here is thirty feet deep in some places and ten in others; if you go just a little astray you’re likely to get stuck in the mud. I’m really sorry we couldn’t get onto the island and look around a bit.”

They pushed off and headed down the river towards the ocean. It was one of those days when the sun was hot but the wind was cold.

As I became more and more concerned about the weather turning foul, I emphatically conveyed to Mr. Itoh my desire to finish off my outdoor research while the weather held. Early the next morning, we left Vancouver for Tsawwassen to catch the ferry to Vancouver Island and Victoria.

In October 1906, Jinsaburo Oikawa landed near Victoria on Vancouver Island aboard the *Sui-an-maru* with eighty-two immigrants, all from the same prefecture. Soon after landing, everyone aboard was arrested and taken to the Customs House where they were disinfected, quarantined, and given permission to come ashore. This permission was extraordinary because illegal immigrants were subject to compulsory deportation by law. It was only through the efforts of Mr. Suburo Yoshie, a clerk at the Japanese consulate, that permission to land was granted to all eighty-two. This delicate situation was resolved by asserting that they were not illegal immigrants in the usual sense of the word; an interesting point that is explained in more detail in the book.

I knew it was unreasonable to expect Victoria to be the same as it was, but I felt a need to stand where they had come ashore with only two days of food remaining. I wanted an idea of where they had wandered for six days: sometimes with full stomachs, mostly not.

The ferry cruised toward the Island on the calm, blue water threading its way through the many fir-covered islands. On the whole, the islands looked uninhabited and the land met the sea abruptly in the form of steep cliffs all around.

The ferry docked on Vancouver Island and we went straight to Victoria. Our first stop was the Customs House which we had asked Mr. Itoh to locate before our arrival. The Customs House is on the Inner Harbour which resembles a bright, open air park in the middle of the city. A white-hulled, luxury cruise ship was docked in the harbour.

Victoria is quite distinct from Vancouver, most notably in its Old English atmosphere as reflected in the architecture and decorations our hotel and its restaurant (even the pictures on the walls). I half expected
women in long white dresses and carrying white parasols to come around the corners. The weather was milder than Vancouver and flowers still bloomed even though the yellow autumn leaves were out in full force.

There were a few places that I had to see: Beecher Bay, where the stowaways first landed, and the Esquimalt Naval Base where the *Sui-an-maru* was impounded.

Since it was not possible to enter the naval base itself, I stood on the shore at the entrance to the bay. Looking down the coast, I saw ten to twenty metre high cliffs and few sandy beaches. A large wave, unanticipated because of the deep water, suddenly crashed against the cliff face, sending its spray high into the air. I had done a rough, walking survey of the coastline around Victoria near my hotel and this type of rugged coastal topography seemed to be the norm.

The recently completed highway from Victoria to Sooke was extremely suitable for sightseeing, passing through parks and boasting many scenic viewpoints; the scenery just begged to be photographed (as did the totem poles). The main highway was bordered by fields and forests as far as one could see. It is called an Island but is actually about half the size of Kyushu in Japan; it hardly feels like an island. I only saw one small part of the very southern end of the island.

The grass in the fields was still green.

We stopped the car on the cliffs above Beecher Bay. There was no beach and the shape of the cliffs coincided exactly with the line of water below.

In *My Sixty Years*, Kimpei Goto described the landing of the *Sui-an-maru* as follows:

*We put ashore in a dinghy in the middle of the night. The footing was extremely treacherous and we had no light so we grabbed small trees and clutched at ivy. Somehow, everyone got ashore and made their way to a secluded spot where we sunk to the ground, exhausted.*

He wrote nothing about cliffs but given that they had to “grab at small trees” and “clutch at ivy” there is no mistaking that they landed where they had to climb. At any rate, putting ashore had not been an easy matter.

“Did they land here? Or, was it over there near that white cliff?” As my imagination ran wild trying to figure out where the ship had landed, I moved toward the edge to look at the ocean. The water was a terrifyingly deep blue and the bank was thickly covered with Scotch broom. The Scotch broom, in turn was covered with out-of-season, yellow flowers. I could not see any ivy, but there was a creeper-like plant. Out-of-season, white flowers bloomed from the middle of a clump of *himejion*.

As I looked down, I saw that climbing was not impossible and decided that this was the sort of place where the phantom immigrants had surely scrambled ashore. Stepping ashore on good old *terra firma*, fifty days after leaving, Japan must have been quite an emotional moment, indeed.

There were many farms inland, including a large apple orchard that was, as yet, unharvested with apples about the same size and colour as *Yoichi* apples from Hokkaido. Overall, the island’s vegetation was little different from Vancouver’s. The vivid, rust-coloured trunk of an arbutus caught my eye.

On the way back to the ferry, we stopped at the Butchart Gardens where an incredible variety of plants grow amongst the whiteness of protruding limestone. It was already four o’clock and the light was starting to fade. My mind was dull with fatigue but the bright red leaves in the Japanese garden stung my tired eyes, an image that remains with me yet.
On the return trip to Vancouver, the ferry glided over the night sea. Even though I was totally exhausted, the trip to Vancouver Island had been immensely satisfactory. Saying good-night to Mr. Itoh at the front of the hotel, I looked up at the sky and noticed that the stars twinkled differently than on previous nights. I was sure that the weather would change by the next day.

Back in my room, I tried to arrange my notes and observations but could not stay awake. “It is an island with lots of exposed limestone” was the only thing I wrote before I dropped off. As interesting and enjoyable as research trips are, some days are just too painful; I was overwhelmed by our hectic pace to avoid the threatened rain.

The weather continued to hold. The waiter at breakfast informed me with a pretension to authority that this sort of weather had not been seen for fifty years. Everyone in Vancouver seemed dumbfounded by the abnormally fine weather.

For our purposes, such conditions were truly fortunate. We had visited nearly all the outdoor places under the clear, blue sky and all that remained to do in Vancouver was investigate some nearby places on foot. I had planned to explore Vancouver extensively nearer the end of my trip but I had already gained a good feel for the city during our comings and goings and was able to abbreviate that part. We had driven through the former Japanese area around Powell Street many times but I wanted to visit it on foot.

Most of my research focused on the Fraser River. When Jinsaburo Oikawa arrived in 1896 with the pioneer’s dream, he found that the canneries had the most modern equipment and the industry was dominated by large firms concentrated in Steveston near the mouth of the Fraser. Large canneries still occupy much of the Vancouver waterfront but one would never imagine that such stately concrete buildings could be dedicated to canning fish.

Lumber mills were everywhere along the Fraser River. Logs are grappled together into rafts far upstream and floated down to the mills where they are hauled out and processed into lumber to be taken away by truck or freight car. Despite the large number of operations, I could not find a single trace of the human powered mills that were common in the late 1800s.

I wanted to see old-fashioned canneries and lumber mills, not modern ones. I realised this was unrealistic but the Provincial Museum in Victoria has a perfectly recreated scene from a small-scale, turn-of-the-century cannery. Using artefacts from that era, the full-size model depicts the whole production process: fish loaded on a conveyor belt, heads removed, meat packed in cans, cans soldered shut and cooked under pressure, and labels affixed. The museum also has a large reproduction of an old lumber mill showing logs being cut into lumber. The knowledge I acquired at the Provincial Museum in Victoria was extremely useful. I realised this especially when I visited the Fraser River and saw that the cannery structure in the museum corresponded quite accurately with the jumbled remains of pilings in the riverbank.

The town of Steveston lies at the mouth of the Fraser River. Just in front of the town is a strand-like island called Steveston Island which is about 2.5 kilometres long but only a hundred metres wide. Cannery Channel, about two or three hundred metres wide, separates the island from the town. During the Meiji Era (late 1800s), the canneries were crammed together along this channel and there are still large fishing and processing companies even today. The area is still an active fishing port so many docks and wharves line the shore.

Steveston Island acts as a natural breakwater for the town of Steveston to the north. Many people of Japanese descent still live and work in Steveston, mostly in the fishery. There was an article about Steveston in the January 10th, 1978 issue of the Asahi Shimbun.
Steveston boasts the largest salmon catch in Canada. The 200-mile offshore limit issue brought big benefits to this town as Japanese firms of all sizes came in a frantic effort to buy up supplies of salmon roe. During the boom three or four years ago, there were rumours that there were people making $100,000 per year. There are about 200 fishing families of Japanese descent living here. Many people make a living working only 50 days a year because strict environmental protection policies dictate that they are only allowed to operate one or two days a week during the fishing season. From the end of the fishing season in October until the next March they collect about $140 per week in unemployment insurance. (Hiroyuki Ishi, Asahi Shimbun, 10 January, 1978).

