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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Internment and Repatriation of the Japanese-French Nationals Resident in New Caledonia, 1941–1946

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## Abstract

The pre-1941 Japanese population of New Caledonia was decimated by the French administration's decision to transfer most of the Japanese residents to Australia for internment at the outbreak of the Asia-Pacific theatre of the Second World War. Among the men transferred to Australia were ten men who had been formerly French nationals but had lost their French nationality by decree. The French Administration's ability to denationalise and intern, and then subsequently repatriate, the former-Japanese French-nationals was possible due to changes to the French nationality laws and regulations introduced by the Vichy regime. This paper considers the case of the Japanese who had taken French nationality and were denationalised in the context of the changes to the French nationality laws that, in turn, negatively affected the post-1945 sustainability of the Japanese community in New Caledonia.

## Keywords

**Japanese; internment; World War Two; New Caledonia; French; denationalisation; repatriation.**

The long-term sustainability of an immigrant community depends on both internal mechanisms, such as the choice of where to live, and external factors, such as the attitudes of local communities to the community's decision to live where it chooses. In periods of unrest or conflict, both factors can change quickly and have an impact on the sustainability of a community. The French administration's decision to intern the male members of the Japanese community in New Caledonia and send most of them to Australia for internment ultimately saw the virtual elimination of the Japanese community in the French Pacific colony. Among those interned were a number of former Japanese French nationals (hereafter former-JF nationals) or Japanese who had taken French nationality (hereafter JF nationals) but had either decided to revoke it after the outbreak of war in the Pacific or were forcibly denationalised.<sup>1</sup> The denationalisation and internment of these men was made possible by changes to the French Nationality Act introduced by the Vichy regime. Whilst these changes have been analysed in the context of metropolitan France and the denationalisation of the local Jewish community (Marrus & Paxton 1995), and to a lesser extent in Algeria where both the Muslim and Jewish communities were targeted in different ways (Weil 2008), the changes have not been the focus of research in New Caledonia.

In this paper, the JF nationals are used as a case study of a group that forms part of a larger group—both internally and externally recognised—to illustrate some of the external mechanisms that can have an impact on the sustainability of a community. Importantly, these factors are complex and not always coherent or consistent, but that does not negate their effects. In the case of the JF nationals, a complex intertwined network of laws, regulations and policies introduced in the late 1930s and early 1940s by the French government combined with changing attitudes to the Japanese community served to curtail the sustainability of New Caledonia's Japanese community post-1945.

## Research on Japanese communities in the South Pacific

An increasing body of work has examined the Japanese who lived across the South Pacific during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, Iwamoto (1999) examines the emigration of Japanese to Papua and New Guinea whilst Peattie (1988) discusses the emergence of a Japanese community in Micronesia. Ganter (1994), Oliver (2007), Nagata (1996; 2001; 2004), Bennett (2001) and Sissons (1977; 1979; 2016) all address issues related to early Japanese communities in Australia, and Bennett (2009) discusses the internment in New Zealand of local Japanese residents as well as those transferred from Fiji and Tonga. In the case of the Japanese in New Caledonia, Kobayashi (1980) and Palombo (2003) both consider the economic factors behind the Japanese' migration whilst Tsuda (2006) addresses the historical and social context of their arrival. Ishikawa (2007) focuses on the emigrants from Okinawa Prefecture who between 1892 and 1919 accounted for almost 15 percent of the Japanese in New Caledonia. From a different perspective, Raulet-Akaza (2012) examines the life of Ono Yaichi who was heavily involved in the negotiations facilitating the first group of workers from Japan to work in New Caledonia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Denton (2014) discusses the life of the Japanese-French woman, Rosalie Kitazawa-Fouque, who became a leading figure in the development of the nickel trade between New Caledonia and Japan. In contrast, Cayrol (2015) notes the 'wall of silence' around the Japanese community in New Caledonia and the role that an exhibition in 2012 at the Musée de Nouvelle Calédonie (Museum of New Caledonia)

1 'Denationalisation' and the 'withdrawal of nationality' are used interchangeably in this paper.

