

## Takahashi Dojo

Hello to the members of the Canada-Japan Society, fans of Canada, and everyone who supports the development of Japan-Canada relations.

Ottawa has heard the voices of March, and the daylight hours are getting much longer. Around the winter solstice in December, the sun sets early, and it was almost pitch black by 4 p.m., but these days, when the weather is nice, it feels like early spring. Daylight-saving time begins on March 10th, and it really feels like spring is just around the corner.

### First

This year, 2024, marks several important anniversaries for Japan-Canada relations. The 150th anniversary of the birth of Lucy Maud Montgomery, author of "Anne of Green Gables"; the 120th anniversary of the establishment of Canadian Government Trade Office in Yokohama; the 95th anniversary of the establishment of the Canadian Embassy in Aoyama, Tokyo; the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Canada-Japan Agreement on Commerce; etc. This year marks the 100th anniversary since the first judo dojo was established in Canada.

The story dates back to 1922. In this year, 19-year-old Shigetaka Sasaki from Tottori Prefecture immigrated to Vancouver. He was a young man who studied business administration while looking after a shop and dreamed of the future. Sasaki started judo at the age of 12 and was a judo 2nd Dan when he moved to Canada. He was a champion in Tottori Prefecture and had experience teaching judo at Yonago High School.

In 1924, two years after Sasaki immigrated to Canada, he opened the Vancouver Judo Club "Tai Iku Dojo" on Powell Street in downtown Vancouver. It was a place to practice the two primary principles of judo, which was started by Jigoro Kano: "Seiryoku-Zenyo (the most effective use of the power of mind and body)" and "Jita-Kyoei (mutual welfare and benefit)". Many Canadians begin attending the dojo. Sasaki and his pupils opened branches of the "Tai Iku Dojo" throughout British Columbia.

In 1932, judo replaced boxing and wrestling as a training subject for the RCMP in Vancouver. It can be said that the universality of judo as a sport has been proven. In addition, Jigoro Kano, who led the Japanese Olympic delegation at the Los Angeles Olympics that same year, stopped by Vancouver on his way back to Japan, encouraged Sasaki and others, and gave the name "Kidokan" to the "Tai Iku Dojo". With the approval of Jigoro Sensei, the founder of modern judo, Canadian judo continued to develop further.

Sasaki is known in Canada as Shigetaka "Steve" Sasaki and is considered the "Father of Judo in Canada." This year marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the "Tai Iku Dojo".

So, in this edition of "Ottawa News," I would like to share with you all about Takahashi Dojo, the base of judo in Ottawa, while also remembering the 100th anniversary of Canadian judo. Takahashi Dojo was founded 55 years ago in 1969 by Masao Takahashi, a second-generation 8th Dan Japanese Canadian judoka. Since then, it has played a prominent role in the development of judo in Canada and beyond Ottawa. At the same time, the dojo is a hub for the Japanese community in Ottawa.

### **Students of Takahashi Dojo**

First, it is the students who clearly demonstrate the great achievements of Takahashi Dojo.

Takahashi Dojo's tatami mats have produced four Olympic athletes, 18 Canadian champions, and five Canadian Judo Hall of Fame judokas.

It is noteworthy that former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, who took over the reins of government for two non-consecutive terms over 16 years, also worked out at Takahashi Dojo during his time as prime minister. He advocated for multiculturalism, overcame the issue of Quebec's independence, normalized diplomatic relations with China ahead of the United States, became part of the G7, and passed the 1982 Constitution Act, leaving a significant mark on Canada's development. It is no exaggeration to say that the technique and spirit of judo supported the long-term regime, which was extremely demanding on both body and mind.

It was Wednesday, February 29, 1984, a leap year exactly 40 years ago, after working out at Takahashi Dojo, when Prime Minister Trudeau took a walk in the snow and decided to resign. He made his announcement the following day on March 1st. Takahashi Dojo was involved in one of the most important moments of national politics.