This article describes the situation for the Japanese fishermen quite well as I found out when I visited the home of Mr. Rintaro Hayashi, a successful citizen of Steveston. Although it was November, the lawn in his large yard was still green. His house was a magnificent, spacious, Western-style house. The gorgeous entrance hall was decorated in Western-style although the interior of the house was adorned with Japanese objects.

Mr. Hayashi was quite knowledgeable about the area’s history from the time when Jinsaburo Oikawa picked up and left. He lived a comfortable life now but as he told his story of hardship before and after the war, I listened attentively with my head lowered respectfully, as if I were being reproached for my carefree, life of ease.

During his story, Mr. Hayashi often referred to Japan’s ‘Abandoned People Policy’ and told how the Japanese Government’s protection of Japanese emigrants to Canada was inadequate. He told about how the rejection of the Japanese was at its peak around the War when even the meadow larks seemed to be shrieking “Japanese! Die! Die!” He had the face of a great man who had endured many hardships. His darkened countenance faced me through his glasses; I felt extremely small and did not dare ask questions.

Mrs. Hayashi’s face, on the other hand, was gentle as she served a genuine, Japanese meal of twenty-one or more different foods. Among the many carefully prepared dishes, the most delicious was the squash from their own back garden that tasted much like a chestnut squash from Shinano.

Sunset on the Fraser River is beautiful from anywhere but it is especially so from the hills overlooking Steveston. The sunset dyes the river pleasing colours while the shimmering gold of maple leaves cover the mountains. That sunset was truly the most beautiful moment of my whole stay in Canada.

There are only a few shops still owned by Japanese on the original Japanese street: Powell Street. During the Second World War, all of the Japanese living in this area were removed from the coast to far-away internment camps and their real estate was confiscated. There were some fortunate enough to sell their property to close friends just before this tragic episode and buy it back at the end of the war but such situations were rare; I did hear a few such stories, however.

For example, Mr. Raisaburo Uchida came to Vancouver in 1915 and lived in a lovely, three-storey, Western-style house that he had built himself. When he was removed to the internment camps, he sold his house to an Englishman, Mr. F.M. Hann, for one dollar and repurchased it for one dollar on his return from the camps. Selling such a mansion for only a dollar was a barely legal manipulation and Mr. Uchida relied on Mr. Hann’s goodwill to defend his fortune. What an expression of mutual trust between two men. However, most Japanese lost everything during the war.

Mr. Uchida had a detailed knowledge of things relating to ‘Little Tokyo.’ I had a particular interest in Powell Street so I highlighted the 1907 Vancouver Riot in my notes, and eventually included it in the
A group of anti-Japanese demonstrators carrying signs suddenly assaulted ‘Japan Town’ and although the destruction was limited, the Japanese immediately armed themselves with stones and Japanese swords to drive away further invasions. Mr. Uchida had come to Canada just after the incident so he did not know the details first-hand although he did remember much about what the city was like at that time.

Mr. Uchida had a copy of the 1935 *Continental Times’ Directory of Japanese in Canada* which had the following entry for Mr. Kimpei Goto:

[Kimpei Goto, Insurance Broker, 785 East Cordova St. Vancouver, B.C.]^70

Using Mr. Uchida’s directory, I marked the locations of the main historic buildings on my map: Japanese schools, physicians’ offices, dentists’ offices, various shops, inns, public baths, restaurants, and gambling establishments. I also marked the canneries and lumber mills near the harbour where the Japanese worked. Interestingly, knowing that the former Japanese consulate was near the present-day Yorkshire Building and using the locations of the immigration building, the post office, and the banks, I was able to deduce that there had been a licensed brothel very near the Hotel Vancouver.

In Mr. Uchida’s front yard there was a holly tree and a double-flowered cherry tree; in the back yard there was an ordinary cherry tree that was at least fifty years old. The yard was enclosed by a low hedge of lush, green Japanese quince.

We wandered around downtown Vancouver as long as time permitted.

Not far from the former ‘Japan Town’ is the area called ‘Gastown.’ At first, I figured the name must be associated with the fog coming off the ocean, but it is actually derived from the name of a pioneer in the area, Gassy Jack. There is a bronze statue of him in the middle of Gastown.

Traces of the Japanese immigrants’ dreams linger around every corner although the surroundings have changed so much that it is difficult to imagine a community of 10,000 Japanese in the area prior to the war. The Japanese have mostly left and been replaced by Chinese immigrants and warehouses.

One building, that I guessed to date from before the war, was an old rooming house. The exterior walls of the two-story building are weathered and falling apart but one can see that there are about twenty, two-story apartments, each with a window. The red, brick chimney sticking up through the roof is the only structurally-sound piece left. The firmly closed-off entrance indicates that no one has lived there for many years although it probably housed quite a few Japanese during its days.

The old cannery nearby is now a processing plant for a fish company and the old lumber mill has become a warehouse. Everything in ‘Japan Town’ has changed except for the Japanese school that looks the same as it did many years before. The wide staircase ascends to the second floor and there is an auditorium and three classrooms inside. Bookcases loaded with children’s books line the halls. The original school was built in 1906 but the present building is the result of a reconstruction in 1928.

Today, Japanese-Canadians live all over Vancouver. However, Chinatown, located next to the original ‘Japan Town’, occupies a large area even today.

“I’ve only been here a short time and not really qualified to say, but I think the subsidence of anti-Japanese feeling is a result of Japanese people assimilating and not congregating in large, conspicuous groups,” Mr. Itoh said as I gazed out on the ocean where concrete piers extended into the inlet.

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^70 Cordova Street is one street south of Powell Street and about 2000 Japanese people lived in the area around Powell and Cordova in 1907.
The pier before me was a large, open space used to sort freight trucks and railway freight cars; it was connected to the nearby C.P.R. station by rail. However, from the Meiji period into the Taisho period (late 1800s to early 1900s), the immigration building had stood on this spot and every Japanese person who landed in Vancouver was obliged to enter that building.

The seagulls circled overhead.

I had finished my Vancouver research except for one thing: a talk with Bungoro Goto whose father, Bunji Goto, had kept the daily log aboard the Sui-an-maru. Bungoro was born in Japan in 1908 and summoned to Canada by his father in 1921. Excluding the internment, he spent his life in the fishing industry in Sunbury on the south bank of the Fraser River opposite Oikawa-jima.

I contacted Bungoro Goto to arrange a meeting. As it turned out, the then-director of the B.C. Fishermen’s Union, Mr. Hydes (Hideo) Onodera, lived near Bungoro so they both came to the hotel (for which I am ever grateful). Mr. Onodera was a nisei (second generation Japanese) born in New Westminster in 1914. In fact, Mr. Onodera’s father was one of the original immigrants from Yonekawa village who had been enticed by Jinsaburo’s scheme. By the time Bungoro arrived in Canada in 1921, Jinsaburo had returned to Japan but there were still people living on both Oikawa-jima and Sato-jima. Between them, the two men knew the history of the islands in some detail.

One of the surprising things I learned from them was that the islanders used ‘Lion Island’ to refer to both Lion Island and Don Island when speaking in general terms. More precisely, however, Don Island was known as Oikawa-jima and Lion Island was known as Sato-jima. In fact, those who lived on Oikawa-jima were villagers from Yonekawa while those on Sato-jima were from Nishikiori village. This confirmed that the settlers had lived on both islands, as we suspected from our earlier visit to the two islands.

Mr. Hirota and I exchanged knowing glances. Before coming to Canada, I had gathered all the available information on Jinsaburo Oikawa but had neither read nor heard anything about these names for the islands. It is information such as this, unavailable elsewhere, that makes personal visits worthwhile.

When I alluded to Jinsaburo Oikawa’s partner, Bungoro immediately responded with the name of Souemon Sato who had journeyed to Canada just slightly before Oikawa. Bungoro went so far as to say that “if you don’t know anything about Souemon Sato, you couldn’t possibly write about Old Oijin.”

Bungoro and Hydes Onodera often referred to Oikawa as Old Oijin, suggesting that they might have been on intimate terms. In fact, the two had only known Oikawa through their fathers’ stories.

There was an abundance of anecdotes about Jinsaburo Oikawa’s Lion Island. There is one story that, during the 1907 Vancouver Riot, Oikawa drew his Japanese sword and waded into the mob, cutting people down. This, however, is false; what is referred to as Oikawa’s ‘long knife affair’ is a completely different story.

