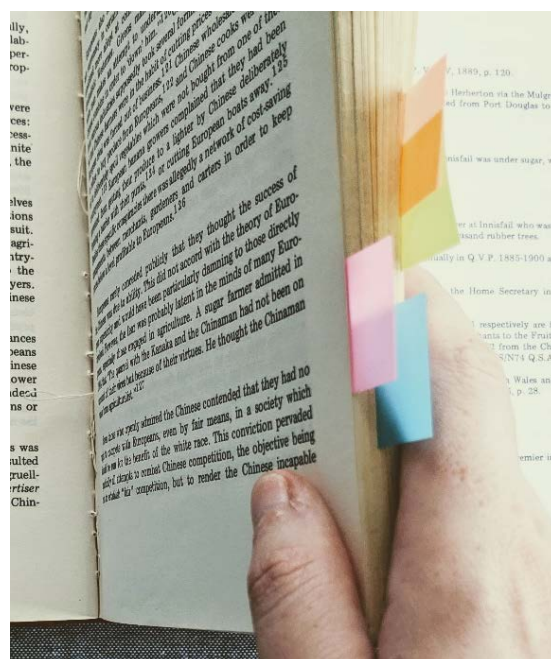


## Forgotten in the Footnotes: Japanese Women in North Queensland, 1880–1941

By Tianna Killoran

When I began a Doctorate in History, I learned very early on that the footnotes are where the good stuff is found. Sure, the actual content of the books I read are useful—but footnotes are like seeing the working of a mathematician or hearing the commentary of a film director. They are a record of the side-notes, musings, and methods of the historian’s brain at work. They contain valuable information for the historian in training and hapless readers who find themselves lost in the pages. But there is another important aspect of footnotes. They are where the overlooked histories of entire people, groups, and organisations are sometimes hinted at.<sup>1</sup> A brief mention in a footnote outside of the main text tends to imply that the historian is thinking, “yeah, I know this person/place/event exists, but I don’t really know or care *too* much about it.” While Foucault’s aim of breathing life into the existences of yet more apparently infamous men in history is not a position I easily fall in-step with, he was certainly precise in his assessment of



footnotes: “real lives have been ‘played out’ in these few sentences . . . their liberty, their misfortune, often their death, in any case their destiny have been, at least partly therein decided. These discourses have really affected lives; these existences have effectively been risked and lost in these words.” In order to bring true revision and discipline to History, due care and attention must be given to those previously overlooked peoples

<sup>1</sup> It might be most appropriate to point out here that the footnote is not a referencing quirk unique to the discipline of History. That said, the focus of this article *is* the History discipline. I would also like to suggest that an endnote is not a “type of footnote” and does not have the same effect on the reader’s experience; I personally find constantly flipping between the section I am reading and the back of the book a tiresome and often incoherent process.

**In many histories of Japanese migration to north Queensland, the male experience has been normalised and the experiences of Japanese women have been relegated to the sidelines.**

who, by all gathered accounts, are the key to north Queensland's as yet untold histories.

Among the individuals scattered within the footnotes of history are the Japanese women who migrated to north Queensland in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Cast summarily as prostitutes and promptly directed to exit stage left, their existence in histories of north Queensland have been typified by simplistic narratives that overlook their value to the region in a colonial setting. In many histories of Japanese migration to north Queensland, the male experience has been normalised and the experiences of Japanese women have been relegated to the sidelines. As is often the case in Australian history, works that mention women become a special category of their own. When revisionist histories attempt to correct the idea of a “womanless frontier,” as is partially the case

here, they become a “her-story” rather than a history.<sup>2</sup> The problem is that “as long as women's history remain[s] a separate enterprise, it [will] always be seen as an ‘optional extra.’”<sup>3</sup> Women's lives, such as these Japanese women's, should not be used to embellish the long white arm of Australian history, they should free us from its grip.