In fact, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's son, Justin, also studied judo at Takahashi Dojo as a boy. When I had the opportunity to speak with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, when I mentioned Takahashi dojo, he smiled nostalgically and said it was a fond memory, which left an impression on me. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau also sent his son and daughter to Takahashi Dojo. Former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, who achieved the redress agreement with Japanese Canadians, also enrolled his son in Takahashi Dojo. It is truly significant in terms of promoting Japanese culture and developing friendship between Japan and Canada.



### **Masao Takahashi's journey**

As a second-generation Japanese Canadian, the life of Masao Takahashi, the founder of Takahashi Dojo, seems to embody the historical changes in the relationship between Japan and Canada.

Masao Takahashi was born in British Columbia on June 24, 1929, the eldest son of Kyukichi and Mine Takahashi, who immigrated to Canada. He started studying judo from a Japanese Canadian living in British Columbia at the age of eight, and quickly became proficient.

However, on December 7, 1941 (Canadian time), when Masao was 12 years old, the Pacific War broke out. Japan and Canada fought as enemies. Immediately after the outbreak of the war, the Canadian government designated Japanese Canadians as enemy aliens. From January 1942 onwards, Japanese Canadians faced extremely harsh conditions, including forced relocation and internment from British Columbia, where there was a large Japanese Canadian community. The Takahashi family's property was confiscated and was forced to relocate to Raymond, Alberta. Masao was forced to work on a beet farm and live in a harsh environment where he was prohibited from going to school. However, he continued to practice judo. Then, on August 15, 1945, the Pacific War ended.

However, after the war, Japanese Canadians were not allowed to relocate to British Columbia until April 1949. In a white-dominated society, Japanese Canadians were subjected to discrimination in every possible way as former enemy nationals and as ethnic minorities.

Meanwhile, young Masao graduated from high school in 1948. In 1949, young Masao was hired by the Department of National Defence, which had begun recruiting ethnic minorities, and entered the Royal Canadian Air Force. After stints in Montreal and Toronto, he was assigned to the aeronautical engineering department in Ottawa.

Masao, a young man, worked hard at judo training while working for the Air Force. At the same time, he actively taught judo within the Air Force and in the Ottawa area. Coincidentally, judo attracted even more attention when it became an Olympic sport for the first time at the

1964 Tokyo Olympics. Masao became a well-respected judoka among the Air Force personnel and Ottawa locals. This also led to the improvement of the status of Japanese Canadians, who had been placed in difficult circumstances.

### **The beginning of Takahashi Dojo**

In October 1969, Masao opened Takahashi Dojo on Melrose Avenue in downtown Ottawa. At the age of forty, he began his second life as a judo instructor while still serving in the Air Force. In January 1970, His Excellency, Shinichi Kondo, then Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to Canada, also attended the dojo, and the New Year's mochi pounding and Kagami Biraki were held in accordance with Japanese tradition. Masao's eldest son, Allyn Takahashi, was a middle school student at the time and said he remembered the event vividly.

Masao was discharged from the Air Force after 22 years of service and started to concentrate on running Takahashi Dojo.

Even before the dojo opened, Masao had been teaching judo to young people living in Ottawa. Therefore, the dojo would attract many young Canadians, regardless of their ethnicity.

The dojo offered the highest level of judo instruction in Canada, based on the core of judo, which teaches not only technique but also the mind. Masao trained many world-class judoka. Additionally, Masao worked closely with the Kodokan's international department. He sent students of his dojo to Japan, the home of judo, to give them the opportunity to practice, and, at the same time, he actively accepted judo trainees from Japan. He also greatly contributed to youth exchange between Japan and Canada through judo.

Eventually, Masao gained fame as the “founding father” of Canadian judo.

Additionally, as mentioned, he taught judo not only to Olympic athletes and Canadian champions, but also to the prime minister and his children. Masao greatly contributed to the friendship between Japan and Canada through his judo instruction.

