

Japanese “Entrepreneur” on the Fraser River: Oikawa Jinsaburo and the Illegal Immigrants of the *Suian Maru*.

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of History

We accept this thesis as conforming
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ABSTRACT

Oikawa Jinsaburo, Japanese entrepreneur, re-located to Canada from 1896 to 1917 and engaged in business enterprises, utopian communities on the Fraser River (Sunbury, Lion Island, Don Island), and immigration ventures. This thesis introduces Oikawa through an English summary of Nitta Jiro's historical novel, Mikkôsen Suian Maru, and presents historical evidence to verify, extend, and complicate this version. Substantial detail is added to the 1906 *Suian Maru* incident and the simplistic explanation of a deal to grant these illegal immigrants entry in exchange for a year of railway labour is problematised in the historical context of anti-Asian sentiment in British Columbia. A favourable (and unusual) confluence of several factors - the absence of pertinent immigration legislation, international obligations, official Japan's attitudes towards emigration, the lack of public outrage, and influential personal connections - enabled Yoshie Saburo to negotiate entry on behalf of Oikawa and the *Suian Maru* passengers.

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Main Characters in Nitta Jiro's Mikkôsen Suian Maru [Stowaway Ship *Suian Maru*]

Oikawa Jinsaburo - main character. (a.k.a. Jinsaburo)

Onodera Ryoji - Jinsaburo's childhood name

Oikawa Jinsaburo's First Family

Uino - Jinsaburo's first wife

Taijiro - Jinsaburo and Uino's eldest son

Michie - Jinsaburo and Uino's second son

Oikawa Jinsaburo's Second Family

Yaeno - Jinsaburo's second wife

Eiji - Jinsaburo and Yaeno's first son

Shima - Jinsaburo and Yaeno's daughter

Other Characters (in order of appearance)

Oikawa Eizo - Uino's father, Jinsaburo's father-in-law

Sato Souemon - Jinsaburo's partner in Canada

Sato Jinuemon - Souemon's father

Nakabayashi Kouemon - Steveston fisherman Jinsaburo met in Yokohama

Kaburagi Goro - Methodist pastor from Vancouver

Miyakawa Masutaro - translator in Vancouver

Goto Kimpei - youngest *Suian Maru* passenger

Yoshie Saburo - clerk at Japanese Consulate in Vancouver

Charles J. Clark - landowner in Sunbury

List of Abbreviations in Footnotes and Bibliography

BCA - British Columbia Archives

JCNMA - Japanese Canadian National Museum and Archives

NAC - National Archives of Canada

RCA - Richmond City Archives

Acknowledgements

There are many people I would like to thank for their encouragement and assistance. Thank you to my committee members: Dr. Joe Moore for asking intriguing questions at the oral, Dr. Yuen-fong Woon for helping me get into this M.A. and then for helping me get out of it, and Dr. Patricia Roy for her enthusiasm and wonderful editing. Thank you also to the faculty and staff at the UVic History department for intriguing classes and assistance with the myriad of regulations; I want to acknowledge Karen Hickton particularly on that last point. Thank you, of course, to Dr. John Price, my supervisor, who recognised my tendency to flit off in all directions and kept me reigned in not only to keep it within reading length but also to avoid the deep waters of what can be a discussion-laden field. My parents, Ken and Marilyn Sulz, were great supporters and offered useful suggestions along the way. Finally, my wife Tanya Berry, deserves credit for putting up with my anxieties and clanging pots to motivate me, gratitude for her advice (she has been through all of this before), and love for being such an inspirational and wonderful person.

Introduction

“Too many events in a man’s life are invisible. Unknown to others as our dreams.”¹

Oikawa Jinsaburo, a Japanese entrepreneur based in British Columbia from 1896 to 1917, was notable enough to attract attention during his lifetime and to be occasionally re-discovered by future generations, yet he never penetrated the general historical consciousness nor attracted historical analysis. This thesis examines his reincarnation in Nitta Jiro’s historical novel, Mikkôsen Suian Maru² and suggests that, despite some minor factual discrepancies and even major omissions, the novel transcends limitations of historical fiction as a source. In particular, the explanation of why eighty-two illegal immigrants³ smuggled aboard the schooner *Suian Maru* were granted permission to stay in Canada will be examined to see how it contributes to a greater understanding of Japanese migration to Canada. The framework of the thesis is four-fold: acquainting the reader with the story, verifying the historical accuracy of the Nitta account, problematising the decision to grant the *Suian Maru* passengers permission to stay, and proposing an explanation for that decision. The underlying theme is that Oikawa’s life, as told by Nitta, is not only a good story but also presents intriguing information provoking further investigation.

¹ Anne Michaels, Fugitive Pieces, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart., 1996), 141.

² Nitta Jiro, Mikkôsen Suian Maru, (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1979). English translation: David Sulz, Phantom Immigrants, (Shawnigan Lake, BC: Eclectica, 1998).

³ Current usage in some fields might suggest a term like “undocumented immigrants.” However, “illegal immigrants” is used in this thesis because, as will be shown, the *Suian Maru* passengers left Japan outside of legal means and broke several Customs, Quarantine, and Immigration laws on their arrival in Canada (i.e. they were definitely not “legal” immigrants). The literal translations of Nitta’s expressions, *mikkôsen* (stowaway ship) or *mikkôsha* (stowaway), are not entirely accurate as the passengers had paid their fares.

Chapter One will acquaint readers unfamiliar with the Oikawa Jinsaburo story through a condensed version of Nitta's novel. The title, Mikkôsen Suian Maru, literally means "The Stowaway Ship Suian Maru" and suggests only one event in Oikawa's long life of dramatic and memorable events. The text, however, spans his whole life including his childhood in an isolated Japanese village, his emergence as a successful entrepreneur there, his relocation to Canada in 1896 at the age of forty-two; his establishment of a community of fellow Japanese on Lion and Don Islands in the Fraser River,⁴ his involvement in the immigrant smuggling venture on the *Suian Maru* in 1906, and his return to Japan in 1917 where he died in 1927.

This summary is necessary because anyone unfamiliar with the novel would have difficulty obtaining it in either Japanese or English. It is long and detailed so an effort is made here to convey the substantial details while retaining a feel for the narrative style through a combination of summary and direct extracts. Some rearranging of the novel was necessary to make the order chronological because the several long flashbacks are confusing for the present purposes. Quotations from the novel, in this and subsequent chapters, are referenced both to the original Japanese and the English translation.

A certain inconsistency in referring to the protagonist by surname (Oikawa) and given name (Jinsaburo) was unavoidable. Because it is customary in Japanese culture and academic writing to use surnames and most sources use Oikawa, this thesis will usually use the surname. However, since there are other characters named Oikawa, and Nitta

⁴ These islands are just off the southern tip of Annacis Island in the south arm of the Fraser River about 15 kilometres upstream from Steveston. Lion Island is often referred to as *Sato-jima* and Don Island as *Oikawa-jima* (*jima* or *shima* = island).

himself usually uses Jinsaburo in the novel, “Jinsaburo” will be used in the summary and whenever confusion is possible. In short, the two names are usually interchangeable.

I was given a copy of Nitta’s book in 1991 during a home-stay in Japan. Intrigued though I was by the frontispiece maps of Miyagi Prefecture (where I was visiting) and British Columbia (where I lived), I doubted I could ever read such a long book in Japanese. However, a series of events resulted in my translating part of the novel at university and the rest while living in Oikawa’s Japanese hometown of Towa-cho in Miyagi Prefecture (it seemed that translating would be only marginally more difficult than reading it). Having translated the novel, I was keen to make it available to interested people. To my surprise, I received many requests for manuscripts of the translation largely in response to two articles I wrote for the Japanese-Canadian newspaper, Nikkei Voice;⁵ to date about 250 copies are in circulation, mostly in the hands of Canadian descendants of the *Suian Maru* passengers or people somehow related to the story. A few had read the Japanese version but most were either unable to read Japanese or unaware even of its existence. Hence, many people were surprised to learn that such a detailed story about their own grand-parents, great-uncles, uncles, other relatives, and acquaintances even existed.

Personal letters revealed that quite a number of direct and indirect memories were triggered by the English translation. Sakae Suto, born on Lion Island in 1931, wrote that “glancing through the book I noticed a few names that as kid I knew them.”⁶ Roy Sasaki

⁵ David Sulz, “Phantom Immigrants: A Saga of Early Newcomers to Canada,” Nikkei Voice, Sept. 1998, 1; and David Sulz, “An Update on *Phantom Immigrants*,” Nikkei Voice, May 1999, 1.

⁶ Sakae Suto, personal letter, 1 Nov. 1998.

wrote to say he had spoken to his second cousin in Sendai, Youichi Sato, who had been interviewed by Nitta Jiro.⁷ Others, “grew up with tales of the many exploits of Jinzaburo and of Oikawa-shima”⁸ and some even remembered people in the story - “I vividly remember Mr. and Mrs. Souemon Sato, - they used to visit us often, and they always brought us children ‘goodies’ when they came.”⁹ Tak Onodera was “born and raised in Sunbury¹⁰ and as a child at the time [he] remembers many people mentioned in this story, Suemon [sic] Sato etc., were all friends of [his] father.”¹¹ Kiyō Goto’s grandfather was Bunji Goto, keeper of the *Suian Maru*’s daily log book, and Kiyō found the book, “very interesting because I could relate to the names of towns and villages mentioned through old folks’ stories since my childhood days.”¹² Amie Roller learned about her great uncle, Sato Souemon, and was amazed at the little incidents she recalled from her childhood visits to Lion Island.¹³

Many people wrote with additional details (mostly genealogical) and the odd correction of name readings,¹⁴ but there were no indications of problems with the story itself. In fact, Mary Oikawa, a relative of “one of the 100 who, as he said, took 100 days

⁷ Roy Sasaki, personal letter, n.d. (1998 or 1999).

⁸ Kim Koblre, personal letter, 26 Oct. 1998.

⁹ Amie Roller, personal letter, 14 Oct. 1998.

¹⁰ On the south bank of the south arm of the Fraser River about 15 kilometres upstream from Steveston and on the shore near Lion and Don Islands.

¹¹ Tak Onodera, personal letter, 14 Jan. 1999.

¹² Kiyō Goto, personal letter, 19 Mar. 1999.

¹³ Amie Roller, personal letter, 4 Oct. 1999.

¹⁴ The characters used in Japanese names often have several ways of being read; one is never sure of how to “pronounce” a name from the characters alone.

to get to Oikawa-jima” reported that certain family members “smile at some of the inaccurate information about the island and its early inhabitants” in other accounts. However, she noted that “according to tales told to [her husband] by his grandfather ..., your account [i.e. translation of Nitta] appears more accurate”¹⁵ than other accounts.

It appears, then, that the community most interested in the story, and with most personal knowledge, found the Nitta account and the translation useful and accurate. Many of them requested that copies of the manuscript be sent to relatives and friends, showing that they found the information worthy of passing on. Aiko Morton thanked me for undertaking the translation, “the story is not only an important part of our personal history but it is also a very important part of Canadian History.”¹⁶ Tak Onodera, who had also read the original Japanese was kind enough to write on my behalf, “a magnificent job in translating this book in spite of the difficulties translating Japanese into English. He is highly commended for accuracy....”¹⁷

This response from Japanese-Canadians whether related to the story or not indicates there is an awareness and an interest in the story of Oikawa either for personal reasons (e.g. family history), for how it contributes to historical knowledge, or just because it is a good story. In order for it to transcend being just a good story, however, an effort had to be made to evaluate the accuracy of Nitta’s account beyond informal letters from people who liked the story and saw pieces of their family’s history in it. I was

¹⁵ Mary Oikawa, personal letter, 30 Sept. 1998.

¹⁶ Aiko Morton, personal letter, 1 Oct. 1999.

¹⁷ Tak Onodera, personal letter, 17 Feb. 1999.

inspired to investigate how the Nitta account, and Oikawa himself, fit into the collective memory and the historical record in Canada.

Chapter Two emerges from an effort to assess the validity and accuracy of Nitta's account; several factors explain why it is largely accepted but some serious limitations make an independent investigation valuable. Nitta Jiro, pseudonym of Fujiwara Hiroto, became one of the "most popular writers in Japan"¹⁸ during his writing career (1951-1980); even today, one can find his books in any bookstore in Japan. He is best known for mountain stories, drawing on his meteorologist's training and his mountaineering hobby, but he also wrote several historical and detective novels. All of his books benefited greatly from his working methods, "before he started on a novel, he would read up on the subject and the region in which the story was set, and then go there."¹⁹

Mikkôsen Suian Maru was no exception.

Nitta first heard about Oikawa Jinsaburo while researching Arasuka Monogatari [Alaskan Story], and informally collected information until a television documentary by NHK²⁰ inspired him to investigate seriously. His research led him to five unpublished sources by intimate participants in the story that he used as the foundation for his novel.²¹ On visiting Canada and Oikawa's hometown of Towa-cho in Miyagi Prefecture, Nitta

¹⁸ James Westerhoven, "Afterword by the Translator," in James Westerhoven, Death March on Mount Hakkoda: A Documentary Novel by Jiro Nita, (Berkeley, CA, Stone Bridge Press, 1992), 203.

¹⁹ Westerhoven, "Afterword," 204.

²⁰ NHK is Japan's public broadcaster. Nitta records this source as Spotlight 51 broadcast materials - "Stowaway Ship *Suian Maru*" by NHK Cultural Department; Nitta, 338; Sulz, 218.

²¹ Nitta, 338; Sulz, 218. These were Oikawa's autobiography, the daily log from the *Suian Maru* kept by Goto Bunji, memoirs by two *Suian Maru* passengers (My 60 Years by Goto Kimpei and Oikawa Chiyomi's recollections), and a later account by Shudô Seiki (Tale of Stowaways to Canada). These are reproduced in Kanichi Onodera, Kanada e Watatta Tôhoku no Mura [The Tôhoku Village that Crossed Over to Canada], (Towa, Miyagi: self-published, 1996), 235-366.

found a few people who had actually known Oikawa but many others had stories to offer. Using these sources, his first-hand experience with the landscapes, and his background in Japanese history, he created an extensive (in length and detail) account of Oikawa's life.

The acceptance of the historical accuracy, however, is complicated by such issues as the historical fiction format as well as the accessibility and reliability of evidence.

Despite his skill in capturing the "facts," Nitta Jiro was a novelist who believed his job was to "spin the thread" that connects the facts established by the historian. An apocryphal story has Nitta meeting a famous historian:

"I wish I were a novelist," said the historian, "so I could forget about my sources and write only from my imagination."

"I wish I were a historian," retorted Nitta, "so I could forget about my imagination and write only from my sources."²²

Of course, the distinction between the historian and the novelist is not so clear cut:

History, historical fiction, fictional history, and fiction all exist along a spectrum ranging from supposedly pure factual representation of literal, historic truth to pure non-literal, invented fictional representation of fantasy.²³

Thus a certain story's location on the spectrum depends on several factors such as the "the actual existence of the characters and the reality of their larger contextual world."²⁴

Mikkôsen Suian Maru is factually based on real characters and set in the reality of the larger contextual world but the threads spun between the facts create a narrative that is more complete and thus, some would argue, eminently believable.

²² Westerhoven, "Afterword by the Translator," 195.

²³ Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., Beyond the Great Story, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997), 67.

²⁴ Berkhofer, Beyond the Great Story, 67

The following comments made about Nitta's Death March on Mount Hakkôda, apply equally to Mikkôsen Suian Maru:

Meticulously researched, with each [many] of its many quotations and references verifiable, the book appears to be a typical example of the documentary novel. ...

But the term "documentary novel" raises false expectations. It leads the reader to assume that the authenticity of the documents extends to the entire novel...

The result is that the fictional re-creation of a historical event may become "truer" in the popular imagination than the event itself.²⁵

Nitta's book about Oikawa Jinsaburo is certainly a masterful interweaving of documented evidence and fictional connective tissue. He quotes excerpts from his sources and enough verifiable background information that the reader might be excused for extending the authenticity to the entire novel. However, fundamental questions must be asked about his sources: oral histories, oral traditions,²⁶ and memoirs are all based on memories, and therein lie some interesting questions.

We are well-aware that oral and written memoirs are consciously constructed by the teller but the actual memories themselves are less often questioned. Research into memory tells us that memories are not pure recall but are "refracted through subsequent experience and contexts of social dynamics;"²⁷ a memory of an event is a combination of the experience, the interpretation at the time, and how later experiences change that

²⁵ Westerhoven, "Afterword by the Translator," 195.

²⁶ Oral histories being "recollections of individuals who were eyewitnesses or had personal experience with events occurring within their lifetime ... [while] oral traditions are narratives transmitted by word of mouth over at least a generation." From Alexander von Gernet, "Oral tradition - Part 2", Oral Narratives and Aboriginal Pasts: An Interdisciplinary Review of the Literatures on Oral Traditions and Oral Histories, Volume One, 1996, <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/pub/orl/index_e.html> (6 March 2003).

²⁷ von Gernet, "Oral Tradition," n.p.

interpretation. Memory is created and organised according to a script (or schema) - a general story already existing in the mind before the event even occurs. Memories, even the first memory of an event, are filtered by sub-conscious narratives; certain memories are retained (because they fit the story) while others are forgotten (there is no place for them) and still others may be created (because they should have happened).²⁸ Thus, although Nitta used many recollections of people who were actually present, there are issues around sources written decades later and even those written at the time (e.g. a ship's log). These memory issues are exacerbated in the case of oral traditions (i.e. other than first-hand accounts) because the person remembers the recounting of a memory of an event, not the event itself.

Nitta's book (in Japanese and English) exacerbates the memory issues through a feedback effect where written documents are incorporated into oral traditions.²⁹ The novel has created a narrative that makes sense of childhood memories, bits of stories, and fragments of memory; thus, it has created a more complete legend around Oikawa Jinsaburo that is difficult to unravel from "pre-Nitta" memories. For example, one person wrote to me that she was amazed at how many little incidents from her childhood visits to her grandparents on Lion Island she was able to recall after reading the translation of Nitta's book.³⁰ Another wrote, "I had heard, during my childhood, of the men who were smuggled here. Very few details were given, just snippets, never the whole story."³¹ This

²⁸ For background on psychological research on memory, see Ulrich Neisser and Ira E. Hyman, Jr., eds, Memory Observed: Remembering in Natural Contexts, 2nd edition (New York; Worth Publishers, 2000).

²⁹ von Gernet, "Oral Tradition," n.p.

³⁰ Amie Roller, personal letter, 4 Oct. 1999.

³¹ Lillian Lee, personal letter, 9 Feb. 1999.

is not to say that such memories are completely inaccurate or not useful for personal or community history; however, one must be aware that they were possibly triggered by a historical novel that created a perfect narrative structure.

This effect is apparent in four short versions of Oikawa in Japanese-Canadian history compilations published after Nitta's book.³² For example, the introduction to the account in Nakamura's book, Issei, implies it was an oral telling of memories by Jinsaburo's descendent (Tom Oikawa) but the story itself is clearly a retelling of Nitta's novel. This is particularly interesting because an oral interview with the same Tom Oikawa prior to Nitta's research trip is very short and very vague:

See my uncle, my second (?) uncle, ... was one of the first from our district to come out here. He went back and brought a lot of Japanese people over. ... they settled on this island here [Don Island]. ... The Japanese people call that Oikawa Island, all the old-timers knew that as Oikawa island.³³

In other words, it seems likely that Tom read Nitta's account between his two tellings and it filled in his own knowledge of the event and provided a complete narrative structure

Chapter Two shows what sources unavailable (or unused) by Nitta have to offer to the investigation. The first section suggests that many of the basic details of the Nitta account can be verified but that he omitted several important details either purposefully or through ignorance, and others were found that contradict him quite dramatically. These omissions and contradictions, by making the story even more complex and more

³² Gordon Nakamura, Issei, (Toronto: NC Press, 1984), 44-49; Roy Ito, Stories of My People (Hamilton: Roy Ito, 1994), 44-58; Toyo Takata, Nikkei Legacy: The Story of Japanese Canadians from Settlement to Today (Toronto: NC Press, 1983), 66-67; Michael Hoshiko, Who Was Who: Pioneer Families in Delta and Surrey (Edwardsville, Il: self-published, 1998), 35, 53, 56.

³³ RCA, Oral History Collection, Tape 47, Side 2, Tommy Oikawa Interview, 15 Jan. 1976.

intriguing, may inspire further research into how Oikawa's story fits into the broader context of Japanese-Canadian history at the turn of the last century.

Chapter Three problematises the decision to let the *Suian Maru* passengers stay by demonstrating that they arrived in a context of racism and anti-immigrant sentiment. Federal government reactions to provincial legislation excluding Asian labour, the obligations of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the reality of passport requirements, the Japanese government's attitude toward emigrants, the degree of opposition to their arrival, and contacts with influential people all seem relevant in explaining why they were allowed to stay. In looking at how each of these factors might have influenced the negotiations negatively, but actually influenced them positively, this chapter concludes that the permission for them to stay was not a foregone conclusion but a result of the favourable convergence of many factors.

Oikawa Jinsaburo's life was dramatic and significant; Nitta Jiro's account of it not only a good story but also a good history that is of special interest to descendants of the *Suian Maru* immigrants for links to their personal histories; to Japanese-Canadians for the contributions to community history; to Canadian academics for the story's relevance to immigration, settlement, racism, and entrepreneurship; and to Canadians as a whole for the adventure itself.

Methodology

1) Acquainting readers with the story.

Nitta Jiro's Mikkôsen Suian Maru is used to present Oikawa Jinsaburo's story for one main reason: I translated it and have published it as Phantom Immigrants. This is a

double-edged sword. On one hand I am extremely familiar with the story because I have literally read it word-for-word and was surrounded by the story while living in Oikawa's hometown during much of the process. On the other hand, I have become mixed up in the "legend" of Oikawa and might assume a background level of knowledge that the reader may not have.

There are, of course, issues related to using a translation. I am quite confident in the accuracy of the translation because I had line-by-line help from people very knowledgeable of the story and have had much positive feedback, including at least one person who has read the novel in both languages. Furthermore, the faithfulness of the translation to the original is of significance only when arguments hinge on very precise interpretations of words. There were many instances in translating where the dictionary offered "apparent" synonyms (i.e. words that are interchangeable in some contexts but not others) but this occurs often enough even when working in the same language. I have no doubt that the translation is at least as accurate regarding Oikawa's life as the original.

2) Verifying the Nitta Account

Having become so familiar with the Oikawa story, I became interested in its accuracy in portraying not only Oikawa Jinsaburo but also the surrounding historical context. This process of verification occurred in two phases: an informal phase before undertaking a more formal examination as part of this thesis. Living in Oikawa's hometown in north-east Miyagi Prefecture and being familiar with his Canadian environment of south-west British Columbia, I was able to verify some of Nitta's details by visiting locations and talking to locals. I found that the Oikawa story was little known

in even the general Japanese Canadian (let alone Canadian) population unless they had some connection to the person or the place (more so in Japan than Canada). My two articles in the Nikkei Voice elicited many personal letters that added to the story. As these informal investigations accumulated and all seemed to verify the Nitta account, I began wondering why such a seemingly accurate and significant story was little known in the broader public. This led to the formal investigation of this thesis.

Several, theoretical questions about accuracy at the level of the novel itself seemed important so I investigated them in sufficient depth to give some background to the rationale for verifying the Nitta account. One English source I found about Nitta himself was an article by the translator of another of his books who pointed out that although Nitta based his novels on extensive research and was mostly faithful to the “facts,” he had no compunctions about changing them to suit the story. This led to a brief examination of literature related to fiction and memory because the novel is obviously partly fictional and was based mostly on memoirs and personal recollections. Neither examination was exhaustive but they did give some important background.

Having established that attempting to verify the Nitta account was warranted, there were two possible approaches. One was to compare the novel’s many details and assertions against the wider literature; however the details of Nitta’s version seem so complete, the background context so rich, and the intertwining of fact and fiction so skilful, that this seemed impossible. The other approach was to gather as much historical evidence as I could about events in the novel, and see how they compared to Nitta’s account. This, too, was potentially endless if the background context were included so I decided to focus the search on Oikawa Jinsaburo himself, some of his enterprises (e.g. the

Suian Maru, Lion and Don Island), and personalities connected to him (e.g. Sato Souemon).

