

In the Face of Time

By Tianna Killoran

The *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* left an indelible stain on the conscience of Australian society. At its foundation, the aim of this “White Australia Policy” was to exclude “undesirable immigrants” from the country. Just what constituted such undesirable immigrants was not specifically described, but it was generally understood to be any person who didn’t fit the description of white or European.

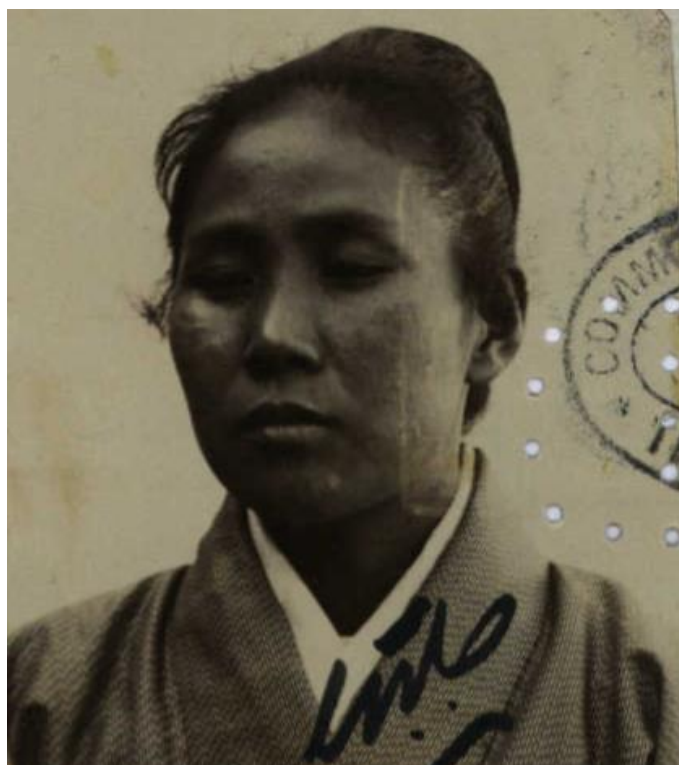
With the banality of evil, the *Restriction Act* erected vast monuments of administrative documentation. The Form 21: Certificate Exempting from the Dictation Test (CEDT) was a disconcerting government document that served as a key mechanism in the machinery of immigration restriction. It was designed to control and limit “undesirable” people entering or leaving Australia. But, in the process of this administrative persecution, many of these peoples’ lives were incidentally captured within the archive of CEDTs.

There is much to be said about the seemingly small and incidental aspects that these forms captured about people’s lives. Within the constraints of beige boxes on pieces of government paper—“*please list name, age, date of birth, height, build, complexion, eye colour, nationality, and birthplace*”—there is both explicit and implied



information we can glean about the complex and fully-formed lives these documents attempted to categorise and judge. As much as the archive might give summary treatment to the lives of the thousands of people contained within its mountains of pages, their lived experiences and realities inevitably manage to creep through.

For me, the photographs on the CEDTs are the most intriguing. Each CEDT contains a profile and side profile photograph of the certificate holder, showing the faces behind these documents.



Images of Masano Kimura from the Certificate Exempting from the Dictation Test Archive.

Above left: 1907; Above right: 1922; Below left: 1922; Below right: 1936



Images of Taroichi Nishi from the Certificate Exempting from the Dictation Test Archive.

Top row: 1915; 1922.

Second row: 1926; 1939.