This article explores some of the reasons why Japanese women have been so far lost in the footnotes of north Queensland history. Further, I hope to begin redressing some of these issues by identifying Japanese women who have leapt from the footnotes and into the body of my own research. Their lived experiences challenge two-dimensional depictions, not only of female sex workers, but of the broader roles and experiences of womanhood in Australian history.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mary Anne Jebb and Anna Haebich, “Across the Great Divide: Gender Relations on Australian Frontiers,” in *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, ed. Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (Sydney: Harcourt Brace, 1992), 28.; Bethanie Blanchard, “Eleanor Catton and Clare Wright: ‘I Call It the Dick Table’,” *The Guardian* 2014. There are many works that have successfully undertaken these revisionist histories, however, historian Clare Wright points out that a book about women in history remains a “women's interest book” rather than a standard work of history about democracy, politics, or business. “Her-stories” will never make it onto the “dick table,” as Wright explains it, unless we forcibly move them from the shelf and place them into the main display.

<sup>3</sup> Patricia Grimshaw et al., *Creating a Nation, 1788–1990* (Perth: API Network, 1994), ix.

<sup>4</sup> I feel occasionally arrested by the impetus of History to historicise its “subjects”—that is, view people in the context and values of their time and place—rather than to provide due care to individuals from a contemporary lens. While the two-dimensional perspectives on sex work and womanhood are not my own but a product of this historicisation, I feel compelled to challenge this view. Even in a historical sense, these women's lives and experiences were varied and multi-dimensional.

## Japanese People in North Queensland: A Brief Overview

After the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the beginning of the Meiji Restoration in the mid-nineteenth century, Japan appeared to embrace the Western world. Japan's opening up following a period of seclusion—*sakoku*—coincided with a large reform program that saw mass industrialisation across transport, communications, administration, and education. Remote rural regions of Japan that historically struggled to make a meagre living from agriculture were placed under greater pressure, finding themselves cut off from large cities' resources but still required to meet increasing resource demands.<sup>5</sup> Beginning from about 1880, many young Japanese men from these poor farming regions of Wakayama, Kumamoto, and Nagasaki began to seek other sources of income throughout Southeast Asia and the Pacific, in the aim of sending money back to their families. Many found work in northern Australia in the pearl shelling and sugar cane farming industries. The stories of these men have traditionally dominated discussions of the role played by Japanese migrants in the development of colonial

Australia.<sup>6</sup>

In the pearl shelling industry concentrated around Broome, Darwin, and Thursday Island, Japanese migrant men worked on pearling luggers as divers. The industry was booming in the period between roughly 1880 and 1920 and was highly profitable for most labourers but was particularly lucrative for divers. Working alongside crews of various races and nationalities, many of these Japanese men benefited from the power associated with their coveted role, usually more than just monetarily. Divers were an essential component of pearling crews and their work required immense skill, supposedly fatalistic and fearless tendencies, and an acceptance of the immense dangers involved in the job. They would spend many hours each day deep underwater, guiding the luggers and collecting shells that could fetch hundreds of pounds per tonne—a quantity which required just a few days of diving. The divers would descend many fathoms to gather the pearl shell, all the while tenuously attached to a lifeline. Having collected all the shell they could carry, the divers would slowly ascend

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<sup>5</sup> N. K. Meaney, *Towards a New Vision: Australia and Japan through 100 Years* (Sydney: Kangaroo Press, 1999), 12.; Diane Menghetti, *Sound of Our Summer Seas* (Melbourne: Macmillan Art, 2004), 13–14. The landscapes of these regions usually include precipitous mountains and volcanoes. Farming therefore becomes difficult and isolated from major centres of trade.

<sup>6</sup> Although we might be trying to ultimately revise or remove the dick table, it is unfortunately the dick table from which we must start to contextualise these women's experiences.

over many hours—an effort to avoid the excruciating and deadly side effects of decompression sickness. Japanese divers were remunerated handsomely for their time and skill.