Because this is the story of Japanese in Canada, it seems obvious to search for materials in both Japanese and English. The biggest drawback to this was my Japanese skill; I am able to translate Japanese but it is a laborious process. I did some searches but efficiently deciding which sources were appropriate in both content and comprehension level was too time-consuming. Fortunately, several Japanese researchers besides Nitta have taken an interest in the Oikawa story and have located, compiled, and/or interpreted numerous Japanese sources.³⁴ Unfortunately, these are either privately published or printed in such small print runs that they are largely inaccessible³⁵ and are sometimes written in pre-war Japanese³⁶ and/or hand-written script and thus very difficult to decipher. There are also indications that other materials, such as diaries and letters, exist in private collections but these are difficult to locate except by chance. Over the years, I have collected several of these various Japanese sources and many were sent to me by readers of Phantom Immigrants. Nonetheless, the issue of translation remained.

I decided to limit the Japanese side of this contribution to a few documents that seemed of interest although the choice was as often dictated by chance as design. It had to be assumed that Nitta, more or less, had used his Japanese sources effectively and

³⁴ Mitsutaka Takada, *Tôki Tabiji no Koe* [Voices of a Distant Journey], (Tokyo: Asahi Publishing, 1991), 41-75; Takao Yamagata, *Ushinawareta Fukei: Nikkei Kanada Gyômin no Kisoku kara* [Forgotten Viewpoints: Recollections of Japanese Canadian Fishermen], (Tokyo: self-published, 1996); Onodera Kanichi, *Kanada e Watatta Tôhoku no Mura* [The Tôhoku Village that Crossed Over to Canada], (Towa, Miyagi: self-published, 1996).

³⁵ Nitta's Mikkôsen Suian Maru has been out of print for many years and is almost impossible to get.

³⁶ Language reforms in the last century have seen many *kanji* characters modified and writing styles changed.

accurately; a comparison would be interesting but far beyond the scope of this paper. As to the other, “new” material, I will have to be content with introducing their existence. I did do an extensive search through the twelve-volume *Kanada Iminshi Shiryô* [Historical Materials of Japanese Immigration to Canada] because it is the pinnacle of inaccessibility and it is unlikely that few could undertake it. The Japanese-language originals are located at an English-Canadian institution but the compilation was published by a Japanese publisher. The contents are reproductions of pre-war publications so the printing is sometimes illegible and many characters have changed. Some volumes have more than one publication contained within them and the collected volumes are in no particular order. There is an English translation of the tables of contents of each publication but several useful entries related to Oikawa were not included.

For the above reasons related to Japanese sources, this thesis concentrates on adding or comparing English-language, Canadian sources to the Oikawa story. A search for documents relating to Oikawa Jinsaburo, Lion Island, Don Island, and the *Suiian Maru* was undertaken at various Canadian institutions such as university and public libraries in Victoria and Vancouver, BC Archives, Richmond City Archives, UBC Asian Library, UBC Special Collections, and the Japanese Canadian Museum and Archives. Further searches were done on the Victoria and Vancouver newspapers for the months surrounding the *Suiian Maru*'s arrival (September to December 1906) for articles specific to the event or gave background about attitudes towards Japanese, Asians, and the labour situation.

The above searches located much of interest in the newspapers, government files (especially the Immigration Branch records), oral interviews, biographies, as well as in

police records, court records, and probates of wills. The importance of these documents is that Nitta did not apparently use them and they are not easily available since they are rarely indexed and names are sometimes misspelled.³⁷ Furthermore, locating much of the information in Canadian sources requires details contained in the Japanese sources, such as names, dates, and places.

It soon became apparent that there were two broad and four specific time periods for sources on Oikawa Jinsaburo. Broadly speaking, there is a post-Nitta period, where the sources seem to be largely based on his account (or my translation), and a pre-Nitta period that includes sources during the Suian Maru incident (1906), during a flurry of publishing on the Japanese in Canada that shows up in the collection noted above (1917-1924), and some interest immediately prior to Nitta in the 1970s. So many details in these sources added to, or contradicted, the Nitta account that the choice of items to feature related to how they cut across several sources or their significance to the story.

3) Problematizing and Contextualising the Treatment of the Suian Maru

The historical context that is infused into Mikkôsen Suian Maru could lead in a multitude of directions: Oikawa as representative of Japanese migrants to Canada, of the transition from the feudal Tokugawa Era to the modern Meiji Era, or of the emergence of a national and international entrepreneurial class to name just a few. The fate of the *Suian Maru* passengers was chosen because it opens debate on the whole question of Asian immigration to British Columbia and, by extension, issues of racism, domestic and international relations, and giving agency to both parties.

³⁷ For example, the official report of the Immigration Agent in Victoria is listed in the NAC and BCA as “Escape of Japanese from Schooner Swan Maru” (i.e. nothing would be found in a search for *Suian Maru*).

To ask why the *Suian Maru* passengers were allowed to stay is to proceed from the conclusion; the real question is why they were dealt with as they were. Unfortunately, no historical evidence yet answers this question indisputably so any solution is purely speculative. Therefore, the following structure was proposed: summarise the context of the arrival, examine their reception vis-à-vis the context, identify possible alternatives for their treatment, and try to justify the final outcome.

This question of their treatment as a function of the context was problematic for the sheer scope of the factors involved. Suggesting that racism was involved, for instance, could lead to infinite discussions of definitions and means of measurement, not to mention the interpretation of its effect on the *Suian Maru* incident. Likewise, suggesting that domestic political relationships in Canada (e.g. B.C. and Ottawa) and Japan (e.g. emigrant policy) as well as international politics (i.e. Canada, the Empire, and Japan) factored into the decision was to open the debate still further.

Since a complete treatment of each factor was beyond the scope of this thesis (if even possible), the goal became to demonstrate that the Oikawa story is a stepping stone for valuable discussions and debates. Possible factors included racial attitudes, legal requirements (anti-Asian legislation and passport requirements), international obligations (Anglo-Japanese Alliance), the attitudes and role of the Japanese Government and Consulate in emigration, and the role of Yoshie Saburo and the Canadian Nippon Supply Company both to immigration generally and the *Suian Maru* specifically. A variety of sources were consulted on each possible factor and an effort was made to address the issue from both the Canadian and Japanese sides. The goal was to present the facts about the arrival of the *Suian Maru* and give some interpretation of their treatment based on

various contexts. If questions are raised, and disagreement voiced about these interpretations and the sources used to reach them, the goal of demonstrating that Nitta's novel is valuable for inspiring interest and research will have been met.

Chapter 1 - The Life and Adventures of Oikawa Jinsaburo (according to Mikkôsen Suian Maru by Nitta Jiro)

Childhood

Oikawa Jinsaburo was born Onodera Ryoji in 1854 in the village of Masubuchi in north-eastern Japan.³⁸ His adventuresome ways started early and the family joke was that “the only way to be sure of his whereabouts was to tie him to a pillar in the house.”³⁹

When he was six, he met a horse-dealer at the hill-top *Batto Kannon Doh* temple complex⁴⁰ near his house who convinced him that a solitary journey to a nearby ridge would secure his future success:

At the third hour of the Ox on a moon-less 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. . . .

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 Tôhoku.⁴¹

Ryoji could not resist. Although his solitary, all-night journey ended with his succumbing to cold, hunger, and exhaustion, when the dazzling light of the brightening horizon,

³⁸Physically, Masubuchi lies a few kilometres up a narrow valley formed by a stream flowing into the Futamatagawa River which, in turn, empties into the Kitakami River about five kilometres downstream from Masubuchi and 100 kilometres upstream from its mouth. The Kitakami River is a major river in north-eastern Japan flowing several hundred kilometres and draining into Sendai Bay on the Pacific coast. It is more difficult to locate the village in human terms because the administrative boundaries changed often and dramatically even over the course of Oikawa’s life. Today it is part of the town of Towa-cho, in the county of Tome-gun, just on the Miyagi side of the prefectural boundary with Iwate.

³⁹ Nitta, 33; Sulz, 24.

⁴⁰ The *Battô Kannon* is a Buddhist deity with a horse’s-head. This particular temple was erected in about 800 A.D. to honour the site where a famous General’s horse had died.

⁴¹ Nitta, 33-34; Sulz, 25. The third hour of the Ox is about 2 a.m. Tôhoku literally means the “east-north” part of Japan; it is now made up of 6 prefectures: Aomori, Akita, Iwate, Miyagi, Yamagata, and Fukushima.

“peeking through his fingers awakened him, he saw it: the Golden Horse sweeping across the sky.”⁴² He knew that he would be successful and rich.

Ryoji’s education began with his grandfather’s lessons in calligraphy and continued with temple-school at *Kessokuji* temple where he learned reading, writing, and the abacus. Although intelligent and a quick-study, he hated the tedium of studying. When he was caught sneaking out of class one day, the priest “punished” him with a lesson on the *Batto Kannon Doh*⁴³ shrine. The priest explained that the horse symbolically represented the potential for human progress as well as freedom to explore:

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.⁴⁴

The political turmoil of the transition from “feudal” Tokugawa Era to the “modern” Meiji Era,⁴⁵ had little effect upon Ryoji’s early teenage years nor upon his hometown of Masubuchi (except for new Governors and stricter tax collection). Ryoji’s teenage years, then, were spent on family chores:

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. ... but

⁴² Nitta, 35; Sulz, 26.

⁴³ *Batto Kannon* is a Buddhist horse-head deity.

⁴⁴ Nitta, 38-39; Sulz, 27-28.

⁴⁵ There is considerable debate about the precise meanings of feudal and modern especially with respect to Japan’s transition. See texts such as E.H. Norman, *Japan’s Emergence as a Modern State* 60th Anniversary Edition (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2000) or Mikiso Hane, *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1986) for a good introduction.

[he] loathed working in the rice paddies and the fields - especially weeding.⁴⁶

Whenever reminded that he would have to get used to ordinary farm work, he replied that he had absolutely no intention of being a farmer.

Ryoji met his future first wife in 1873 when he rescued her from a fall in the river. Oikawa Uino was catching fireflies when the mass of pale, blue-green glow moved onto the bridge and surrounded her:

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 bridge⁴⁷

Uino’s father, Oikawa Eizo, a successful businessman with good connections to the *Date-han*;⁴⁸ was so impressed by the young Ryoji that he soon had him working on his barge transporting lumber and charcoal down the Kitakami river to Ishinomaki. In 1875, Ryoji (21) and Uino (16) were married and he was adopted into the heir-less Oikawa family. He also took on an ancestor’s first-name and became Oikawa Jinsaburo.

Meiji-era Entrepreneur

Over the next twenty-one years (1875-96), Oikawa Jinsaburo emerged as a successful entrepreneur and earned many nicknames; the most common was ‘Oijin’ from the first syllables of his names but he was also called, often facetiously, “new-fangled Oijin” for his interest in, and adoption of, new things and ideas. His other nicknames -

⁴⁶ Nitta, 44; Sulz, 32.

⁴⁷ Nitta, 46; Sulz, 33.

⁴⁸ *Han* refers to administrative areas set up by the *Shôgun*. The *Date-han* in southern Tôhoku (i.e. much of north-eastern Japan) was administered by the *Date* clan from their base in Sendai.

riverboat Oijin, ice-house Oijin, and silk-factory Oijin - give a condensed summary of his entrepreneurial activities in Japan.

Most of his father-in-law's transportation business was gradually entrusted to him by 1877 but he tired of the monotonous routine of trips up and down the river. On a visit to Oginohama port one summer day, he met a sailor from an ice-transporting ship en route from Hokkaidô to Tokyo and Osaka who told him:

At least a thousand places ... 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?⁴⁹

His mother lent him enough money to build an ice-house to store winter ice for summer sale in Sendai as a side-line to his other responsibilities. Stiff competition soon emerged but the Masubuchi Ice Company was a successful start to his entrepreneurial career.

Conflict with his father-in-law gradually arose over business strategies; Eizo's success was built on securing public contracts but Jinsaburo resented the gifts to, and entertainment of, supposedly impartial and upstanding officials. In 1885, Jinsaburo came across a pamphlet promoting the Meiji goals of modernisation and industrialisation. Noting that his hometown satisfied the conditions for successful silk-reeling - an environment for silk worms, pure water, water-wheel potential, and abundant fuel - he visited the Prefectural Office where he was introduced to the Governor:

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.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Nitta, 51; Sulz, 36.

⁵⁰ Nitta, 59-60; Sulz, 41.

A quick trip to the silk producing region of Suwa in Nagano Prefecture resulted in the purchase of a silk-reeling factory which he planned to finance publicly: 65% of the shares to be held by the Onodera family (his relatives by birth) and the remaining 35% to be offered to local silk farmers. Recognising the challenge in convincing conservative, country folk to invest in a risky venture, he requested an official letter from the Prefecture which stated:

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 ... the Prefecture requested [him] 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.⁵¹

By 1889, the Masubuchi Silk Reeling Company was in full-operation and the Governor made his promised visit. Jinsaburo's fame soared and others followed his example, making Miyagi Prefecture a successful silk-reeling area. Over the next decade, Jinsaburo expanded beyond silk-reeling by establishing offices in Ishinomaki and Sendai to collect and inspect raw silk from many factories to ship to Yokohama for export. His own factory had expanded to 150 workers by 1893. The increased demand and price triggered by the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, and good harvests in 1894 and 1895, brought prosperity to Jinsaburo and his hometown.

Rumours of Canada

At the annual *Batto Kannon Doh* horse festival in 1896, Jinsaburo's life changed through his dramatic rescue of a young boy about to be trampled by a runaway horse. The

⁵¹ Nitta, 61-62; Sulz, 42.

little boy's father invited Jinsaburo home and happened to mention a letter from Sato Souemon in Canada. This letter reported a river, ten times bigger than the local Kitakami River, that turned completely red every fall from salmon:

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.

Jinsaburo's entrepreneurial spirit was triggered and he excused himself immediately to visit Souemon's family in the nearby village of Nishikiori.

Jinsaburo and Souemon's father, Sato Jinuemon, had been childhood friends so Jinuemon knew something was up as soon as he arrived:

I've heard rumours that you plan to expand into the largest silk-reeling factory in Tohoku, not just Miyagi. Why would you want to give all that up and go to Canada?

To which Jinsaburo replied:

When I started the silk factory, ... nobody believed that silk-reeling could be successful... however, success breeds imitation... [and] now the market is very tight and the silk-reeling business is saturated.⁵²

Further conversation revealed that Souemon had met some sailors who offered to stow him away on a ship but his father had convinced him to have a legitimate agent in Yokohama book the passage and arrange for someone to meet him on arrival. Of course, it was common to call on family connections to ease the transition to a new place, but the fact that one could hire a non-relative to do so was intriguing to Jinsaburo; it was like a market for family ties.

⁵² Nitta, 17; Sulz, 14.

The visit also confirmed the reports of discarded salmon and roe so Jinsaburo left immediately for Yokohama to gather more information on this topic. He assumed there would be regulations in Canada against foreigners taking fish, especially if the newspaper reports about anti-Japanese immigration sentiments in the United States also applied to Canada, but he could not imagine objections to collecting the discards. At the Nagano Inn in Yokohama, he met Nakabayashi Kouemon, a fisherman from Steveston on the mouth of the Fraser River, who was a wealth of useful information. Nakabayashi confirmed that “dog” salmon were considered fit only for dogs and there were untold millions of salmon in the Fraser River. He was, however, quite negative about the entrepreneurial opportunities for Japanese:

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.⁵³

When Nakabayashi described how the canneries were built on pilings so waste parts could be dropped through holes into the river, Jinsaburo asked whether the roe was thrown out with the rest. “The hairy barbarians don’t eat salmon roe,” was the simple reply.⁵⁴

Considerable investigation into shipping goods (e.g. transportation costs, insurance, and customs regulations), turned up no obvious obstacles so Jinsaburo asked about getting himself to Canada. Although it took weeks for business permission, and months for emigration permission, it seemed the process could be expedited if one had a “convincing reason” (that is to say, “put money in the right hands”).⁵⁵

⁵³ Nitta, 25; Sulz, 20.

⁵⁴ Nitta, 25; Sulz 20.

⁵⁵ Nitta, 26-27; Sulz, 21.

On returning to Masubuchi, he announced his departure and brushed aside the considerable protest from family and shareholders alike with the explanation:

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.⁵⁶

He promised to send for his wife, Uino, and sons, Taijiro and Michie, when he settled.

Establishment as Entrepreneur in Canada

On August 8th, Meiji 29 (1896), Oikawa Jinsaburo left Yokohama aboard the American ship, *Pelican*, as a business traveller in a second-class cabin. During the long voyage, Kaburagi Goro, a Methodist pastor from Vancouver taught him the alphabet, a few simple phrases, and how to sign his name. As Jinsaburo recounted a long, self-reflective version of his life story to Kaburagi, he came to realise the grief he had caused his family in his single-minded pursuit of his own goals. However, Kaburagi reassured him:

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] the Golden Horse is not yours exclusively; the people of Yonekawa and all Japan are relying on it to come through for you.⁵⁷

During a brief stop in Victoria, Jinsaburo noticed that the breakwater looked familiar but the faces were entirely different; the few foreigners he had seen in Yokohama had been swamped in a mass of Japanese; here he was the one to be swamped.

On arrival in Vancouver, Jinsaburo checked in to a Japanese hostel on Powell Street where he was asked:

⁵⁶ Nitta, 28; Sulz, 22.

⁵⁷ Nitta, 68; Sulz, 46-47.

“What part of Japan are you from. That’s the standard greeting here, you know.”

“Miyagi,” Jinsaburo answered.

“Oh,” the man said, making no attempt to mask his disappointment.⁵⁸

Kaburagi took Jinsaburo to the Japanese Consulate to register as a businessman⁵⁹ and introduced him to Miyakawa Masutaro, a translator, who accompanied him to Steveston to see the Fraser River and visit a cannery. He was disappointed that the great masses of salmon were not immediately visible except when pulled out of the muddy water into the many fishing boats and surprised at what he considered to be overly elaborate, and unnecessarily comfortable, canneries. He was, however, elated to see the unwanted fish parts, including roe, thrown into the river through holes in the floor; collecting would be as easy as floating a small boat under the cannery and waiting for it to fill.

They visited Nakabayashi (his Yokohama informant) in Steveston where the shabbiness of the Japanese section and the unsavoury sight of men drinking alcohol during daylight hours shocked Jinsaburo. Nakabayashi was proud that sixty percent of the fishermen were Japanese and that the Japanese had built up the fishery despite being at the mercy of the fishing companies and canneries. He attributed his own success to his family being in Canada and his abstinence from drink; however, he noted:

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.⁶⁰

Having guessed at Jinsaburo’s business plans, Nakabayashi suggested a year as an

⁵⁸ Nitta, 77-78; Sulz, 52.

⁵⁹ Nitta relates that all Japanese had to register with the Consulate on arrival.

⁶⁰ Nitta, 84; Sulz, 55-56.

ordinary labourer to get a feel for life in Canada from the bottom up.

Jinsaburo worked the next several months as a fisherman, a sawmill hand, and then as a logger in the mountains. He discovered several things about the Japanese labourers: they interacted almost exclusively with people from their home prefectures who spoke the same dialect; the temptations of alcohol, gambling, and prostitution were strong; they resented sending money home despite earning many times what they could in Japan; and their success largely depended on the connections of their group and *sempai* (the older members of their group). Although Jinsaburo's age, ambition, and home prefecture made him a lonely outsider,⁶¹ this isolation allowed him to avoid temptation and focus on his goals. In April, 1897, he returned to Vancouver with only a slight change in his salmon roe plans: "first and foremost, I need to get people from my own village to work for me because the Japanese here are so insular."⁶²

Building Utopia: Sunbury to Don and Lion Islands

Many good things happened during Jinsaburo's second year in Canada. He had noticed that the ever-abundant "dog salmon" were discarded and determined that the potential for salting and exporting was great, if he could find a business partner. Conveniently, Sato Souemon showed up and they became instant partners. On deciding to find a base for their fishing operations and a refuge from the temptations of Steveston, they made a deal with a Charles J. Clark who would pay them \$75 per acre to clear cottonwoods off his land in Sunbury. He also let them keep the wood, build a house, and

⁶¹ There were few people from Miyagi Prefecture in Canada at the time.

⁶² Nitta, 90; Sulz, 59-60.

acted as their guarantor at a nearby cannery. The most difficult part of their plan was finding men from Miyagi but eventually a carpenter was found and, sometime later, two men came to see if the business was for real:

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.”⁶³

They finished the first log house in January 1898 whereupon the cannery assigned them two boats with gear and issued a certificate stating they were contracted to it.

In June, Jinsaburo used money he had brought from Japan to buy three used boats to lessen the impact of the “lease trap” whereby the cannery leased boats, gear, and homes but deducted inflated lease payments from the employees’ wages. By the opening of the fishing season, they had attracted ten inexperienced men, acquired five boats, and been assigned by the cannery to an area on the north side of the river near two small islands:

Don Island and Lion Island. The first day was a disaster right from the start:

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

“Pull them in! Pull them in!” Jinsaburo yelled angrily, seeing that the nets were already full...⁶⁴

Their training and Jinsaburo’s frantic instructions proved inadequate as one man fell overboard. As the rest of the group moved to help, they floated into a no-fishing zone and were forced to release their nets. The overboard man was rescued by two white fishermen.

⁶³ Nitta, 102; Sulz, 66.

⁶⁴ Nitta, 105; Sulz, 68.

There were no fish caught that day but Jinsaburo took home-made *sake* to the rescuers as thanks. When he offered to buy dog-salmon for a penny a piece, the surprised White fishermen asked, “Japanese eat dog salmon? Well, we just throw them back in the river so you can have them for free.”⁶⁵ Jinsaburo and Souemon salt-packed these dog-salmon to sell to cookhouses feeding Japanese labourers in the sawmills and on the railway. By September 1898, they added *sake* production to their fishing and salting businesses; clear *sake* to trade with the White fishermen for dog salmon and unfiltered *sake* with bits of floating rice for Japanese. As word of their success spread, more men (and not all from Miyagi) sought to join them; soon their three log houses were almost full and the number of workers stabilised at twenty. Knowing more manpower was needed, Jinsaburo returned to Masubuchi in December 1898 to entice fellow-villagers to join him in Canada.

Jinsaburo’s joyous, royal homecoming came crashing down when he announced there were jobs and living quarters for everyone who wanted to join him:

“Last year was really hard. The famine was so bad that some died of starvation,” Jinuemon finally said ...

“If that’s the case,” Jinsaburo thought to himself, “there will surely be many young men willing to go to Canada with me.”⁶⁶

Despite his offer and claims that they would make six times as much money in Canada, nobody could afford the sixty yen fare outright or was willing to sell land or houses to get it. There were suggestions that Jinsaburo could lend money for the fare up-front but he was only willing to do this for a brewer and cooper whose skills he felt essential. By

⁶⁵ Nitta, 106; Sulz, 69.

⁶⁶ Nitta, 109-110; Sulz, 71.

February 1899, only nine people had committed to going; Sato Jinuemon and his son Soshiro; Iwabuchi Yasuemon; Suzuki Tatsunosuke (the cooper); Saito Juro (the brewer); his own family (Uino, Taijiro, and Michie); and Oikawa Yaeno (daughter of his relative Oikawa Chusaburo and Uino's domestic helper).⁶⁷ Jinuemon's participation, based on his fears of losing his wealth to bad harvests and dying from starvation, meant that times were bad in Japan, indeed.

This trip was a permanent break from Japan for Jinsaburo in several ways. He took his immediate family to Canada and had to sell his remaining shares in the silk-reeling factory to do so because of a rift with his father-in-law. Jinsaburo had asked Eizo to countersign a loan but was refused based on his failure to send remittances from Canada. Although Jinsaburo explained his earnings were tied up in the Canadian business, Eizo stood firm, and they had no further contact. The group of ten departed for Canada in May 1899 after Jinsaburo had completed the necessary formalities in Yokohama.

