

**Female Japanese Citizens in New Caledonia:  
Pre-December 8, 1941**

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**Abstract**

In January 1941, the Japanese female population in New Caledonia included the Japan-born as well as former French citizens and subjects, Dutch subjects (primarily Javanese) and local Indigenous Kanak women who were married to Japanese men. Before the enactment of a new French Nationality Law in August 1927, French women who married non-French citizens became citizens of their husband's country and therefore French women who married Japanese men became Japanese. After the change in the law, French women who married Japanese retained their French citizenship. Kanak and Dutch women who married Japanese men also became Japanese. The number of Japan-born women was low compared to the number of Japanese men, primarily because the French authorities did not permit *yobiyose* (proxy marriages by correspondence). This article is an exploratory study of the three categories of Japanese women who were resident in New Caledonia at the time of the outbreak of the Asia-Pacific theatre of war in December 1941: heritage, Japan-born and Japanese-by-marriage. It discusses the different effects that marriage had on the women depending on their backgrounds.

**Keywords:** Japanese, women, New Caledonia, citizenship law, marriage, Kanak

**Introduction**

Japanese migration to New Caledonia began in 1892. By the time a census on the Japanese population living in New Caledonia was held on 24 November 1941, 1,104 Japanese, including fifty-seven women, were resident in the French colony (ANC 107W 2852 Census of Japanese Residents, 24 November 1941). The Japanese female population in New Caledonia fell into three broad categories: around half were Japan-born Japanese citizens whilst the remainder were either Japanese-by-marriage (see below) or born locally to Japanese fathers (Japanese citizenship is patrilineal; this latter group is hereafter referred to as 'heritage' Japanese). At the time of the outbreak of World War II in the Asia-Pacific theatre on 8 December 1941, only a few of the heritage citizens had reached the 'age of majority' and hence were recorded as children in the census. The women who were Japanese-by-marriage were a combination of French colonial subjects (i.e. Tonkinese [Vietnamese], local Indigenous Kanaks, Dutch subjects [e.g. Javanese] and French nationals who married Japanese citizens. At the time, many countries' citizenship laws saw women who married a citizen of another country become a citizen of their husband's country upon marriage. This was the case in France where women who married non-French nationals (prior to an amended French nationality law taking effect on 10 August 1927) lost their French nationality and became citizens of their husband's country (Weil 2008). French women who married non-

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French nationals after 10 August 1927 were able to retain their French nationality as long as they had been born on French territory (Weil 2008).

To date, whilst research on the pre-war Japanese community in New Caledonia has recently increased (Kobayashi 1980; Ward 2016; Ward 2017; Tsuda 2006), there has been little research focused primarily on the Japanese women in that community. This is probably due to a combination of the overwhelming number of men compared to women and the emphasis in the literature on the economic history of the Japanese in New Caledonia (see, for example, Palombo 2003). One exception to the lack of focus on women is Denton's [2014] discussion of the French-Japanese Berthe Rosalie Kitazawa-Fouque who was heavily involved in the development of the nickel trade between Japan and New Caledonia. Nevertheless, even in Denton's work, the link between biography and economic history is clear.

In this article, the various situations of the Japanese women resident in New Caledonia in December 1941 are explored. The article aims to highlight the complexities which emerge when marriage, citizenship, migration and war or conflict intersect. It shows the diversity of the women's backgrounds, relationship types and the different ways they were treated once war broke out. As an exploratory article, it introduces a number of areas for further research.

## Japanese migration to New Caledonia

Japanese emigration to New Caledonia began in 1892 with the signing of an agreement to allow Japanese to work in the nickel mines in the French colony (ANC 107W 2853 Letter to The Minister of Overseas Colonies, Paris from the Governor of New Caledonia, dated 3 November 1933; Bencivengo, 2013). As a result of the unpleasant working and living conditions experienced by the workers, the agreement was terminated by the Japanese government and no further Japanese moved to New Caledonia until a new agreement was reached in 1900 (Kutsuki, 2004: 190). From then until the outbreak of World War I, small groups of mostly male miners moved to New Caledonia on work contracts of usually five years. At the end of their contracts, the majority of the men returned to Japan, but a small number chose to remain in New Caledonia. Some of the men who remained continued to work as miners but others took up other occupations including operating shops and patisseries. Around one-third of the Japanese population lived in and around Noumea with the remainder mostly spread across the main island of Grande Terre (ANC 107W 2852 Census of Japanese Residents 24 November 1941).