Similarly in the sugar cane industry, Japanese men were employed as labourers, or more often, in skilled positions in the mills. Although this work did not pay as well as diving, it was still a great sum for migrants from poor farming families and was undoubtedly a more comfortable life than that experienced on pearling boats. Their working conditions—particularly compared to the pest-infested pearling luggers with their meagre subsistence of rations—included comfortable working barracks on raised platforms, regular meals, hot baths, and new clothes annually. Japanese labourers in the sugar cane industry vigorously enforced the favourable conditions of their contracts and were supported in this by their locally-based consulate.<sup>7</sup> Although many of them sent money home and regularly visited Japan as originally intended, most ended up living in Australia long-term.<sup>8</sup> Japanese labourers even capitalised on

their accumulated skills and wealth to buy their own pearling luggers, eventually dominating the pearl shelling industry, or using their profits as capital to operate their own farms or businesses. Many of these Japanese migrants remained in Australia for decades, right up until 1941 when the Australian government interned them as enemy aliens.

Thus has been the conventional story of Japanese migration, specifically of Japanese men, to north Queensland up until 1941. Japanese women, however, are a recognised but severely overlooked group of migrants who are rarely and briefly referred to in this narrative. While it is true male labour migrants represented the majority of those Japanese people who came to Australia, the group certainly was not exclusively male. While a few notable historians such as David Sissons and Regina Ganter have recognised that some Japanese women migrated to Australia and discussed their casting as prostitutes, they are otherwise dismissed amongst the footnotes in most histories of Japanese migration to Australia.<sup>9</sup> There is some recognition that not

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<sup>7</sup> Menghetti, *Sound of Our Summer Seas*, 14. The first official Japanese Consulate in Australia was located in Townsville.

<sup>8</sup> Their regular return trips to Japan are recorded within the thousands of Certifications of Exemption from the Dictation Test held by the National Archives of Australia (NAA). These certificates, although an administrative requirement of the White Australia Policy, provide insight into the movements of Japanese migrants. Ironically these documents demonstrate Japanese migrants' long-term residency rather than presenting the story of sojourners that is so frequently told.

<sup>9</sup> David C. S. Sissons, *Karayuki-san: The Japanese Prostitutes in Australia, 1887–1916* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1977).; Regina Ganter, “The Wakayama Triangle: Japanese Heritage of North Australia,” *Journal of Australian Studies* 23, no. 61 (1999). Many works about Japanese migration to northern Australia during this period tend to overlook the presence of Japanese women almost entirely. Sissons and Ganter at least discuss their presence and although focusing mostly on their role as prostitutes, also hint at some of the problems inherent in this default labelling. That said, there is little attempt at resolving the problems therein.

necessarily all of the Japanese women who migrated to north Queensland were prostitutes, but history has heretofore remained silent about these women and their lives. Due to the historical impulse to label categories of people that lay outside the white, male, and Eurocentric historical experience, layers of “other” upon “other” have diminished the significance and recognition of Japanese women within histories of north Queensland.

The term for Japanese prostitutes in north Queensland was *Karayuki-san*, which refers to Japanese women who worked as prostitutes outside Japan. The word roughly translates as “going to China.” Similar to male Japanese migrants, these women came from poor farming areas and would either travel or be sent across to China to work as prostitutes and earn money for their families. Japan has a long history of prostituting women and it was not unusual for poor farming families to sell their daughters in order to pay taxes. In fact, the Tokugawa government at one point explicitly instructed poor farmers to sell their daughters.<sup>10</sup> It is important here not to minimise the pain and trauma involved in sex trafficking and the sale of sex, but it is equally important to ensure that the *Karayuki-san* are not cast as hapless outlets for the sexual passions of north Queensland men. To portray either role is to, with a single stroke,

objectify and deny these women’s agency in their own histories. Notions of agency and choice are minefields in this context, but it is crucial to recognise that individuals often work within the bounds of their circumstances, expressing power that is available to them. Some women may have been kidnapped or coerced into becoming *Karayuki-san*, whilst others may have made the choice to enter into this work as a means of social and financial independence.<sup>11</sup>