Back in Canada, the cooper made casks out of the felled cottonwood trees for the brewer's *miso*, soy sauce, and *sake*. With this, Jinsaburo gained a new nickname, "raw-*sake* Oijin" although he would have preferred something like 'dog-salmon Oijin.' As for the family members, on Kaburagi's advice Michie was sent to school in Vancouver to learn English and become Christian, Taijiro stayed in the colony, and Uino and Yaeno were assigned the domestic duties that thirty men required and appreciated. Uino struggled to keep a strong outward demeanour for the sake of her husband's image but:

⁶⁷ Nitta, 113; Sulz, 74.

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.⁶⁸

In May 1900, Uino collapsed and Taijiro accompanied her back to Japan in October where she died shortly thereafter. Taijiro blamed Jinsaburo for her death and never forgave him for not going home with her.

Jinsaburo had had every intention of accompanying them but had to cancel when tensions erupted with the White fishermen over a request for Japanese fishermen to support demands for higher prices from the canneries. Jinsaburo sympathised but felt they could not survive a prolonged strike and so continued to fish:

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.⁶⁹

Because relations had always been good due to the sheer size and abundance of the river, the dispute soon ended and peace returned to Sunbury.

This external peace was disrupted by internal dissension when news of Uino's death reached the island and Jinuemon made a shocking announcement:

"[Uino] 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."⁷⁰

The men, starved for female companionship, resented this "beautiful flower" being plucked from beneath their noses; Yaeno was displeased by the lack of consultation; and

⁶⁸ Nitta, 115; Sulz, 75.

⁶⁹ Nitta, 119; Sulz, 78.

⁷⁰ Nitta, 121; Sulz, 79.

Jinsaburo himself was caught by surprise. Despite the 28-year age gap, the marriage went ahead to ease competition between the single men and also ensure her personal safety after she was almost attacked by an “amorous” visitor to the colony.

At the beginning of 1901, Mr. Clark approached them with an offer to move to uninhabited, thickly-forested Don Island:

“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.⁷¹

The move began in May with the first tasks being clearing land on Don Island, re-erecting the houses, and cultivating fields. After adding a brew-house and a big store-house, they turned their attention back to the fishing:

Among the Japanese living there, the bigger island became *Oikawa-jima* 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.’⁷²

The population remained around thirty and their accomplishments were remarkable: more buildings, continued clearing, and more docks for the ever-increasing number of boats. A platform was built on the west side of the island to gut and salt-pack the dog salmon into large casks:

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

⁷¹ Nitta, 123-124; Sulz, 80. These islands are near the north bank of the south arm of the Fraser River just downstream of Annacis Island in front of Sunbury. Don Island is the slightly bigger of the two.

⁷² Nitta 130; Sulz, 84.

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*.⁷³

As for exporting, they found that the direct route from Vancouver to Yokohama was the only way to ship salt-salmon and roe since there was too much spoilage on the longer, warmer transit via Hawaii. Later in 1901, Sato Souemeon and Miyakawa Masutaro, the two English speakers, began running collector boats for the cannery on the upper delta and also picked up dog-salmon for their own use at a penny a piece.

Jinsaburo's fame spread through the islanders to their relatives in Japan where times were still tough. In 1902, ten people (including three couples) from Yonekawa and Nishikiori arrived and Jinsaburo and Yaeno had a baby boy whom they named Eiji.⁷⁴ Business improved still more when they began exporting salt-salmon and salmon roe to Japan in earnest. The salmon roe was just as easily collected as Jinsaburo had hoped:

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.⁷⁵

In early 1903, Jinsaburo and Taijiro set up the Eibei Shokai Company⁷⁶ in Yokohama to handle exports and then returned to his hometown to recruit more people. Success in Canada and the economic conditions at home (years of famine followed by deep recession) should have worked in his favour but there was only slight success with men and none at all with women. At Uino's grave, a voice behind him said:

⁷³ Nitta, 132; Sulz, 85.

⁷⁴ The “*ei*” character means England or British, and “*ji*” means “manage” or “peacefulness.”

⁷⁵ Nitta, 134; Sulz 86.

⁷⁶ British-America Trading Company

“Poor Uino, poor, piteous Uino,” it said. “Imagine, going all the way to America only to be murdered. ... No doubt Yaeno will be back, too. ... She’ll come back sick and she’ll die, too. Just like Uino.”⁷⁷

Uino’s death, apparently, was the reason for the reluctance of the women.

As for the men, a lack of money and rumours that Jinsaburo was so desperate he would eventually pay the fares himself made them hesitate. Therefore, Jinsaburo sponsored three men, a carpenter, a blacksmith, and a mechanic, and leaked his own rumours about giving up and leaving. Several men came forward willing to pay their own way; however, they reneged because of an unofficial policy preventing military-aged men from leaving country due to rumours that Japan was preparing for war with Russia. A telegram announcing a fire on *Oikawa-jima* hastened his departure.

He returned in April, 1903 to find the combined dining, meeting, and leisure hall destroyed during a late-night drinking party that had broken the no-drinking-after-9-rule.

Furthermore, Jinuemon made an unexpected demand:

“... 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?”⁷⁸

Because Souemon considered himself more an apprentice than a partner, they easily agreed on an amicable split, as summarised by Jinsaburo:

We may be splitting Lion Island into *Oikawa-jima* and *Sato-jima* but there will be no animosity or quarrelling. Agreed? ... *Sato-jima* 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.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Nitta, 137; Sulz, 88.

⁷⁸ Nitta, 141; Sulz, 90.

⁷⁹ Nitta, 142-143; Sulz, 91.

Fifteen people and five boats moved to this new, *Sato-jima* on Lion Island. The population of Don or *Oikawa-jima*⁸⁰ quickly rebounded to forty when the three tradesmen and five unexpected others who had made their own arrangements arrived in the summer.

All the businesses prospered from 1903 to 1905 and a small steam boat was added to transport goods along the river. A baby girl joined the Oikawa family in 1904; they named her Shima, meaning island. She and Eiji (3) lived on the island; Taijiro was in Yokohama and Michie (19) planned on attending university after finishing English school in Vancouver.

The Suian Maru Escapade

Jinsaburo's recruitment plans in Japan stalled with tightened conscription and emigration laws to retain potential soldiers during the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 but resumed quickly with peace in May 1905. Kaburagi introduced him to Yoshie Saburo, a clerk at the Japanese Consulate in Vancouver with much useful information about the immigration situation:

The [Canadian] 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.⁸¹

Despite these congruent goals, the increasing anti-Asian sentiments of White labourers in Canada and the Japanese government's fear of continuing hostility with Russia had

⁸⁰ Confusingly, the two-island group is often referred to as Lion Island or *Raion-jima*.

⁸¹ Nitta, 147; Sulz, 94.

resulted in an agreement to limit migrants.⁸² Nonetheless, Jinsaburo planned to bring a hundred of his villagers to Canada aboard a chartered ship disguised as fishermen. As Jinsaburo explained:

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.⁸³

Yoshie suggested that the Consulate would probably help and that the adventure would surely warrant special mention in the history of immigration. Furthermore, he mentioned that Kaburagi had similar plans for a Japanese settlement on the Queen Charlotte Islands centred around a Methodist church.

Jinsaburo spent the next several months planning with Yoshie and Kaburagi as well as collecting maps and charts of Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlotte Islands; among his own people, Jinsaburo only discussed plans with Souemon. As his plans took shape, Jinsaburo decided (or was convinced by Yoshie) to recruit from Wakayama, Hiroshima, and Shiga prefectures in collaboration with the Hiroshima Overseas Development Agency.

In 1905, Jinsaburo went to Japan to arrange this “fishing” operation by chartering a 200 tonne ship, the *Dainomaru*, and setting a fare of 130 yen per passenger. Recruiting one hundred men and preparing to sail took little time but a loose-lipped braggart overheard in a local bar resulted in Jinsaburo and the Captain being arrested on the very

⁸² The official Gentlemen’s Agreement was not signed until December 1907 so it is unclear to which agreement Nitta refers.

⁸³Nitta, 149; Sulz, 95.

evening of departure. The case was dismissed from court because all their papers were in order but the venture ultimately failed because the accountant disappeared with the money and the Captain with the ship; Jinsaburo and the company were left to cover the refunds. Adding insult to injury, the newspapers portrayed Jinsaburo as a swindler.

In April 1906, Jinsaburo returned to his hometown of Masubuchi to find that the Russo-Japanese War and successive bad harvests in 1904 and 1905 had taken their toll:

Most farming families were out of food and had to dip into their seed rice just to survive. In April [1906], 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 ... but food, not money, was the problem.⁸⁴

Despite knowledge of the *Daimomaru* affair, there was considerable interest in Jinsaburo's new plan to smuggle people from his hometown out of Japan disguised as fishermen for 100 yen each. Given his role in the success of their fellow villagers in Canada, few believed he could be the swindler reported in the newspapers. Before long, eighty-two people from middle- to upper-class families raised the fare by selling assets such as forest plots or rice paddies. Most were in their 20s and 30s but sixteen were over forty and five were under twenty. Goto Kimpei, the boy Jinsaburo had rescued from the runaway horse, was the youngest at eighteen.

When the money was collected, Jinsaburo left to charter a boat and made plans to sail by the middle of July from Oginohama port near Ishinomaki. Because of the *Dainomaru* incident, secrecy was paramount:

⁸⁴ Nitta, 154; Sulz, 99.

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.⁸⁵

July came and went with no word; rumours of Jinsaburo the swindler began to circulate.

He finally returned at the beginning of August and called a pre-departure meeting where he told the emigrants:

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 ...

You are all second and third sons. I chose you specifically to build a new Yonekawa in Canada. ... 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...

You are the pioneers, the leading spirits. Others from our village will follow you when they hear of your success.⁸⁶

To avoid suspicion, the travellers independently went to various inns in Ishinomaki and told the curious that they were on a pilgrimage to *Kinkasan* Island.⁸⁷ The departure was slightly delayed so several men returned home for the militia roll call but, finally, the *Suian Maru* set sail from Oginohama Port at 7:30 a.m. on 31 August 1906.

The men were surprised to discover three women on board (a passenger's wife and two relatives of Jinsaburo) but their presence was calming and indicated that Canada must not be so dangerous. The contingent numbered:

Forty-five from Yonekawa, ten from Maiya, eleven from Uwanuma, two from Takarae, two from Asamizu, and one from Nishikiori for a total of

⁸⁵ Nitta, 158; Sulz, 100-101.

⁸⁶ Nitta, 161; Sulz, 103.

⁸⁷ A famous, sacred island near Ishinomaki. *Kinkasan* coincidentally means "Gold Mountain"; the name the Chinese (and Japanese) used in referring to North America.

seventy-one from Tome-county. In addition, there [were] three from elsewhere in Miyagi, three from Iwate, and five from Kanagawa.⁸⁸

Jinsaburo assigned everyone to various tasks such as mess, infirmary, sanitation, and cabin detail and gave specific tasks to Goto Kimpei (calendar) and Goto Bunji (ship's diary).

On hitting open water, the ship began pitching and rolling so everyone rushed for the hold. The *Suian Maru* was a cargo ship with no cabins below deck so straw matting was laid between the pillars with bedding on top. After the initial bout of seasickness for these mountain farmers, the first few weeks were uneventful; good weather and fresh fish to eat. There were strict rules against drinking *sake* but Goto Kimpei sang folksongs to ease the tension. Near the Aleutian Islands, the temperature dropped dramatically and the wind picked up into a huge storm on September 16th:

Buckets full of vomit slid and rolled back and forth amongst the passengers Occasionally a prayer-chant of '*Namu Amida Butsu*' rose above the din ... as the men became convinced that their time on earth had run out in this small, noisy, rank cabin.⁸⁹

The excitement of the first storm quickly wore off and life on the ship settled into routine boredom. The carpenters took on little projects such as building partitions between the pillars and boxes for the vomit pails. There were games - *shogi*, *go*, and cards - but gambling was strictly forbidden. A study group was formed to learn the English alphabet.

A month into the voyage, they sighted land, but several factors prolonged the journey. The entrance to Juan de Fuca Strait is extremely difficult to locate, especially in the fog and wind, and the ship became too light to steer as the food and water stocks were

⁸⁸ Nitta, 166; Sulz, 106.

⁸⁹ Nitta, 174; Sulz, 107.

used up. Although sea water scooped into the hold as ballast solved this, Jinsaburo suddenly decided to head for the mostly uninhabited, resource-rich Queen Charlotte Islands. A short argument ensued with the Captain insisting the contract was to land at Beecher Bay just east of Victoria but they changed course anyway.

Seven rough days later, they reached their new destination but found nowhere to land and so turned around. Approaching Vancouver Island again on October 17th, a favourable wind allowed them to follow another schooner into the Strait. At two a.m., they dropped anchor about five miles east of Victoria. The Captain suggested they land there but Jinsaburo insisted they return to Beecher Bay, which they had overshot. At 10 a.m. on October 19th, 1906 the *Suian Maru* anchored in Beecher Bay, fifty days after leaving Japan. Jinsaburo distributed surplus army clothes, boots, and biscuits. He then formed three, 16-member “overland” groups who were to head north on foot until they came to a railway that would lead them to Sidney. A fourth, 17-member group was to follow the coastline to Sidney in a lifeboat. The remaining seventeen and Jinsaburo stayed with the *Suian Maru* posing as fishermen. Jinsaburo, with a proper passport, would land quickly and send a telegram to Souemon to come across and pick up the new arrivals.

Four lifeboats slipped from the side of the *Suian Maru* into the blackness of night on 19 October 1906 with three landing on a shallow sandy beach at the bottom of a cliff. With daylight, these men found apples in an orchard and mushrooms in the forest which were a welcome treat. There were many adventures and discoveries along the way to Sidney: the sight of a white woman with long blond hair on a bicycle, an offer of employment by a farmer, yellow autumn leaves so unlike the red of Japan, and high-nosed, dark-skinned labourers wearing white coverings on their heads. Increasing

familiarity, fatigue, and hunger quickly led to less concern about lighting fires at night and walking along the road; however, Jinsaburo's warning stuck with them:

“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.”⁹⁰

They were all eventually apprehended by the authorities.

Although some were caught barely hours after landing, the last few were finally caught six days later in Sidney. Capture brought relief to this last group:

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...there were twenty-six of them in the car.⁹¹

On arriving in Victoria, they saw the foreign architecture, fashion, and people for the first time. Children stared curiously but adults averted their eyes. An ill-dressed man with a shaggy, red beard confronted them and vehemently spat out the word “Jap” which they had learned was derogatory. Their status as captured criminals suddenly hit them.

They were taken to a large, warehouse-like building on a deserted side street where they were gestured to wash up and eat. Confusion reigned. Were they prisoners? Would they be deported? Or were they to be released? After a wonderful dinner, they slept in bunkbeds with blankets, and were given another delicious meal for breakfast. There was no sign of the other fifty-six *Suian Maru* immigrants so discussion raged:

“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.”

⁹⁰ Nitta, 196; Sulz, 125.

⁹¹ Nitta, 197; Sulz, 126.

“...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....”⁹²

Nevertheless, they were as polite and well-behaved as possible, just in case.

After breakfast, they were taken to a building filled with steam, clanking metal, and the smell of chemicals. In a brightly lit room, they were made to strip naked and place their clothes in metal boxes:

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 ...

Kimpei figured that it was a poisonous shower and he would soon die from it ... [but he soon] 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.⁹³

A medical check followed and the still-hot metal boxes with their steam-sterilised clothes were returned. A gasoline launch took them to the naval base in Esquimalt where they were re-united with the whole party aboard the *Suian Maru*. Although they learned that everyone had been captured and put through the same procedures, there was little interest in each other’s adventures; despair hung in the air.

Before long, the whole group was summoned on deck where Jinsaburo introduced Yoshie Saburo from the Japanese Consulate who reprimanded them for their ill-advised and insolent actions in trying to smuggle themselves into Canada. His tone then softened:

“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

⁹² Nitta, 200; Sulz, 128.

⁹³ Nitta, 201-202; Sulz, 129.

about the last group of twenty-six whose whereabouts were completely unknown for five days.”⁹⁴

Finally, some indication of their future was given:

“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.”⁹⁵

With this good news, everyone’s spirits lifted and the adventure stories flew. When all stories had been told and compared, the following details emerged:

The morning after the overland and sea-borne groups left the ship, the *Suian 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 police boarded and searched the *Suian 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 *Suian 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 ...

The sea-borne 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.

Finally, on the sixth day, the remaining Japanese were found wandering near Sidney ...⁹⁶

After several interminable days of worry and doubt among the immigrants, Yoshie returned to announce that despite extensive newspaper coverage and some indications of

⁹⁴ Nitta, 204-205; Sulz, 131.

⁹⁵ Nitta, 205; Sulz, 131.

⁹⁶ Nitta, 206; Sulz, 132.

outrage at this supposedly first attempt at immigrant smuggling in Canada, the *Suian Maru* passengers had been granted permission to stay and would receive legal passports. Furthermore, he was clear in ascribing credit for the happy outcome to Consul-General Morikawa Rishiro, whose duty it was 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.⁹⁷

The Captain of the *Suian Maru*, Nishikiori Moritaro, was fined \$3,075 for putting immigrants ashore illegally and allowing them to take baggage not cleared by customs. This worked out to \$37 for each of the 83 passengers. The Nikka Yôben Company in Vancouver agreed to cover the fine until the immigrants found work.

Years of Struggle and Death

On 3 November 1906, after a year and a half away, Jinsaburo returned to Oikawa-*jima* to find everything running smoothly. One-third of the island was cleared for fields and there were several new buildings. The account books showed that production and sales of both polished and fermented rice were up although salt-salmon exports were down because of competition for orders and for fish. Jinsaburo was surrounded by talent: Souemon's good business proved him more than just agent and translator; Miyakawa was diligent, loyal, and could smooth relations with the local foreigners [i.e. Canadians] but had little ambition; and Yaeno's accounting skills were invaluable.

⁹⁷ Nitta, 208; Sulz, 133.

On 5 November 1906, Jinsaburo hosted a party for the *Suian Maru* passengers:

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. ... 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.⁹⁸

The "variety of reasons" referred to the deal the Consulate, the Nikka Yôben Company, and the Canadian Immigration office had negotiated stipulating the *Suian Maru* men would work at least one year on the railroad in exchange for permission to stay. Iwabuchi Yasuemon, who had come to Canada with Jinsaburo in 1898, gave the following advice:

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.⁹⁹

The *Suian Maru* men were understandably worried about their debts as the original fare, the fines, and the clothes, bedding, and lodging forwarded by the Nikka Yôben Company amounted to about \$130 or 260 yen each. This was more than a lifetime of work in Japan but they did receive the promised \$1.50 per day and were able to save considerable amounts once the novelty of having such money wore off. After their obligatory year on the railway, some chose to work on Oikawa-*jima* but many continued with the railway or found other jobs. Most of them probably visited the colony when they were passing through.

Nothing further came of the *Suian Maru* incident for Jinsaburo once the fine was paid. The *Suian Maru* itself was loaded with salt-salmon from Oikawa-*jima* for export to

⁹⁸ Nitta, 220; Sulz, 142.

⁹⁹ Nitta, 221; Sulz, 142.

Japan. Jinsaburo's interest in immigration continued and his meetings with Kaburagi and Yoshie often led to discussions on immigration and discrimination. Yoshie advocated enticing more Japanese immigrants to Canada to demonstrate their value and excellence while Kaburagi argued for better assimilation of those already in Canada:

We Japanese are discriminated against [because] 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.¹⁰⁰

Jinsaburo's solution was a combination; take many new immigrants to the Queen Charlotte Islands and build a church-centred-society there.

Despite his enthusiasm, Jinsaburo was torn. The Lion Island colony was reaching its limits but leaving all their hard work behind would be a waste; leaving it in the care of someone else would mean starting anew. The problems were compounded by the growing tide of anti-Japanese sentiment filtering across the border from the United States.

Although labour organisations claimed the sentiment was purely economic (low wage labour stealing jobs), others like Yoshie saw it as racism. Given such sentiments, Jinsaburo decided to get as many Japanese to Canada while still possible.

Yoshie introduced Jinsaburo to Mr. Ozaki, of the Nikka Yôben Company, who was grateful to Jinsaburo and the *Suian Maru* passengers for raising his company's profile as a labour contractor with the C.P.R. The purpose of the meeting was for Mr. Ozaki to suggest a plan to bring more immigrants:

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.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Nitta, 231; Sulz, 149.

¹⁰¹ Nitta, 234; Sulz, 150.

In July 1907, Jinsaburo went to the Queen Charlottes, found them practically devoid of settlement, and then went to Yokohama to meet Taijiro and start the Japan Trust Company as a travel agency. Recruiting in Yonekawa for legal emigration was easier this time because of the *Suian Maru* success and the substantial amounts of money being remitted. Unfortunately, the September 1907 Vancouver riot foiled his plans.

The violence that emerged in Chinatown and Powell Street from the “peaceful” Asiatic Exclusion League rally on Saturday, September 7th exacerbated public opinion. Newspapers ran stories on the martial tendencies of the Japanese but made little mention of the riot’s White instigators. The Japanese community received compensation for property damages from the Canadian government who then:

Pressured the Japanese Government to sign the Lemieux Agreement limiting the number of Japanese immigrants to four hundred a year ... Within the Agreement, however, was a provision that Japanese already in Canada would get preference in sponsoring relatives to immigrate.¹⁰²

Jinsaburo was still able to sponsor fifty people in 1908 and another thirty in 1910.

Still thinking of a Utopian colony on the Queen Charlotte Islands, but with few potential emigrants left in his hometown, Jinsaburo asked Yoshie to approach Mr. Ozaki about reviving their 1907 plan. Yoshie noted that the Lemieux Agreement made that deal impossible; Jinsaburo’s plan, however, was another operation like the *Suian Maru* but with five-hundred people. Within a week, the Consul-General summoned Jinsaburo and advised him that, “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” and that his plans would “result in a serious diplomatic incident

¹⁰² Nitta, 241; Sulz, 155.

between Japan and Canada and there is no guarantee that we could protect you from being deported.¹⁰³ The Consul-General indicated that he personally considered the Lemieux Agreement regrettable but emphasised that the Japanese Government was taking all steps to prevent immigrants from leaving Japan illegally.

Yoshie later explained that Mr. Ozaki had approached his contact in the C.P.R. who, in turn, had contacted the Immigration Department. Although the Lemieux Agreement had apparently been implemented against the wishes of business and the Immigration Department itself, the C.P.R. contact had unfortunately approached the government official who most rigidly adhered to the letter of the law and brought the matter to the Consul-General.

This failure encouraged Jinsaburo to concentrate on the Lion Island colony again. A perimeter dyke was built to prevent flooding and farming talents were revived to cultivate vegetables like cabbages, carrots, *hakusai* (sui choy or Chinese cabbage), pumpkin squash, and *daikon* (horseradish); Jinsaburo's *takuan* (pickled *daikon*) became famous. By 1911, the population fluctuated between seventy and one hundred depending on the season with several floating raft-houses connected to the land by cables.

The spring of 1912 was the beginning of the end for Oikawa Jinsaburo and his dreams in Canada. His son, Michie, recently graduated from university and working in Toronto, informed him that he would not return to the island; although proud of his son's accomplishments, Jinsaburo was disappointed. Tragedy struck in June when 10-year-old Eiji drowned in the Fraser River:

¹⁰³ Nitta, 245; Sulz, 157.

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....¹⁰⁴

Except for one thrilling incident in 1914 when Jinsaburo faced down a pistol-waving fishermen encroaching on their fishing grounds, Jinsaburo and the colony struggled by on the hard work of the islanders and their excellent reputation. The economy went bad with the outbreak of World War I and competition for salt-salmon exports increased; the only income came from the rice polishing and the fishing season.

Return to Japan

In 1916, Jinsaburo decided that Taijiro would take over the colony so he could return to Japan. Although the decision was a shock, he explained to Kaburagi:

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. ... As long as I can see that Fraser River, Eiji's ghost won't disappear.¹⁰⁵

Taijiro, then thirty-eight, had no trouble entering Canada in 1916 as a former resident and member of Jinsaburo's immediate family; he became master and Jinsaburo became 'Old Oijin' or 'grand master.' There was a grand farewell party in April 1917 where people thanked him from the depths 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."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Nitta, 258; Sulz, 165.