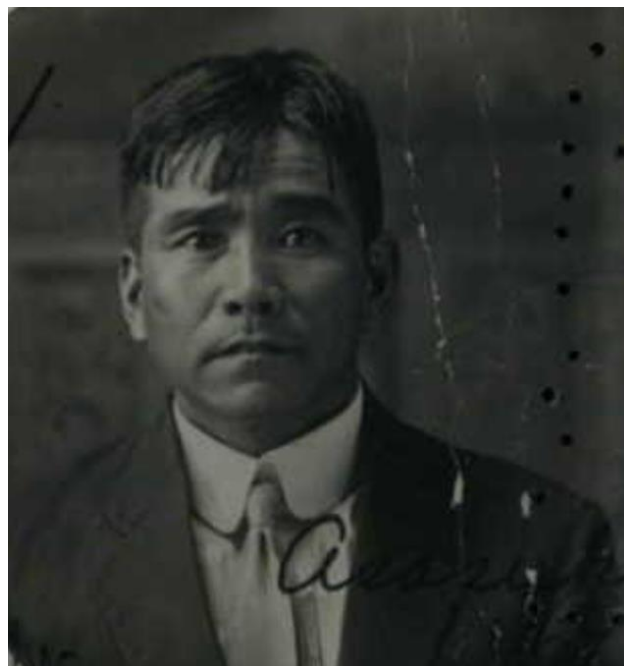


Images of Toki Mayeshiba from the Certificate Exempting from the Dictation Test Archive.

Top row: 1906; 1907; 1912

Second row: 1914; 1916; 1918

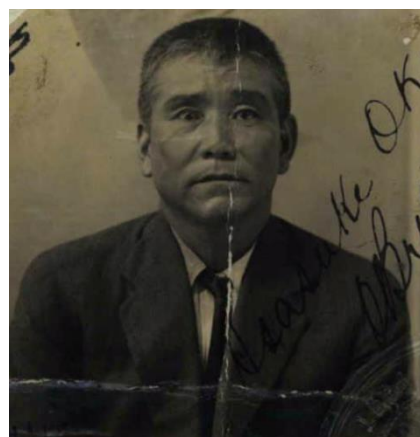
Left: 1919



Images of Asasuke Oki from the Certificate Exempting from the Dictation Test Archive.

Top row: 1915; 1919.

Below: 1923. Right: 1926. Below right: 1935.



I am certainly not the first to feel curious about these photographs; there are endless possibilities for understanding and interpreting this archival source. Australian artist Peter Drew has installed his *AUSSIE* poster series around Australia, which takes select CEDT photographs and overlays them with the word “AUSSIE.” Drew explains that “thanks to a racist immigration policy, we’ve inherited a beautiful photographic record of Australia’s racial diversity that might have otherwise remained invisible” (97). The Real Face of White Australia project, created by Tim Sherratt and Kate Bagnall, has also extracted these CEDT photographs. Sherratt and Bagnall use digital tools that scrape the images from the documents and visualise a “wall of faces” that reimagines the archive in an online space. The wall of faces create a vision that “cuts through time and bureaucratic opacity to help us meet real people from the past” (22).

If you spend enough time wading through these CEDTs, you can build micro-stories with an assemblage of photos that show people change and age over time.

In the photographs, some people age dramatically within the space of five years. Others slowly develop a frown that etches itself into the lines of their face. A person’s choice in clothing might shift suddenly, or even gradually over the space of a few decades. Other times the photographs can show a person committed to a single outfit. A slightly askew bowtie can raise even more questions. People grow out their hair

or suddenly develop a certain crookedness on the bridge of their nose from one photograph to the next.

It is ironic, then, that despite government efforts to exclude these people from Australian society—even to the extent of literally stamping and scribbling across their faces—the very opposite has been achieved. We are limited in what we can understand about these people from their photographs, but these are small peaks into the lives of thousands of people that may otherwise be lost.

Works Cited

Secondary Sources

Drew, Peter. *Poster Boy: A Memoir of Art and Politics*. Black Inc., 2019.

Sherratt, Tim, and Kate Bagnall. "The People Inside." *Seeing the Past with Computers: Experiments with Augmented Reality and Computer Vision for History*, edited by Kevin Kee, Timothy Compeau, 2019, pp. 11-31.

Primary Sources

National Archives Australia (hereafter NAA): BP313/1, HIROHATO M, HIRCHATA, Masano (or Masano OKI) - Nationality: Japanese - arrived Thursday Island 30 December 1922 on the Tango Maru.

