

PRINCIPAL EVENTS IN THE NIKKEI COMMUNITY OF PERU

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The events in the Peruvian Nikkei community are divided into two very distinct stages. There is a clear separation between the first and second stages until World War II.

It is also worth noting that we also can make a division between the earlier and later periods from the rise of Alberto Fujimori as president of the country.

Before the war, the principal events from 1899 until 1923 were the arrival of the ships carrying Japanese immigrants.

From 1909 onward, the formations of a series of guilds (e.g. hairdresser, merchant, coffee shop, restaurant, baker, etc.) were the principal issues.

In 1910 the Japanese Dooshikai (or the Japanese Fraternal Association) and the Okinawa Youth Association were founded. In 1917 the Japanese Central Society was established. In the same year, the first Kenjinkai and the first Japanese associations in the provinces were founded.

In 1921 the Japanese Central Society, which was the leading organization within the Japanese community in Peru at the time, showed great dynamism and boasted of great economic capacity. It offered to donate to the city of Lima the monuments to Manco Capac, which reached fruition five years later. In 1923 it sent important economic assistance to Japan where a great earthquake hit Tokyo and left more than 100,000 dead.

It was a time when many prominent members of the Japanese community rubbed shoulders with elite Lima society, while in economic terms their businesses prospered. The Japanese Chamber of Commerce had been created in 1915.

In 1929, when the Great Depression started as a result of the Wall Street crisis, the global economy collapsed and general discontent spread throughout the world.

In 1934 an anti-Japanese campaign was waged by a sector of the press, with the participation of Peruvian politicians and intellectuals.

In 1936 the Japanese Central Society donated an Olympic-size pool to Lima on the occasion of the city's 400th anniversary. In 1938 the society also donated two war planes to Japan, which, at the time, was at war with China. The society did so without knowing what would happen three years later in 1941 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, followed by the U.S. declaration of war.

In 1940 an anti-Japanese demonstration took place in Lima that ended with the removal of Japanese from their places of residence and business. A few months later a massive earthquake destroyed a large part of Lima.

In 1941 the Peruvian government, fearing that members of the Japanese community might engage in acts of sabotage, passed a resolution freezing the property of those of Japanese descent. The government also prohibited the gathering of more than three Japanese at any one time, the importation of Japanese goods, the speaking of Japanese, while also limiting the free movement of peoples within the territorial limits of the country, among other measures.

In 1942 Peru broke off diplomatic relations with Japan, Italy, and Germany, closed down the Japanese embassy, and began to persecute the more prominent members of the community, deporting them to U.S. concentration camps. Some Japanese opted to change their last name, while others sought refuge in the mountains and jungle.

Peru was the most affected of the Latin American countries; of the 2,264 Japanese who were deported, 1,771, or almost 80%, were from Peru. The Italians and Germans had much better luck than the Japanese.

Most Italians and Germans were not deported because the former enjoyed economic power, while the latter, although few in number, occupied the upper rung of Peruvian society. Only a few Italians and Germans were imprisoned in the police stations and then released.

We can say with little hesitation that the years between 1940 and 1945 were the most fateful years for the Japanese community in Peru. The Japanese and their offspring born during the 1930s and 1940s were the ones who most suffered the consequences of discrimination and abuse.

Yet after the storm comes the calm. In 1947 the restrictions against the Japanese were lifted, and little by little life for the Japanese community returned to normal. A sign of this return was the reestablishment of Japanese newspapers in the country.

In 1955, after being inactive for fifteen years, the governing board of the Japanese Central Society was elected, and with it came the resumption of cultural and social activities in the community.

In 1967 the Japanese Peruvian Cultural Center was founded with the participation of Prince Akihito and Princess Michiko.

In 1980 the Commemorative Museum of Japanese Immigration to Peru was established.

In 1981 the Jesús María Polyclinic was founded, which was part of the celebrations surrounding the eightieth anniversary of Japanese immigration to Peru.

In 1982 the Japanese Central Society changed its name to the Japanese Peruvian Association, and it has remained so ever since.

Alberto Fujimori was elected president of Peru in 1990, the first Nisei (the child of Japanese parents) to occupy such a high office worldwide.

In 1993 the country commemorated the 120th anniversary of the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation between Japan and Peru, and it also inaugurated the Japanese Peruvian Theater.

In 1996 Alberto Fujimori is reelected president of Peru. The following year, on December 17, 1996, the terrorist group Tupac Amaru takes over the Japanese ambassador's residence.

In April 22, 1997, after 127 days of captivity, the seventy-one hostages are freed in Operation Chavin de Huantar, which President Fujimori personally oversaw.

In 1999 the Japanese community celebrates the centenary of Japanese immigration to Peru.

In 2000, after a confusing incident of corruption in which one of the president's main advisers is implicated, President Fujimori is obliged to resign from office.

In 2004 the Japanese Peruvian Centenary Group is formed.

In 2007 Fujimori is extradited from Chile and legal proceedings begin against him. He is accused of violating human rights and of corruption. Fujimori is sentenced to 25 years in prison in April 2009.