During the Alaskan Gold Rush, many adventurers were gripped by gold fever, and went to Alaska; most never found gold and did not even have enough money to return to their homes. Some of these men somehow made their ways from Nome, Alaska to Vancouver and ended up as fishermen. It seems that within this group there were some particularly unscrupulous fellows. These outlaws-cum-fishermen came down the coast and tried to take over the Lion Island fishing grounds on the authority of the pistol; even the fishing company was unwilling to face them.

One day, Oikawa took his black-sheathed Japanese sword, jumped into a small motorboat and went out to the ten outlaw-fishermen’s boats. The ringleader read in Jinsaburo’s desperate eyes the intention to slice him in two and then commit suicide by slicing his own stomach. This was enough to cause the outlaws to flee and the fishing grounds were recovered.
Jinsaburo Oikawa returned to Japan in 1918 for various reasons, not least of which was the drowning of his ten year-old son, Eiji. Eiji, born on the island, had surprised all the adults with his cleverness and studious nature from an early age. Oikawa assumed that Eiji would succeed him.

“My father always told me that Old Oijin stressed that the importance of studying hard so as not to be ridiculed by the ‘hairy barbarians.’ Although he couldn’t speak English too well himself, Old Oijin believed that to participate equally with the ‘hairy barbarians,’ the younger Japanese must not only speak English but also read it and write it. Even while he argued that we should become Canadians to eliminate the distinction between ‘hairy barbarians’ and Japanese, he still tried to maintain our common village heritage in the interests of self-defence,” Bungoro told me.

As foreseen by Old Oijin, the people of Lion Island eventually left the island, moved over to Sunbury, and assimilated into White society. When they returned to Sunbury after the tragic events of World War II, a major factor in their ability to take up fishing again was the support they received from their White friends.

“Eighty per cent of my children have an international marriage,” Bungoro said. Now, he did not say whether this was eight-out-of-ten or four-out-of-five; nevertheless, it was a telling comment.

Hydes Onodera was more comfortable speaking English than Japanese. He was well-known for inventing a machine to automatically wind up fishing nets on board ship and is presently a director of the B.C. Fishermen’s Union (membership 5000). Interestingly, the president of the union, Mr. Tatsuro Suzuki, is the son of Genosuke Suzuki who had come over on the Sui-an-maru. It seems that many of the children of those enticed by Jinsaburo Oikawa have taken on leadership positions in their communities.

The ten days that we spent exploring Vancouver were extremely busy with not a single rainy day the whole time. On the last day, we went to see the Fraser River one last time. We stood silently on a hill in New Westminster looking out over the river. The sky was cloudy and the mist evoked that sense of loneliness and introspection that often accompanies travel. Eiji Oikawa, who died when he was only ten years old, was supposedly buried in New Westminster although I was unsuccessful in finding his grave. As we stood on that lonely hill overlooking the muddy Fraser, I imagined Jinsaburo standing in the same place the day he left Canada, bidding the river and his dreams farewell.

At 4:05 p.m., we boarded a CPR train bound for Banff. I had always wanted to cross the Rocky Mountains in a sightseeing train and this was the perfect opportunity to do so. When the Sui-an-maru settlers first came to Canada, they worked in the bitter cold and dangerous conditions of the railway being built through the Rockies. I would have liked to find out anything about their experiences during that time.

I dropped my luggage into my single sleeping compartment and made my way up to the second floor observation deck to watch the scenery as darkness fell.

Very soon the train entered the forest and it became dark. I looked up and saw that the clouds had disappeared; the sky was clear. At dinner that evening, I took a sip of wine and suddenly remembered the Bloody Caesar I had at the Cannery Restaurant overlooking the inlet in Vancouver. A Bloody Caesar is a smooth cocktail with vodka, the juice from squeezed clams, and tomato juice. The interior of the restaurant was finished with brown planks and adorned with tools and instruments (such as boiler gauges) used in canneries long ago. I do not remember what I ate but the red wine triggered a recall of the blood-red cocktail and the fond memories of my stay in Vancouver.

The moon appeared later in the evening and, although waning, gave off enough light to see the outline of the river and forest.

My single compartment had a toilet and a washbasin. It was big enough for two when the bed was up but the room changed completely when the bed was pulled down from the wall. As the bed came right out
over the toilet, one had to open the door and work from the hallway to prepare the bed. I must say, however, that having done so, the bed was just perfect for one person.

The single compartment across the hall was occupied by a man and a woman (presumably a couple) who left their door half open and talked until late.

I climbed into bed and stretched out but was unable to sleep; I turned out the lamp and watched the scenery going by. By the light of the moon, and with my face close to the cold window, I caught glimpses of white that I took to be snow although there did not seem to be any thickness. I had to wait for the morning light.

The train followed the river into the heart of the mountains. Suddenly, our speed dropped off and the sound of the engines grew louder as we started up a steep slope. Occasionally, we stopped at stations that were stations in name only. In some of the smaller towns with but a few houses, the stations did not even have a platform. A lumber mill illuminated by electric lights was so close to the station that the log storage area abutted the platform.

The B.C. economy is about seventy per cent dependant on forestry in its various forms. The forest through which we travelled was thoroughly managed with the forest cycle regulated at sixty years. It seemed that the rules were obeyed, although such a large forest is susceptible to forest fires ignited by natural causes and human negligence during the dry, summer season.

I slept about three or four hours until the morning coldness crept through my window and I awoke to find that it was already quite light outside. It was 6 o’clock and I could not sleep any more so I opened my door and went out into the hall. At the very same time, a young woman came out of the single compartment across from mine and a young man stuck his head out after her. It’s not for me to comment, but there is definitely not enough room for two to sleep comfortably in those single compartments. Evidently, they had managed, although it must have been quite crowded.

By the morning light, I saw that the whiteness of the previous night was not snow but frost in places the sun did not reach during the day. I was surprised at the thickness of the frost and how much it looked like snow. I thought about all the frost I’d seen in Japan and realised that, under special conditions, such frost does occur in Japan, too.

The morning sun dyed the Rocky Mountain peaks red and there were three layers of mist. Gradually, these three layers merged into a single, purple layer which then became a cloud. Beyond the forests of fir, the white mountains were enormous and breathtakingly beautiful. The clearly visible fault lines running along the sheer cliffs seemed to be characteristic of the Rocky Mountains.

The train climbed and descended as the topography became more complex. The vegetation changed dramatically with the passing kilometres. Leaving the fir forest, we passed through a spruce forest for a time, from which we emerged into a birch forest alongside the frozen river; I was enchanted by the beauty of the birch bark. Before long, however, we entered another spruce forest where the frost hanging from the spruce needles looked like snow. I considered trying to capture such beauty in the lines of a Haiku or Tanka poem but found I could not write even one line.

At seven o’clock, the river ice started to break and a vapour rose from the surface until there was a layer of morning mist hovering above the river. It was so exciting and perfect that it could have been a life-size meteorological demonstration rather than a natural phenomenon.

I saw a man bundled up in his parka out for a morning walk along the road that followed the edge of the steaming river. There were twenty or so log cabins nestled in a small, frost-covered valley.

71 Short poems. Haiku poems have three lines in a 5-7-5 syllable pattern. Tanka poems have a 5-7-5-7-7 pattern.
The train entered a V-shaped ravine and slowed dramatically as if afraid. The steep, spruce covered sides of the valley came down to the tracks on either side and there was evidence of slides along the whole length of the valley. Uprooted spruce trees that had been swept along by landslides or avalanches covered the valley floor. Obviously, such slides were common judging from the numerous scars on both left and right. Snow up to fifty centimetres thick gathered in these slide shoots. Sand and snow from the valley walls filled and obstructed the river. There was evidence of many smaller, surface slides as well. It must have been a valley just like this where some of those from the *Sui-an-maru* were caught in an avalanche. The fearful valley went on and on, seeming never to end.

There were countless waterfalls and each one was frozen solid. Some of the frozen shapes seemed quite gentle and peaceful, while others reflected the angry, turbulent waterfall that must appear during the warmer months. The number of tunnels increased and the train slowed still more. We crept through a tunnel entrance of piled, squared blocks that dripping water had turned into large icicles. Emerging from the tunnel, the train started down a slope and we came into a grey forest of bare cottonwoods in a swamp. The snow here was powdery and very deep.

Soon after entering Yoho National Park, we passed a gigantic mountain, the top of which I could not see despite straining my eyes upward through the window. This mountain looked to be a hundred times bigger than Mount Yarigatake in the Japanese Alps. I guessed it to be the famous Mount Robson (3954m), although it was probably a different mountain altogether. It’s sides were pale yellow and the top third was bereft of trees and snow; the wind must be something fierce up there.