played in recognising the existence of the pre-war community. Research on the changes to the legislation governing French nationality, especially during the Vichy regime, is also ongoing. Weil (2008) provides a comprehensive analysis of the changes to French nationality laws since the French Revolution, and Plender (1974) explains the changes to the laws in 1973 that removed the differences between the laws governing those eligible to take French nationality in metropolitan France vis-à-vis its Overseas Territories. Marrus and Paxton (1995) highlight the changes to French nationality directed at the exclusion of Jews. To date, however, no detailed analysis of the effects that these changes had in New Caledonia, especially as they pertain to the Japanese who had taken French nationality, has been undertaken. This paper aims to remedy this situation.

## New Caledonian history

France annexed New Caledonia in 1853 and shortly afterwards established a penal colony on the island of Nouville, a short distance from Nouméa. During World War Two Nouville became the site of an internment camp for the colony's enemy aliens. Until 1956, New Caledonia was administered from metropolitan France through a High Commissioner for the Pacific who simultaneously acted as the Governor of New Caledonia (hereafter Governor). While the 1998 Nouméa Accord has given New Caledonia a 'special collectivity' status among France's overseas territories, it remains French territory and as such, the laws of metropolitan France in most cases apply in New Caledonia.

In September 1940 New Caledonians chose to align with the Free French government in exile, an act that saw many New Caledonia-based Vichy supporters expelled and sent to Saigon.<sup>2</sup> At the time, the population of New Caledonia consisted primarily of French-Europeans (Cardoche), Tonkinese,<sup>3</sup> Javanese, local Indigenous 'Kanak' Melanesians, and Japanese. The Japanese community, in fact, was the largest in the South Pacific and only second in size to that of Hawaii. Most of the Japanese had migrated to work in New Caledonia's nickel mines. As Denton (2014) notes, members of the Japanese community had a comparatively privileged position compared to other immigrant communities and were respected by the French administration.

## Japanese population of 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 (Bencivengo 2012; Raulet-Akaza 2012). In accordance with this agreement, 599 men from Kumamoto Prefecture moved to New Caledonia in 1892 (Kobayashi 190: 276–277). The harsh working conditions combined with the tropical climate meant only eight men stayed to the end of their five-year contracts. As a result of the problems, the agreement was terminated and no further Japanese emigrated until after a revised agreement was signed in 1900 (Kutsuki 2004: 190).<sup>4</sup> Under the revised new agreement, 1,208 Japanese moved to New Caledonia in 1900 and 1901 (Kutsuki 2004: 191). Thereafter, small groups of mostly miners emigrated on an irregular basis through to the outbreak of World War 1. At the end of their contracts, the majority of

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<sup>2</sup> For discussions on the shift to the Free French cause, see chapter two of Munholland (2005).

<sup>3</sup> The Tonkinese originated from an area now covered by the Red River delta region of northern Vietnam.

<sup>4</sup> According to Kutsuki (2004: 190) 23 members of the first group of men died in New Caledonia.

the Japanese returned to Japan, but a small number chose to remain in New Caledonia. Most of those who stayed continued to work as miners, but as Kobayashi (1980: 211) shows, some became farmers, merchants or carpenters. Owing to a combination of the depressed economic conditions in New Caledonia after World War 1 and a shift to the hiring of Tonkinese workers in the nickel mines, very few Japanese moved there between 1919 and 1941 (Ishikawa 2008: 84). In line with the Japanese government's view that New Caledonia was within its 'sphere of influence' (Archives de la Nouvelle Calédonie [hereafter ANC] 107W 2852 Cable from Charles de Gaulle to Henri Sautot, Governor of New Caledonia, 15 February 1941), a Japanese consulate was established in Nouméa in March 1940.