Masao's noble and sincere personality, leadership, and ability to execute tasks were highly praised by the Royal Canadian Air Force, the Government of Ontario, and local judo officials. In later years, many awards were awarded to him by the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, and others.



### **Japanese Canadian leader Masao Takahashi**

Masao demonstrated excellent leadership skills beyond just teaching judo.

For a long time, Japanese Canadians living in Ottawa seemed to lack organizational cohesion. This may be due to the hardships experienced during the Pacific War. However, in 1976, Masao called for the establishment of the Ottawa Japanese Community Association (OJCA). He organized and chaired the founding preparatory meeting and worked hard to establish OJCA. In the following year, in 1976, the organization was established.

The year 1977 was the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the first Japanese immigrant, Manzo Nagano, to British Columbia. More than 30 years had passed since the end of the Pacific War, and it was a time when Japanese Canadians' sense of pride and their position in Canadian society were greatly improved. The presence of a Japanese Canadian organization in Canada's capital was of great significance.

Masao subsequently served as OJCA chairman twice, in 1978-79 and in 1985-86. He made important contributions to the development of the Japanese Canadian community in the Ottawa area.

Years passed, and in 2002, Masao turned 72 years old. The Government of Japan conferred the Order of the Sacred Treasure, Gold Rays with Rosette on him. His achievements were based on the following:

1. Improving the status of Japanese Canadians in postwar Canada;
2. Promoting friendship between Japan and Canada through judo;
3. The development of the Japanese Canadian community in Ottawa.

When I think of today's extremely good Japan-Canada relations and the highly respected Japanese Canadians, I feel that Masao's achievements were truly significant, and I cannot express enough my gratitude to him.

## Conclusion – Expanding Takahashi Dojo

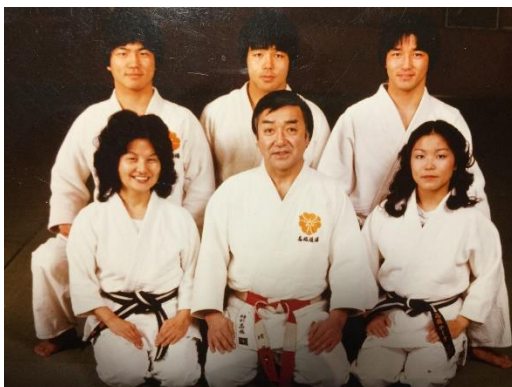
As mentioned above, the great Masao was a wonderful instructor, but in fact, there were other instructors at the dojo besides Masao.

Masao's beloved wife, June, is also a judoka. She is the first female judoka in Canada to earn a black belt and holds the highest rank, 7th Dan. She also coached the Cameroonian women's national judo team.

Masao and June have four children, all of whom have studied judo and are active in their respective fields.

Takahashi Dojo began as a dojo for judo training, but has gradually expanded into a dojo where you can fully learn not only judo, but also judo kata, kendo, karate, and iaido. A Paralympian in judo “kata” has also emerged in from Takahashi Dojo.

Takahashi Dojo is, of course, the centre of martial arts in Ottawa, but it is also becoming a hub for the Japanese community.



I would like to write a personal note here. It was on a snowy day on Sunday, February 4, 2024. I received an invitation and went to Takahashi Dojo. In fact, this day was the anniversary of the dojo becoming one of the venues of the Ottawa Go Club. I'm not good at Go at all, but I performed the ritual of placing the first stone. Every Sunday from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Go enthusiasts gather to compete. It was impressive that there were more Go players of other ethnicities than of Japanese or Asian descent, symbolizing Canada's diversity and inclusiveness.



Masao's eldest son, Allyn, who now runs Takahashi Dojo, gave an impressive speech. He noted that the “The important mission of Takahashi Dojo is to foster friendship between Japan and Ottawa through martial arts, including judo, and I'm really happy to be able to help promote Go from now on”.

Takahashi Dojo is a treasure to the citizens of Ottawa.