I thought I caught a glimpse of a hanging glacier about two-thirds of the way up the mountain but before I could verify it, the mountain passed out of sight; perhaps it was only an illusion. The unusually shaped peaks followed one another endlessly. There were peaks that looked like three Egyptian sphinxes sitting together on the mountain top. The snow got deeper and must have been at least two metres deep, based on the depth of the deer tracks I could see out of my window.

We soon left British Columbia and entered the province of Alberta. At 11:00 a.m., we arrived in Banff where the thermometer indicated minus eighteen degrees Celsius if my conversion from Fahrenheit to Centigrade was accurate. There was snow everywhere, even on the streets where cars drove on the packed snow. The sky was indescribably beautiful and so blue that it was almost black. There was no wind and very few people to be seen.

Tourists visiting the Rockies usually choose Banff as a base because of the nearby hot springs, lakes, and mountains and the incomparable scenery. More than thirty thousand people pass through the park gates during the summer season although the number drops to barely three thousand in the winter off-season, most of whom are permanent residents. When we visited, there were three souvenir shops and a restaurant managed by Japanese; we heard some twenty Japanese-run souvenir shops suddenly appear when the tourist season begins. The local residents become somewhat disgusted with the aggressive marketing techniques of these vendors, especially the constant shouting to attract customers. There are so many Japanese tourists in Banff during the summer that I think it would be best not to visit at that time of the year.

I had every reason to be exhausted but the sight of the mountains restored my good humour. In fact, I felt like shouting for joy as I walked along the snowy streets.

We took our bags into the hotel but had no time to rest as we immediately left for Lake Louise (1700 metres above sea level). On the way, we were stopped by a herd of deer searching the snow in the middle of the road for food. Some of the deer came up and thrust their heads against the car window. It was quite some time before the deer dispersed and we were able to continue.
There were few people at Lake Louise, probably because it was so cold: cold that cut like a knife. Snow covered the lake’s frozen surface and the surrounding fir forests were as quiet as death. I turned quickly at the sudden shrill of a squirrel and caught a glimpse of it on a nearby fir tree branch. Evidently, the squirrel was in search of food.

Mt. Victoria loomed before us, covered in snow. I looked up at the mountain, trying to determine a climbing route but the cold was sharp and my head began to hurt. Because I was wearing two pairs of thick wool socks my feet were warm enough, until I stepped into deep snow which filled my boots, that is. It was almost unbearably painful to remove the boots to empty them.

The cold cut through my leather gloves and numbed my fingers. The ink in my pen had frozen so I was unable to take notes. As I frantically searched for a pencil, I tried to ask Mr. Itoh about the height of the mountain but my lips were frozen and no words came out.

When I awoke the next morning in Banff, I sat at the hotel window looking out on Mount Rundle which resembles a giant crouching lion. As I gazed, I recalled the part of Kimpei Goto’s memoir that described his time as a bus-boy in a first-class hotel restaurant in nearby Calgary: bow-tie, tuxedo, light make-up, and all. Since he had come to Banff many times, he must have seen this mountain himself many years before. Even though the mountains here look nothing like Japanese mountains and are a powerful reminder of being in a foreign land, they surely triggered a powerful sense of homesickness in Kimpei.

Although Banff is more than 750 kilometres from Vancouver, we were still on the west coast when viewed from a continental context.

We set off for Calgary, an expansive city of 550,000 people about 110 kilometres from Banff. The boundary of Banff National Park is about twenty minutes drive east of Banff on the edge of a small snowy plain known as the Stony Plain Indian Reserve. It was here that I came across an interesting phenomenon: a snowstorm confined to a few centimetres above the ground. During an ordinary snowstorm, falling snow and accumulated snow are whipped up by the wind and become so furious at times that the sky turns dark, surely a vision of hell.

The snowstorm that I saw that day was only a few centimetres high, like a thin film over the prairie. Alternatively, one might imagine three-centimetre-high waves spreading across the snowy plain like dry ice sprinkled on the prairie. This surface storm stretched across the prairie as far as I could see, but remained a mystery to me. The wind was blowing at several metres per second but I have no idea whatsoever why the snow was lifted no more than five centimetres off the surface. Perhaps the grains of snow were too heavy or the wind only blew near the surface. I do not know.

I wanted to stop the car to get a closer look at this fantastic ‘low level snowstorm’ (as I refer to it). However, as this would make us late for our flight from Calgary, I kept my mouth shut. In retrospect, such a short delay would not have been a problem; I wish I had stopped. I was very tired during my little tour and no doubt missed some important details as a result.

We parted company with Mr. Itoh at the Calgary airport. He was catching a return flight to Vancouver, while we were going further across the continent to Toronto, nearer the east coast.

I had every intention of rereading and rearranging my research notes during the five hour flight but I was overcome with fatigue from the moment I boarded the plane. Even looking down on the expansive Canadian prairies could not keep me awake for long.

Toronto is a big city. The morning after our arrival, I contacted Kimpei Goto’s widow, Takeki Goto, whom I hoped to visit at her home in Hamilton.
The mildness of Toronto caught me by surprise after Banff; the airport thermometer read 5°C and few people wore overcoats. Outside the hotel window, I saw smoke rising from chimneys all around. The building I could see from my window appeared to be some sort of chemical factory. The hotel and factory lawns were green but the tree-lined street was half covered with fallen leaves. The climate seemed a little warmer than Vancouver, perhaps closer to that of Vancouver Island. There was a clear view of Lake Ontario from the fifth floor of the hotel.

At nine o’clock the next morning, I went down to the lobby to meet Mr. Ken Suzuki, who would help me plan my stay in Toronto. Mr. Suzuki was born in Vancouver, worked in Japan for a few years after the war, and then returned to Canada. We decided to go first to Hamilton to interview Takeki Goto, take in Niagara Falls, and return to Toronto the next evening. We were on the home stretch.

Hamilton is sixty kilometres from Toronto. We drove south along a wonderful road following the western shore of Lake Ontario. The maple trees were fantastic; unlike the yellow maple leaves in Vancouver these were a brilliant red. What a wonderful sightseeing place.

Hamilton is an industrial city of 700,000 people and numerous steel factories; however, the air did not seem at all dirty.

Takeki Goto had a beautiful house in the suburbs. She was born in Japan in 1901 and was seventy-seven years old. She got married in her home town in 1920 when she was eighteen and travelled to Vancouver aboard the Kasima-marutha that same year. Mr. and Mrs. Goto ran a rooming house in Vancouver but Kimpei worked as an insurance broker so Mrs. Goto was left with the difficult task of running a 36-room boarding house. During that time, she bore several children one after the other while single-handedly running the boarding house. Theirs was a story of hardship and toil: from the boarding house, to life in the internment camp, to starting anew in Toronto after the war. Somehow, in spite of the hardship, Takeki-san managed to bring up four boys and three girls. One of the boys is presently engaged to a beautiful, blonde Canadian woman.

When we got around to talking about the Sui-an-maru and Jinsaburo Oikawa, she said, “I’ll tell you what I know about Oijin but I only heard about him after the war when we came to Toronto so...”

Basically, her account was the same as what her husband, Kimpei Goto, had written in My Sixty Years; however, my visit was rewarded by two or three new stories.

“Papa (Kimpei) was a very good at singing folk songs. Sometimes, when they were on the stowaway ship and some sort of trouble came up, everyone begged him to sing. When he sang Sansa-shigure (a famous folksong from Miyagi prefecture), everyone relaxed. It was even said that his songs brought tears to the eyes of some.”

Despite the fact that Takeki-san had only heard rumours of riots on board the ship and never directly from her husband, I still believe that the trip out to see her was worthwhile. Though their lives were hard in Canada, Kimpei Goto always managed to send a monthly remittance back to his hometown in Japan; such actions underscore the reasons for their immigration.

I asked Takeki-san about the cotton on the cottonwood trees. I had heard that cottonwoods in Vancouver are famous; there is so much white fluff blown around every June that it is just like a blizzard. Takeki-san, however, knew nothing about it.

“After all, I was busy every day and rarely had the opportunity to go far afield.”

Such an answer gave me an insight into her hard-working life as a housewife. She did know a lot about garden flowers, though. With tears in her eyes she told me how Japanese gardens along Powell Street used to make her long for her home country and even today, the sight of a camellia has the same effect. I was moved beyond words.
That evening, we were invited to a sumptuous feast at a hill-top Chinese restaurant behind the city by ten members of Takeki-san’s family. After dinner, we continued the party at one of the daughter’s houses. The international nature of the family and the way the conversation switched between English and Japanese, made the hatred and division of the war-time era hard to imagine. We finally left after several brandies and returned to the hotel at 2 a.m.