In July 1921 the Japanese population stood at 1,751 (ANC 107W 2853 Letter to The Minister of Overseas Colonies, Paris from the Governor of New Caledonia, dated 3 November 1933) but thereafter began to decline due to the depressed economic conditions in New Caledonia and a shift to the employment of cheaper Tonkinese workers in the mines (Ishikawa 2008: 84). As noted above, the Japanese population stood at 1,104 in November 1941, including fifty-seven women. The Japanese population had declined since 1 January that year when it stood at 1,126, but then it had only included fifty-two women (National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA) A2670 282/1940 Report on the Australian Military Mission to New Caledonia, Feb-March 1941: Part 1: Summary Appendix 12). The reasons for the increase in the number of female residents between January and November 1941 are unclear, but at least one was a new-born baby (Yamagushiko Kazuko b. 31 March 1941 in Noumea) (NAA MP1103/1, CJF22391). To explain the decrease in men, it is possible that the November 1941 census counted some Japanese male citizens who had taken French nationality, as Japanese. According to Rowena Ward (2017), an estimated thirty-five Japanese men took French nationality between 1926 and 1939. No Japan-born women are known to have become French nationals although Berthe Rosalie Fouque-Kitazawa, born to a French

father and a Japanese mother, was French at birth but had become a Japanese citizen by virtue of her marriage to Eijō Kitazawa (Denton, 2014: 639).

According to Wilfred Burchett who visited New Caledonia in 1941, thirty-six Japanese men were married to Japanese women 'and another twenty to white women of French origin' (1941: 148). He also claims that there were another 137 couples where Japanese men were in de facto relationships with Javanese, Indo-Chinese, Melanesian or 'white' women. As these relationships were not 'official', the women were not Japanese although their children could have been Japanese citizens if their births had been registered with the appropriate Japanese authorities. This, however, was difficult to organise. Prior to the opening of the Japanese Consulate in Noumea in 1940, the registration of births, deaths and marriages had to be undertaken through the Japanese Consulate in Sydney, by physically going to Japan, or by organising someone in Japan to undertake the registration. This proved too difficult in many cases and a large number of registrations were not officially recorded in Japan. As is shown below, this situation had consequences for women and children.

In line with the French authority's plans in the event of war with Japan, the local authorities began interning the male Japanese residents of New Caledonia immediately after the declaration of war on 8 December, 1941. Most were subsequently transferred to Australia for internment. The internment of the Japanese men had long-lasting consequences on their families irrespective of whether they remained in New Caledonia or were transferred to Australia. Some of those interned in Australia expressed a wish to be repatriated to New Caledonia rather than Japan, but all were repatriated to Japan in 1946 (Ward 2016). The repatriation of the Japanese men to Japan left many of their families without a means of support and also meant that most affected children/partners never saw their fathers/husbands again.

## Japan-born

Around half of the Japanese women in New Caledonia in December 1941 were Japan-born and almost all of these were married to Japanese men. The exceptions, in terms of women married to Japanese men, were Yoshino Haru, a servant (see below), who was single, the above-mentioned Berthe Rosalie Fouque-Kitazawa, and her daughter, Kazuko (Kay) Marie Catherine Mouren (hereafter 'Kay Kitazawa-Mouren'). Kay Kitazawa-Mouren was French by virtue of her marriage in Tokyo to Jacques Mouren, a French national (NAA A367 C75275 Translation of letter by Mrs Jacques Sylvain Mouren to the French Consul, Sydney dated 14 February 1942). The relatively low number of women compared to the number of men was primarily because the French authorities did not permit 'proxy marriages by correspondence' (Burchett 1941: 147) or *yobiyose* in Japanese. According to Henningham, the French authorities' restrictions on women were designed to 'discourage long-term settlement' (2016: 33). The situation in New Caledonia was therefore very different to that in the United States where marriages to 'picture brides' living in Japan were a common form of marriage for Japanese men who had migrated to the United States (Moore, 2003: 35-36). As a result of the French administration's restrictions, Japanese women needed to be married prior to their husbands' departure for New Caledonia or the Japanese men needed to return to Japan in order to marry a Japanese woman. The women resident in New Caledonia were primarily married prior to arrival although there were a few (e.g. Oshiro Kamato) who married when their husbands returned to Japan for a short period (ANC 34W 33). A number of men were registered as married on arrival in New Caledonia and since they never returned to Japan until they were repatriated during or after the war, did not see their wives (or children) for many years. For example, Hamada Kenzo, who arrived in New Caledonia in 1914, was reportedly married in Japan

with two children (ANC 34W 14). He was repatriated to Japan as part of the Anglo-Japanese Civilian Exchange of September 1942 (NAA MP1103/1, CJ19083) at which time he presumably saw his family for the first time in over 25 years.