The pattern of Japanese women migrating abroad to work as prostitutes later expanded throughout South East Asia and the Pacific, including Australia. The term *Karayuki-san* continued to apply. This long history, although part of an extensive trade that exploited women, was also a factor in the exceptional success of Japanese brothels in Australia. As Raelene Frances explains:

Japanese women made very successful brothel-keepers. This was partly the result of their knowledge acquired through long personal experience at all levels of the industry. It was also a reflection on the businesslike approach taken to selling sex by Japanese entrepreneurs, who had had hundreds of years to develop these skills in the context of officially sanctioned prostitution in Japan. These entrepreneurs

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<sup>10</sup> Raelene Frances, *Selling Sex: A Hidden History of Prostitution* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007), 47.

<sup>11</sup> James Warren, *Pirates, Prostitutes and Pullers: Explorations in the Ethno- and Social History of Southeast Asia* (Perth: UWA Publishing, 2008), 242–243.

had extensive experience in operating on an international basis, with the know-how and connections to establish brothels in new areas, keep these supplied with ‘fresh girls’ and adapt to the local legal cultural climate.<sup>12</sup>

In Australia particularly, the *Karayuki-san* were able to live under comparably comfortable conditions. Often it was quite possible for individual women to pay off their debts within three or four years and become *jimae*, or independent.<sup>13</sup> Many of the women—like Japanese men—used their substantial earnings to invest in pearling luggers or other businesses. Japanese investment and ownership in the pearling industry, from both men and women, facilitated their monopoly of the pearl shelling industry in northern Australia. If *Karayuki-san*



were purchasing pearling luggers, however, it raises the question of whether there was anything else they were doing with their newly acquired money and independence. Importantly, why do we not yet have the answer to this question?

## Challenges of Locating Japanese Women

There are many complicating and compounding reasons for why Japanese women have been so far dismissed and neglected in the histories of Japanese migration to north Queensland. Some

work has been done to integrate the lives of Japanese women as wives, mothers, and workers into the existing historiography,<sup>14</sup> but usually with an emphasis on the role of the *Karayuki-san*

<sup>12</sup> Frances, *Selling Sex*, 54.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>14</sup> Yuriko Nagata, “The Japanese in Torres Strait,” in *Navigating Boundaries: The Asian Diaspora in Torres Strait*, ed. Anna Shnukal, Guy Malcolm Ramsay, and Yuriko Nagata (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004).; Sissons, *Karayuki-san.*; Ganter, “The Wakayama Triangle.”; Noreen Jones, *Number 2 Home: A Story of Japanese Pioneers in Australia* (Fremantle, Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2002). In many of these works, the description of the women is usually framed as individuals who are prostitutes *first*, a handful of whom also happen to be wives and mothers. While I would not argue that this is not an entirely inaccurate description of some of the women’s lives, the postulation is problematic.



that is problematic within historical archives and sources.

Gendering of historical roles and contributions is a well-attested factor that obscures the presence of women in historical archives. In the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, women only account for four percent of entries. Men are portrayed as the principal players in the history of the Australian nation, operating in the public domain, while women are all too frequently assumed to be occupying the domestic sphere.<sup>15</sup> The public sphere is where important and official actions take place, usually recorded on paper; men are signing forms, doing business, creating contracts, banking money, getting employed, and so forth. In contrast, historians have long assumed that women's occupation of the domestic sphere has meant that such records are rarely created about them, and therefore they were not really doing anything of note. This is patently false. Many histories have begun to read into the silences around women in history, such as *Creating a Nation*, *Minding Her Own Business*, and *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka* to name but a few. As Wright, the author of the latter elucidates in her research about women on the Ballarat goldfields, she "went back to the same set of archives with a different set of questions. Women were there, other historians had just not seen that

as in any way significant or pertinent."<sup>16</sup> It has not been a case of the historical archives being silent about women, but of historians being deaf to women's presence in the records.