¹⁰⁵ Nitta, 269; Sulz, 171.

¹⁰⁶ Nitta, 276-277; Sulz, 175.

The most eloquent and understanding praise came from Kaburagi, who had met Jinsaburo on his first voyage to Canada:

Your heart carried the Golden Horse across the ocean and it has settled here.
... You have planted the seeds for many futures. You are a great pioneer.¹⁰⁷

Jinsaburo's return to Yonekawa was discouraging; most of their property had been lost when the silk-reeling factory went bankrupt and the loan he had co-signed to expand it was called in. The factory had been dismantled and most of the forest plots and rice paddies sold; only the house and yard remained. Some friends offered him a house in Kakeyama (near Ishinomaki) where he made *tsukudani*¹⁰⁸ out of fresh water shrimp from Hirobuchi swamp. Before long, he envisioned reclaiming the swamp to make rice paddies and went about measuring the swamp and drawing up plans. His ever-prudent wife, Yaeno, opened a small shop which she called "Amerika-ya."

In 1919, Jinsaburo took his maps and plans to the Prefectural Office in Sendai where they were admired but rejected as there were detailed plans already in progress. In monetary desperation in 1921, Jinsaburo wrote to people on Oikawa-*jima* who owed him about \$200 in all but received only a reprimand from Taijiro for insulting the recipients and making him lose face as Jinsaburo's successor.

In the spring of 1922, Iwabuchi Yasuemon visited with news of the islands:

People have been drifting away from Lion-*jima* ever since you left. I figure there will be nobody left in two or three years... When you and Sajin (Sato Jinuemon) both left one after the other, it was as if the islanders lost their anchors.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Nitta, 276-277; Sulz, 175.

¹⁰⁸ Snacks with a thick, soy-flavoured sauce

¹⁰⁹ Nitta, 304-305; Sulz, 191-192.

Many islanders had moved to shore so their children could attend school. Once on shore, they became part of the community by adopting White culture; just as Jinsaburo had encouraged. Yasuemon noted that he had tried to count all the people whom Jinsaburo had helped go to Canada, “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.”¹¹⁰

Taijiro returned to Japan in 1924 and reported that the last of the Lion Island Japanese had left the island. In 1925, Jinsaburo slipped while cutting ice from a pond and suffered a mild stroke. Perhaps this glimpse of his mortality impelled him to begin writing his memoirs which he worked on intently until April 4th, 1927 when, at the age of seventy-three, he passed away. As the village history describes:

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....

(from The History of Yonekawa Village, Tome County)¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Nitta, 306; Sulz, 192.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Nitta, 310; Sulz, 194.

Chapter 2 - Verifying the Nitta Account

There is little doubt that Oikawa Jinsaburo was a real person, a businessman, who came to Canada around the turn of the twentieth century; operated around Sunbury, Lion Island, and Don Island with family members and others from his hometown; made several trips back and forth to Japan; was involved in immigration including the *Suian Maru* incident; and returned to Japan where he died. Most evidence indicates that Mikkôusen Suian Maru by Nitta Jiro is largely accurate and based on verifiable facts. However, details and sources unused by Nitta complicate the Oikawa legend; some add details that are consistent but others suggest inconsistencies or contradictions that make the “complete” story of Oikawa more elusive and fascinating.

This chapter will introduce some of these new, pre-Nitta sources from three eras: 1970s, 1920s, and contemporary to the events. First, it will touch on some of the evidence that either supports the Nitta account or adds consistent details to events other than the *Suian Maru* incident. Then, a few of the more interesting (and glaring) omissions and contradictions will be introduced. Finally, some of the rich documentation and sources surrounding the *Suian Maru* affair in newspaper accounts and official records will be presented to substantially add to Nitta’s portrayal.

Verification

In establishing that Oikawa existed, a database of official documents lists an Oikawa Jinsaburo (or Jinzaburo) as a merchant from Miyagi Prefecture who received tickets from Japan to Canada in 1900 (at 45 years of age), 1904 (at 49 years of age) and

1913 (at 59 years of age).¹¹² Canadian documents in the same database show him as a returning immigrant at Vancouver in June 1913 aboard the *Empress of India* having left in January aboard the *Canada Maru*; he was 59 years of age, self-employed, and with an address and destination of Lion Island.¹¹³ A different official record has him arriving back in Canada in March 1904 aboard the *Empress of India*; he was granted entry because he had a passport (no. 54096) and was a “former resident. Lion Island... Fraser River.”¹¹⁴

In 1973, several years before Nitta’s research, Buck Suzuki, a Fraser River Japanese fisherman, was interviewed about the Japanese around Lulu Island.¹¹⁵ His father was one of the *Suian Maru* passengers and he tells about an Oikawa and Sato from north-east Japan who were “bosses or representatives or spokesmen for the fishermen” around Don Island. He describes the Don Island colony as very primitive but happy; the soil was good, the community was tight-knit and supportive, and there was even the “occasional group of entertainers” from Japan every year or so. As for Oikawa Jinsaburo:

He had great ideas and started a winery and he brought in experts from Japan, he bought a big supply of rice, he put in a special steam engine for steaming rice in large quantities, he had huge barrels for the rice ... his idea was to make some money other than from fishing by selling this wine to people in Vancouver and New Westminster. It just so happened that the rival party got a sniff of it, notified the authorities ... [who] came over there with axes ... the little creek that flows through Don Island was running pure sake, it was a shame.

¹¹² JCNMA, Audrey Kobayashi, Issei Life Histories: An Interactive Data Base on Japanese-Canadian History, 1992, [Japan 7799], [Japan 9086], [Japan 17358].

¹¹³ JCNMA, Kobayashi, Issei Life Histories, [Return 1693].

¹¹⁴ BCA, British Columbia Provincial Secretary, Record of Japanese and East Indians Entering British Columbia, 1904-1905 and 1908, GR0618, p. 14-15, 1 Mar. 1904.

¹¹⁵ RCA, Oral History Collection, tape 31, side 1, Buck Suzuki Interview, 26 Apr. 1973. The printed summary makes no reference to Oikawa Jinsaburo or the *Suian Maru* but the tape itself is full of details although very difficult to hear. Lulu Island is a large island right at the mouth of the Fraser; Richmond and Steveston are on it.

There are a few minor discrepancies between Suzuki's telling and Nitta's version but, overall, Suzuki's story confirms and adds details more than it elicits questions. There are no indications that Nitta talked with Suzuki although he apparently knew of him.¹¹⁶

Older sources in the Historical Materials of Japanese Immigration to Canada¹¹⁷ also support the existence of Oikawa Jinsaburo. One entry locates his "sphere of influence" as the Fraser River and describes him as "hail[ing] from Miyagi Prefecture and is now respected as an elder statesman among the Japanese in Canada."¹¹⁸ Another entry, a detailed biography of Jinsaburo and his sons, establishes that he came from Yonekawa village to the Fraser River and established a community on Lion Island which cultivated "carrots, *gobo* (burdock root), *daikon* (radish), and onions" and participated in the fishing industry. Although it does not mention Sato Souemon by name, it does report the Sato family as advisors and partners.¹¹⁹ When this biography was published in 1921, Jinsaburo

¹¹⁶ Nitta, 325-326; Sulz, 207-208.

¹¹⁷ Locating references in this collection is tricky. The twelve volume set is a collection of Japanese language sources published in Canada in the first half of the 1900s. As there seems to be discrepancies in cataloguing, I reference both the original and the modern collection. In some cases there is a transcription into modern Japanese that is much easier to read so I include this reference as well.

¹¹⁸ "Oikawa Jinsaburo and the Immigration Incident (Oct. 26, 1906)," in Jinshiro Nakayama, ed. Kanada Dôhō Hatten Taikan: Zen [Encyclopaedia of the Japanese in Canada: Complete], (Tokyo: Japan Times, 1921), 1893, in Toshiji Sasaki and Tsuneharu Gonnami, eds, Kanada Iminshi Shiryô [Historical Materials of Japanese Immigration to Canada] vol. 8 (Tokyo: Fuji Publishing, 2000), 1893. Interpretation and English quotes based on my own translation.

¹¹⁹ "Portraits of the Japanese in Canada - Miyagi - Oikawa Jinsaburo, Taijiro, and Michie," in Jinshiro Nakayama, Kanada Dôhō Hatten Taikan: Furoku [Encyclopaedia of the Japanese in Canada: Supplement], (Vancouver: Jinshiro Nakayama, 1921), 236 - 240, in Toshiji Sasaki, ed., Kanada Iminshi Shiryô [Historical Materials of Japanese Immigration to Canada] vol. 2 (Tokyo: Fuji Publishing, 1995), 272-275. Transcribed into modern Japanese in Kanichi Onodera, Kanada e Watatta Tôhoku no Mura, [The Tôhoku Village that Crossed over to Canada] (Towa-cho, Japan: self-published, 1996), 371-375. Interpretation and English quotes based on my own translation.

had already returned to Japan and Taijiro had taken over managing the businesses in Canada.

This article also expands upon the importance of Oikawa to the Japanese community. It predicts that Jinsaburo will be known as “the pioneer in the establishment of this new rice milling industry” and asserts that although he “should not be exempt from the occasional criticism for recklessness,” his efforts and risky adventures surely saved many people “from the depths of an eternal Hell” (presumably referring to their prospects in an isolated hometown wracked by famine). In conclusion, it contends that Oikawa and his two sons showed:

Consistent reliability, far-reaching administrative ability, superior vision and judgement and a strength of spirit the likes of which would not be found among the 10,000 odd Japanese in Canada no matter how far one searched.

Anomalies

While there is little doubt about the existence of Oikawa Jinsaburo and his many adventures, some historical sources contradict the Nitta account and expose omissions that have the potential to alter the story significantly. The following section introduces issues surrounding the 1901 census, Nobuo Chiyoharu,¹²⁰ Sato Souemon, the Ewen Cannery, Taijiro and Michie, and Yoshie Saburo, not to negate the value of Nitta’s version but to demonstrate that there is still more of this fascinating story to investigate.

The census is often a good source for confirming identities and locations of historical figures. Fortunately, there was a Dominion census in 1901 that coincided quite closely with the Oikawa/Sato colony’s move from Sunbury to Don and Lion Islands. A

¹²⁰ Or possibly Chiyoji.

scan of all the likely sub-districts in the area (Delta, Dewdney, New Westminster, and Richmond) even revealed a likely cluster of twelve people in two households in the Delta area.¹²¹ While the surnames are typical of Oikawa's home area and later show up on the *Suian Maru's* passenger list in 1906, the given names are unfamiliar to the Nitta account and, indeed, Oikawa Jinsaburo and Sato Souemon do not show up at all. Explanations are many but there is no certainty. It could be this is the wrong location, but there are no other incidences of names such as Oikawa, Sato, Abe, or Kumagai in other places. Perhaps they were away at the time of the enumerator's visit, but the details on all household members was collected whether present or not. Maybe insufficient care was taken in copying the names, but every name is a legitimate Japanese name spelled correctly. Possibly, part of the group had already moved to the islands, but several other small islands show up in the census and there was a large cannery on Lion Island. Also, it could be that the Japanese gave incorrect information to the enumerator or that Nitta had changed names in his novel.

In contrast to this mystery of expected people going "missing" is a situation where an unexpected person appears. The biography of Jinsaburo and his sons in the Historical Materials of Japanese Immigration to Canada¹²² has a vague line that could suggest either that members of the Sato family were Jinsaburo's trusted advisors or that another character, Nobuo, was also an advisor.¹²³ Although Nobuo is almost unknown as a

¹²¹ Sato Sojiro, Kumagai Jinjiro, Uwamoto Jukichi, Ujye Gentaro, Maruyama Kumonosuke (?), Oikawa Shokichi and Abe Bujiro, Sato Jisuke, Shimidai (?) Hajime, Oikawa Gisutsu, Naihara Kimi, Suto Tachigoro

¹²² "Portraits ... Oikawa," in Nakayama, *Kanada Dôhō Hatten Taikan: Furoku*, 236; Sasaki, *Kanada Iminshi Shiryô*, 272; Onodera, *Kanada e Watatta Tohoku no Mura*, 372.

¹²³ This arises from a *kanji* combination that could be read "*shinfu*" or "*Nobuo*"; the former meaning "trusted man" or "advisor" and the latter being a name.

surname,¹²⁴ a further search of the Historical Materials turns up a biography for a Nobuo Chiyoharu:

Hailing from Ishimori-village, Tome-county, Miyagi-prefecture, he graduated from the National English Institute. As Oikawa Jinsaburo's interpreter, he came over to Vancouver in Meiji 34 [1901] and lived in New Westminster.¹²⁵

This Nobuo later severed ties with Jinsaburo to go out on his own as a labour contractor and land speculator amassing (and losing) a great fortune before moving to California.

Although Nitta's version never mentions a Nobuo,¹²⁶ the character of Miyakawa Masutaro appears as Jinsaburo's interpreter, albeit with some big differences. For example, while Nobuo came to Canada as Jinsaburo's interpreter and later struck off on his own, Miyakawa was already in Canada and stayed with Jinsaburo until the return to Japan in 1917. Most significantly, where Nobuo was ambitious and well-educated, Miyakawa was portrayed as a loyal, unambitious follower:

He 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.¹²⁷

Whether Nitta was unaware of Nobuo, or consciously changed his character to fit the novel, would be an interesting subject of speculation and further research.

¹²⁴ Personal experience, discussions with Japanese speakers, and P.G. O'Neill, Japanese Names: A Comprehensive Index by Characters and Readings, (New York: Weatherhill, 1972), 85.

¹²⁵ "Portraits of the Japanese in Canada - Miyagi - Nobuo Chiyoharu," in Nakayama, Kanada Dôhō Hatten Taikan: Furoku, 338; Sasaki, Kanada Iminshi Shiryô, 338.

¹²⁶ Nor do any other sources, interestingly enough.

¹²⁷ Nitta, 218; Sulz, 141.

Where the Nobuo connection was either totally missed or significantly altered, there are indications that the partnership with Sato Souemon was perhaps overdone in the Nitta account. Buck Suzuki's interview in 1973, based on memories of his father's stories, gives one indication of this:

There was some very bitter rivalry between the two leaders and one leader whose name was Sato apparently had a larger number of fishermen than the other man who was known as Oikawa.¹²⁸

Contrary to this claim for a rivalry are some excerpts from Sato Souemon's recollections that do support a partnership. Souemon recalls Jinsaburo with respect "as a great entrepreneur, a pioneer in Canada, and my own benefactor"¹²⁹ and remembers:

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.¹³⁰

However, there are potential issues with this translation due to the character of the Japanese language in the omission of pronouns. Given a context of rivalry rather than partnership and noting that Souemon's recollection is actually titled "About Oikawa Jinsaburo," it is legitimate to read the "we" as "he" (i.e. He moved over ... after his fourth year). Adding further complexity is a notable difference between the Oikawa and Sato biographies;¹³¹ the first mentions the Sato family as Oikawa's advisors and consultants but there is no mention of Oikawa in the entries for Sato Souemon or Sato

¹²⁸ RCA, Buck Suzuki interview.

¹²⁹ From Sato Souemon's Recollections, quoted in Nitta, 278; Sulz, 176.

¹³⁰ Nitta, 127; Sulz, 82.

¹³¹ "Portraits ... Oikawa" Nakayama, *Kanada Dôhō Hatten Taikan: Furoku*, 236-240; Sasaki, *Kanada Iminshi Shiryô*, 272-275; Onodera, *Kanada e Watatta Tohoku no Mura*, 371-375. And "Portraits ... Sato Souemon," in Nakayama, *Kanada Dôhō Hatten Taikan: Furoku*, 241-243; Sasaki, *Kanada Iminshi Shiryô*, 277-279.

Sôshiro. Furthermore, Souemon is reported as coming to Canada in Meiji 33 (1900), three years after Jinsaburo himself. This is significant because Nitta's account is premised on Jinsaburo first coming to Canada based on Souemon's letters from there.

Whether rivals or partners, Buck Suzuki's interview also indicates that Oikawa and Sato were working as "bosses or representatives or spokesmen for the fishermen fishing for the cannery" which he identifies as Ewen's Cannery. Suzuki further indicates that "persons of Japanese origin apparently had been working for and fishing for Ewen's Cannery since the mid-1890's."¹³² This cannery was located on Lion Island but it does not appear in any other version of the story (including Nitta) nor does anything of the Oikawa story appear in accounts of Ewen's Cannery. This is peculiar because it is fairly obvious that the two stories must intertwine since this large cannery and large community co-existed in a tiny space at the same time.

Nitta, in the context of the move of the Oikawa/Sato colony from Sunbury, describes Don and Lion Island as "uninhabited and covered in thick forest"¹³³ which they then developed for fields and houses. Another biography notes that Jinsaburo "set his sights on Lion Island..., purchased this island and set about building a base for his future activities." These activities included building a "600-foot long wharf facing the main channel" and equipping his group with "fishing nets, boats, and tackle, as well as housing facilities and contracts with the cannery."¹³⁴

¹³² RCA, Buck Suzuki interview.

¹³³ Nitta, 123-124; Sulz, 80.

¹³⁴ "Portraits ... Oikawa," in Nakayama, *Kanada Dôhō Hatten Taikan: Furoku*, 236; Sasaki, *Kanada Iminshi Shiryô*, 272; Onodera, *Kanada e Watatta Tohoku no Mura*, 372.

Canadian sources on the fishing industry in the Fraser River tell a very different story about Lion Island. Far from being uninhabited and forested in 1901, there is evidence that Alexander Ewen, the “father of salmon canning in British Columbia,”¹³⁵ built his second cannery on Lion Island sometime between 1876 and 1884.¹³⁶ This cannery was the biggest on the river for many years and its double-namesake product (“Lion” brand with the “Ewen” label) became well-known throughout the British Empire; the cannery was still in operation in 1901-1902 when it was purchased (or amalgamated) into the BC Packers Association.¹³⁷

Several photos relating to this cannery on Lion Island are reproduced in Cork Lines and Canning Lines; one depicts the large cannery (which “could produce 15,000 cans daily”) although the date is not specified¹³⁸ and another, from 1887, shows the Native Indian workers who came down the coast by canoe to work there.¹³⁹ A third photo of men posing in front of an unidentified building has the caption, “by the 1890s, increasing numbers of Japanese immigrants like these men employed at Ewen’s Lion

¹³⁵ Cicely Lyons, Salmon: Our Heritage (Vancouver: BC Packers Ltd., 1969), n.p. (picture caption at front).

¹³⁶ Cicely Lyons dates the building at 1876, Meggs and Stacey date it at 1882, and the Dictionary of Canadian Biography dates it at 1884. Lyons, Salmon, 147; Geoff Meggs and Duncan Stacey, Cork Lines and Canning Lines, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1992), 15; H. Keith Ralston, “Alexander Ewen,” Dictionary of Canadian Biography, (CD-ROM), Vol. XIII (Toronto: University of Toronto and Quebec: Universite Laval, 2000).

¹³⁷ Lyons, Salmon: Our Heritage, n.p. and 147.

¹³⁸ Meggs and Stacey, Cork Lines and Canning Lines, 15-17. Photo from Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum / 1781.

¹³⁹ Meggs and Stacey, Cork Lines and Canning Lines, 18-19. Photo from Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum / 1824.

Island cannery were moving into the Fraser fleet.”¹⁴⁰ Although there is no indication in this source that these men were part of the Oikawa/Sato group, the original photo has an undated page attached to the back which identifies some of the men.¹⁴¹ Unfortunately, the men are identified not by their names but as relatives (Father, Uncle, Grandfather, Father-in-Law) of “Union members;” the attachment does, however, give other useful information. The building in the background is identified as the “bunkhouse on Don Island” which is separated from Lion Island by a “narrow but then deep channel”; this supports a connection between Japanese on Don and Lion Islands. Furthermore, the photo is dated as 1913 when Oikawa’s colony was supposedly still extant and the surnames of several identified men match up with names on the *Suian Maru* passenger list.

Other indications supporting Oikawa’s connection to the Ewen Cannery and Ewen himself were found but they are somewhat complicated. One source lists Oikawa as operating a “trading business at No. 1 Cannery ... [with] 70 employees”¹⁴² but various searches did not reveal a No. 1 Cannery in British Columbia.¹⁴³ Examination of the most likely source of this reference, however, revealed that “No. 1” was likely an error in the transcription of “Ewen” to Japanese and back to English.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, another source

¹⁴⁰ Meggs and Stacey. Cork Lines and Canning Lines, 33. Photo from Fisherman Publishing Society Collection, Special Collections, UBC.

¹⁴¹ Evans [sic] Cannery, Lion Island, 1913, UBC Library, Special Collections, Fisherman Publishing Society photograph collection. The page is obviously from many years after the photo as the young boy in the photo is identified as a “retired honorary Union member.”

¹⁴² JCNMA, Kobayashi, Issei Life Histories, [Doho 273].

¹⁴³ George Brandak (Curator of Manuscripts, UBC Special Collections), personal interview, 11 Dec. 2002 and personal email, 18 Dec. 2002. Mr. Brandak had consulted with Duncan Stacey, author of Salmonopolis: The Steveston Story and Cork Lines and Canning Lines.

indicates that Jinsaburo's son, Taijiro was working (or planned to work) at Ewen's Cannery in 1909¹⁴⁵ suggesting, through family connections, that the cannery in question was "Ewen's" not "No. 1."

As to the actual ownership of the islands, Nitta is not clear whether they were purchased by Oikawa or somehow leased or rented. One source indicates that Jinsaburo owned and/or leased land totalling 20 acres (the size of Don Island)¹⁴⁶ and Alexander Ewen's probated will shows that his assets included a mortgage to "J. Oikawa" for "Lot 517 Group I" in the amount of \$4102.68 (including interest owing on the principal).¹⁴⁷ A modern map of the area shows Don Island as L517G1 and Lion Island as L516G1 in Block 4 North Range 4 West, Section 16. This section belonged to Alexander Ewen in 1889 and was part of the Ewen estate in 1911.¹⁴⁸

In other words, it appears that Oikawa Jinsaburo and Alexander Ewen had some connections over Don and Lion Islands. Apparently, such a relationship would not be out of character for Ewen as he was "true to his friends and appreciative of his employees ... he loaned money to men who worked for him when they wanted to build canneries of

¹⁴⁴ Oikawa's trading business is given as "yo n ki ya na ri" in the phonetic *katakana* script. This is consistent with both "one cannery" (i.e. No. 1) and "Ewen Cannery." Tairiku Nippô Sha (ed), *Kanada Dôhō Hatten Shi*, 1 [History of the Japanese in Canada], (Vancouver: *Tairiku Nippô Sha*, 1909), 201; Sasaki, *Kanada Iminshi Shiryô* vol. 2, 115.

¹⁴⁵ JCNMA, Kobayashi, *Issei Life Histories*, [Doho 273].

¹⁴⁶ Tairiku Nippô Sha, *Kanada Dôhō Hatten Shi*, 1, 201; Sasaki, *Kanada Iminshi Shiryô* vol. 2, 115.

¹⁴⁷ BCA, British Columbia Supreme Court (New Westminster) Probate Files 1881-1941, GR 1422, reel B11291, no. 836 Alexander Ewen, 24 Sept 1907.

¹⁴⁸ RCA, Richmond Heritage Advisory Committee, "Settlement Patterns in East Richmond and on Sea Island" (index cards).

their own.”¹⁴⁹ It is more than likely, therefore, that Alexander Ewen and Oikawa Jinsaburo not only knew each other but had significant dealings despite the lack of cross-referencing in their respective stories.

Two more characters fit into this discussion of the missed and mis-represented: Oikawa’s older sons from his first marriage to Uino. Because Nitta’s story is about Jinsaburo, it is not surprising that Taijiro and Michie do not factor largely but there are indications that their stories, too, warrant further examination. The biography on the Oikawas¹⁵⁰ from 1921, for example, hints at the role of his sons in the opening line:

When the formidable trio of the courageous, plucky Oikawa Jinsaburo, the multi-talented Oikawa Taijiro, and the well-educated, meticulous, scrupulous Oikawa Michie worked and planned together,¹⁵¹ there was nothing in the world they could not accomplish.

