

Review of *Nikkei Fishermen on the BC Coast: Their Biographies and Photographs*

(Editor and Project Manager, Masako Fukawa, Harbour Publishing, 2007)

By Takashi Ohki, May 5, 2026

1. Preface

The Preface explains that the creation of this book emerged from a profound sense of urgency felt by three sons of Nikkei fishermen as they witnessed “*the sea of aging faces and the recent loss of their fathers*” and realized that an entire century of fishing history on the BC coast was coming to an end. Motivated by the desire to honour the sacrifices and hardships endured by earlier generations, they formed the Nikkei Fishermen’s Reunion Committee together with other community members who shared the same conviction. The Preface outlines the Committee’s three major commemorative projects. The first was a reunion dinner held on November 3, 2001, where elderly fishermen from across Canada gathered, many seeing each other for the first time since their forced dispersal in 1942. The second project was the unveiling of a bronze statue of a Nikkei fisherman on September 20, 2002, overlooking the Fraser River in Steveston. The Preface notes that the statue, created by sculptor Junichiro Iwase, was unveiled in the presence of dignitaries including the Lieutenant Governor of BC, the Consul General of Japan, and local political leaders. Two years later, in 2004, Princess Takamado of Japan rededicated the statue during her visit to Canada, marking 75 years of diplomatic relations between Canada and Japan.

The Preface then describes the formation of the Nikkei Fishermen’s Book Committee in 2003, which consisted largely of individuals with deep personal ties to the fishing industry—many of them full-time fishermen whose families had fished for generations. Their collective expertise and lived experience shaped the development of the book. The Committee included nine full-time fishermen and several others who had worked in various roles such as deckhands, net men, packer skippers, cannery workers, and translators. The Preface emphasizes that the book represents the third and final phase of the commemorative project: a comprehensive collection of biographies and photographs documenting 130 years of Nikkei fishing history on the BC coast.

The Japanese-language Preface expands on the same themes, describing the motivations of the third-generation Nikkei who initiated the project and the collaborative efforts of retired fishermen and community organizations. It recounts the reunion dinner, the statue project, and the extensive work required to gather materials for the book. The Committee collected 3,680 names of Nikkei fishermen and ultimately compiled 767 biographies with photographs. The Preface acknowledges the challenges of gathering accurate information—particularly given the advanced age of many fishermen and the scarcity of prewar and postwar records—but expresses gratitude for the cooperation of families, community members, and supporting organizations. The title 潮流 (“Tides”) was chosen to symbolize the long journey of Nikkei fishermen over more than a century. The Preface closes with appreciation for all who contributed materials, support, and encouragement, and asks readers for understanding of any errors or omissions.

2. Introduction

The Introduction describes the multi-year process through which the biographies and photographs in the book were collected. The first step occurred in 2001, when a survey was distributed to fishermen and widows to identify invitees for the reunion dinner. This initial survey gathered essential information, including names, birth years, years fished, vessel names, gear types, fishing areas, and spouses' names, and also requested photographs for display at the reunion. When the Nikkei Fishermen's Book Committee was formed in 2003, this survey served as the basis for a more detailed questionnaire. Committee members mailed or personally delivered the expanded questionnaire to fishermen and their families, collecting information through written responses, phone calls, and interviews. Over the following years, repeated calls for submissions were made through English- and Japanese-language media, but most contributions were gathered through personal outreach by Committee members.

To raise awareness of the project, photo displays were organized at major community events, including the Steveston Salmon Festival, the Powell Street Festival, and Nikkei Week at the National Nikkei Museum and Heritage Centre. The Introduction highlights the enormous scale of the task: 767 biographies were compiled through 60 work sessions, during which Committee members meticulously checked each biography for accuracy. When information was missing or unclear—particularly regarding fishing lineage—Committee members followed up with phone calls and personal visits. In addition to written materials, approximately 2,000 photographs were scanned and catalogued.

In 2004, each respondent received a draft of their biography for review, and many provided corrections or additional details. Submission deadlines were repeatedly extended because new individuals continued to come forward, having only recently learned about the project. The Introduction notes that on November 5, 2006, the public was invited to a presentation at the Steveston Buddhist Temple to review the book's progress and make final adjustments to their biographies before publication.

Overall, the Introduction conveys the Committee's commitment to accuracy, inclusiveness, and community collaboration. It underscores the importance of preserving the stories of Nikkei fishermen—many of whom endured prewar discrimination, wartime dispossession, and postwar rebuilding—and ensuring that their contributions to the BC fishing industry are not forgotten. The process described is one of careful documentation, community engagement, and respect for the lived experiences of the fishermen and their families.

3. Example of a biography

Amadatsu, Tsunemori

Born in Kagoshima, Japan, Jul 2, 1913. Died March, 1978. Came from Japan to fish with father in Skeena River. Before the war lived in Sunbury, Prince Rupert and Queensborough. Married Toshi Kubo – died Dec 10, 2002. Had 4 children and 4 grandchildren.

Years Fished: 35 years.

First Job in Fishery: deckhand with father, fishing by oar and sail in Skeena River.

War Years: lived in Taber, Lethbridge AB, sugar beet farm; Manitoba, sawmill; Geraldton ON, logging camp. In 1949 returned to the coast and lived on Lulu Island, East Richmond.

Postwar: vessels – *Jean A, Merrimac* – gillnet. Fished for Glenrose Fishing Co., New England Cannery and Nelson Bros Fisheries in Skeena River, Fraser River and Rivers Inlet. Retired in 1972.

Community Orgs: Steveston Buddhist Temple; Shigin Club; UFAWU.

Additional Info: off-season work: pulp and paper in Powell River (prewar). Wife Toshi, netwoman for 45 years; daughter Jean worked in cannery during summer holidays.