

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Asato/Teaching Mikadoism

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Preface

Every Saturday morning during the school year in 1930, Minoru “Min” Yasui and his brothers and sisters walked two miles from their home to the Nihon Gakkō (Japanese school) in Hood River, Oregon’s community of Nikkei, or ethnic Japanese.¹ The official name of the school was the Hood River Japanese Language School, and it met weekly in the Hood River Japanese Community Hall. Min and his fellow Nisei, second-generation Japanese Americans, were taught by Rev. Isaac Inouye, a Harvard-educated Methodist minister.² Although Rev. Inouye had a powerful reputation, the Nisei kids thought that he had an irascible and testy nature.³ Still, it was he who taught them how to read the native tongue of Issei.

Twelve years later, in November 1942, Min Yasui was in Portland’s federal district court, charged with deliberately violating the curfew imposed on “all persons of Japanese ancestry” by the United States military.⁴ Yasui, who studied law at the University of Oregon, was challenging the government’s racial discrimination policy—why only Japanese Americans had to obey a restrictive curfew under the army’s guise of “military necessity,” which Yasui rejected. Judge James Alger Fee, however, refused to appreciate Yasui’s constitutional defense and implied that Yasui gave up his rights because he attended a Japanese language school for three years, became proficient in the language, and then secured a job at the Japanese consulate in Chicago.⁵ His case was later appealed in the United States Supreme Court, which ruled in 1943 that he and another register, Gordon Hirabayashi, were indeed guilty of violating military orders. The government argued that the forced mass relocation of Japanese Americans was necessary since the military had stated that some Japanese Americans were fifth columnists—suppressing evidence from the FBI and other agencies that there had not been one case of espionage or sabotage by a Japanese American. The court relied on the final report of Lieutenant General John DeWitt, which suggested that Nisei, despite being American citizens, were a threat because the majority had attended Japanese language schools. DeWitt argued that these institutions were designed for “cultivating allegiance to Japan.”⁶ Thus, the knowledge to

speak, read, and write Japanese, and the existence of Japanese language schools, were used to “prove” that the entire community of Japanese Americans might be disloyal to the United States. Their conviction “left a suspicion about loyalty that ‘hangs as a cloud over 120,000 Japanese Americans’ who were shipped to the internment camps.”⁷

This book explores the origin of the Japanese language school issue, focusing on a history of the Japanese language school controversy from 1919 to 1927. The school debate became a battleground among various factions for control over Japanese Americans’ lives and their future. Under the influence of the “Americanization” movement, invigorated during World War I, nativists demanded that the question of Japanese language schools was a challenge to Japanese assimilability into white society. Activists in the Japanese exclusion movement raised the “Japanese language school problem” to question Japanese Americans’ loyalty to the United States and endeavored to use this issue to halt the economic “invasion” and, further, Japanese immigration to the United States. American officials, anti-Japanese newspapers, and Japanese exclusionists manufactured an image of Japanese language schools as evil institutions, and this disinformation was so widespread that many believed it rather than the truth. Even white supporters of Nikkei and some Japanese Americans themselves saw the Japanese language schools as an abdication of parents’ responsibility to give their children an education that would best raise them as American citizens. The history of the Japanese language school issue is parallel to the Japanese immigrants’ struggle to secure fundamental civil rights in the United States. In this book, I explore the origins of the Japanese language school “problem,” from the early 1900s through its development in Hawaii, California, and Washington, focusing on how the Japanese language school controversy was created in these three locations and was used to pursue different objectives for various parties.

Many studies of Japanese American history briefly mention Japanese language schools. However, few offer a detailed examination of those schools in relation to the Japanese exclusion movement. Three exceptions include unpublished dissertations and a master’s thesis. Yoshihide Matsubayashi (1984) treated the development of Japanese language schools in Hawaii and California from 1892 to 1941. He made extensive use of Japanese American newspapers and documents from Japanese education associations. The weakness of his study is that he provides a developmental rather than a critical analysis of Japanese language schools and how their policies changed with the concurrent “Japanese language school problem.” Matsubayashi did not compare or analyze the different motivations

behind the Japanese language school debate in places that differed politically, socially, and economically.⁸ Ann Halsted's 1989 dissertation displays rigorous use of archival documents to show how the Hawaiian territorial government imposed "Americanization" policies on Nisei children and controlled their language schools. Her study does an excellent job of depicting conflict between Hawaii's authorities and the Nikkei community.⁹ Mariko Takagi studied prewar Japanese language schools in Hawaii by comparing textbooks produced by Hawaii's Japanese language teachers and the Japanese ministry of education. Her sociology thesis (1987) examines the changes in Hawaii's textbooks, especially their moral elements, in accordance with Hawaii's social environment surrounding Japanese language schools.¹⁰ Although both Halsted and Takagi depicted Hawaiian Nikkei's struggle to maintain Japanese language schools, neither of them explored the impact of Hawaii's language school debate on the West Coast.