In the Nitta story, Taijiro simply returned to Japan with Uino in 1900 and stayed there as the Yokohama connection until 1916 when he returned to Canada to assume control of the colony. Other sources, however, indicate much more for Taijiro. One, for example, indicates that Taijiro went to Japan in November 1908 and returned in July 1909; before and after this trip he was self-employed at Ewen’s Cannery in New Westminster. He was in Canada but unmarried between 1917 and 1919, and was still in New Westminster in 1926.¹⁵² While the biography in the Historical Materials also reports

¹⁴⁹ Lyons, Salmon. Our Heritage quoted in RCA, Alder Bloom, Salmon Canning in British Columbia - 1870-1970, (unpublished manuscript), 6.

¹⁵⁰ “Portraits ... Oikawa,” in Nakayama, Kanada Dôhō Hatten Taikan:Furoku, 236-239; Sasaki, Kanada Iminshi Shiryô, 272-274; Onodera, Kanada e Watatta Tohoku no Mura, 370-375.

¹⁵¹ Literally, “like the three legs of a kettle stand.”

¹⁵² JCNMA, Kobayashi, Issei Life Histories, [Doho 273]. Unfortunately the database does not explain how he could be self-employed at a cannery; perhaps as a labour boss or as contracted fisherman.

that Taijiro took control of Jinsaburo's enterprises on the return of the "esteemed father" to Japan, it does not portray him as the administrator of demise:

He has inherited his talented father's ambitions and determination, and shows extraordinary boldness, he controls the temptation to act blindly or rashly; he only undertakes new enterprises after carefully evaluating all factors in his mind.

Despite an unfortunate experience with both Japanese and Canadian authorities over an export venture aboard the *Kinkasan Maru*, the biographer has great hopes for Taijiro; like a caged tiger, he is waiting for an opportunity to "spring forth like a whirlwind swirling a leaf ... and secure a brilliant achievement." Furthermore, Taijiro is described as being involved in community services in Canada: he served as president of the Japanese Association in New Westminster, established a pre-school and elementary school, and worked for the betterment of the fishing industry.

Interestingly, Buck Suzuki has a third alternative for Taijiro that actually blames him for the demise of Jinsaburo's dream on Lion Island:

This son was one of the first Japanese playboys, I guess. He was very well acquainted with the aristocracy over in Victoria [inaudible] wonderful [inaudible] even though he was a married man in his own right, he had money, he spent [inaudible] father's money [inaudible] he had a grand time"¹⁵³

Finding the truth of Taijiro in this triangle of historical novel, laudatory biographical dictionary, and memories of someone who may have known him in childhood would be an intriguing challenge, indeed.

According to Nitta, the other son, Michie, attended school in Vancouver and university in Toronto; he was the educated son who chose to move away and assimilate rather than return to the family enterprise. However, the biography of the three Oikawas

¹⁵³ RCA, Buck Suzuki interview.

noted above states that Michie studied Commerce at California State University and turned down lucrative offers in San Francisco to return to Lion Island in 1916. His skills lay in communication with non-Japanese and Japanese from all walks of life; he was meticulous, modest, and conservative. At the time the biography was written, he had recently returned to Japan to take a prestigious position with a large firm. Whatever the truth of these two sons, further investigation would likely show them to have had more involvement with Jinsaburo, and more interesting lives, than Nitta credits them with.

Perhaps the most fascinating character linked to Oikawa Jinsaburo is Yoshie Saburo. In Nitta's account, he is a clerk at the Japanese Consulate in Vancouver who appears frequently in the role of advisor, confidante, and subtle champion for Jinsaburo. He was a valuable contact for his inside information about attitudes towards immigration, his skill in negotiating on behalf of the *Suian Maru*, and his valuable contacts in both Japan and in Canada.

Other documentation, however, suggests that Yoshie quit the Consulate just weeks after the *Suian Maru* incident to form the Canada Nippon Supply Company (C.N.S. Co.) which was a major player in labour immigration to B.C. Because of this connection, he was interviewed extensively by the Royal Commission on Oriental Labour headed by Mackenzie King after the Vancouver Riot of 1907.¹⁵⁴ Later, he went to work as an interpreter for the Canadian Immigration Department and was investigated by the R.C.M.P. for using his position to allow fraudulent entry of immigrants and profit

¹⁵⁴ W. L. Mackenzie King, Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Methods by which Oriental Labourers have been Induced to Come to Canada, (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1908), 27-48.

personally from it.¹⁵⁵ In December 1931, Yoshie was sentenced to two and half years of hard labour on charges related to the “bringing into Canada of Japanese by false birth certificates, the sale of these birth certificates to person in Japan ...and the same dealing, of course, with Naturalization certificates.”¹⁵⁶ The case also resulted in several arrests in Japan of police officers and inspectors in charge of passports.

While there is no mention of Oikawa Jinsaburo nor the *Suian Maru* in Yoshie’s later investigations and trial, one wonders whether these conspiracies and illegal actions were restricted to Yoshie’s later career or whether there were indications of them in his earlier relationship with Oikawa. Perhaps, Yoshie was part of Oikawa’s immigration schemes from the start and provided help with the immigration regulations and finding employment. It might even be speculated that the *Suian Maru* was a test case for Yoshie; his success in bringing about such a favourable result to a seemingly clear case of illegal migration by convincing the Consulate to back negotiations with Canadian authorities despite the various pitfalls, just may have been the impetus for him to resign his position with the Consulate and join Gotoh in forming the Canadian Nippon Supply Co. Although the focus of this thesis is on Oikawa Jinsaburo, Yoshie may be more important to the story than Nitta might have portrayed. If nothing else, his story is definitely more interesting than Nitta allowed.

¹⁵⁵ See Canada, Immigration Branch, RG76, vol. 342, file 361435, reel C10250, BCA, GR 1547, reel B1041, Fred Yoshi alias Kiyoshi Suhinoto, Vancouver, B.C., Smuggling Japanese in Canada.

¹⁵⁶ Canada, Immigration Branch, RG76, vol. 342, file 361435, reel C10250, BCA, GR 1547, reel B1041, R.C.M.P. Report on Conclusion of Case, 7 Dec. 1932.

The Suian Maru Incident

The foregoing discussion on the veracity of the Nitta account has focused on issues such as the identity of characters and differing interpretations of their role in the story. While such issues might be considered “local” to the Oikawa community or to Japanese-Canadians from Miyagi Prefecture or to local historians of the lower Fraser River, the *Suian Maru* incident might be characterised as “international,” involving governments, consulates, and the general public. Not surprisingly, evidence relating to the *Suian Maru* in oral histories, biographies, newspapers, and official reports can be used to evaluate and elaborate upon the Nitta account. This section will survey some of these sources and assert that although Nitta portrayed the adventure quite accurately in terms of the Japanese participants, whole other layers from the Canadian side complement his version.

Post-Nitta versions of the *Suian Maru* events follow his narrative so closely that they are of little interest to the present project. Buck Suzuki’s recollections of his father’s stories, on the other hand, while not inconsistent with Nitta’s account, do add some interesting anecdotes. For example, when the *Suian Maru* was detained at William Head, the passengers “bartered with the native Indian people ...[for] the lowly dogfish” which tasted surprisingly good after so long at sea. Another anecdote has some of the landed passengers picked up by the Northwest Mounted Police and taken to an English-style pub:

There were all kinds of strange foreign-looking people, ... with big noses and red hair. ... all of a sudden one man took his hat off and he went all around the pub and he took up a collection and he looked around for the leader and, he said, he dumped a bunch of foreign coins into our laps.

This action made a huge impression on Buck's father who said he would never forget it. It also sheds some light on racial attitudes that will be discussed further in chapter three.

A 1921 article in the Historical Materials, about the *Suian Maru* incident describes it with the same basic details as Nitta: eighty-two people, problems with the Immigration Department, negotiations by Yoshie, a favourable settlement, and a labour agreement. It also adds that all the passengers were eventually quite successful in Canada “except for the three men with eye disease [trachoma]” An interesting line of research is opened in this article by a long, convoluted sentence with many sub-clauses and vague words:

In Meiji 39 [1906], he led a group of 82 of his fellow villagers in crossing over here but, because they casually [or accidentally] neglected the formal immigration procedures; problems ensued when there was indignation and severe measures were taken by the Immigration Department; the situation became unmanageable and ended up in court proceedings.¹⁵⁷

“Casually” and “accidentally” are often interchangeable; however, “casually neglecting” the immigration requirements implies knowing about the requirements and consciously evading them (supporting Nitta) while “accidentally neglecting” them implies a legitimate unawareness. Furthermore, it is not clear who was indignant and who brought the matter before the courts. Someone reading this sentence with little knowledge of the story might easily conclude that Oikawa was unaware of the immigrations regulations, became indignant at the severe treatment of the Immigration authorities, and took the matter to

¹⁵⁷ “Oikawa Jinsaburo and the Immigration Incident (Oct. 26, 1906)” in Nakayama, *Kanada Dôhō Hatten Taikan: Zen*, 1893; Sasaki and Gonnami, *Kanada Iminshi Shiryô* vol. 8, 1893.

court. However, most evidence, including Nitta, makes it fairly clear the immigration authorities were indignant and took the immigrants to court.¹⁵⁸

As noted in the introduction, there are considerable issues with accounts recorded some time after the events. The arrival of the *Suian Maru* did attract considerable attention at the time and left a paper trail in the federal Immigration Branch, the records of the Provincial Court and Provincial Police, and most usefully, the newspapers. These documents certainly support the Nitta account both in the actual events and the uncertainty which the *Suian Maru* passengers faced when they arrived; they also add new layers to the story.

Records from the Immigration Branch¹⁵⁹ indicate that the 196-ton *Suian Maru* with M. Nishikigori as Master and J. Oikawa as Charterer left Oginohama on 1 September 1906 and arrived in Victoria on 31 October 1906 at 9:45 a.m. with 96 people on board; 83 passengers in steerage and 13 Japanese crew. The ship was examined by Dr. G.L. Milne (Dominion Medical Inspector and Immigration Officer) and the form with names, ages, marital status, occupations, intent to settle in Canada, and ultimate destination was neatly filled out. The men were mostly farmers, except for four carpenters, and only one of the three women was married. All passengers intended to settle in Canada with their destination listed as Victoria. It is also noted that Jinsaburo

¹⁵⁸ Several possibilities for interpretation problems can be suggested; the sentence is poorly constructed, the writer was making a political statement about immigration by creating a victimised hero of Oikawa, or the reader is influenced by background knowledge, experiences, and biases. An interesting study would examine how various Japanese speakers interpret the sentence based on knowledge of Oikawa, experiences with discrimination, familiarity with Japanese-Canadian history, and attitudes toward authority.

¹⁵⁹ BCA, Canada, Immigration Branch, GR1739, file 579633, reel B7920, Reports of Monthly Steamship Arrivals for Vancouver and Victoria, 1905-1922, October 1906 and BCA, Canada, Immigration Branch, GR1739, file 577098, reel B7935, Ships Passenger List, Victoria, 18 April 1906-21 July 1907, *Suian Maru*, 31 Oct. 1906.

Oikawa had resided in Canada within the previous year and that three passengers were “detained” although there are no more details on this.¹⁶⁰

The only inconsistency with the Nitta account is the date of arrival; Nitta records dropping anchor on 19 October, apprehension of the ship on 20 October, and the locating of the final “at-large” passengers by 25 October;¹⁶¹ quite different from the 31 October noted above. The answer to this seeming mystery, however, is quite simple; the form was filled out after negotiations were completed and the matter had gone to court, not when the *Suian Maru* actually arrived. In other words, the discrepancy reflects the two-week state of limbo for the *Suian Maru* passengers. The details of this intervening period are covered extensively by the newspapers of the day and some official documents.

The extensive newspaper coverage on the *Suian Maru* affair in the morning Victoria Daily Colonist and the evening Victoria Daily Times runs from 21 October to 9 November 1906.¹⁶² A collection of these articles reads almost like a mystery novel with many twists, turns, theories, false leads, and surprises. Where the newspaper details overlap with the Nitta account, there is overall agreement of the “facts.” However, the substantial additional information from the Canadian perspective so complements the Nitta account that what follows is but a selective summary of the newspaper accounts to demonstrate the depth of the story that has hitherto been missed.

The 21 October 1906 headline in the Victoria Daily Colonist reads: “JAP COOLIES LAND AND ARE ARRESTED: The Schooner *Suian Maru* Disembarks

¹⁶⁰ Most likely eye-disease or trachoma.

¹⁶¹ Nitta, 191; Sulz, 122.

Twenty-two Men at Beecher Bay and is Seized by Authorities.”¹⁶³ The article related that on Friday (19 October), the three-masted schooner, *Suiian Maru* hovered about in Beecher Bay until nightfall when an old sampan ferried twenty-two Japanese to shore, nine of whom had already been arrested. At daybreak, the schooner started off with thirty-nine left on board but was boarded soon thereafter by Dr. A. T. Watt, the Dominion Quarantine Officer who had received reports of a suspicious boat. Dr. Watt found fishing gear scattered about the decks to support the Captain’s story that they had been fishing the Copper Islands but had drifted to Victoria when the weather turned bad; their plan was to buy salt salmon in New Westminster.

Dr. Watt’s suspicions were raised, however, by the new (i.e. unused) fishing gear and baggage in the hold that was “entirely dissimilar to the slop-chest clothes of the fisherman,” especially when much of it was unclaimed when the schooner was taken to William Head for fumigation and disinfecting. Furthermore, the nine already arrested men had been trying to pass as fishermen but they wore Japanese army uniforms and their “personal effects also contradicted the claim that the men were fishermen.”

The true story was not easily extracted but, after a failed bribery attempt, it was admitted that twenty-two men had been landed after a 49 day passage from Oginohama, “not far from Hakodate in North Japan,” leaving thirteen at large. It was assumed that the *Suiian Maru* was only apprehended because it was short of fresh water and provisions; “otherwise it ... would have stood out to sea ... after landing the 22 men.” There was

¹⁶² Coverage also appeared in the Vancouver Daily World, Vancouver Daily Province, and Daily Columbian (New Westminster) but these were mostly re-prints from the Victoria newspapers.

also confusion about the attempt to evade regulations because there were no restrictions against Japanese such as the head-tax against the Chinese; “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.” The article outlined the various fines from \$20 to \$100 and more in consequence of infracting “many customs, quarantine and immigration regulations.”¹⁶⁴

The next day, 22 October, the Times picked up on the story with the headline: “NUMBER OF JAPS SMUGGLED ASHORE: BOLD ATTEMPT TO ELUDE THE OFFICIALS.” This was largely the same as the previous Colonist story but with a few different interpretations and new pieces of information. This article reported the *Suian Maru*, after landing the thirty-five men in Beecher Bay, came to the quarantine station with “yellow flag flying [and] boldly submitted to the required inspection.” Furthermore, the “truth” about the landed men only came out when Dr. Watt “tried a genuine bluff” on the Captain; having received a report of the Japanese in army uniforms near Victoria, he outright asked, “Where are the men you landed at Beecher Bay?” With new information from the Captain, Dr. Watt phoned Dr. Milne who, in turn, enlisted the help of the provincial police. Twenty men were soon apprehended with fifteen more considered still at large. It had also been determined that “Jinzaburs Orkanu,” former resident of New Westminster, was the owner of the vessel and this was a trial run in “bringing to these

¹⁶³ It is recognised that the term “Jap” is considered vulgar and derogatory; however, its use in quotations from the time is not only accurate but instructive. This matter is taken up in some more detail at the beginning of chapter three.

¹⁶⁴ Victoria Daily Colonist, 21 Oct. 1906, 1.

shores natives of the Orient in large numbers without complying with the ordinary regulations.”¹⁶⁵

The following day, 23 October 1906, the Colonist reported, “JAPANESE SCHOONER HELD BY CUSTOMS ... MORE MAY HAVE BEEN PUT ASHORE.” Mr. Newbury, the Collector of Customs, had imposed a fine of \$800 for “having landed passengers at a place that is not a port of entry” and further actions were expected by the quarantine and immigration officials. The captured men had been taken to William Head to pass quarantine and then were replaced on board the schooner being held by authorities. An unknown number of the group were still at large with “some reports stating that at least forty coolies were landed.” The article included an explanation by one of the “unfortunates” for the “ill-luck” of the *Suian Maru*; the “failure of the builders to launch the schooner on a lucky day, and moreover because of failure to invoke the ‘funadama’ [water spirit] before leaving.”¹⁶⁶

The Times article of the same day added that “action ... is being delayed ... pending the arrival of the Japanese consul from Vancouver.” Although the men were reported as physically fit, they lacked the necessary passports necessary for landing in Canada, therefore the reporter concluded:

Some of the men are deserters from the Japanese army and this fact explains why they were willing to exchange the comfortable and cheaper passage by steamer where detection, however, would be almost unavoidable, for the poor accommodation and the excessive[sic] charge of the schooner.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Victoria Daily Times, 22 Oct. 1906, 4.

¹⁶⁶ Victoria Daily Colonist, 23 Oct. 1906, 7.

¹⁶⁷ Victoria Daily Times, 23 Oct. 1906, 5.

The Colonist and Times articles of 24 October, are the most extensive of the whole series and reveal that most of the *Suian Maru* escapade had been discovered by this time. The Colonist headlined, “HOW JAPANESE WERE SMUGGLED: Seventy-Eight Admitted to Have Been Landed - Schooner Is Fined: THE SCHEME WAS WELL-PLANNED: Organizer Was Arrested in Japan While Attempting Previous Expedition.” The details were based on information provided by “S. Yoshiye, chancellor of the Japanese consulate at Vancouver” whose extensive interviews brought out the full story. According to this article, there were actually two landings; 53 men and 3 women in Parry Bay near Esquimalt Harbour then 22 more men in Beecher Bay. The project was known to have been planned by Oikawa who was described as having lived for some time at New Westminster and on the Fraser River “where he has interests in a cannery and saltery....” The plan called for the landed passengers to make their way to Sidney using maps “drawn as the intelligence corps of an army might have planned them” where they would meet a steamer to take them to the Fraser River. Once there, they were to work for Oikawa “until the amount due for their passage and landing is repaid.”

Oikawa did not come off very well in this article which reported he had brought twenty men to British Columbia three years previously to work for him at the “magnificent monthly wage of \$7.50 per month” but when they learned the real scale of wages, they “promptly broke the contracts.” Then, two years previously, he had bought a schooner and collected fares from about sixty Japanese. Police in Japan foiled that venture and Oikawa was “sentenced to a year’s imprisonment but appealed to the supreme court which reversed the judgment [sic].” As to the current *Suian Maru* incident,

Oikawa had applied to the Japanese government to take fifty men on a “deep-sea fishing cruise to the vicinity of the Copper Islands” but, before departure, he got the Captain and crew drunk at a tea house and smuggled thirty more men and three women on board. The Captain, crew, and passengers, however, received full sympathy in this article. The passengers were reported to be in despair as they faced imprisonment in Japan for leaving home by false pretences and without passports while the Captain was worried he would “lose his expected decoration for service on a Japanese transport during the recent war [Russo-Japanese War].”¹⁶⁸

The Times article that same afternoon ran, “SMALL ARMY OF JAPS CAPTURED AS THEY DESCENDED UPON SIDNEY TOWN.” An “amusing” anecdote related that Sergeant Murray of the Provincial Police in Victoria had received a message from Sidney that “an army of Japanese was marching down upon the quiet little town.” Sgt. Murray instructed the informant to “secure the men” but the prospect of rounding up “this invading army with the forces at hand ... seemed too great a proposition ... having in mind the record of these little soldiers in the war with Russia.” Eventually, more help was enlisted and the men were sent to Victoria and then on to quarantine.¹⁶⁹

From 25 October, when all the surreptitiously landed Japanese had been safely rounded up, the newspaper coverage turned to the future of the passengers and there was great sympathy for them. The Colonist ran the headline “CONTRABAND JAPS WERE VICTIMIZED: Investigation Shows That They Were Misled as to Conditions Here:

¹⁶⁸ Victoria Daily Colonist, 24 Oct. 1906, 5.

¹⁶⁹ Victoria Daily Times, 24 Oct. 1906, 1.

BELIEVED EXCLUSION WAS IN FORCE: Men in Military Uniforms Are Farmers Not Deserters From Army.” The article asserted that “Mr. Yoshige,” had discovered the passengers were duped and “Oikawa planned [sic] to profit well from his venture.” Aside from the \$50 to \$200 that he or his elder brother were paid for passage, Oikawa extracted contracts from the passengers to “pay further monthly instalments on arrival,” and sold surplus uniforms, biscuits, and blankets to them for “ten and twenty times that price.” He misled them into believing not only that “they must discard their Japanese kimonos and haori in favour of European clothing, or the military uniforms” but also that, similar to the Chinese “Japanese were debarred from entering Canada ... under a new law.” According to the Colonist, neither the Immigration nor Quarantine Departments had yet acted but promised they would work together in inflicting punishment. It is added that if Oikawa somehow avoided punishment in Canada, he would “certainly have to face prosecution on account of the expedition if he returns to Japan.”¹⁷⁰

The Times had similar information but the headline, “JAP WAS WILY SCHEMER” is more indicative of the changing public perception of the *Suian Maru* passengers from “illegal coolies”, or invading army, to unwitting victims. As for Oikawa, the paper ascertained that he “has connections in this province and owns a fishing station and small steamer ... a few miles up the Fraser river” although it did not explain how this affected the case.¹⁷¹

By 27 October, after the previous lengthy articles had seemingly exposed all the “facts” of the *Suian Maru* escapade, the newspaper coverage fell dramatically. On 27

¹⁷⁰ Victoria Daily Colonist, 25 Oct. 1906, 3.

¹⁷¹ Victoria Daily Times, 25 Oct. 1906, 2.

October, the Colonist merely reported that the last of the “runaways” had been captured and Dr. Milne would enter “proceedings against the vessel on the grounds of infraction of the immigration regulations.” Readers were also reminded of the still-unpaid, \$800 fine that had been levied by the Customs Department.¹⁷² On 30 October, the Times reported, “JAPANESE CAPTAIN CONVICTED AND FINED: *Suian Maru*’s Skipper Must pay Big Sum for Escapade at Beecher Bay.” The prosecution had argued for a “penalty heavy enough to act as a warning” for this case which was the “first one of its kind to be dealt with in this city” and Magistrate Hall imposed a fine of \$35 for each of the 65 passengers and \$3.15 in court costs. The total fines, including the \$800 from Customs came to \$3078.15.¹⁷³ The 31 October Colonist reported that Captain Nishikiori had asked for a few days to pay the fines; the passengers, except four detained for medical treatment, “were given their liberty.”

After the excitement leading up to the trial, there was a lull in coverage until November 7th when it was reported the fines had not yet been paid but the authorities believed an “honest attempt” was being made as Oikawa “owns property on the Fraser and is now trying to borrow sufficient money.”¹⁷⁴ Finally, nearly three weeks after the start of the affair, the Times reported on November 8th that “*SUIAN MARU GOES FREE THIS EVENING: Fines Against Japanese Schooner Have Been Paid and Clearance Will Be Given.*” Despite the previous extensive coverage, the article merely stated that the “*Suian Maru*’s escape and capture caused a mild sensation at the time.” Oikawa had

¹⁷² Victoria Daily Colonist, 27 Oct. 1906, 9.

¹⁷³ Victoria Daily Times, 30 Oct. 1906, 5.

¹⁷⁴ Victoria Daily Times, 7 Nov. 1906, 10.

raised enough money to pay the fines through a lien based on his ownership of “property on the mainland and his good standing among his fellow countrymen.”¹⁷⁵ On 9 November 1906, the Colonist simply reported on the release of the *Suian Maru* and noted that the vessel would leave that day to load salt salmon for the return voyage.¹⁷⁶

The newspaper coverage of the *Suian Maru* story is interesting in how its “Canadian” perspective of the events complements Nitta’s coverage through the eyes of the Japanese involved, especially since there is no indication that Nitta had access to these articles. Of course, historians are often sceptical of newspaper accounts but there is reason enough to consider the reports of that time as useful documents. For one thing, they describe the confusion and uncertainty that surrounded the arrival of the *Suian Maru*. For another, they show how news of the *Suian Maru* was disseminated to the British Columbia public, although the public reaction is not clear.

