

**The Lives of Immigrants at the Japanese Canadian War Memorial in Stanley Park,
Vancouver, and *The Vancouver Asahi***

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When I was taking a walk the other day in Stanley Park in Vancouver, Canada, I saw a pillar. As I walked closer, I was drawn to its decorations and wondered what it was. It looked strange to me. It seemed like an obelisk that commemorated the dead. Unlike an obelisk, however, it was a Greek column, and surprisingly it had a little house on the top with an octagonal roof over it. I thought, “That looks like a Japanese temple.” As I looked more closely, wondering how this peculiar cultural mix could have come about, I found that it was a Japanese Canadian war memorial. The plaque states: “This monument is in lasting memory of the 190 who answered the call of duty for Canada and to the 54 who laid down their lives in defence of freedom in the great war. Their names are engraved on the monument erected, April 2, 1920.”

This reminded me of the 2014 film *The Vancouver Asahi*. The movie describes how early Japanese immigrants were discriminated against in Canada and how they reacted to and survived this racial discrimination. A character in the movie says that Japanese people volunteered to join the military so that they might be regarded as Canadians, but it changed nothing. As I was looking at the pillar, I could feel their pain and hear their cry: “We also shed our blood for this land. We are Canadians.” I figured that was probably the reason behind the erection of the pillar in the middle of Stanley Park (for White people to see). The somewhat odd mixture of two cultures manifested in the pillar—Greek and Japanese—however, seemed to demonstrate the struggle and inability of the Japanese Canadians to fully incorporate Canadian culture and Japanese culture. For me, that is the life of immigrants—the coexistence of different cultures in an odd form.



When the Pacific War broke out, Japanese people in Vancouver were interned and lost their livelihood. Most third-generation Japanese people put aside (or gave up) Japanese culture and assimilated to Canadian culture and society. I read an online article—by a Japanese community—explaining that it is often new Japanese immigrants, not long-time immigrants, who bring and share Japanese culture in Canada. I could feel sadness in the article.

There is no right answer to living as an immigrant. Second-generation and third-generation immigrants may be more likely to assimilate into Canadian society and culture than the first generation. Even so, the cultural conflict and the search for identity in the process will never be easy. Though it is a story of Japanese immigrants and I am a Korean immigrant, as I looked at the pillar and watched *The Vancouver Asahi*, I could experience indirectly what they went through. I learned a lesson from the monument and the movie. Those who have walked on the same path as I have can be my best companions and friends because they can understand my struggle and my story.

“You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:19, NRSV)