From Methodist Mission to Modern Hospital: The History of Steveston’s Japanese Hospital 1895-1942

Helen Vandenberg, PhD Candidate, RN, University of British Columbia, School of Nursing
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As early as 1897, Japanese Christian missionaries believed that the Japanese fishermen would be an ideal group to build and maintain a modern Japanese hospital. Plans began to organize a subscription system and leadership board that would oversee the hospital’s development. The development of the hospital as a ‘modern’ institution was driven by recent changes that occurred in Japan during the late Meiji Restoration. During this period, Japan revolutionized and began a campaign of modernization and militarization, with the goal of becoming an imperial power equal to that of Western nations. These ideas were utilized by Japanese communities abroad as they faced racism and exclusion from communities that supported the dominance of White-European culture. The Japanese hospital became a symbol of resistance for the Japanese community, an example of the success of Japanese populations in Canada.

The Japanese hospital operated in Steveston until 1942, when it was closed due to the internment of all Japanese Canadians during World War II. The history of the Japanese hospital in Steveston demonstrates that hospital development in Canada was not only shaped by medical advancement, professionalization of health care occupations and by state-driven initiatives, but also by the communities that established and maintained health care services during Canada’s early colonial history.