Twenty-seven Japan-born women – including Kashima Hatsuko who was born in colonial Korea (NAA MP1103/2 CJF22663) – were among the more than 1,000 Japanese citizens resident in New Caledonia who were transferred to Australia for internment between December 1941 and May 1942 (Nagata 1996; Ward 2016; Ward 2017). In keeping with the French authority's plans should war with Japan eventuate, the Japanese women in New Caledonia were not interned at the outbreak of the war. Rather, the women were allowed to continue to live in their communities and were taken into custody only the day before their ship departed for Australia. For example, Haga Misao's husband (Haga Suejiro) was arrested on 8 December 1941 (ANC 34W 14) but Misao was not taken into custody until 18 December, the day before the 'Cap des Palmes' departed Noumea for Australia with the couple on board (ANC 34W 14). It is unclear how much forewarning the women were given about their departure. In total, there were four separate transfers of Japanese internees to Australia. Women and children were aboard on each occasion (NAA MP508/1 255/702/1729 various cables relating to the arrival of ships carrying internees from New Caledonia).

Four women from New Caledonia interned in Australia (Ikeda Tsuyuko; Nakamura Kinue; Kashima Hatsu and Yoshino Haru) were among the Japanese repatriated to Japan as part of the Anglo-Japanese Civilian Exchange of September 1942. As Ward (2016) details, Yoshino Haru, a servant employed by the Kashima family (parents and three children) was not nominated by the Japanese government to be part of the exchange but the Kashima family refused repatriation without her. Once permission was received from the Japanese government for Yoshino to be included in the exchange, the Kashima family agreed to return to Japan. All three adults and children were repatriated to Japan via (what was then) Lourenco Marques in September 1942. All women not repatriated through the exchange program returned to Japan in early 1946 as part of the repatriation program organised under the auspices of the occupation authorities. Members of the Kitazawa family, and Haga Misao, had been nominated to be repatriated to Japan as part of the proposed Second Anglo-Japanese Civilian Exchange planned to be held at Goa in October 1942 which, for various reasons, did not eventuate (NAA MT885/1 255/18/308 various cables regarding the negotiations for the exchange; Fedorowich 1997; Ward 2015). Whilst the New Caledonian authorities did not oppose the repatriation of Haga Misao to Japan, they did oppose the repatriation of the Kitazawa family (Kay Kitazawa-Mouren, Kitazawa Takako, Kitazawa Jacqueline (infant) and Berthe Rosalie Fouque-Kitazawa) on the grounds that they were 'dangerous' or 'very dangerous' (NAA MT885/1 255/18/308 Letter to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Canberra from Ballard, Australian Official Representative, New Caledonia, dated 12 November 1943). Whilst it is unclear precisely what 'dangerous' and 'very dangerous' means, it is probable that the terms were at least partly due to the fact that Jacques Mouren, Kay Kitazawa-Mouren's husband, was considered to be a Vichy supporter (NAA A367 C68307 Record of 'Interviews with Japanese Internees at No 4 Camp, Tatura, on 21.7.46', Case No. 58).

## **Japanese-by-marriage**

The Japanese-by-marriage category includes a number of different sub-groups depending on the background of the women. One sub-group covers the originally-French women who married Japanese men before the August 1927 change to the French Nationality Act which meant they were considered to be Japanese citizens under French law. This group includes both 'white' French and

Tonkinese women. A second sub-group covers the Javanese women who were Dutch subjects. Under the 1892 Dutch Nationality Law which applied at the time, Dutch women who married non-Dutch men lost their Dutch nationality (Vink 2005). This meant that women such as Dotikromo Amanah (b. Java 1877) who married Nishimori Kikujiro on 13 February 1920 in Noumea (ANC 34W 32) was considered to have automatically become a Japanese citizen. For women in the above sub-groups, the change to Japanese citizenship gave them no additional practical citizenship rights as Japanese women did not receive the right to vote until December 1945. However, for the Kanak women who form a third sub-group and who were at the time ineligible for French nationality, marriage to a Japanese citizen and the consequential acquisition of Japanese citizenship relieved them from the restrictions on the freedom of movement which applied to the Kanak population (I. Kurtovich, personal communication No. 1, 2 October 2017). For instance, Rose Mosse, an Indigenous woman born on Lifou Island in 1901, married Hayashi Toyoki in February 1926 (ANC 34W 15) at which time she was deemed to have become a Japanese citizen. As a Japanese citizen, Rose had freedom of movement not accorded to other Kanaks.