Increased recognition of the role of women in Australian history, however, has not necessarily translated to a recognition of migrant women's experiences. Most revisionist histories about women focus on *white* women, usually of upper class. While Catherine Bishop recognises that it is difficult to identify non-European women in the record,<sup>17</sup> historian Gillian Bottomley sees the problem that "[w]omen tend to disappear in discussions about migration, as immigrants often disappear in discussions about class and about women."<sup>18</sup> In the case where gender is less commonly used as a category of historical analysis, the issue is compounded by intersecting factors of race and class. Therefore, when it comes to identifying Japanese women who are from poor farming regions and migrated to Australia, who are also assumed to have worked in an industry that is legally muddy, historians have treated Japanese women as near impossible to identify in archival material.

Complicating intersecting factors of race, class, and gender further, the means of arrival for most Japanese women during the period between 1880 and 1941 was either loosely monitored,

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<sup>15</sup> Grimshaw et al., *Creating a Nation*, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Blanchard, "The Dick Table."

<sup>17</sup> Catherine Bishop, *Minding Her Own Business: Colonial Businesswomen in Sydney* (Sydney, NSW: NewSouth Publishing, 2015), 20.

<sup>18</sup> Bottomley as cited in Nagata, "The Japanese in Torres Strait," 98.

discreet, or entirely secret. There are few, if any, records of their arrival. Most were reportedly prostituted women who arrived in Australia under conditions that were unregulated in the pre-Federation era, or purposely secretive once immigration regulations became increasingly stringent. Sissons describes the story of Usa Hashimoto, a twenty-one-year-old Japanese woman who arrived on Thursday Island in 1897. Usa's description of her travel from Japan to Australia is possibly representative of many other Japanese women's experiences at the time. Originally from Nagasaki, a Japanese man had offered to take her to see her sister who ran a lodging house in Singapore. Usa agreed and was boarded onto a ship at midnight without a passport. She was transferred, without landing, to another ship at Shanghai and later arrived in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, she was told she could not get to Singapore without a passport. Instead, she was offered the "opportunity" to travel to Thursday Island, where a passport was not required. Usa agreed. Upon arrival in Thursday Island, the man handed her over to a brothel-keeper named Shiosaki in return for cash. Shiosaki informed Usa that she owed one hundred pounds for the travel, entering her into an agreement to pay the debt by prostitution. If Usa had made the trip from Nagasaki to

Thursday Island direct, it would have likely cost only twelve pounds.<sup>19</sup> Many Japanese women like Usa arrived in similarly discreet circumstances. In the period after 1901, there are many reports that Japanese women began to enter Australia as stowaways. Some of the ships were fitted with secret compartments and the women were offloaded into small boats that disembarked at secret ports in north Queensland. Other women were dressed as men, pretending they were labourers destined for the pearl shelling industry.<sup>20</sup> As such, the arrival of Japanese women to ports around Australia are lacking recorded evidence and are limited to tales of the tragic and sordid.

Upon arrival, the nature of the *Karayuki-san's* work was often illegal and discreet. Usually, historians only find sex workers in archives where their encounters with legal authorities are recorded. The traces that are left behind in these cases almost always emphasise the tragic and violent parts of the lives of *Karayuki-san*. For example, we only know the story of Usa Hashimoto because she was interviewed by police on Thursday Island. Some of the women were also victims of violent attacks, murders, rapes, and occasionally suicide. In some cases, the police and coroner's reports offer an insight into the lives of these women, but this is usually

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<sup>19</sup> Sissons, *Karayuki-san*, 26–27. Sissons explains that he suspects, but cannot prove, that Usa's sister ran a brothel in Singapore and she was travelling to work for her. The circumstances of her arrival to Thursday Island are therefore very concerning, but perhaps not entirely surprising to Usa.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 27–28. Sissons also recounts some disturbing and sad reports about Japanese women who were hidden in the bunkers of ships and were subsequently crushed, starved, or burned to death.