As to the accuracy of the newspaper accounts, Dr. G.L. Milne’s official report as Dominion Medical Inspector and Immigration Officer to the Superintendent of Immigration in Ottawa includes two copies of newspaper articles “giving [him] a full account of their doings.”¹⁷⁷ The file itself contains a detailed bill of costs submitted by the department’s lawyer and several receipts for such items as interpreter fees and

¹⁷⁵ Victoria Daily Times, 8 Nov. 1906, 9.

¹⁷⁶ Victoria Daily Colonist, 9 Nov. 1906, 8.

¹⁷⁷ Canada, Immigration Branch, RG76, vol. 401, file 574351 reel c10292, BCA, GR1547, reel B1083, Milne to Scott, 29 Oct 1906. The articles were: “Several Charges Against Vessel,” Victoria Daily Times, 23 Oct. 1906, 5 and “Small Army of Japs Captured as they Descended upon Sidney Town,” Victoria Daily Times, 24 Oct. 1906, 1.

delivering summons; however, it adds little more to knowledge about the *Suian Maru* affair.

Milne's file does, however, indicate broader ramifications of the *Suian Maru* incident within the government of Canada. As Medical Inspector, he told Dr. P.H. Bryce, Dominion Chief Medical Officer, that the arrival of the *Suian Maru* exposed "defects in our Immigration Act." For one, he advised that the "provision to deal with Stowaways must be made clear." His main concern, however, was the difficulty in co-ordinating the administrative actions of the Customs, Quarantine, Immigration, and Medical Officers which had become a problem under the new Immigration Act that had come out earlier that year. Furthermore, he did not have the correct forms required by the new Act, and the new requirement to go to court to impose fines was a "long and tedious process and is very unsatisfactory as you get the lawyers quarreling [sic] over the case the ship is detained not for days but weeks and in the end the costs equal the fine in some cases."¹⁷⁸ Bryce acknowledged the "confusion between the officers of the several services" but he trusted that they would "have the matter arranged long ere this." He noted that there would be alterations relating to "stowaways" but gave no details.¹⁷⁹

The account of the trial in the Victoria Provincial Court Records¹⁸⁰ and the relevant entries from the Provincial Police Force Record Book of Activities¹⁸¹ add little

¹⁷⁸ Canada, Immigration Branch, RG76, vol. 401, file 574351 reel c10292, BCA, GR1547, reel B1083, Milne to Bryce, 29 Oct 1906.

¹⁷⁹ Canada, Immigration Branch, RG76, vol. 401, reel c10292, file 574351, BCA GR1547, reel B1083, Bryce to Milne, 7 Nov. 1906.

¹⁸⁰ BCA, British Columbia, Victoria Provincial Court Records, GR065, vol.3, 4 Feb 1904 - 18 July 1910, p. 73, Moritaro Nishikiyori, 30 Oct. 1906.

to the newspaper coverage. The Record Book provides a timeline of police activities relating to the *Suian Maru* but is more interesting for its relative paucity of detail. Over the ten days of action, only ten brief records indicate that Constables Carter, Cox, and Conway had some contact with the Japanese such as conveying them to city lock-up from the train station, visiting them at the lock up, visiting Dr. Watt, and attending Provincial Police Court. While the dates and times might be a useful cross-reference to other accounts, there are few significant details. One suspects there might be a more complete police report giving details of the investigation but it has yet to be located.

Conclusion

Nitta Jiro's account of Oikawa Jinsaburo's life, although classified as a documentary novel or historical fiction and therefore not "true" history, has enough verifiable "truth" in terms of the actual existence of characters and situation to explain its acceptance as a useful historical account. It is clear that Oikawa was connected to Lion Island and Don Island (*Oikawa-jima* and *Sato-jima*) and that he was involved in the *Suian Maru* incident of 1906. It is also clear that many of the characters introduced in the novel were real people and had some connection to Oikawa. There are several examples of omissions (Nobuo Sato, Ewen Cannery) and contradictions (1901 Census, Sato Souemon, Tajiro and Michie, Yoshie Saburo) but the result is not to negate the value of Nitta's version but, rather, to make it more complicated and thus worthy of further research.

¹⁸¹ BCA, Provincial Police Force Record Book of Activities, GR0424, p. 288-292, 20 Oct. 1906 - 30 Oct. 1906.

Of all the historical evidence directly relating to Oikawa Jinsaburo, none is so rich and varied as that relating to the *Suian Maru*. With little variation, except for the addition of detail, all sources seemed to agree with the basic story that the *Suian Maru*, with Oikawa Jinsaburo and eighty-two of his fellow villagers, surreptitiously left Japan for British Columbia in September 1906. After a long voyage, it anchored off southern Vancouver Island in October and the secret migrants attempted to make their way to Sidney and then on to Lion and Don Islands in the Fraser River. Over the next few days, the *Suian Maru* was impounded and the passengers were apprehended by the Provincial Police. When the dust settled about three weeks later, fines were imposed for infractions to Customs, Quarantine, and Immigration laws, the *Suian Maru* and its crew were allowed to return to Japan, and the eighty-three passengers were granted permission to stay in Canada in exchange for working one year as labourers on the C.P.R.

Despite the intense interest at the time, and the variety of evidence found in newspaper articles, oral histories, biographies, and official reports, there is little detail to explain their eventual treatment. It was not a foregone conclusion that they would be allowed to stay in Canada and the explanation that a deal was made for them to labour for the C.P.R. seems almost too simple given a context of anti-immigrant and anti-Asian sentiment. Indeed, later commentaries on the incident assert that “Oikawa had to contend with intense hostility to Oriental immigration”¹⁸² and that deportation was possible; one descendant said, “at normal times, these people would have been deported to Japan”¹⁸³ and even one passenger recalled being informed by the Japanese Consulate representative

¹⁸² Ito, *Stories of My People*, 46.

¹⁸³ Nakamura, *Issei*, 49.

that “they are talking about sending you back to Japan.”¹⁸⁴ In order to understand the final, and perhaps unexpected, outcome of the *Suiian Maru* incident, an examination of the various forces acting on the decision is instructive even if the definitive answer remains elusive.

¹⁸⁴ Although it is not clear who “they” were. Goto Kimpei’s recollections from 1966 in Ito, Stories of My People, 52.

Chapter 3 - Should They Stay or Should They Go?

In the summer of 1906, the *Suian Maru* was secretly chartered by a proven immigrant smuggler to sneak 82 farmers and labourers out of Japan on the false pretence of being a deep-sea fishing expedition. Lacking official sanction to emigrate (and therefore passports), they secretly landed in Canada and thereby broke Customs, Immigration, and Quarantine Laws. In tramping through the forests and country roads clothed in surplus Japanese military uniforms, they might have been mistaken as an invading army to British Columbians who had heard much about the Japanese defeat of Russia in 1905 and already had concerns about Japan's imperialistic intentions.

Furthermore, British Columbia was not a welcoming place for Asian immigrants, let alone ones who had circumvented laws and regulations. Racism was rampant and manifested itself in many ways from the "soft" or "paternalistic" racism of language like "little soldiers" or the "Flowery Kingdom," to the "vulgar" and overt racism of calls for a "White Man's Province" and various means to exclude Asians or dissuade them from coming.¹⁸⁵ That the labour migrants aboard the *Suian Maru* would be welcomed with open arms seems unlikely especially since they had left Japan under false pretences and broken Canadian laws. Nonetheless, they were allowed to stay and work.

Various versions of the Oikawa story are content to explain that negotiations were held between the Canadian and Japanese authorities with the final outcome being permission to stay based on working one year on the railroad. There is, however, little

¹⁸⁵ The term "Jap" is difficult to categorise; like "Chink" or "Nigger," it was in common use at the time but became considered extremely "vulgar" and derogatory. The debate over whether such terms (and they existed for most nationalities) were considered racist at the time, either by the users or the receivers, is beyond the scope of this thesis.

historical evidence specific to the *Suian Maru* negotiations to explain the way they were treated. An examination of the context around their arrival shows that several factors appear to have worked in their favour: an absence of legal means to keep them out of B.C., the assistance of the Japanese Consulate which was facilitated by a lack of public outrage against the *Suian Maru*, and a fortunate contact in the Consulate who had independent reasons for helping them stay.

Direct Evidence of Suian Maru's Treatment

Direct evidence outlining the details of the *Suain Maru* negotiations is sparse and vague. The Victoria Daily Colonist merely reported that “the passengers who were illegally landed ... were examined by Dr. Milne ... [and] were given their liberty;”¹⁸⁶ Dr. Milne’s official report (as Medical Inspector and Immigration Agent) to the Superintendent of Immigration explained the outcome as “the amount of the fine [ordered by the magistrate] was paid.”¹⁸⁷ The official report from the Consulate in Vancouver to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo simply noted that “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.” The only hint of a reason was the “especially pitiable circumstances” that had been discovered during the course of investigation¹⁸⁸ but there are no details.

¹⁸⁶ Victoria Daily Colonist, 1 Nov. 1906, 9.

¹⁸⁷ Canada, Immigration Branch, RG76, vol. 401, reel C-10292, file 574351, BCA, GR1547, reel B1083, G.L. Milne to W.D. Scott, 8 Nov. 1906.

¹⁸⁸ Nitta, 212-213; Sulz, 136.

Later versions of the story are little better; one says “the courts proved lenient and permitted them to remain in Canada, first fining them for illegal trespass”¹⁸⁹ while another reports that Yoshie Saburo “managed to obtain permission for them to land” by explaining to the Canadian authorities that each immigrant had a “great desire to work in Canada” and sending them back to Japan would be a “tragedy.”¹⁹⁰ Even the recollections of Goto Kimpei, a *Suian Maru* passenger, only note that “a few days later we received the wonderful news. Permission to land had come from Ottawa.”¹⁹¹

Nitta concluded (or created the conclusion) that a special agreement was reached because of “good relations between Japan and England, the fact that Canada is in need of labourers, and that they like Japanese workers very much.”¹⁹² He also suggested that negotiations between the Consulate, the Immigration officials, and the Nikka Yôben Company resulted in an agreement whereby the *Suian Maru* men “would work a minimum of one year on the railroad in exchange for permission to stay in Canada.”¹⁹³ This explanation is supported by oral accounts given by Buck Suzuki and Tom Oikawa. Suzuki’s father told him they were asked, ‘Do you want to be deported or will you become Canadian citizens? ... We are short of labour here and we need help.’¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Takata, *Nikkei Legacy*, 67.

¹⁹⁰ Ito, *Stories of My People*, 46.

¹⁹¹ Goto Kimpei’s recollections in Ito, *Stories of My People*, 52.

¹⁹² Nitta, 208; Sulz, 133.

¹⁹³ Nitta, 220; Sulz, 142.

¹⁹⁴ RCA, Buck Suzuki Interview, 1973

Likewise, Tom Oikawa remembered his father saying, “at that time Canada needed huge numbers of cheap labour for the construction of the C.P.R.”¹⁹⁵

Unfortunately, Nitta’s conclusion is embedded in a historical novel with no evidence to support it and the Buck Suzuki / Tom Oikawa explanation relies on memories of stories told by their fathers. Granted, their fathers were passengers on the *Suiian Maru* but the stories were passed on after the fact to their young sons and it is likely that Tom Oikawa had read the Nitta account prior to recounting his version. Furthermore, these explanations, while possibly accurate in portraying a need for labour and good relations between Canada and Japan, seem to oversimplify the negotiations in light of attitudes toward Asian immigrants in British Columbia at the time.

Anti-Asian Sentiment in B.C. in Decades Around Suiian Maru Arrival

Many Canadians and British Columbians may pride themselves today on their commitment to multiculturalism and probably believe, superficially at least, that “the nation has evolved more or less harmoniously as a multicultural society.”¹⁹⁶ This is not true. To put it mildly, “from afar, Canada looks idyllic; up close the picture blurs”¹⁹⁷ and, less mildly, a denial of this is to cling “tenaciously to the myth of the ethnic mosaic.”¹⁹⁸ It has been suggested that “Canadians may be upset to learn that, historically, racism was

¹⁹⁵ Nakamura, *Issei*, 49. The main C.P.R. line had been completed in 1885 so this probably referred to the construction of branch lines or track maintenance.

¹⁹⁶ Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1978), x.

¹⁹⁷ Augie Fleras and Jean Leonard Elliot, *Unequal Relations: An Introduction to Race and Ethnic Dynamics in Canada*, (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 2003), 7.

¹⁹⁸ Ward, *White Canada Forever*, x.

openly and ruthlessly directed at non-whites,”¹⁹⁹ but it is probable that many are well-aware of the chequered history of race and ethnic relations either through personal experience, family stories, or through accounts that line library and bookstore shelves. As one Japanese-Canadian put it, “after the war, everybody realized discrimination is real bad for all of us, and now it doesn’t matter what colour your skin is, a Canadian is a Canadian. But it wasn’t like that before the war.”²⁰⁰ Whatever the attitudes and beliefs of the situation in the present and recent past, British Columbia was not a friendly place for most immigrants, especially from Asia, when the *Suian Maru* arrived in October 1906.

In general, immigration matters were the responsibility of Canada after Confederation and the policies showed a definite hierarchy of immigrant preference. Preferred immigrants were those from the “so-called superior stock of Great Britain” although non-preferred immigrants from middle to Eastern Europe and Russia were “admired for their brawn and industry” but still held in suspicion. The lowest on this immigrant pecking order were blacks, Asians, and the Irish. Jews and Mediterranean peoples were treated separately again.²⁰¹ Given the nationality of the *Suian Maru* immigrants and the tension between some provinces and the federal government over immigration, attitudes towards Asians in British Columbia are most relevant.

Strong attitudes prevailed among British Columbians who were “highly self-conscious of their British origin” and believed the colony was best populated by British

¹⁹⁹ Fleras, *Unequal Relations*, 254.

²⁰⁰ Interview with George Nitta, in Daphne Marlatt and Carole Itter, *Opening Doors: Vancouver’s East End*, (Victoria: Province of British Columbia, 1979), 20.

²⁰¹ Fleras, *Unequal Relations*, 253.

immigrants.²⁰² From this, a broadly-based and extremely open anti-Asian sentiment developed on the west coast that manifested itself in many ways including exclusionary legislation and even riots; the following brief descriptions will give a general impression of anti-Asian sentiment in B.C. and then focus on sentiments towards Japanese and the *Suian Maru* arrival in particular.²⁰³

Asian immigrants have been coming to British Columbia since its establishment in 1858 but their reception by “dominant” groups had been less than sympathetic and resulted in many suggestions and actions to exclude them from the province and to discourage more from coming. For example, Chinese and Japanese were provincially disfranchised in 1872 and 1895 respectively. That eliminated their political voice at the federal levels since that voters’ lists was based on the provincial lists. This disfranchisement also curtailed their economic opportunity because the right to practice certain professions was contingent on being a registered voter.

Asian residents were also targeted during the racially motivated Vancouver Riot in September 1907 Vancouver Riot. Although this large, public demonstration organised by the Asiatic Exclusion League²⁰⁴ was “orderly” in itself, a mob somehow emerged from it and marched into Chinatown and the Japanese area around Powell Street that night and re-appeared the next day. There was considerable damage to buildings but no major injuries or deaths resulted from the skirmishes. A Royal Commission recommended

²⁰² Ken Adachi, *The Enemy that Never Was* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 37.

²⁰³ Some good sources with much more detail are Patricia Roy, *A White Man’s Province*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989); Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978); Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was*. David Chuenyan Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, (Vancouver, UBC Press, 1988).

²⁰⁴ The formation of which had been initiated by the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council.

compensation for property loss but an agreement to limit Japanese immigration also resulted.²⁰⁵

As for Asian immigrants, British Columbia introduced Legislation to restrict or exclude Asian immigration almost every year between 1900 and 1907. These Acts, under such titles as “An Act to Regulate Immigration into British Columbia,” were based on B.C.’s right under the British North America Act of 1867 to pass laws relating to immigration but only so long as they were not “repugnant to any Act of the Parliament of Canada.”²⁰⁶ Although these provincial Acts did not refer specifically to Asian immigrants, the requirement of several of them that potential immigrants “write out at dictation, in the characters of some language of Europe, and sign in the presence of the officer, a passage of fifty words in length in an European language directed by the officer”²⁰⁷ gives great discretion in selection of immigrants; especially Asians. This “Natal Act,” first used in the 1903 version, was a response to the federal government’s concern that discrimination on the basis of race or colour was “needlessly offensive to British Indians, and to Asiatic powers.”²⁰⁸ This concern, and the repeated disallowance of B.C.’s immigration legislation, reflects the pragmatics and problems of international relations for the federal government: i.e. the status of citizens from a British colony in other parts of the Empire, Japan’s emergence as an imperialist power, and China’s lack of international influence.

²⁰⁵ For a detailed description of the Vancouver Riot and this Gentlemen’s Agreement (or Lemieux Agreement, or Hayashi-Lemieux Agreement), see Roy, White Man’s Province, 184-226.

²⁰⁶ British North America Act, 1867, section 95.

²⁰⁷ “British Columbia Immigration Act, 1905, section 3” in Statutes of British Columbia Chapter 28 (Victoria; King’s Printer, 1905), 160.

²⁰⁸ “The Anglo-Japanese Alliance,” Round Table 1:2 (Feb. 1911): 124.

Chinese immigrants in Canada had been long discriminated against. The 1885 Chinese Immigration Act, passed by Canada in response to British Columbia demands, was intended to discourage immigrants by making every Chinese person who came to Canada pay a “head tax” of \$50 thus making saving money impossible for labourers. This head tax was increased to \$100 in 1901, \$500 in 1903, and, in 1923, an Act was passed to exclude Chinese immigration altogether.²⁰⁹ To discourage Indian immigrants, who were putatively fellow British subjects (and Japanese immigrants coming via Hawaii), a “continuous voyage” requirement was instituted to make immigration technically impossible because no ship could sail directly to Canada from India. The 1914 arrival of the *Komagata Maru* with several hundred Indian immigrants aboard tested this continuous voyage requirement incident but, after several months of negotiations and legal challenges with the passengers confined on board ship during a hot summer, only a few passengers were granted entry; the majority were denied and sent back.

Japanese immigrants were a different matter again as Japan became an increasingly potent imperialist power and ally of the British Empire. The Meiji Government’s program to “join the community of nations as an equal member and thus be eligible to participate in the game of international power politics”²¹⁰ was so successful that the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation signed with the United Kingdom in 1894 was successively strengthened in the Anglo-Japanese Alliances of 1902 and 1905. The goal of the Alliance was to maintain general peace in the Far East by linking the strongest

²⁰⁹ Lai, Chinatowns, 53-56.

²¹⁰ Hane, Modern Japan, 85.

forces in the region; co-operation protected them from each other and from other combinations of powers.

Japan's success was a double-edged sword for Japanese immigrants in British Columbia. It obligated the Canadian government to disallow British Columbia's exclusionary immigration legislation but it contributed to a concern that immigrants were working to further Japan's imperialist intentions in western Canada. Japan's navy did patrol Canada's west coast during World War I but the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was cancelled after the War and the shameful treatment of Japanese-Canadians during World War II is well known. Although the relationship between Japan and Canada (as nations and citizens) is complicated, some assert that "of all the ethnic groups in British Columbia, the Japanese have suffered most from ... the prejudices on the part of their fellow British Columbians."²¹¹ However, the goal of this paper is not to compare the relative racism against various Asian groups but to assert that British Columbia, from the late-1880s and well into the 1900s, was not a friendly place for Asians.

There is much discussion over the extent to which the racial prejudice manifested itself in British Columbia. Some argue that racial prejudice was proclaimed "in the legislature, on the street, in the press, at the meeting hall [and] ... almost everywhere opinions were exchanged" with the only dissenters being a few, un-influential ministers and university professors, or others who "kept their counsel to themselves."²¹² Others do not dispute overall anti-Asian sentiment but suggest that anti-Asian sentiment was

²¹¹ Ken Adachi, "The Japanese," in John Norris, ed., Strangers Entertained: A History of the Ethnic Groups of British Columbia (Vancouver: Evergreen Press, 1971), 221.

²¹² Ward, White Canada Forever, 3, 107, 167.

complicated by factors such as variations in economic conditions, geographic location, international events, political rhetoric, class conflict, and specific times. For example, anti-Asian sentiment might subside when economic conditions were good but rise during an election. It also happened that one area of the province might be temporarily sympathetic to Asians while another was vehemently opposed. Furthermore there is much evidence of class distinction; “traders, diplomats, and military heroes were welcome visitors” but labourers were welcomed only by employers and only when more suitable workers were not available.²¹³

Despite all the caveats and nuances, it appears that, in general, from 1858 to 1914, the “concern for Asian competition evolved from being the business of a few demagogues and workingmen to a broadly held fear that became part of the provincial identity.”²¹⁴ This is not to say that all Asians were discriminated against by all others at all times. It is to say that racism, especially against Asians, ran deep; sometimes in explicitly overt displays but almost always in attitudes and language where racial epithets were more than common.

Reception to the Suian Maru's Arrival

Given the anti-Asian sentiments present in B.C. in the decades around the *Suian Maru's* arrival in October 1906, the intense interest in the local newspapers is not unexpected. From 21 October to 9 November, there is extensive and almost daily coverage in the two Victoria newspapers, as well as occasional updates in the Vancouver

²¹³ Roy, *A White Man's Province*, vii-xvii.

²¹⁴ Roy, *A White Man's Province*, viii.

and New Westminster papers.²¹⁵ There were several provocative headlines, especially in the first few days:

- “Jap Coolies Land and Are Arrested ... Illicitly Disembarks ... Seized by Authorities”²¹⁶
- “Number of Japs Smuggled Ashore ... Bold Attempt to Elude the Officials”²¹⁷
- “The Scheme Was Well Planned - Organizer Was Arrested in Japan While Attempting Previous Expedition”²¹⁸
- “Small Army of Japs Captured As They Descended Upon Sidney Town”²¹⁹
- “Jap Was Wily Schemer”²²⁰

Paradoxically, the texts of the articles appear not overtly antagonistic.²²¹ “Jap” is replaced by “Japanese,” there was little political rhetoric and editorial comment, there were no indignant calls to have them deported, and no organised opposition to their arrival was apparently mustered. The most indignant article only cautiously asserted:

This effort to trick the Canadian officials by bringing to these shores natives of the Orient in large numbers without complying with the ordinary regulations was only the first of what was intended to become a regular business

²¹⁵ Victoria Daily Colonist, Victoria Daily Times, Vancouver Daily World, Vancouver Daily Province, Daily Columbian (New Westminster), 21 Oct. 1906 - 9 November 1906.

²¹⁶ Victoria Daily Colonist, 21 Oct. 1906, 1.

²¹⁷ Victoria Daily Times, 22 Oct. 1906, 4.

²¹⁸ Victoria Daily Colonist, 24 Oct. 1906, 5.

²¹⁹ Victoria Daily Times, 24 Oct. 1906, 1.

²²⁰ Victoria Daily Times, 25 Oct. 1906, 2.

²²¹ The headlines and the articles were likely written by different people with different purposes: attract the attention of newspaper buyers by the headline writers and get the “true” story by the writers.

and concluded, “undoubtedly the venture would have been profitable had it turned out as planned.”²²² There was little, if any, hint that the *Suian Maru* incident reflected anything but the actions of individuals.

For the most part, the articles established the concrete details of this “Japanese descent upon our coast [which] is undoubtedly one of the most mysterious things that ever happened.”²²³ Interest revolved around the evolving details of how many immigrants there actually were, who they really were, and why they undertook to smuggle themselves into the country surreptitiously, on false pretences, in such a dangerous and uncomfortable manner, when there was no real need to do so. The explanation that they were fishermen blown off course was quickly proven wrong by the insufficient and unused fishing gear and the suspicious baggage. New theories emerged almost daily; one day they were “coolie” labourers while the next they were deserters from the Japanese army. Another day, they were revealed to be unfortunate labourers enticed (and misled) by Oikawa to work specifically in his cannery and saltery. That same day, they were mistaken for an invading (and formidable) army marching on Sidney. In the end, however, they were correctly identified as farmers who had been recruited or sponsored by the property-owning, and respected, Oikawa Jinsaburo.