There are several published studies on Japanese language schools, which mostly approach them as educational policy studies. Some highlight identity conflicts between a cultural and racial background rooted in Japan and pressures for Americanization and assimilation into a new generation of Japanese Americans. Eileen Tamura's *Americanization, Acculturation and Ethnic Identity* (1994) explores the effects of Americanization on Hawaii's Nisei education and their assimilation procedures during Hawaii's territorial period.¹¹ Yukuji Okita examines the changing perspectives on Japanese education in Hawaii and the movement toward the question of raising future generations of Japanese Americans. Okita utilized pioneer-era Japanese newspapers and Japanese diplomatic records, which cast new light on the early Hawaii Issei's problem of education for their offspring.¹² Toyotomi Morimoto (1997) uses archival materials from UCLA's Japanese American Research Project to highlight the meandering textbook compilation process taken by the Japanese Language School Association, and the controversy surrounding this process in the ethnic community.¹³ Teruko Kumei (2000) investigates the Japanese government's policy on Nisei education between 1906 and World War II.¹⁴ In another article (2002), Kumei demonstrates how Issei parents faced the challenge of preserving Japanese spirit, heritage, and language through Japanese education.¹⁵ From a related angle, Yoon Pak (2002) explores early Nisei education in Seattle by examining letters and compositions written by Japanese American seventh and eighth graders, just before they were sent to the Puyallup Assembly Center in 1942, and later to concentration camps.¹⁶

This book builds on these works, but reframes the question as to how the anti-Japanese language school campaign evolved and how the Nikkei community reacted to the situation. By looking in detail at the situations between 1919 and 1927, grounded in the history of three communities, it is possible to highlight the power dynamics concerning Japanese language schools in the Territory of Hawaii and the states of California and Washington. Comparison of the attack on Japanese language schools and community responses in three different locations helps us to see the “distinctive histories” and also the connections of “shared experiences,” which, as Yuji Ichioka has pointed out, have been neglected in studies of Issei history.¹⁷ By using a variety of primary sources, I also hope to show some of the complexity of Issei opinion and Japanese diplomatic action. This study is not a final conclusion but is written in the hope of broadening the history of Japanese language schools. Although the focus is on the period following World War I, emphasis is on the impact of the long-lasting scar that the anti-Japanese movement created by suggesting the disloyalty of Japanese Americans and their language schools. It also suggests a need for further research on the question of religion in Nikkei history.

Chapter 1 briefly introduces Japanese immigration to Hawaii and the contiguous United States. The chapter also introduces the origin of Japanese language schools and religious conflicts over the schools in Nikkei communities. The policies of the Japanese foreign and education ministries concerning the education of Japanese Americans are also explored in this chapter.

In chapter 2, the very origin of the Japanese language school controversy is examined, based on archival materials from the 1919 Federal Survey of Education in Hawaii. Japanese language schools were originally subsidized and encouraged by sugar planters. However, as Japanese Americans gained power as the largest group of plantation laborers, their language schools were abruptly targeted as the primary focus of the Territorial Department of Public Instruction (DPI). This chapter attempts to explore the different players, and questions the rationale that promoted the Japanese language school controversy in Hawaii.

Chapter 3 shows how the “Japanese language school problem” quickly spread to California. On the surface, it seems to have been based on Hawaii’s model; however, its development was closely tied with California’s 1919 alien land law and the Japanese exclusion movement. The chapter probes how and why California’s Japanese exclusionists attacked Japanese language schools as one of their targets. This chapter also explores

the efforts of California's Japanese consul general to resolve the "Japanese language school problem."

Although Washington state had the third largest Japanese population, few scholars have explored its Japanese language schools or the wider anti-Japanese movement in the state. The Japanese language school debate there was definitely less intense than in Hawaii or California. However, an examination of Washington's case (chapter 4) highlights the importance of a local historical context for our understanding of the Japanese language school issue as well as its importance for both Nikkei and anti-Japanese activists.

In the final chapter, I explore the meaning of the "Japanese language school problem" in each location, highlighting differences and similarities. The chapter also briefly discusses the situation of other foreign language schools in American history for comparison, and suggests further research on the functions of language schools for a nation of immigrants. It includes comparison of the Supreme Court decisions on Japanese language school laws and other foreign language school cases in terms of the catalysts behind these controversies. It is the author's contention that more detailed studies of other language school issues will challenge our historical consensus on the Americanization period following World War I and will lead to a more nuanced understanding of this important period of American history.