**The failure to explore the lives of these women in any depth has been the product of historians' emphasis on their role as prostitutes, the resulting archival "silence," and has served as a self-fulfilling prophecy.**

filtered through a colonial masculine perspective. For the most part, *Karayuki-san* in north Queensland often operated successfully without disturbing the broader community, and as such officials often thought it was in the public interest to leave them undisturbed. In Australia particularly, the Japanese brothels were at pains to keep a low profile and often operated under the guise of a legitimate business like a tobacconist, confectioner, cool drink shop or dressmaking establishment.<sup>21</sup> Commissioner W.E. Parry-Okeden particularly "felt that in the sugar districts there must be outlets for the sexual passions . . . and that it was less revolting and degrading if these were satisfied by Japanese rather than Caucasian women."<sup>22</sup> *Karayuki-san* business records would appear legal and while police records might suggest suspicion of a Japanese brothel, the authorities were not inclined to inspect closely. The discreet and orderly fashion of the Japanese brothels and the women who worked in them were rarely seen and did not disturb neighbours or affront standards of decency.

Finally, the fundamental assumption that Japanese women who migrated to north Queensland worked as *Karayuki-san* overshadows the depth of these women's lives and reduces them to caricature. The assumption that all Japanese women were prostitutes is based on the often quoted, although since challenged, Queensland Police Commissioner's 1897 estimate that of the 115 women in north Queensland, all but one (the Japanese consul's wife), were prostitutes.<sup>23</sup> Ganter has pointed out that the Japanese Consul had male assistants who also brought their wives to Australia. My own research has also suggested this is untrue. It is more problematic, though, that whilst many Japanese women may have been prostitutes,<sup>24</sup> their lives cannot be simplified or defined solely by their work. Frances' *Selling Sex: A Hidden History of Prostitution* speaks more generally but astutely observes that "the prostitutes . . . were never one-dimensional, nor was 'prostitute' necessarily their main or only identity: they were also mothers, daughters, sisters, friends, lovers, wives, and often engaged in work besides the sale

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<sup>21</sup> Frances, *Selling Sex*, 56.

<sup>22</sup> Sissons, *Karayuki-san*, 40–40a.

<sup>23</sup> Ganter, "The Wakayama Triangle," 57.

<sup>24</sup> Although many may not have been at all.

of sex. They were not, and are not, so very different to other women of their time, who perhaps barter sex in less transparent and honest ways.”<sup>25</sup> The oversimplified narrative of *Karayuki-san* has both captured the lives of almost all Japanese women who migrated to Australia and mystified the depth of their lived experiences in north Queensland. The failure to explore the lives

of these women in any depth has been the product of historians’ emphasis on their role as prostitutes, the resulting archival “silence,” and has served as a self-fulfilling prophecy. If historians look for prostitutes, they will find prostitutes. If historians look for women, they will find women.

## Finding Some Japanese Women

To illustrate above points about locating Japanese women in north Queensland archives and to redress the over-emphasis on *Karayuki-san*, I have to offer some small snippets of the lives of Japanese *women* who lived in north Queensland. The following individuals have emerged from the historical archives by a simple method of looking for women, rather than for prostitutes.<sup>26</sup> The threads of their lives have been pieced together from digitised newspapers; births, deaths, and marriage certificates; and government records from the Queensland State Archives and the

National Archives of Australia. These brief insights are only very small hints at the types of stories about Japanese women that are yet to be told in full. A richer story that hints at whole and multi-dimensional lives has begun to develop around these women, entirely separate to the automatic assumptions about *Karayuki-san*. Perhaps some of these women were also prostitutes at some point in their lives, but there is no evidence to suggest this was ever the case. Please take the following at face value.