NAA: J2483, 144/33, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Toki Mayeshiba (of Thursday Island) - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Japan - departed for Japan per NIKKO MARU on 26 March 1914, returned to Thursday Island per TANGO MARU on 27 December 1914.

NAA: J2483, 176/73, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Taroichi Nishi (of Townsville) - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Japan - departed for Japan per NIKKO MARU on 28 May 1915, returned to Townsville per TANGO MARU on 27 December 1915.

NAA: J2483, 184/65, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Asasuke Oki (of Townsville) - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Japan - departed for Japan per HITACHI MARU on 30 September 1915, returned to Townsville per AKI MARU on 1 March 1916.

NAA: J2483, 193/31, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Toki Mayeshiba (of Thursday Island) - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Nagasaki Ken Japan - departed for Japan per AKI MARU on 3 April 1916, returned to Thursday Island per AKI MARU on 26 November 1916.

NAA: J2483, 239/21, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Mrs Toki Mayeshiba (of Thursday Island) - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Nagasaki Ken Japan - departed for Japan per NIKKO MARU on 3 March 1918, returned to Thursday Island per NIKKO MARU on 14 February 1919.

NAA: J2483, 265/25, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Asasuke Oki (of Townsville) - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Kobe, Japan - departed for Japan per NIKKO MARU on 17 March 1919, returned to Townsville per NIKKO MARU on 13 May 1920.

NAA: J2483, 286/19, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Toki Mayeshiba (of Thursday Island) - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Wakayama Ken Japan - departed for Japan per NIKKO MARU on 7 December 1919, returned to Thursday Island per AKI MARU on 26 November 1922.

- NAA: J2483, 324/070, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Masano Oki - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Fukuoka Ken Japan - departed for Japan per AKI MARU 1 April 1922 returned Thursday Island per TANGO MARU 30 December 1922.
- NAA: J2483, 344/028, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Taroichi Nishi - Nationality: Japanese Birthplace: Kamitawara Japan.
- NAA: J2483, 346/60, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Asasuke Oki - Nationality: Japanese Birthplace; Oshima Japan - departed for China per EASTERN 20 April 1923 returned Townsville YOSHINO MARU 29 January 1924.
- NAA: J2483, 409/6, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Asasuke Oki - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Oshima Japan - departed for Japan per ST ALBANS 22 March 1926 returned Townsville per AKI MARU 8 May 1927.
- NAA: J2483, 409/66, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Taroichi Nishi (of Townsville) - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Japan - departed for Japan per CHANGTE 1 June 1926 returned Thursday Island per Mishima Maru 7 March 1927.
- NAA: J2483, 519/97, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Asasuke Oki - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Oshima - returned Japan per KAMO MARU 4 March 1935
- NAA: J2483, 535/44, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Masano Kimura [Oki] - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Japan - departed for Japan per KITANO MARU 4 April 1936 returned Thursday Island per KITANO MARU 6 May 1937.
- NAA: J2483, 551/15, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Taroichi Nishi - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Japan - departed for Hong Kong per KAMO MARU 3 April 1939 returned Thursday Island per KITANO MARU 10 November 1939.
- NAA: J2483, 92/44, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Toki Mayeshiba (of Thursday Island) - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Nagasaki Japan - departed for Japan per YAWATA MARU on 28 March 1912, returned to Thursday Island per KUMANO MARU on 31 December 1912.
- NAA: J3136, 1906/16, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Toki Shiomasu (of Thursday Island) - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Japan - departed for Japan per TAIYUAN ON 22 March 1906, returned to Thursday Island per AIRLIE on 10 May 1906.
- NAA: J3136, 1907/102, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Toki Shiomasu - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Nagasaki, Japan - departed for Japan per KUMANO MARU on 25 July 1907, returned to Thursday Island per KUMANO MARU on 10 December 1907.
- NAA: J3136, 1907/379, Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (CEDT) - Name: Masano Kimura [Mrs

Asaki Oki] - Nationality: Japanese - Birthplace: Fukuoka-Ken - departed for Japan per NIKKO MARU on 12 December 1907, returned to Thursday Island per KUMANO MARU on 18 August 1908.