On leaving the Goto’s, we each received an envelope on which ‘a farewell gift’ was written. Back at the hotel, we found each to contain 200 dollars. We telephoned to say that we really could not accept such a generous gift, but were told that it was an old family custom and to please accept it. We were at a loss over such goodwill. Indeed, this custom of the farewell gift among Japanese was mentioned in Kimpei Goto’s My Sixty Years. Apparently, the spirit of a Meiji gentleman, Kimpei Goto, lives on in his widow, Takeki-san. We accepted the gift, but not without some reservation.

The trip from Hamilton to Niagara Falls is perfect for a day trip. Mr. Ken Suzuki drove as we covered the fifty kilometres to the falls along a road that more or less followed the south side of Lake Ontario. There were poplars from the same family as the cottonwood but, unlike in Vancouver, we did not see any real cottonwoods. There were, however, willows with vivid yellow leaves everywhere: along the lake, along the rivers, and along the canals. Japanese willows stay green until the first frost when all of the leaves suddenly drop off so I had never seen such beautiful yellow willow leaves before.

When we stopped the car to stretch our legs and stand under the willows, our whole bodies were dyed by the brilliant yellow. There were yellow-leaved pussy willows and countless orchards of apples, peaches, cherries, grapes, and plums. We pulled into Niagara-on-the-Lake for a short rest.

We walked slowly along the maple-lined streets of gold. As the golden leaves caught the sunlight, they shone with an even greater intensity. Apparently, we had happened to visit when the leaves were at their peak. Niagara-on-the-lake is a summer resort town so there were many closed up homes. We strolled into an oak forest. The oak and the maple leaves were the same shade of yellow but they differed in intensity. One can not say which is more beautiful, the radiantly yellow maples or the more sober oak. Amongst the yellow were amber patches of leaves just on the verge of falling. I do not know why the yellow leaves should be so beautiful in Canada. Perhaps it has something to do with the wide diurnal range of temperature.

We stood on the shore of Lake Ontario and watched the ripples draw up on shore. Actually, the lake is so large that it was more like standing on the seashore. Long, slender algae like human hair floated on the water and the sandy beach was brown, not white. It was calm and peaceful that day but the lake is no doubt very frightful when it gets rough. Driftwood was heaped up on the beach like a mountain and a white passenger ferry billowed smoke as it slowly made its way across my field of vision. The gulls circled overhead.

Nearby Fort George looked like it had come straight out of a western movie with its fence and gate made of grappled logs. Usually, forts and castle remains excite me but not so that day, perhaps because the fort was evidently reconstructed for the tourist trade. A near-by mountain ash with bright red berries caught my eye and held my attention away from the fort.

Niagara Falls was but a short distance from Fort George. When we arrived, I jumped out of the car and almost ran to the lookout point. The falls were right in front and the spray was cold on my face. Actually, as we were quite high up, it would be more accurate to say that we were on a level with the top of the falls across the gorge while the falls themselves were below. When I looked down on the falls, I felt betrayed.

Ever since childhood I had been bombarded by photographs, pictures, movies, and television images depicting these gigantic falls. When confronted by the real thing, however, I was disappointed. Truly they
are magnificent, but not quite as magnificent as in my imagination. I had imagined them to be so gigantic that I would be completely overwhelmed. No doubt my expectations were too high. We bought a ticket for the elevator down to the lookout at river level, below the falls. As I stood beneath the falls, getting soaked by the spray and looking way up, I recognised their magnificence and was awed. Unfortunately, it was too late to overcome that first impression of disappointment.

Although it was the off-season, there were still many tourists. Looking out over the falls, I noticed how the Canadian falls on the right seemed to be much larger than the American falls on the left. As I gazed at the horseshoe-shaped basin of the falls, the wind picked up the spray and whipped it up towards us. The wind also brought a strange smell; one that I had not experienced before. If I were forced to describe it I might say it smelled like freshly cut wood. A deafening roar emanating from the base of the falls vibrated to the base of my spine. A flock of gulls gathered above the river just where the turbulent, foaming water eased out and became calm again.

Mr. Suzuki knew just the right place to see the rainbow. We left the lookout crowded with tourists and drove to where the sun was at our backs and we could look down on the falls from an angle. From the depths of the yellow maple trees a huge rainbow emerged, larger than any rainbow I had ever seen caused by one waterfall. It was larger even than the ever-present rainbow in photographs of the falls. Niagara Falls, adorned by such a beautiful rainbow, was truly awe inspiring.

The rainbow over the falls did not waver even slightly and there was no worry that it would disappear as quickly as raindrop rainbows. I sat and gazed on the everlasting rainbow for quite some time. I am sure that Kimpei Goto did the same many times. Kimpei’s hometown of Yonekawa Village in Miyagi Prefecture is known for its rainbows so this was, doubtlessly, a bridge to his roots.

On the way back, we tried to find an orchard supposedly run by a Japanese. Unfortunately, the person we were looking for had quit farming several years before, or so we were told by Mr. George Houtby who owned a seventy-acre orchard nearby. Mr. Houtby’s grandfather had come from England many years before and opened up this land.

It was quite the operation; the 25 people (family members and employees) who ran the orchard grew many varieties of fruit and there were three refrigerated warehouses. The patriarch of this Houtby operation was tall (190 cm) and seemed, at first, to be rather cool and unapproachable. However, as we got to know each other, he would often throw jokes into his explanations of the area.

He told us that the Matsu-apple from Japan had a very good reputation and was being grown more widely. As I had never heard of a “matsu” apple before, I asked whether it might be the “mutsu” apple he was referring to but his pronunciation was definitely “matsu”; unfortunately, every last apple of that type had been sold. There was a roadside stand in front of the farm where they sold a basket of fifty apples for a dollar (200 yen). A two-litre bottle of apple juice went for $1.50 (300 yen). Single apples were sold for 2 cents a piece (4 yen). Even apples that fell to the ground were picked up and sold as pie apples. According to Mr. Suzuki, Canadians are very fond of home-made apple pies.

Our return to Toronto marked the final stage of our research trip. We wanted to meet Mr. Hiroji Taira whose father, Mr. Ichinojo Taira had come over on the Sui-an-maru at the age of forty-one. Hiroji, called to Canada at seventeen, was now seventy-three years old and living in Toronto with his wife, Mikiko, also from Yonekawa who had come over in 1930 to marry him. They had three daughters, all married and with nine children between them. There was a shelf in the second-floor living room, adorned with family photos, which revealed the international nature of the family.

We did not actually meet Hiroji as he was too busy at work but we did ask Mikiko many questions. We asked about the wartime internment when they were sent to a ghost town in the mountains and, as expected,
heard the stories of hardship. It seems that they were interned in a town that had been deserted after the
gold rush in the late 1800s.

Mikiko-san laughed as she told us, “The daughters can only speak broken Japanese and the
grandchildren can not speak it at all.”

The street in front of the Taira’s home was lined with large oak trees whose yellow, autumn leaves were
very beautiful. No doubt the fallen leaves are a bother but the advantages far outweigh the inconvenience. Mrs. Taira pointed out a squirrel perched in a nearby tree.

The Continental Times Company of Toronto publishes a Japanese language newspaper for Toronto’s
20,000 residents of Japanese origin. The company started out in Vancouver but relocated to Toronto after
the war. The president, Mr. Yoriki Iwasaki, was born in 1903 and moved to Vancouver when he was
nineteen. There he married Midori Iwasaki, daughter of the founder, Mr. Yasushi Iwasaki, and took on the
family name. Eventually, Yoriki Iwasaki became the paper’s second president. Although he is now
seventy-six and Midori is seventy-one, they are very healthy and showed me how hard they still work. Mr. Kunio Taba, the editor-in-chief, was born in Vancouver in 1935 but spent ten years after the war working
in Tokyo where he mastered the slang of the merchants and craftsmen of Old Tokyo.

Mr. and Mrs. Iwasaki were a walking encyclopaedia of things related to Vancouver and easily
answered all of the questions I had prepared. Their stories were so interesting that one could listen to them
all day and never tire. They were thoroughly familiar with everything about pre-war Japanese society in
Vancouver. Interesting characters emerged one after another from their stories, each one so unique that a
book could have been written about any one of them.

Of the ten thousand Japanese in Vancouver prior to the war, about five hundred could be said to have
been well-to-do. That wealth differential persisted even through the internment and most successful second
and third generation Japanese seem to have come from that well-to-do group. ‘Good’ people dominated the
Iwasaki’s stories, but there were examples of ‘bad’ people as well - unscrupulous characters who exploited
their fellow Japanese immigrants.