### Momu Mitakara

Momu Mitakara was born in 1863 and arrived in Australia at the age of 33 in 1896. Her husband

was named Sukezayemon, who arrived into Queensland three years before her. In 1903,

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<sup>25</sup> Frances, *Selling Sex*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Whilst this might seem to be an overly simplistic approach, the distillation of the lives of nameless Japanese women down to a single novel footnote has been the consistent approach by historians heretofore. As such, it is worth noting my methodology involves researching Japanese women rather than Japanese prostitutes.

Momu gave birth to her daughter, Miyoka Mitakara. There are no other details about Momu before 1916, but from at least 1916 she lived with her family in a house at Bemerside near the Seymour River just north of Ingham. They operated a sugar cane farm on the previously subdivided Ripple Creek Estate, servicing the Macknade Mill. Although there were usually small buildings designed as workers' quarters on the farms, it is unlikely this was fit for a family. Instead, the Mitakaras lived in "comfortable home" of two stories overlooking the sugar cane farm and the waters of the Seymour River. Miyoka, Momu's daughter, was a frequent "pen pal" of *The Queenslander*: "We have got a sugar cane farm down here, overlooking the blue waters of the Seymour River. Our home is surrounded with all sorts of merry birds."<sup>27</sup> The

family even owned a fox terrier named "Brownie" and had double zinnias planted in their front garden. The family were wealthy enough to live a fairly comfortable life, also sending Miyoka to a boarding school in Townsville. Sadly, in the flooding that followed the catastrophic 1927 cyclone that hit north Queensland, Momu's husband Sukezayemon was swept away after trying to cross a flooded gully on his way back from the Seymour Hotel with some friends. In the following three years, there is not much to be seen in records about Momu and Miyoka. It would appear they were able to settle the farm and the estate left behind by Sukezayemon, packing their bags and leaving for Japan together in 1930. Momu left behind thirty-four years of life in Australia and Miyoka left the only home she had ever known.

## Shigi Furukawa

Shigi Furukawa was a laundry proprietress in Mackay for many decades, operating the Fuji Laundry on Wood Street until she handed it to her son to take care of.<sup>28</sup> Arriving in a similar era to Momu in 1898, Shigi arrived to Townsville via the Yamashiro Maru and immediately travelled to Thursday Island, where she lived for twenty years

until moving to Mackay in 1918. We have no specific details about Shigi's life on Thursday Island during this time. It is likely she lived in the "Japanese quarters" named "Japtown" on Thursday Island that was a commercially and socially self-sufficient quarter of the island.<sup>29</sup> Whilst it might be easy to assume that Shigi

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<sup>27</sup> "The Young Queenslander: An Invitation," *Queenslander*, February 1, 1919, 45.

<sup>28</sup> I have not yet been able to determine whether this legitimate business was also a front for a brothel, as some literature has suggested, but it certainly operated as a legitimate laundry in its own right.

<sup>29</sup> Nagata, "The Japanese in Torres Strait," 41. "Japtown" is a name that was applied to the commercial and residential centre of Japanese activities in north Queensland towns, a term akin to "Chinatown." Although the latter appears to be more well known, my impression from informal communications is that in many places such

worked as a prostitute during this time, it is no less possible that she worked either as a domestic servant, in one of the Japanese silk, furniture, and draperies stores, or even in one of the three soy sauce factories on the island. In the period between 1908 and 1926, Shigi married twice. Originally her maiden name was Shigi Furuchi, until she married and became Shigi Ogawa in 1908. It is unclear when her husband Jutarō died, but she remarried and became Shigi Furukawa in

1926 after marrying Mitsugoro Furukawa. Shigi also visited Japan a few times during her 48 years in Australia, first in 1914 and again 1935, both for a few months at a time. Shigi also had several family members from her village in Japan living throughout north Queensland. Her husband—and presumably also Shigi as well—were heavily involved in the Mackay Japanese Association. There is still a great deal to be learned about Shigi beyond some of these very brief details of her life.