An additional sub-group of Japanese-by-marriage could include originally-French women who had married Japanese citizens prior to August 1927 but became French again after successfully applying to be reintegrated to French nationality. For instance, Julia Quenneville (b. 1906) married Shiramatsu Juhei in 1925 at which time she was considered to have become Japanese (ANC 34W 19). However, Julia became French again in 1936 when both she and her husband took French nationality (ANC 127W 47). Whilst women such as Julia were no longer Japanese citizens in December 1941, it is interesting to recognise that some French women had previously been considered to be Japanese. In some cases, these changes were voluntary (i.e. they applied to regain their French nationality) but at other times they were involuntary (i.e. becoming Japanese through marriage).

It is unclear however, how many of the Japanese-by-marriage were actually recognised as Japanese citizens by the Japanese government as most of the marriages between Japanese men and non-Japanese women were not registered with the Japanese authorities. To be eligible for Japanese citizenship, people had to be listed on a Japan-based family register (*koseki*) which are maintained by local municipal authorities (i.e. city, town or village) in Japan. As noted earlier, completing the registration formalities was difficult due to the lack of Japanese consular representation in Noumea before March 1940. Consequently, in many cases, the required registrations were not made and many of the women in the Japanese-by-marriage category were not officially Japanese although they were considered to be Japanese by the local French authorities.

All women who were originally French but considered Japanese-by-marriage eventually regained their French nationality. For some women this was done by decree. For example, Lisie Foord, born in Pouébo in 1908, married Hotta Matsuziro in March 1926 at which time she was considered to have become Japanese (ANC 44W 127). Matsuziro died in internment in Australia in February 1945 (NAA MP1103/1 CJ22434) and Lisie became a French citizen again by decree in January 1947 (ANC 44W 127). In reality, Lisie probably was never officially Japanese as it is unlikely that her marriage had been registered with the Japanese authorities and hence she did not need to undergo reintegration to French nationality. Prior to the closure of the Japanese Consulate in Noumea in December 1941, the French authorities had on occasion contacted the Consulate regarding the status of marriages. For instance, according to notations on Outsunomya (nee Kartpededjo) Maria's (b. 1883 Java) Arrival Card, the Japanese Consulate confirmed in letters dated 29 August and 17 September 1940 that there was no record of her 1926 marriage to Outsunomya Genjenon (ANC 34W 33). An additional notation states that she is a Dutch subject. Presumably, women such as Maria later took French nationality as they lost their Dutch citizenship when

Indonesia gained its independence in 1949. More research on what happened to the former Dutch subjects after 1949 is needed.

While most wives and families never saw their Japanese husbands / fathers again after the latter were transferred to Australia for internment, some did. Yoshida Georgette Eugenie (nee Laurent), a widow with three daughters, married Tsutsui Buhei on 17 September 1923 in Kone (ANC 34W 43). Tsutsui was interned on 8 December 1941 and transferred to Australia on the last ship to leave Noumea on 29 May 1942. He was repatriated to Japan as part of the Anglo-Japanese Civilian Exchange in September 1942 (ANC 34W 43). Eugenie regained her French nationality in 1949 (ANC 34W 43). Tsutsui returned to New Caledonia in January 1955, almost thirteen years after he had been forcibly removed. He then returned to Japan a year later where he died in 1975 (I. Kurtovich, personal communication No. 2, 4 October 2017).

## Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has discussed the various situations of the Japanese female citizens resident in New Caledonia in December 1941. It has focused on women who fell into two of the three broad categories which covered the women: the Japan-born and the Japanese-by-marriage. Due to the French authorities' restrictions on 'proxy marriages by correspondence', there were comparatively few women in the first category and within this group, only one – Yoshino Haru – was unmarried. All women who were Japan-born were repatriated to Japan via Australia in either 1942 or 1946.

The composition of the Japanese-by-marriage group was quite diverse: it included women of French, Kanak, Tonkinese (Vietnamese) and Javanese backgrounds who married Japanese citizens prior to the outbreak of war in December 1941. The category of women who were originally French included women who married Japanese nationals before the adoption of a new French Nationality Act on 27 August 1927 and who had not regained their French nationality. French women who married Japanese citizens after that date retained their French nationality. In the case of women born in Java, as Dutch subjects, they lost their Dutch citizenship upon marriage. The Japanese-by-marriage category also included Kanak women who, through marriage, acquired official citizenship for the first time as they were at the time excluded from French nationality. Through a discussion of these various categories, this article highlighted the complexities that emerge when migration, marriage, citizenship and conflict or war intersect. As an exploratory article, it has only introduced some of the scenarios relating to the women. More research is needed to show what happened to the women and their families after their husbands (and fathers) were interned and repatriated to Japan. More research is also called for on what impacts marriage to Japanese men had on Kanak women and women born in Java. In the latter case, research focused on what happened to the women during and immediately after the war as well as after Indonesia gained independence is needed.

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