The Iwasaki’s gave me the name of the one man who could tell me most about the Vancouver Riot of
1907 in which I was most interested: Mr. Kintaro Chikaramatsu who was living in an old folk’s home in
Toronto. On the day that we went to visit him, it rained for the first time since leaving Japan.

The old folks home, a beautiful six-storey building, looked very much like a hotel. Each floor was fully
equipped with such things as a games room, sanitation facilities, and medical equipment. Kintaro
Chikaramatsu, in room 311, was average height and build for an old person but he had been a sailor from
Yamaguchi Prefecture who landed in Vancouver and got a job as a bodyguard at a gambling house. His
hair may have been grey but his strength was still evident in his handshake. When we got around to talking
about the Vancouver Riot his eyes lit up.

“IT was the September when I was twenty,” he burst out eagerly, and once started, could not be stopped.
He described the day in exquisite detail, punctuating the story with excited gestures. He used the
expression ‘hairy barbarian’ frequently and emphasised that the riot had been instigated by the hairy
barbarians. He had wanted to kill the hairy barbarians but was held back by the cries of the old men to not
kill anyone; it was a disappointment to just pursue and disperse the invaders.

There was a lot of power on that street in those days and when they brandished their Japanese swords,
the police were the first to disappear, quickly followed by the mob of hairy barbarians. As they fled, they
pulled their pistols but not one shot was fired. The drawn swords and the rocks hurled from the rooftops
were enough to cause hesitation and, eventually, a retreat. Kintaro paused and drew a deep breath. He
spread out a map to illustrate his story. He remembered every detail, from where the mob had attacked to
the street where they retreated. I was amazed at the vigour with which he told the story, for he had to be at least ninety-two years old.

Kintaro never married and was left without any relatives. In the midst of his story, a forty-ish, female staff member came in with a bundle of laundry. He called after her to stop,

“Hey, come and listen for a while. They are going to publish a book about me. These men came all the way from Japan especially to write about me,” he said in very rough English.

The woman looked at him, looked at us, said, “Isn’t that wonderful,” turned around with her two hands full, and left.

When I asked Kintaro about Oikawa Jinsaburo he replied that although they had never met, he knew that he was the boss on Lion Island. When I mentioned Kimpei Goto, Kintaro remarked that his wife had been a White. He did not say “hairy barbarian” but “White.” Obviously there was a distinction between the two. I disagreed and said that Mrs. Goto was not White, she was from Miyagi Prefecture. But he would not concede.

“No doubt about it,” he maintained. “His wife, who ran the rooming house, was White.”

When I looked at the picture of Takeki Goto again, I saw not only that she was a handsome woman but also that she had a long nose and rather large eyes. If she were dressed up in the Western clothes of the time, she could quite easily pass for a White person. Actually, when we went to visit Takeki Goto in Hamilton, we had trouble finding the house at first so we asked a neighbourhood woman. Although we were sure that this woman was White, it turned out that she was actually Takeki Goto’s second daughter, Toshiko, who was born in Canada and had lived her whole life there. She was indistinguishable as Japanese among Canadians and I came to understand how Mr. Chikaramatsu might mistake Takeki for a White person.

As we were leaving, Kintaro said, “Come back anytime, I’m always free.”

I am sure that a book about Kintaro Chikaramatsu would be extremely interesting.

It only rained for that one day and the next day was fine again. We had finished our research in Canada and the weather was spectacular as we departed for Los Angeles. Mr. and Mrs. Taira came out to the airport to see us off and gave us a rather expensive farewell gift. Unfortunately, we did not have time to thank this warm-hearted pair from Tohoku adequately before we had to leave. We also parted company with Mr. Ken Suzuki who had so graciously accepted our request to guide us.

As I stared out over the wide expanse of the North American continent, I reflected how smoothly the trip had gone thanks to my travelling companion, Mr. Hirota. He was young and his English was very good; I was perfectly content to entrust him with the details. He was to fly straight back to Japan from Los Angeles, but I had made plans to stay there for four days with my son and his family. My whole body was exhausted from the journey; all I wanted to do was sleep. The sandman danced before my eyes and the brown-green earth below merged into the darkness of sleep.

On arriving back in Tokyo, I had but a day to relax before I met Mr. Hirota at Ueno Station to catch the 10:03 Hatsukari express. I was so anxious on the train that I could not sit still. We changed trains in Ichinoseki at 15:22 and arrived in Ishikoshi Station thirty minutes later. By car from Ishikoshi, we drove eastward for thirty minutes and arrived in Towa-cho (formerly Yonekawa Village). It was already dark.

It was the first time that I had been in Towa-cho, but Mr. Hirota had made a fact-finding trip here before we went to Canada. It was not my first time in this part of Japan, however, as I had visited nearby Ishinomaki to do research on Kyosuke Yasuda (Frank Yasuda), the hero of another of my novels called Alaskan Story. Researching that story, I visited the protagonist’s hometown after going to Alaska as I
thought that going to the hometown first might bias my overseas research. I found that strategy effective for Alaskan Story, so I decided to do the same for this story.

I first came across snippets of the Sui-an-maru immigrants during research for Alaskan Story and started collecting information with no particular goal in mind. Then, unexpectedly, in the fall of 1973, NHK’s72 “Spotlight” did a nationally televised feature on the story. As a result of this story, a rash of people from all over the country descended on Towa-cho. When Mr. Hirota visited, he went first to the village office to explain his purpose and to enlist some cooperation. In the end, he got a promise of cooperation from the Board of Education, especially from one employee in particular, Mr. Kanichi Onodera, who was invaluable to the whole project.

Mr. Hirota gathered as much information as he could at that early stage of the project. Among the materials he collected was the daily log of the Sui-an-maru written by Bunji Goto that was found in the family home. Many people had visited the town seeking information about the Sui-an-maru, and most of it had been uncovered already. Of that which was found, much was borrowed with vague promises of return and the whereabouts of those pieces is now unknown. However, Bunji Goro’s hand-written log somehow escaped the eyes of the collectors and was found nestled in a storage basket by Mr. Hirota and Mr. Kanichi Onodera. This piece was taken to the village office, duplicated, and immediately returned. That little booklet was to be immeasurably helpful in writing this novel.

The following is a ranking of the six most important pieces of information gathered in Towa-cho:
1. Secret Immigrants to Canada edited by and in the possession of Rokuro Goto
   i) An Immigrant to Canada’s Tale by Seiki Shuto
   ii) My 60 Years by Kimpei Goto
2. Jinsaburo Oikawa’s Autobiography in the possession of Shima Oikawa
3. The Sui-an-maru’s Daily Log by Bunji Goto in the possession of Chuko Goto
5. Memoires of Chiyomi Oikawa in the possession of Tsuyoshi Oikawa
6. Spotlight 51: broadcast material (NHK Cultural Department)

Of the above six items, I had seen all except the fourth before going to Canada. As for the fourth, I borrowed it from Yaichi Sato on my return and duplicated it.

Jinsaburo Oikawa’s autobiography was written in very beautiful, cursive-style calligraphy and a very difficult literary style. Mr. Hirota took it to Mr. Hiroshi Kawasaki who was an expert in translating old documents to modern language. I read that story over and over again and gradually came to understand his writing style; he wrote about the most significant parts first and got to the finer details later. He did not have time to write his diary properly so he evidently organised it in his head, letting his mind run free and obliging his pen to keep up with what his mind wanted to leave for posterity. Naturally then, the first things to come out were those that were the most significant. Once I caught on to his style, I tried to rewrite his story without altering the meaning. Many people have tried unsuccessfully to read and understand Oikawa’s diary - thus I have tried to revive his story and make it accessible.

In addition, there is one other source that deserves special mention: All About Jinsaburo Oikawa by Souemon Sato. Because Bungoro Goto had said to me in Canada, “If you want to write about Oijin, you have to look into Souemon Sato first,” I interviewed Sato’s nephew, Yaichi Sato. Without Bungoro Goto’s advice, I should not have met with Yaichi Sato and, therefore, would never have learned of Souemon Sato’s very important book. Jinsaburo Oikawa’s experiences and adventures were so numerous and

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72 Japan’s national public broadcasting company.
unusual that ordinary people who would not normally have written memoires did so because of their mere association with him. These sources have been invaluable in writing this novel; it would have been so much less interesting without them.

Jinsaburo Oikawa’s birthplace in the Shimodai area of Masubuchi in Towa has recently become famous for a certain species of firefly called the Genji firefly (*genji botaru*). Masubuchi is a quiet, mountain village through which flows the clear Masubuchi River. At present Mrs. Toyoko Onodera, the head of the family lives in Jinsaburo Oikawa’s birthplace as Jinsaburo was her great uncle.