Three weeks after the *Suian Maru*'s arrival, when all the passengers had been rounded up, the story unravelled, and the charges laid, the newspapers dispassionately reported that the heavy fines had been paid, the *Suian Maru* was free to return to Japan, and “the Japanese emigrants who were landed at Beecher bay [sic] and afterwards

²²² Victoria Daily Times, 22 Oct. 1906, 4.

²²³ Victoria Daily Times, 23 Oct. 1906, 4.

recaptured [had] been released.”²²⁴ In retrospect, the same article characterised the whole incident of eighty-two Japanese landing in army uniforms and evading the laws and regulations as merely causing a “mild sensation at the time.”²²⁵

This is not to say that the newspapers welcomed the *Suian Maru* immigrants with open arms. The articles assured the readers that laws would be upheld and penalties enforced; the immigrants had “infracted many customs, quarantine and immigration regulations for all of which a penalty might be enforced.”²²⁶ The report on the court case noted that “counsel for the prosecution intimated to Magistrat [sic] Hall that this case was the first one of its kind to be dealt with in this city and asked that His Honour inflict a penalty heavy enough to act as a warning.”²²⁷ Furthermore, the language in the text indicated no sudden change in racist attitudes towards Asians; expressions like “Jap,” “coolie,” “little brown men,” and “little soldiers” belie the underlying attitudes even if there was no organised, and vehement opposition to their arrival. How, then, can the treatment of the *Suian Maru* passengers be explained?

Treatment of the Suian Maru

Given the discussion on the attitudes towards Asian immigrants in B.C. around 1906, it is safe to assume that the *Suian Maru* immigrants were not automatically welcome in British Columbia. Careful negotiations were entered into and they were allowed to stay although this was not a foregone conclusion; there were two potential

²²⁴ Victoria Daily Times, 8 Nov. 1906, 4.

²²⁵ Victoria Daily Times, 8 Nov. 1906, 4.

²²⁶ Victoria Daily Colonist, 21 Oct. 1906, 1.

²²⁷ Victoria Daily Times, 30 Oct. 1906, 5.

legal mechanisms which might have influenced their treatment and denied them entry: British Columbia legislation to exclude Asian immigrants and the immigrants lack of passports. Furthermore, the Japanese Consulate was under no obligation to negotiate on behalf of their staying but had to act in the best interests of a Japanese Government that had already demonstrated an overall desire not to create antagonism over labour immigrants. An examination of each of these factors in turn will suggest that the *Suian Maru* passengers were allowed to stay because, at the time of their arrival, there were no legal means to deny them, a desire by the Japanese Government to encourage migration when it could, and no public opposition against them. The key to bringing this favourable alignment together was Yoshie Saburo and his connections to the Canadian Nippon Supply Company.

Absence of Exclusionary Legislation and Treaty Obligations

It was noted earlier that British Columbia had enacted legislation intended to limit or exclude Asian immigration almost annually in the early 1900s but these had been repeatedly disallowed by the federal government. The most recent enactment prior to the *Suian Maru*'s arrival was in April 1905 but this had been disallowed in October 1905 and the next attempt was not made until 1907. These disallowances did not mean that the federal government was necessarily opposed to this anti-Asian legislation *per se* (it likely would have preferred not to aggravate the west coast); however, inasmuch as these laws included Japanese immigrants, it was "forced to weigh Japan's position in the

international world and her relationship with the British Empire,”²²⁸ especially after Canada officially became a party to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

Japan and Great Britain’s 1894 Treaty of Commerce and Navigation included a clause that granted their respective subjects “the full liberty to enter, travel, or reside in any part of the dominions and possessions of the other Contracting Party, [with] full and perfect protection for their persons and property.”²²⁹ Canada, through a clause that allowed it an exemption²³⁰ did not sign the treaty until January 1906 (with ratification in July and Parliamentary assent in January 1907). Canada considered requesting the right to exclude labourers and artisans through a clause provisionally agreed to by Japan in 1897 but that had never been used. In the end, however, Canada opted to “adhere absolutely and without reserve” because indications from the Japanese Consul-General in Ottawa were that Japan “would refuse to enter into any commercial treaty which involved its admitting Canada’s right to differentiate against the entry of Japanese.”²³¹

For the *Suiian Maru* case, this meant there was no general anti-Asian legislation to deny their entry and there were obligations under the Anglo-Japanese Alliance to allow them to enter. However, there are no indications whether these reciprocal rights of travel and residence were granted automatically or if a government had to invoke them on behalf of its subjects. Because the *Suiian Maru* passengers left without the permission of the Japanese government, they did not have passports to identify themselves as Japanese

²²⁸ Adachi, *Enemy that Never Was*, 71.

²²⁹ “Japanese Treaty Act, 1906, Article I,” in *Statutes of Canada*, ch. 50 (Ottawa, King’s Printer, 1907), 349.

²³⁰ “Japanese Treaty Act, Article XIX,” 356..

²³¹ “Anglo-Japanese Alliance,” 133.

citizens, nor did they have permission to leave. Given this, it is questionable whether these rights would even apply to them.

No Canadian Requirements for a Passport

British Columbians understood that Japanese needed passports to enter Canada. Newspaper articles about the *Suian Maru* expressed surprise at the attempt to evade customs and immigration regulations because “any Japanese may land who is in a healthy condition and has the necessary passport with which every Japanese who leaves home regularly is armed” and those without passports were not usually allowed entry.”²³² The passengers themselves were reportedly expecting to be deported because leaving Japan without passports was “a crime under the Japanese laws.”²³³ In the end, the passengers were given their liberty after paying the various fines but no further mention was made of their lack of passports. In fact, Canada’s Immigration Act of 1906 stipulates that permission to leave a vessel depended upon all “requirements of this Act and of any Order-in-Council, proclamation or regulation made thereunder” being carried out.²³⁴ These requirements included a clean bill of health and possibly a prescribed minimum amount of money. The Act specifically prohibited various classes of “undesirables”²³⁵ but

²³² Victoria Daily Colonist, 21 Oct. 1906, 1. See also Victoria Daily Times, 23 Oct. 1906, 5 and Victoria Daily Colonist, 24 Oct. 1906, 5.

²³³ Victoria Daily Colonist, 24 Oct. 1906, 5.

²³⁴ Canada, The Immigration Act 1906, section 17, in Statutes of Canada (Ottawa, King’s Printer, 1906).

²³⁵ Any immigrant who is “feeble-minded, an idiot, or an epileptic, or who is insane, ... deaf and dumb, or dumb, blind or infirm,” “who is afflicted with a loathsome disease,” who is a “pauper, or destitute, a professional beggar, or vagrant,” or who has been “convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude” or is in any way involved in prostitution.

makes no reference to the need for passports. Thus, the *Suian Maru* passengers fulfilled all the stated requirement of the Act.²³⁶

It was possibly as a result of the *Suian Maru* incident that, on December 29, 1906, W.D. Scott (Superintendent of Immigration) gave written reiteration of verbal instructions to local Immigration Agents, including Dr. Milne in Victoria, drawing their attention “to the desire of the Department that you shall not permit any Japanese to land in Canada who are not in possession of a passport.”²³⁷ This unofficial requirement for passports was legally challenged in Vancouver in May 1907 when the acting Medical Inspector ordered two Japanese “stowaways” deported “by reason of them not having pastports [sic].” Their lawyer argued that a lack of passports “was no ground for deportation” and an adjournment was granted to determine if any proclamation or arrangement had been made under Section 30 of the Act.²³⁸ Presumably, none had been made because, on reconvening, “the Chief Justice made an order for their discharge.”²³⁹ If there had been no proclamation or arrangement by May 1907, it seems likely that there had been none when the *Suian Maru* arrived.

In August 1907, Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier attempted to obtain a cabinet order “prohibiting the landing in Canada of Japanese immigrants, other than those who

²³⁶ Canada, The Immigration Act 1906, sections 18, 20, 26, 27, 28, 29.

²³⁷ Canada Immigration Branch, RG76, vol. 331, file 330483, pt. 4, reel C10243, BCA, GR1547, reel B1033,. W.D. Scott to G.L. Milne, 29 Dec. 1906.

²³⁸ Section 30 of The Immigration Act, 1906 states that “The Governor in Council may, by proclamation or order, whenever he considers it necessary or expedient, prohibit the landing in Canada of any specified class of immigrants, of which due notice shall be given to the transportation companies.”

²³⁹ Canada Immigration Branch, RG76, vol. 332, file 330483, pt. 5, reel C10243, BCA, GR1547, reel B1034, MacDonnel and Henderson to Deputy Minister of Justice, 6 May 1907.

come from Japan direct, bearing passports” but hand-written notes on the request show the “recommendation was not acted upon as we have rec’d no O in C.”²⁴⁰ Then in October 1907, newspapers reported that “Japs May Have to Secure Passports,” but it was suggested “understanding with Japan would be necessary to enforce such an order” since it interfered with the treaty.²⁴¹ Thus Canadian law did not strictly require Japanese immigrants to have passports when the *Suian Maru* arrived in 1906; however, it may have been an issue under Japanese law.

Japanese Passports Required for Domestic Control and International Relations

Victoria newspaper comments on the passport requirements for Japanese immigrants (i.e. “not usual ... to allow the entry ... of Japanese not armed with passports” and “crime under the Japanese laws to leave for foreign countries without passports”)²⁴² may have referred not to Canada’s requirement for passports to enter but to Japan’s requirement for passports to leave. Although the Meiji-era of Oikawa Jinsaburo’s lifespan is often characterised by internationalization and wholesale Westernization, the influence of a centuries-long Tokugawa policy of seclusion that limited contact, disallowed foreign travel, and forbade Japanese then overseas from returning home was slow to change.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Canada Immigration Branch, RG76, vol 83, file 9309, reel C4750 BCA, GR1547, reel, B0794, Wilfrid Laurier to Governor General in Council, 9 Aug. 1907.

²⁴¹ Manitoba Free Press, 27 Sept. 1907, in Canada Immigration Branch, RG76, vol 83, file 9309, reel C4750, BCA, GR1547, reel B0794.

²⁴² Victoria Daily Colonist, 24 Oct. 1906, 5.

²⁴³ This change did not signify an abandonment of Japanese nationalism. Tokugawa nationalism from the early 1600s to the 1860s was predicated on creating strength by isolation and seclusion outside influences (*sakoku*). The Meiji tactic was to create national strength by meeting the outside on its own terms. This strengthening and enriching the nation policy was known as *fukoku kyōhei*.

Passports were a means for Japan to control its limited overseas travellers as the instructions given to passport applicants in the 1878 *Kaigai ryōkenkisoku* (overseas passport ordinance) show:

1. Without permission, you must not visit or stay in a country other than the one the travel to which has been authorized. You must return to Japan without prolonging the authorized period of stay in a foreign country.
2. You must not, of course, register your name in a census registry in the foreign country you will visit nor be converted to an alien religious faith.
3. You must not violate the provisions of the treaty. You must try to associate with foreigners with sincerity.²⁴⁴

The strictness of passport regulation in Japan had apparently not changed much by the time of the *Suian Maru*'s arrival as the following details recorded in 1907 show:

Application ... must be accompanied by a certified copy of the register record. The Foreign Office ... causes such inquiries to be made concerning the applicant as are deemed expedient. The application is sent to the local police authorities for their certificate, and if, after this examination, the Foreign Office is satisfied that all requirements have been met and that it is proper to grant a passport, one is issued.

This “register record” had been kept in every municipality for generations and listed births, deaths, marriages, and changes of residence so that “each individual is bound up [in] the record of his family connection.” In addition, individuals had to have “bondsmen” who would personally guarantee that the migrant complied with all requirements.²⁴⁵ In leaving without passports, the *Suian Maru* passengers circumvented this complex system but was that really important?

²⁴⁴ Nagai Matsuzo, comp., *Nichibei bunka koushou-shi* [A History of Japanese American Cultural Relations], Vol. V: *Ijuuhen* [Immigration Volume] (Tokyo: Yoyo-sha, 1955) quoted in Donald Teruo Hata, *Undesirables: Early immigrants and the Anti-Japanese Movement in San Francisco, 1892-1893, Prelude to Exclusion* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 23.

²⁴⁵ King, *Royal Commission ...Methods by Which Oriental Labourers have been Induced*, 17-18

Some evidence shows that it may not have been. The “Record of Japanese and East Asians Entering British Columbia,” kept in 1904 and again in 1908 has a column headed “why passed” and includes variations on the notation, “certified by Jap. Consul.”²⁴⁶ The exact conditions or import of this are unclear but it seems the Consul General in Vancouver could vouch for an immigrant or grant a passport on arrival.²⁴⁷ Indeed, the Nitta version has Yoshie Saburo, representing the Japanese Consulate, informing the passengers that “we will go into Victoria to get your pictures taken and by this time tomorrow, you will each have a legal passport.”²⁴⁸ Even a re-reading of the newspaper quotation above, “all Japanese immigrants are supposed to obtain [passports] before they can land in Canada,”²⁴⁹ seems to allow for passports issued after the fact if “land” is taken to mean “permission to stay.”

This seeming inconsistency in Japan’s passport requirements mirrors a shift in emphasis from passport as domestic control to passports as means to control Japan’s international image. As Japan become a powerful member of the imperialistic world, a concern arose that “the character of the Japanese abroad [would] be taken as an index of the character of the nation at home.”²⁵⁰ Between 1889 and 1893, Japan took various measures to check on its subjects abroad. From Vancouver, the Consul General reported

²⁴⁶ Several variations of this appear: certified by Consul, cert by Jap Consul, Reg. Jap Consul, Reg. Jap. Consul, Reg Jap Consul. Given the small space in the ledger and that there was no pattern in whether “cert”; “reg”; “Jap” had periods, there is probably nothing racist to be read into the mere fact that Japanese was often abbreviated to “Jap.”

²⁴⁷ BCA, British Columbia Provincial Secretary, Immigration Record, GR0618, Box 1.

²⁴⁸ Nitta, 207-208; Sulz, 133.

²⁴⁹ Victoria Daily Times, 23 Oct. 1906, 5.

many Japanese there were poor, destitute, chronically ill and “spend all they have earned to indulge in drinking, gambling or other kinds of pleasure.”²⁵¹ In response, the Consulate assigned staff to help Canadian immigration officials keep “bad” examples from entering and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs directed Prefectural Governors to suppress the departure of contract labourers by enforcing emigration restrictions vigorously.²⁵² The Consulate encouraged permanent resident but gradually refined policies to ensure that “only people worthy of representing a growing, imperial East Asian nation be approved for travel ... not low class or densely ignorant.”²⁵³ The 1896, *imin hogohô* (Emigrant Protection Law)²⁵⁴ defined labourers as those “engaged in farming, ranching, fishing, mining, manufacturing, engineering, construction, transportation, and domestic services.”²⁵⁵ In 1900, a ban was put on labour immigrants with Viscount Aoki, Minister of Foreign Affairs, reportedly ordering that the emigration of labourers to Canada or the United States be “prohibited entirely, for the time being.”²⁵⁶

This background of restrictions begs the question of why the farmers and labourers aboard the *Suian Maru* garnered the assistance of the Consulate in getting passports and clemency in punishment despite disregarding various laws and restrictions that seemed

²⁵⁰ W.M. Rice. “Report of the United States Commissioner” in Canada, Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, 413.

²⁵¹ Quoted in Hata, Undesirables, 69

²⁵² Mitziko Sawada, Tokyo Life, New York Dreams (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 42.

²⁵³ Sawada, Tokyo Life, New York Dreams, 44.

²⁵⁴ Sawada, Tokyo Life, New York Dreams, 45

²⁵⁵ Sawada, Tokyo Life, New York Dreams, 208.

²⁵⁶ Canada, Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, 396.

designed especially to keep people like them from emigrating to Canada. Part of the answer lies in consideration of why the Meiji government might favour emigration and pursue neo-mercantile, proactive actions on migration; migrants provided traffic and revenue for shipping lines, revenue to the state through remittances and taxes, a market for exports, and access to a supply of raw and partly-finished materials.²⁵⁷ The *Suian Maru* passengers could potentially fulfil all of these benefits so it is not inconsistent that the Consulate negotiated on their behalf, after all. Their ability to do so was, however, dependant on the dictates of international relations.

There seems to be an inconsistency in the perceptions of the power and abilities of the Japanese Consulates. At one extreme, some saw them as “mother hens clucking over their broods, ...expend[ing] a great deal of energy in looking after the welfare of immigrants”²⁵⁸ while others considered them “merely decorative [with] absolutely no power.”²⁵⁹ They were probably both depending on the will of their political masters in Japan and there are several examples of Japan pursuing vigorous protests and exertions of influence in response to attempts at restricting immigrants. In 1903, the Canadian Minister of Agriculture warned that “the matter of Japanese immigration would have to be handled with caution, since the proud and sensitive Japanese would be sure to resent any legislation specifically directed against them.”²⁶⁰ Likewise, by 1906, Japan’s international

²⁵⁷ Neville Bennet, “Japanese Emigration Policy 1880-1941,” in Asians in Australia: the Dynamics of Migration and Settlement. Eds. Christine Inglis et al (St. Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1992): 25 and “Anglo-Japanese Alliance,” 136.

²⁵⁸ Adachi, Enemy that Never Was, 42.

²⁵⁹ Nitta, 84; Sulz, 56.

²⁶⁰ Klaus Pringsheim, Neighbours Across the Pacific: The Development of Economic and Political Relations Between Canada and Japan (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press), 11.

stature had increased to the point where it refused to even consider giving other jurisdictions the right to exclude its labourers and artisans under the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.²⁶¹ Furthermore, Japan's protests were often heeded because they were backed by "blood and iron."²⁶²

It is likely, then that any willingness on the part of Japan to restrict and regulate emigrants or make concessions to discrimination against certain classes was a function of the "risk of political repercussions and the fear of damaging commercial prospects"²⁶³ not merely a disdain for labourers and farmers such as arrived on the *Suiian Maru*. It is clear that Consulates, and Japan, had to balance conflicting goals: from facilitating commercial interests, to maintaining contact with men liable for military service, ensuring that emigrants would be of good character and not likely to become a public charge, and fulfilling obligations to foreign countries.²⁶⁴

Japanese Consulate Help Facilitated by Lack of Public Opposition.

Given the conflicting responsibilities of the Consulate to citizens, domestic government, and international concerns, there were potentially two options for the Japanese Consulate to negotiate with the Canadians regarding the *Suiian Maru*. The harsh option might see them co-operating in sending a strong message to satisfy anti-Asian immigrant attitudes while the soft option would see the matter swept under the carpet to

²⁶¹ "Anglo-Japanese Alliance," 135.

²⁶² "Anglo-Japanese Alliance," 137.

²⁶³ Ian Nish, Japanese Foreign Policy 1869-1942 (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1976), 281.

²⁶⁴ King, Royal Commission ...Methods by Which Oriental Labourers have been Induced, 17-18

prevent it becoming an issue. For a time, the latter seemed unlikely as the incident had already garnered extensive press coverage; the harsh option seemed most likely.

As the Victoria Daily Colonist reported:

If they are deported, as they fear they will be, imprisonment stares them in the face, for they left home by false pretences, as it were, signing the records of the Kencho on being permitted to engage in deep-sea fishing for six months. None have passports, and it is a crime under the Japanese laws to leave for foreign countries without passports.²⁶⁵

Leniency for the passengers could have been risky; the process (and thus control) of emigration policy within Japan could have been undermined if word got out that a large group had smuggled themselves out of the country on false pretences and been allowed to stay in Canada. The Consul General's report to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, shows he was well aware of the potential risk in noting the Victoria newspapers had initially reported on the "unprecedented event and expressed outrage;" he thus warned of 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."²⁶⁶

Oikawa himself was an interesting case as he had a passport and the Victoria Daily Times reported that he owned property on the B.C. mainland "and has a good standing among his fellow countrymen in the province."²⁶⁷ However, this was not necessarily a point in his favour as there were sometime concerns in B.C. that land ownership "would

²⁶⁵ "How Japanese Were Smuggled," Victoria Daily Colonist, 24 Oct. 1906, 5.

²⁶⁶ Quoted in Nitta, 212; Sulz, 136.

²⁶⁷ Victoria Daily Times, 8 Nov. 1906, 4.

entrench Japanese colonies in [B.C.] ... [and drive] white farmers from the land.”²⁶⁸ One editorial did suggest that Oikawa was “undoubtedly a sinner” but was lucky because “we do not punish people on general principles in this country;” however, he was “apt to get what is coming to him” if he could be deported because the “Japanese government may be trusted to do the rest.”²⁶⁹ It should be noted that this refers specifically to Oikawa and the same paper had run an article the previous day reporting how he had victimised and swindled the *Suian Maru* passengers.²⁷⁰

There was great interest in how they would be charged for breaking the Quarantine, Customs, and Immigration Laws and whether they would be deported but there does not seem to be the “outrage” that the Consul-General suggested. There were apparently no organised demonstrations nor public demands for their deportation and, in fact, interest in the story dies off quickly after they were convicted and fined in the Provincial Police Court; there was no reaction to news that the passengers had been given their liberty.

Thus it seems the soft alternative of convincing everyone that the *Suian Maru* passengers were not actually illegal immigrants became possible. The Consul General’s report noted that a clerk of the Consulate, Yoshie Saburo, had been sent to investigate and recommended that “under the especially pitiable circumstances it would not be in anyone’s best interests to return them to Japan.” There is no explanation of these pitiable

²⁶⁸ Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 106. Dr. Patricia Roy (personal e-mail, 15 May 2003) notes that such concern was most intense just before the World War I and in the 1920s. Ward dates this concern to the early 1900s when the first few immigrants began purchasing land.

²⁶⁹ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 26 Oct. 1906, 4.

²⁷⁰ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 25 Oct. 1906, 3.

conditions but Yoshie successfully explained to the Canadian authorities why the *Suian Maru* had entered illegally and was able to convince them to “exercise clemency in not prosecuting, and, in fact, grant legal permission to immigrate.”²⁷¹ The lack of violent public outcry no doubt contributed to the success of the negotiations but such a lack in an obviously anti-Asian environment seems anomalous.

There are indications in the secondary literature that “mounting racial tensions” beginning in the summer of 1906 resulted in a frenzy of newspapers articles and public meetings where the “old call for a white Canada” was renewed with vigour.²⁷² For example, a magazine editorial in September 1906 asserted that, “the slant-eyed Asiatic with his yellow skin, his unmanly humility, his cheap wants, would destroy the whole equilibrium of society.”²⁷³ This agitation supposedly subsided over the winter months of 1906 when immigration slowed²⁷⁴ but flared again in February 1907 as “one of the major issues in the provincial election.”²⁷⁵ Seemingly contradictory evidence suggests that “British Columbians had been relatively quiet on the Asian question” in the years leading up to 1907 because of a sharp decline in Asian immigration²⁷⁶ due to the increase in the Chinese head tax and that the Japanese government had “prohibit[ed] entirely the

²⁷¹ Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Miscellaneous file relating to Illegal Japanese Immigrants to Foreign Countries,” Public Document 805-21027, 5 Nov. 1906 in Nitta, 212-214; Sulz, 135.

²⁷² Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 65.

²⁷³ From *Saturday Night* magazine, quoted in Fleras, *Unequal Relations*, 255.

²⁷⁴ Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 65.

²⁷⁵ Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was*, 64.

²⁷⁶ Roy, *A White Man’s Province*, 153 with a table on 270.

emigration of Japanese labourers.”²⁷⁷ This immigration decline, combined with little natural increase in the province, coincided with, or created, a shortage of cheap labour just when it was in desperate demand.²⁷⁸ Indeed, Gotoh Saori, the largest Japanese labour contractor in Vancouver, testified “it was increasingly difficult to obtain the supply of Japanese labour which his contracts called for” from 1900 to 1906.²⁷⁹

Primary sources specific to late October and early November 1906 highlight some of the complexities in assessing the degree of racism at the time; there was labour demand by employers but overall opposition from workers, interest in Asian nations and culture but only in their “proper” place, and respect for Japan as ally. Labour was so scarce in October 1906 that the Superintendent of Immigration reportedly said he would place no limit on the number of immigrants because he had been “utterly unable to meet the demands for labor that pour in upon me from all parts of the west well nigh every day.”²⁸⁰ Labour papers admitted that conditions had been better in the months before October 1906, not so good to “overload the wage-earner with an amount of wealth that he can with difficulty dispose of” but “quite sufficient to cause the heartstrings of employers to be torn with anguish.”²⁸¹ Opposition to Asian labour appears sympathetic - they will be

²⁷⁷ Canada. Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1902).