## Otosume Iwanaga

Otosume Iwanaga similarly arrived to Australia in 1895 from Nagasaki. She had a husband, Tokitaro, and while they were living in Atherton in 1923, they adopted a child who was the orphan of Chinese parents. Their adopted daughter is named Annie Margaret Iwanaga. It seems not long after Annie's adoption that the family moves to Cairns and Otosume's husband buys a Japanese silk goods store named T. Iwanaga & Co. As a family business, it is likely Otosume had a fair say in the day-to-day operations of the store.<sup>30</sup> Their store would have been popular in Cairns, with many locals buying their wares and clothes. The family experienced some upward class mobility throughout their years in Cairns. Otosume's husband was probably the main driver of this, moving from working as a cane

labourer, up to a businessman and even the president of the Japanese Association in Cairns at one point. Although many records describe Otosume as a "housewife," she was also a keen community participant, a frequent face at the local Church and often sent her daughter off to dances and fundraisers through the church's girls' guild. Otosume and her family were also a very socially-connected family in the Cairns region. Annie's eighteenth birthday party in 1936 was reported in the local *Cairns Post* as "a merry gathering of about 50 friends and well-wishers ... [who] did not disperse until the small hours of Sunday morning."<sup>31</sup> The family appears a number of times in the local newspaper throughout the many decades they lived in Australia, often for participating in fundraisers, sporting events, and

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as Broome and potentially Thursday Island, "Japtown" preceded "Chinatown."

<sup>30</sup> Bottomley as cited in *ibid.*, 103.

<sup>31</sup> "Edmonton News: House Party and Birthday Celebrating," *Cairns Post*, October 10, 1936, 9.

social occasions. This further demonstrates their social connectedness to the wider Cairns community. Otosume is a clear and visible

participant in this family, with the Iwanagas making it clear that Australia was their home.

## Conclusion

Momu, Shigi, and Otosume are but a handful of the Japanese women who have been forgotten in the footnotes of historical writing.<sup>32</sup> In the history of Japanese migration to north Queensland between 1880 and 1941, there is still much more attention that needs to be given to write them into existing historiography. Although the identified issues around gender, race, class, and the sale of sex are abundant and relentless, there are opportunities to develop stories from previously examined historical archives. The main challenge is in writing into the spaces and silences in the record where the story of *Karayuki-*

*san* has overshadowed the depth of Japanese women's experiences in early north Queensland society. While the narrative of the *Karayuki-san* has usually occupied barely a footnote itself in the histories of north Queensland, near absent are the experiences and whole lives of Japanese women in these lines. Adding diverse stories and voices to histories requires attention to developing peoples' historical identities in ways that are fully rounded. It is only by prodding and poking the holes in these stories in the footnotes that we can layer diversity into the history of north Queensland.

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<sup>32</sup> Evidently, there is still much more to be said about the lives of these Japanese women and others. The records are there, they just need to be looked at.

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Series BP4/3: Alien registration forms, alphabetical series by nationality

Series BP628/5: Name Index & Registration Cards for Internees Dossiers Single Number series

Series BP9/3: Personal statements and declaration of aliens entering the state of Queensland, alphabetical series

Series J2483: Certificates Exempting from Dictation Test [CEDT] issued under “The Immigration Restriction Acts 1901–1905” and Regulations (and amending legislation), two number series

Series J2773: Correspondence files, annual single number series

Series MP1103/1: Registers containing “Service and Casualty” forms (Form A112) of enemy prisoners of



war and internees held in camps in Australia

Series MP1103/2: Dossiers containing reports on Internees and Prisoners of War held in Australian camps, single number series with alphabetical prefix.

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Editor’s note: Due to its importance to the themes developed in this essay, the original Chicago Style referencing has been retained throughout.