The main house is about three hundred years old and large enough for ten rooms of between ten and twelve *tatami* mats (20-24 square metres). It seems that Jinsaburo’s father, Juroji, was head of the village; it is not an exaggeration to say that his was a renowned, old family. The roof is thatched in the old style and the house stands on a small hill overlooking the Masubuchi River in front with the mountains in the rear.

One of Oikawa’s first ambitions was to build a silk factory on a field adjacent to the garden and just below the house. The silk-reeling factory was successful and employed two hundred factory girls but Jinsaburo was not satisfied with this small success. Leaving the Onodera’s in charge of the factory, he went to America. There is nothing left of the factory buildings; the sole remains of the era are the walnut tree that used to grow beside the waterwheel hut, the old plum tree in the garden, the pond surrounded by five-needled pine trees in the back garden, and the stump of an old azalea. The water that comes down the pipe from the mountain is as cold as ice.

“When I was only ten years old, the old man of Kakeyama (Oikawa) was frightening. He never said much, and when he did, he only said the minimum necessary. He had stern eyes,” Toyoko recollected.

The house that Jinsaburo lived in when he was adopted by the Oikawa family was replaced by a beautiful, newly-built house. Yaeno Oikawa’s parents’ house was also very close, and from it one could see the thatched roof of Yasuemon Iwabuchi’s house within shouting distance.

On returning to Japan, Yasuemon Iwabuchi served as a village official until after the war and there are many anecdotes surviving about this very talented man. One tells of his campaign speech that played on the pronunciation of his name. “Yasuemon as Mayor of Yonekawa is a cheap deal, he’ll do all the administrative work for only a nickel!” was chanted to the tune of *sansa shigure* (a well-known local folksong). Another story tells how he used his fluency in English and German to shock an officer of the occupation forces after the war.

There was only one person in Masubuchi that had actually lived on Oikawa-jima and that was Shinobu Hatakeyama. She married Yuki Hatekeyama (one of the original stowaways who settled on Oikawa Island) and went to Oikawa-jima in 1915. In other words, she lived on the island at the same time as Jinsaburo Oikawa for three years. With the single phrase, “He was as hard on himself as he was on others,” she summed up his character completely.

It was hard to believe that Shinobu was all of eighty-nine years old; she was still as sharp as a tack. Words like “cannery” and “boss” and “collector” flew easily from her mouth. To find someone still alive who had lived on Oikawa Island was a lucky stroke for my research.

Kessokuji Temple, on Chikubu mountain near Shinobu Hatakeyama’s house, is famous as the central temple for the great horse-worshipping religion of the northern Kanto Plain. It is said to be the place where Sakano Tamuramaro buried his favourite horse and built the Batto Kannon Doh temple. Apparently, the

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73 Oikawa’s second wife
74 “Cheap things” is pronounced *ya-su-i-mo-no* in Japanese.
75 The Buddhist God of Horses
name of the town Masubuchi is derived from ‘Buddha with a Horse’s Head’. Many small votive plaques (ema) with prayers written on them adorn the temple’s outside walls. Among them I found one that read:

To the God of safe voyages to America. Please guard me and my five companions ... [5 illegible names] ... and keep us safe.

Jinsaburo Oikawa, 19 March 1911

Because the tablet was attached to a wooden wall and exposed to the elements, the picture on the front and the names of his five companions had faded away. What was certain, however, was that Jinsaburo Oikawa had visited the temple in 1911 before going overseas with a number of people. There were many other tablets praying for a safe voyage to America although none of them mentioned Canada; they must have been referring to the American continent.

The temple grounds resembled a botanical garden. There were Japanese cedars, Torreyas, and Ginkos that must have been at least a thousand years old and many other rare trees.

Wakakusa mountain is just north of Oinokawara in the town of Yonekawa. From the top of it, one can take in the topography of the whole area in a single glance. Hachiman-jinja shrine, with a long history, is nearby.

Kimpei Goto’s family home is almost in the middle of Oinokawara village and is surrounded by the houses of others who went to Canada. Kanichi Onodera had marked on a map the houses of all those who had gone to Canada and kindly showed them to me. I could not, however, see any difference between them and the neighbours’ houses.

Last year, I went on a data collection trip for my novel, Coral, and visited Suou Island, from where many people went to America to work at the turn of the century. When they had made enough money, they returned to the island and built extremely fine, two-storey houses. There was an area of the island known as ‘American village’ where there were only Western-style houses.

Before visiting Towa, I had a mental image that resembled the ‘American village’ on Suou Island. After all, many people had similarly gone to Canada and returned with lots of money; I assumed they would have had the same tendency to build large, beautiful houses. This, however, was not the case.

Those who went abroad from Yonekawa Village did so not for themselves but for the survival of their families. It had been their fate to be born in a village which lived under the constant threat of crop failure. It is said that Yonekawa Village only survived because of those remittances.

Kimpei Goto’s family home was right in front of the Kiriyakeya Inn where we stayed. In the back garden, there were daikon with still-green leaves and still-blooming, yellow chrysanthemums. Fall was still in full swing in Canada but there were no red or yellow autumn leaves to be seen yet in Yonekawa although the ground was white with frost in the mornings.

Only one plant caught my eye in Towa and that was the beautiful Nanden bamboo whose clusters of red berries looked like flowers. I could now empathise with Takeki Goto in Canada who had told me that the sight of Nanden bamboo brought tears to her eyes. There was Nanden bamboo in the garden of every house: red Nanden and white Nanden which was just as beautiful. There was also a very old, white Nanden surrounding Jinsaburo Oikawa’s monument at Kesokuji temple. The brilliant red of the large Nanden was no doubt a result of the clean air and the rich soil. One could travel the whole of Japan and not find any Nanden bamboo to compare.
Souemon Sato’s nephew, Yaichi Sato, was born on Sato Island in 1910 and returned to Japan with his family in 1914. Yaichi Sato had a great interest in Jinsaburo Oikawa and had kept in touch with his uncle in Toronto while he was still in good health. His uncle had sent him a copy of his memoirs from Toronto.

When Souemon Sato’s father, Jinuemon Sato, returned from Canada, he became mayor and got involved in a few business deals that went into debt. To pay off his father’s debts, Souemon sold his land in Vancouver and built a new life on top of all the sacrifices that he had made for his family.

In all, we stayed three days in Towa and, with Kanichi Onodera as our guide, explored every corner and met many people with interesting stories. If I am successful in writing about Oijin it is due, in no small part, to the kindness of the people of Towa and their willingness to share their knowledge and anecdotes. Jinsaburo Oikawa was already a legend around those parts.

It rained the day we visited Kakeyama where Jinsaburo Oikawa spent his last days. We followed the Kitakami river downstream to the outskirts of Ishinomaki and the ‘America House’ where he had lived in Kakeyama. On returning from Canada, the three of them (Oikawa, his wife, and his daughter) ran a small store they called ‘America House’ where they sold liquor and food. The present owner had changed the name to ‘Kono’s Store’ and did not respond when I suggested that ‘America House’ had been a good name.

There was a plum tree in the back garden and, just behind it, the Ishinomaki Rail Line. Oikawa died on the second floor of this house as he dreamed of reclaiming Hirobuchi swamp. In the very year he died, the swamp was drained and transformed into rice paddies. It has changed so much now that one can only guess where the swamp had been.

Oikawa’s grave is on a small knoll overlooked by a mountain. The tombstone is made of black granite and the words ‘Oikawa Family Grave’ are carved deeply on its face. On the side, the following is written about Jinsaburo Oikawa.

Jinsaburo Oikawa (childhood name Ryoji) was born the third son of Juroji Onodera of Shimodai, Masabuchi, Yonekawa Village, Tome County. He was adopted into the Oikawa’s Hosogoe household and took the name Jinsaburo which had been his grandfather’s name. He worked hard to promote domestic industry although he went for a time to Lion Island near New Westminster in the British colony of British Columbia where he was a pioneer in the Fraser River fishery. Present day Lion Island was formerly called Oikawa-jima.

On his return he lived in Kakeyama, Kanomata Village, Monou County until his death. He is buried at the Raikoji Temple in Masubuchi. There is a brief outline of his life on his monument at Kesokuji Temple in Masubuchi but his autobiography gives a much more detailed account of his dreams and accomplishments. His faithful and loyal wife Yaeno bore him two children, Eiji and Shima. Eiji was drowned in the Fraser River in his youth; Shima, carries on the Hosogoe lineage.

This information was provided by the descendants.

In the year of our Lord, September 1969. (Ryoichiro Oikawa)

The back of the tombstone reads as follows:
There is a drooping cherry tree nearby whose spring blossoms must be something spectacular. In the cemetery of the family temple in Masubuchi is a stone monument that reads only ‘Oikawa Family Plot’ on the front and ‘Carved by Taijiro, July 1929’ on the back. As I mentally compared the two tombstones, the cold rain drove into me.