²⁷⁸ See Roy, A White Man's Province, 165.

²⁷⁹ King, Royal Commission ...Methods by Which Oriental Labourers have been Induced, 20.

²⁸⁰ In Clive Phillips-Wolley, “Obstacles in the Way of Labour,” Victoria Daily Colonist, 28 Oct. 1906, 19.

²⁸¹ Western Clarion, 27 Oct. 1906, 1.

“taken advantage of and compelled to work for a smaller wages” - but the intent is to suggest they stay away from Canada and the “systematic swindle.”²⁸²

Some newspaper articles displayed a degree of cultural relativism in saying “the East is topsyturvy land from the Eastern [sic] point of view; although, of course, to their vision it is we Westerners who are upside down.”²⁸³ An interest in Japanese things was evidenced by large advertisements in almost every edition of both Victoria papers for “Japanese Fancy Goods” available at J.M. Nagano & Co. and the Mikado Bazaar. On closer examination, however, this sympathy and interest suggests that Asia was fine, but in its own place, and even that “the Anglo-Saxon race is quite as much out of place in India as the Indians are in the portions of the Empire we have arbitrarily set apart as our own special preserve.”²⁸⁴

Many articles were complimentary of Japanese culture, technical skill, business acumen, and international achievement. There is also a marked sympathy and support for Japan vis-à-vis the United States in their increasingly strained relations; attributed to such incidents as “the American protest against the Japanese programme in Manchuria, the killing of Japanese sealers, the murder of the Japanese bank president in San Francisco, the Hawaiian exclusion policy ... [and] the exclusion of Japanese children from the public schools of California.”²⁸⁵ This support was reportedly due to Japan’s military strength (“a

²⁸² Western Clarion, 27 Oct. 1906, 1.

²⁸³ Victoria Daily Colonist, 21 Oct. 1906, 16.

²⁸⁴ Victoria Daily Times, 26 Oct. 1906, 2.

²⁸⁵ Victoria Daily Colonist, 23 Oct. 1906, 2.

sudden war would prove disastrous to the United States”)²⁸⁶ and rise to a “place where Great Britain is proud to recognize her as an ally.”²⁸⁷

Only one article referred directly to Japanese immigration other than the *Suian Maru*. Mr. K. Ishii, “perhaps the best known Japanese merchant of this city,” reported on returning from Japan that a large exodus to Korea was “relieving the congestion in the home land [Japan]” and the Japanese authorities were anxious that emigrants “should not become paupers and bring discredit upon Japan ... they must possess five thousand yens in money or in property ... [or have] two residents who can give a guarantee.”

Furthermore, the description of some of Mr. Ishii’s ship-mates as “scions of aristocratic families” coming to take up farming, verges on endorsing Japanese immigration by noting that farming “is a new departure and shows a change in the disposition of the Japanese people and a growing interest in Canada which was formerly little known.”²⁸⁸

These contemporary sources, no matter how favourable they seem to Japanese immigration, represent but a tiny slice of time in an overall atmosphere of anti-Asian sentiment. Nonetheless it is evident that they contribute to the picture of why there was no public outrage against the *Suian Maru* arrival that might have obligated the Japanese Consulate to ensure its image in Canada was not damaged. All of the above explanations – no legal means to exclude, potential treaty obligations, no strict need for passports by either country, and a lack of public outcry are all passive or reactive factors and do not explain the active negotiation by the Consulate. The role and connections of Yoshie

²⁸⁶ Victoria Daily Colonist, 3 Nov. 1906, 4.

²⁸⁷ Victoria Daily Times, 27 Oct. 1906, 2.

²⁸⁸ Victoria Daily Times, 27 Oct. 1906, 2.

Saburo, however, fit the criteria for an active force. He had the means through the Consulate's authority, the solution through his connections with a labour contracting company, and the incentive to help his personal friend Oikawa and probably contribute to his personal success in the bargain.

Deals and Connections - Yoshie, the Canadian Nippon Supply Co., and the C.P.R.

Nitta Jiro, based on his readings of the memoirs of Oikawa Jinsaburo and others, indicates in his fictionalised account:

Through negotiations between the Canadian Immigration Office, the Japanese Consulate, and the Nikka Yoben Company, it was decided that the immigrants would work a minimum of one year on the railroad in exchange for permission to stay in Canada.²⁸⁹

While Nitta's version depends upon interpretations of the participants who may or may not have known the "real" reason for permission to stay, there is much circumstantial evidence to support his explanation. Yoshie Saburo, clerk at the Japanese Consulate, also had connections to Gotoh Saori who, in turn, had a contract to supply Japanese labourers to the C.P.R.

Nitta credits the *Nikka Yôben Kaisha*²⁹⁰ for putting up the money to pay the fines, arranging work on the railway, and outfitting the immigrants with clothing and tools but there are no references in the Japanese-Canadian literature to a *Nikka Yôben Kaisha*. On the other hand, Bunji Goto referred to a *Nikka Yôtatsu Kaisha*²⁹¹ in the diary he kept

²⁸⁹ Nitta, 220; Sulz, 142.

²⁹⁰ *Nikka* is comprised of the *kanji* characters for Japan and Canada, *yôben* most often refers to defecation (there is no explanation why Nitta would use this), *kaisha* means company.

²⁹¹ *Nikka* = Japan and Canada, *Yôtatsu* - purveyance or supply, *Kaisha* = company.

during the *Suian Maru* voyage and beyond.²⁹² Several entries in the Historical Materials of Japanese Immigration to Canada refer to such a company in Vancouver; some identify Gotoh Saori as the manager²⁹³ and other advertisements translate the company name as the “C.N.S. Co.” and “Canadian Nippon Supply Co.” respectively.²⁹⁴ This Canadian Nippon Supply Company with Gotoh Saori as “contractor” was referred to extensively in King’s Royal Commission of 1907 and definitely link it to Yoshie Saburo.

Mr. Gotoh had come to Canada from the United States in 1901 and had an agreement with the C.P.R. to be its sole contractor for Japanese labour. Unfortunately, he had fallen on “straightened circumstances” due to a “preference of his fellow countrymen for fishing ... and the absence ... of arrivals of labourers in any appreciable numbers from Japan.” During these bad times, Mr. Gotoh “became associated with Mr. Yoshy, a member of the Japanese Consulate at Vancouver” and they subsequently formed the Canadian Nippon Supply Company” in December 1906.²⁹⁵ Given the similarity of names (Yoshy – Yoshie) and his position at the Consulate, it appears clear that the Yoshie Saburo who negotiated on behalf of the *Suian Maru* is the Mr. Yoshy of the labour contracting company. It also suggests investigation into that company might shed light on the *Suian Maru* affair.

The Canadian Nippon Supply Company was of great interest to the King Commission in 1907 which made detailed investigations of its records and interviewed its

²⁹² Bunji Goto, “*Kôkai Nisshi* [Diary of a Voyage]” in Onodera, *Kanada e Watatta Tôhoku no Mura*, 275.

²⁹³ *Tairiku Nippô Sha*, eds., *Kanada Dôhôte Hatten Shi*, 1, 127; Sasaki, *Kanada Iminshi Shiryô* vol. 1, 78.

²⁹⁴ *Tairiku Nippô Sha*, eds., *Kanada Dôhôte Hatten Shi* vol. 2 (1917), 128 and vol. 3 (1924), 358; Sasaki, *Kanada Iminshi Shiryô* vol. 1, 128, 358.

²⁹⁵ King, *Report of the Royal Commission (1907)*, 27.

principals. While nothing in this testimony showed a direct connection with the *Suian Maru* there are some tantalising leads. Unfortunately, the Commission's main interest was immigration after January 1907 so any potential evidence of the *Suian Maru* affair was missed by a mere two months. Furthermore, the Commission's preoccupation with discovering whether emigration companies in Japan were promoting increased emigration to Canada prompted Mr. Yoshy to "disclaim all relationship between the Canadian Nippon Supply Company and any Japanese emigration company."²⁹⁶ While this does not preclude an involvement with the *Suian Maru* and Oikawa because Oikawa was based in Canada, it does not prove it either.²⁹⁷

When the Commission made a surprise visit to the company's offices, Mr. Yoshy was helpful in supplying access to books and records:

A card catalogue record is kept of all Japanese to whom employment has been given. This record shows the place of residence of the applicant immediately prior to the time of his application for employment; it shows also the date on which he was employed by the company and the disposition of his labour from time to time.²⁹⁸

Although the Commission only used the catalogue to determine the origin of immigrants from May to October, 1907, it is more than likely that the *Suian Maru* passengers would

²⁹⁶ King, Report of the Royal Commission (1907), 28.

²⁹⁷ While this interpretation, might appear to read too much into the answer, there is little doubt that Mr. Yoshy chose his words carefully to allow maximum mis-interpretation. For example, when asked if there were companies in Japan "collecting Japanese desirous of emigrating, and forwarding them to Canada?" he answered that there were "no special emigration companies in Japan, just for the purpose of sending emigrants to Canada." (King, 29). Although seemingly direct, the answer could be interpreted many ways (e.g. the companies sent emigrants to other places or did more than just send emigrants).

²⁹⁸ King, Royal Commission ...Methods by Which Oriental Labourers have been Induced, 44.

have been found therein; many C.N.S Co. workers “had been among the labourers formerly in his [Gotoh’s] employ and were taken over ... at the time of its formation.”²⁹⁹

One seeming problem with the assertion that the real-life *Nikka Yôtatsu Kaisha* was the *Nikka Yôben Kaisha* of Nitta’s account is that the company was not registered until a month after the *Suian Maru* arrived. One possibility is that the idea for the company was already in the minds of Yoshie and Gotoh and was referred to by name to the passengers. Alternatively, since Gotoh’s contracts were transferred to the new company within weeks of the *Suian Maru* starting, the *Suian Maru* men might later have remembered working for the *Nikka Yôtatsu Kaisha*.

It is clear that Yoshie Saburo was connected both to the Consulate and to the Canadian Nippon Supply Company when he negotiated on behalf of the *Suian Maru* passengers in October 1906. It is therefore likely that the success of those negotiations was intricately linked to Yoshie Saburo’s ability and willingness to combine his influence in the Consulate and his connections to a labour contracting company in finding jobs for a boat load of eighty-two labour immigrants and thus giving the perfect excuse for the authorities to grant them permission to stay.

Conclusion

The end result of all this investigation is that Nitta’s explanation for their treatment is about as accurate as it gets; Yoshie Saburo, with his connections to a labour contracting company and the Japanese consulate, brokered a deal between the Canadian and Japanese authorities. Furthermore, the legal and public circumstances of the time

²⁹⁹ King, Royal Commission ...Methods by Which Oriental Labourers have been Induced, 44.

made the deal not only possible but also the most logical choice. The *Suian Maru* arrived in British Columbia when anti-Japanese sentiments, although always present, were at a low-ebb due to factors such as good economic times, a lengthy period with relatively few Asian immigrants, and respect for Japan as an ally. Whether or not the story of the “pitiable” yet admirable *Suian Maru* passengers struck a chord with British Columbians, there was no organised call for their deportation. Even if there were, Ottawa had been more concerned with the obligations of Empire and upholding the Anglo-Japanese Alliance than provincial attitudes towards Asian immigration so there were no legal means to refuse them entry (i.e. passport requirements or exclusionary immigration legislation).

Nonetheless, these lower-class, labour immigrants had left Japan irregularly (if not illegally) and infringed several Canadian laws on arrival; there is less evidence why the Japanese government, as represented by the Consulate in Vancouver, expended such effort in assisting them when there was the potential of damaging Japan’s credibility at home and abroad. In failing to punish them severely for leaving Japan without permission and on false pretences, the Japanese government potentially opened its migration control processes (e.g. family register, passport applications) to abuse by emigrants and questions of effectiveness by British Columbians already suspicious of Japan’s commitment to self-regulation of emigrants. It appears, however, that these controls were a response to international pressures to limit Japanese immigration so the lack of pressure surrounding the *Suian Maru*’s arrival meant the Consulate had no need to enforce its controls.

The active participant in the negotiations was Yoshie Saburo whose influence through the Consulate, connections to Gotoh at the Canadian Nippon Supply Company

which had connections with the C.P.R., and personal incentive led to a win-win solution for all involved. The immigrants got permission to stay and work, the C.N.S got labourers to fulfil its contracts, the C.P.R. got much needed labour to continue its railway projects, British Columbians saw the immigrants get guaranteed jobs outside the Lower Mainland where labour competition and unrest was most pronounced, Canada fulfilled its obligations to Empire under the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, and Japan did not have to admit problems with its emigration policies and got hard-working citizens in British Columbia.

However, appealing and ‘tight’ the above explanation, it is still speculative. Whatever the “real” reason, it is likely that such a window of opportunity did not last long after the *Suiian Maru* incident. Anti-Asian sentiment became a hot issue again in the February 1907 provincial election and exploded, after heavy immigration in the spring and summer, in the Vancouver Riot in September of that same year. By early 1908, the Lemieux Agreement limited the Japanese Consulate’s ability to intervene on behalf of immigrants. Finally, the loss of Yoshie Saburo’s connection to the Consulate probably meant no one would, or could, take up the fight with such personal connections and incentive.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to show both that Oikawa Jinsaburo led a remarkable life worthy of historical attention and that Nitta Jiro did it justice; both in terms of Oikawa's life and what his story might mean in the broader historical context. This was to be accomplished through three approaches: familiarising, verifying, and contextualising. In Chapter 1, the unfamiliar reader was introduced to the Oikawa story through a summary of Nitta's Mikkôsen Suian Maru in translation which, although detailed and thorough, is best described as a historical-fiction or documentary novel. Chapter Two showed, through a presentation of various historical sources, that the Nitta version mostly transcends fiction; many of the particular details can be supported by historical evidence and the overall story is true. There are, however, some significant omissions and contradictions between the novel and the historical evidence but these add, rather than detract, to the value of the story. Chapter Three took one event in the story, the treatment of the *Suian Maru* passengers, and examined it in light of the context of the times. This was done both to suggest explanations for their treatment and to suggest that Nitta's version of Oikawa's life can be used as a stepping stone to a broader understanding of history: in this case, Japanese migration to British Columbia in 1906.

Oikawa has been remembered through the decades especially for his community on Lion and Don Islands in the Fraser River, his entrepreneurial success, and for his involvement in the fascinating *Suian Maru* immigration incident of 1906. This memory, however, has been limited mostly to Japanese from his hometown of Towa-cho in Miyagi Prefecture and Japanese-Canadians with some connection to that place. Nitta's 1979

novel presented characters and situations so believable and logically connected that readers are excused for mistaking it for a factual biography rather than a novel. Indeed, many people interested in Oikawa, including descendants and friends of people associated with him, generally consider it to be an accurate portrayal. To my knowledge, however, no one has critically examined the historical veracity of the Oikawa story, at least in English.

Several versions of Oikawa's life have appeared in community history collections since Nitta's version appeared but these are so consistent with it that they are likely entirely based on it. Many "pre-Nitta" sources, although difficult to locate, show that there is much more to the Oikawa story. For the most part, these accord with the novel and suggest that Nitta got the story basically right, but new details do extend and enhance Nitta's portrayal. Some of these new details seem to contradict Nitta directly, for example:

- * the Oikawa / Sato colony shows up in the 1901 census based on surnames and approximate location but the given names are inconsistent with Nitta's novel;
- * the real-life Nobuo Chiyoharu character is missing from, or changed considerably in the novel;
- * Sato Souemon may have been Nitta's rival rather than partner;
- * the Ewen Cannery on Lion Island and the Oikawa / Sato colonies on Lion and Don island are not mentioned in respective accounts of the other although they coexisted in time and space;
- * the roles of characters such as Oikawa's sons (Taijiro and Michie) and Yoshie Saburo (of the Vancouver Consulate) may have been more interesting and significant than Nitta allows;
- * the *Suian Maru* incident of 1906 created quite a stir of interest on the "Canadian" side that was mostly missed by Nitta's portrayal of the "Japanese" side;

* there is little evidence explaining the decision to allow the *Suian Maru* migrants to stay in Canada despite indications it could have been controversial.

A full examination of each of these was beyond the limits of this study so the first five were briefly introduced to suggest possible avenues for further research. The last two about the *Suian Maru* were examined in greater detail.

Although Nitta's title suggests the *Suian Maru* is the focus of the novel, the actual arrival comprises only about five percent. Furthermore, because he worked from Japanese sources, he largely missed the considerable interest by the public and the authorities in Victoria. Newspaper accounts show mystification, especially since there was no apparent need for these Japanese to smuggle themselves into Canada. Theories about their identity changed daily: distressed fishermen, invading army, army deserters, or victims of an immigration scam. Oikawa's status was likewise difficult to ascertain: "wily schemer," respected businessman, or a hometown benefactor. It is not impossible to assert that he was all of these depending on who is judging.

This public attention to the *Suian Maru* abruptly fell off when all the passengers had been rounded up and the court had imposed fines. The intrigue surrounding the arrival had been solved and punishment given, but the decision to let them stay was not of much interest. Official sources show little evidence of the decision to stay. The Immigration Department file indicates the newspaper articles were accurate and adds little more. Furthermore, the local immigration agent, Dr. Milne, was more concerned with how the *Suian Maru* case exposed flaws in the new 1906 Immigration Act and the rivalry between the Immigration, Customs, and Quarantine Officers over who had priority in examining and fining incoming ships.

Why the *Suiian Maru* immigrants were granted permission to stay in Canada remains vague and problematic. Despite indications that it was of little interest at the time, the historical context suggests that it could have been. British Columbia in the late 1800s and early 1900s was not a friendly place even for most Asian immigrants who entered legally. Often, it was downright hostile especially to those of different race or class; British Columbia was to be a “white man’s province” and unfair labour competition was not welcome; Asian labourers were under pressure on both counts. The Japanese Consulate, as official representative of Japan, was responsible for representing Japanese interests in British Columbia and this included the interests of immigrants. However, the Japanese government, although powerful, seemed more concerned with its image in the imperialist world than the welfare of lowly farmers and labourers who might “tarnish” its stature. In other words, the chance of the *Suiian Maru* being welcomed with open arms by either Canada or Japan seem unlikely.

Despite the limited evidence directly relating to the permission for the *Suiian Maru* passengers to stay, various factors in the context of the times suggest possibilities. There were no legislative means for British Columbia or Canada to refuse them entry; provincial exclusionary legislation had been routinely and recently disallowed by the federal government. On the contrary, it appears there were obligations to grant them entry under the Anglo-Japanese Alliance which bound Canada. Whether these treaty rights were extended to illegitimate immigrants was another matter; in arriving without passports, the *Suiian Maru* passengers indicated they were not sanctioned by the Japanese government.

Although there were suggestions at the time that passports were required for entry to Canada, there were no such requirements in the Immigration Act and the passengers

satisfied the other conditions. Various unofficial attempts to enforce or change the passport requirements in the months surrounding the *Suian Maru*'s arrival were unsuccessful. At any rate, the Japanese Consulate could apparently issue passports on the spot, passports were a prerogative of the Japanese government, and issuance was related to its internal policies and external relations.

Japan used passports to control emigration for both internal and external reasons. Internally, passport restriction could, for example, ensure an adequate supply of soldiers in case of war; externally, it allowed Japan to limit the number of immigrants according to international pressure yet still encourage migration for commercial or Imperial reasons. That there was no obvious uproar at the *Suian Maru* arrival meant the Consulate need not concern itself with appeasing Canadian demands. This lack of outrage at their arrival illustrates the complexity of assessing the extent and import of anti-Asian sentiment; it was always present but manifested in different degree according to specifics of time, place, and individual attitudes. When the *Suian Maru* arrived in 1906, anti-Asian sentiment was muted by a strong economy, a slowing of the increase in numbers of Asians, and a labour shortage which meant abundant jobs for all.

The above explanation encompasses passive or enabling factors but does not identify the active force that made the negotiations happen. Yoshie Saburo appears to be the force to convince the authorities that the *Suian Maru* passengers could be given passports and far off jobs to remove them from the spotlight. Yoshie was able to accomplish this through his role as Consulate representative and his connections to the Canada Nippon Supply Company. The incentive for him to do so was his personal connection to Oikawa and possibly the potential for personal gain. In other words, Yoshie

brokered a deal that was good for all; the immigrants got to stay with jobs, neither government was seen to be weak on illegal immigration and could meet its international obligations, the Consulate kept the incident under control, and the Canadian Nippon Supply Company was able to fulfil its contracts with Canadian railway companies which got their needed labourers. What influences, if any, the C.P.R. may have brought to bear on the matter is unknown.

In light of the above, one set of correspondences seem relevant to the *Suian Maru* affair but their analysis opens so many questions that I did not deal with them in the main text. At exactly the time of the *Suian Maru*'s arrival, a Seattle attorney coincidentally wrote a very carefully worded letter to the Superintendent of Immigration in Ottawa about Japanese immigration:

I wish to enquire whether or not the Canadian Government or the Canadian people, have any objection, either legal or sentimental, to immigrants from the Empire of Japan to Canada or any of its Provinces, and further, do Japanese residents of Canada, and of the Province of Alberta in particular, have the same rights so far as acquiring title to any and all lands, that are accorded to the citizens of Canada.

I am aware that your Government looks with favor upon immigration from the United States, and the point I make is, does the Government, and the people of Canada look with equal favor upon immigrants from the Empire of Japan .³⁰⁰

W. D. Scott, as Superintendent of Immigration, replied:

No special restriction is place upon Japanese immigration to Canada. If they fulfil the requirements as to health and ability to support themselves the Japanese are admitted the same as other immigrants and they are accorded the same rights as to acquiring lands and in all other respects as immigrants from any other nation. This applies to the Province of Alberta as well as to

³⁰⁰ Canada Immigration Branch, RG76, vol. 83, file 9309, reel C4750, BCA, GR1547, reel B0794, John F. Main to Interior Dept, Ottawa, 25 Oct. 1906.

all other parts of Canada and Japanese residents may be naturalized the same as other people after three years' residence in this country.³⁰¹

Scott's reply was sent on 7 November 1906 just two days after Dr. Milne's report on the *Suian Maru* arrived at the Immigration Branch. Scott was probably aware of the *Suian Maru* affair and the media reaction to it as he drafted his response to Scott.

Scott's reply, however, is problematic for several reasons. One is that it is outright false in some respects; Japanese were disenfranchised and did not have the same rights, but only in B.C. Secondly, it is misleading in suggesting there were no restrictions on immigrants; Canada imposed none but only because Japan appeared to be "voluntarily" restricting them. Furthermore, it might even be asserted that the attitude in this letter partially explains the sudden influx of Japanese in 1907, in B.C. and/or southern Alberta.

There are many layers to the Oikawa Jinsaburo story, and Nitta's account presents many but not all. Oikawa, himself, is considered by too many to be responsible for several hundred Japanese people spending all or part of their lives in Canada. The present-day significance of his influence extends beyond the small community of Miyagi-ites, through the broader Japanese-Canadian and Canadian societies, to international relations between Japan and Canada. As for the story, it is a migration story representing all migrants and none, illuminating the complexity of analysing migration. It represents individual and group; politics and economics; necessity and pure adventure. Oikawa's nationality and socio-economic status highlight many of the contradictions in studying migration to British Columbia; as a Japanese, he was both despised as an Asian yet respected as a citizen of a world power; as an entrepreneur, he was both despised as an economic threat

³⁰¹ Canada Immigration Branch, RG76, vol. 83, file 9309, reel C4750, BCA, GR1547, reel B0794, W. D. Scott to John F. Main, 7 Nov. 1906.

yet respected as a member of a higher class. Ultimately, it reminds us that behind historical absolutes and generalisations, there are specific stories that do not necessarily fit, reminding us that the world is full of diversity and opportunities for individual action.

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Japanese “Entrepreneur” on the Fraser River: Oikawa Jinsaburo and the Illegal Immigrants of the *Suian Maru*.

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June 26, 2003