I met Oikawa’s daughter, Shima, in Sendai. She was born on Lion Island but returned to Japan with her family when she was thirteen years old. She had an amazing memory and recalled things about her father from when she was a child until his last years. It was spring when Jinsaburo offered up his last dream of reclaiming Hirobuchi swamp. He had bought a bag of rapeseed and carried it on his back to the swamp. When asked by onlookers what he was doing, he replied,

“The seeds will sprout and very soon become green. Then, whoever wishes can pick the leaves to eat may do so. In spring, the plants will flower and there will be many seeds. In turn, the seeds will sprout and become green the next year and for many years to come.”

In this way, he planned to reclaim the swamp and provide greens for the people who lived nearby.

Just before he died, he said to his daughter, Shima, “I wanted to do something for the people around me. And just as I was able to do so, I got too old.”

Jinsaburo Oikawa’s philosophy was similar to that of Frank Yasuda and characteristic of a Tohoku person.

*Give all that you are able, expect nothing, and good things will come to you.*

My research trip finally ended in Sendai.

I have acknowledged all of those who assisted me in Canada, Towa, and Sendai in various places throughout this epilogue; however, I would like to bring it all together here. I would especially like to thank Rokuro Goto, Kimpei Goto’s younger brother and Vice-President of the Miyagi Dentist’s Association, for lending a hand right from the start. He helped me arrange my trip to Canada, Towa, and Sendai. I thank him from the bottom of my heart.

In Towa, I would like to thank Ryoshi Numakura, Shinji Suzuki, Keizo Goto, and Tsugio Sato. In Kannan village, Ritsu Takamatsu, Shigeru Oikawa, Yoko Oikawa, and Yuko Oikawa gave invaluable assistance. In Sendai, I thank Kichiji Goto, Seiki Shuto, and Chosuke Nakamura for their interesting stories. I thank all of the above for all their help and encouragement.

Lastly, I would like to heartily thank Shiichiro Katayanagi and Akira Miki of Kodansha Publishing for their pertinent advice on this rather long novel.

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Appendices

I “Jap Coolies Land…”

Victoria Daily Colonist, Sunday, 21 October 1906

JAP COOLIES LAND AND ARE ARRESTED

The Schooner Suian Maru Illicitly Disembarks Twenty-two Men at Beecher Bay and is Seized by Authorities.

The Japanese schooner Suian Maru was yesterday seized by authorities because of an alleged attempt to run a schooner-load of Japanese into Canada at Beecher Bay. Nine of the Japanese surreptitiously landed were arrested at Parson’s Bridge and the provincial and city police are in pursuit of others, some of whom have reached Victoria and are in hiding.

On Friday the Suian Maru, a three-masted schooner of about two hundred tons, a new vessel, parked off Beecher Bay and hovered about until after nightfall. Then, under cover of darkness, an old sampan, the sole type of boats or dories on the quasi-fishing vessel, made many trips to land twenty-two Japanese among the trees in the desired land. There were thirty-nine left on board the schooner which at daybreak started off. There was no wind, and before the schooner was far from where the twenty-two had been landed, she was boarded by Dr. Watt, quarantine officer.

Suspicious Movements

The Schooner was seen from the city yesterday morning hovering about Beecher Bay in a suspicious manner and her presence was reported to Dr. Watt. He went with the quarantine tug Earle to investigate. The old Japanese captain had prepared for the doctor’s coming. There were new fishing lines and various fishing gear - mostly short lugs scattered about the decks. This was in itself calculated to cause suspicion. The lines were new, and obviously never touched by water. They had never been used for the purpose of fishing, or for anything else but an attempt at deception, that was evident. Then, too, there were no dories such as a fishing vessel would carry, no boats, nor anything to allow of fishing on the part of the crew of fifty-three Japanese. There was only one old sampan.

“Where are you from?” asked Dr. Watt.

“Have been fishing Copper Islands,” said the Japanese Captain.

“Very bad weather; no can catch fish, drift here.”
The Japanese pointed to the fishing gear. The mate also pointed to the gear coiled so nicely about the deck.

“Weather too bad Copper Islands. Now go New Westminster buy salt salmon.”

This wasn’t so suspicious, but down in the hold there were forty bunks, and an accumulation of baggage. It was the usual baggage of the Japanese steerage passenger and entirely dissimilar to the slop-chest clothes of the fishermen.

The schooner was taken to Williams Head, the quarantine officer having explained that it was necessary for the vessel to be fumigated and the baggage of those on board disinfected. When the baggage was brought up there was much that was unclaimed. Finally, the men who remained by the vessel said it belonged to others.

“What others?” asked the quarantine superintendent.

**Japanese Landed**

Soon the story came out: there had been many Japanese landed. The captain explained that twenty-two men had run away when the schooner was at the other bay.

The Schooner was then turned over to the provincial police and taken to Esquimalt, where she was moored at the naval buoy and a patrol arranged lest some of the remaining 31 on board escaped.

Without attracting attention he slipped a little package of gold coins into the pocket of Dr. Watt. The doctor felt the jingling store of gold and put it aside as an exhibit in the case.

Meanwhile, the Japanese ship master thought he had succeeded in bribing the official. The mate spoke some English and he maintained a story of fishing, rough weather and drifting to Victoria. He also denied that there had been any men landed.

That mate was suave. He held to his tale until the evidence began to accumulate. Finally he looked over to the captain and he said “Shigataganai” which means, in effect, “It can’t be helped.”

Then they admitted that the Suian Maru was a new schooner and on her maiden voyage. She had left Oginohama, a port not far from Hakodate in North Japan on September 1st and had sailed across the Pacific in 49 days, an average passage, bringing 53 in all on board. They had sailed into the straits of Juan de Fuca a few days ago and on Friday put into Beecher Bay where 22 men were landed. Then the quarantine doctor had come, and the gear had been spread about the deck to deceive.

**Short of Water**

When the Suian Maru was brought into Esquimalt, it was found she was without fresh water and provisions were short; otherwise it is believed the vessel would have stood out to sea at once after landing the 22 men at Beecher Bay.

The vessel is held pending further action by the authorities. She is liable to a fine of from $20 to $100 for not having given a list of her passenger to the immigration officer and for further fines for having landed passengers without calling at quarantine, for fines for having landed
passengers without having entered, and other fines - the master has infracted many customs, quarantine and immigration regulations for all of which a penalty might be enforced.

**Disguise is Poor**

The mate was brought ashore and is at a Japanese boarding house. Some of the captured ones were dressed in Japanese army uniforms. When on their way to the city they endeavoured to pass as employees coming from the fish traps but their clothing and appearance gave this the lie while their personal effects also contradicted the claim that the men were fishermen. The thirteen still at large are expected to be apprehended shortly.

**The Official Theory**

There is no reason why any attempt should be made to evade the regulations which govern the immigration of Japanese into Canada, that is if the Japanese have left the homeland regularly and with passports and are fit to pass medical examinations. The belief of the official is that these men have failed to pass the medical examination or have failed to secure passports to leave Japan, and have adopted this means of reaching the land they seek to enter. According to the Immigration regulations any Japanese may land who is in a healthy condition and has the necessary passport with which every Japanese immigrant who leaves home regularly is armed. There is no head tax or restrictions similar to those which prevent the landing of Chinese.
JAP COOLIES LAND
AND ARE ARRESTED

The Schooner Sultan Maru Illegally Disembarks
Twenty-Two Men at Beecher Bay and Is
Seized by Authorities

FEATHERSTONE—IS
MAKE STATEMENT
MONDAY

Further Unimportant Ev
Taken In, Nanaimo, Mo
Trial Yesterday
No Objectionable Test

Nanaimo, Oct. 20—The

As the schooner was

The court was 

The court was opened 

When the Sultan Maru was disembar 

Established 1853

Victoria Daily Colonist, Sunday, October 28th, 1893
ENID

Men

Cases reported at the stench. This resulted in a spread of the disease. The buildings were burned and the remains were removed.

JAPANESE LANDED AT

On the 28th of July, 1910, a report was made that Japanese were landed at a certain point. Investigation revealed that they were not Japanese but laborers from China. The report was false.

What about the Japanese

The Japanese settlement was located in the area where the Japanese had previously lived. The population was small and the area was sparsely inhabited.

The Emperor's Order

The Emperor's order was to deport the Japanese from the country. The order was carried out by the authorities.

The Japanese were deported to Japan. The operation was successful and the Japanese were repatriated.
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