On 24 November 1941, the Japanese population of New Caledonia comprised 1,047 men and 57 women (total 1,104) (ANC 107W 2852).<sup>5</sup> Just less than one-third of the Japanese population lived in and around Nouméa (336), with the remainder spread in smaller populations across the colony, including Koumac (90) and Thio (71) (ANC 107W 2852). The population had fallen since 1 January 1941 when it was 1,126, including 1,074 men (National Archives of Australia [hereafter NAA] A2670 282/1940 Australian Military Mission to New Caledonia, Appendix 12) yet it still constituted over 76 percent of the foreign population. Some of the decrease was due to natural causes but with the outbreak of war becoming increasingly likely, some of the Japanese returned to Japan. A number of the Japanese were married or in long-term relationships with Javanese, Caldoche, Tonkinese or Indigenous women, and many of these couples had children. The nationality of the children varied depending on whether their parents were married and, if not, on the nationality of their mother. Some children were ostensibly Japanese as their fathers were not French nationals; however, as the registration of births with the appropriate Japanese authorities was difficult, many of those children were not recognised as Japanese subjects by the Japanese government.<sup>6</sup>

## French nationality

At the beginning of the twentieth century, French nationality was a mix of the *jus soli* (birthplace) and *jus sanguinis* (parentage) concepts of nationality. French nationality was given automatically to the children of a French father but could also be acquired by non-French citizens through naturalisation. There was a strong ideological correlation between being 'socially' French and French nationality. That is, French nationals were expected to adhere to certain French characteristics, which were absorbed through socialisation. These characteristics included fluency in the French language and a knowledge of French history and society. Importantly, French women who married non-French nationals lost their French nationality upon marriage and became citizens of their husband's country. Moreover, children born of such couples were not French nationals irrespective of where they were born or chose to reside.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Kobayashi (1980: 216) there were very few Japanese women in New Caledonia because the local authorities did not recognise proxy marriages and most of the men were single when they arrived. It was possible, if the men were married before arrival, to arrange for their wives to join them but few men took this path.

<sup>6</sup> To be eligible for Japanese citizenship people had to be listed on a Japan-based family register. Family registers were maintained at the local municipal level (for instance, town or village). The organisation of such a registration was difficult to organise without local consular representation. To register a child before the establishment of the Japanese Consulate in Nouméa in 1940 required registering a child through the Japanese Consulate in Sydney, by physically going to Japan or by organising someone in Japan to register the child. The registration proved too cumbersome in many cases and most children were not registered in Japan.

Rather, they were citizens of their father's country or stateless if not eligible for citizenship of that country.

The nationality laws were largely applied equally in France's territories as in metropolitan France but as Plender (1974: 717, note 43) shows, from the early 1880s the nationality laws were applied more liberally in France's colonies, including New Caledonia, in order to encourage immigration.<sup>7</sup> In this case immigration referred to people of a European background and not the residents of France's colonies, including any Indigenous peoples. Indigenous people, such as the New Caledonian Kanak, were ineligible for French nationality.

After the First World War, France experienced depopulation due to a combination of war casualties and an increasing number of women marrying non-French citizens.<sup>8</sup> In 1920 for instance, 14,178 French women married non-French citizens while only 8,736 non-French women acquired French nationality through marriage, therefore resulting in a loss of 5,442 people (Weil 2008: 65). This situation raised some concerns about France's long-term future and underpinned moves to change the Nationality Act in the 1920s (Weil 2008: 65–67). After much deliberation, a new Nationality Act took effect on 10 August 1927. Under the new law, French women who married non-French citizens on French territory were eligible to remain French nationals. Previously, formerly French women could apply to regain their French nationality and should their application be successful, became French once again by decree. New Caledonia-born Julia Quenneville for instance, regained her French nationality when her Japanese husband (Shiramitsu Jukei)<sup>9</sup> became French on 1 May 1936 (ANC 127W 47).<sup>10</sup>

Under the changes, children born to French mothers and non-French fathers could also be French nationals as long as they were born on French territory. At the same time, the eligibility period for naturalisation was reduced from ten years to three years and in the process socialisation became an encouragement to naturalisation rather than naturalisation as the culmination of socialisation (Weil 2008: 68). Despite the seemingly more liberal nationality law, new French nationals were 'barred from exercising political rights' (Weil 2008: 194) and were excluded from certain professions in the short term.

Under the new law, the terms governing denaturalisation or the withdrawal of French nationality were also changed. According to Weil (2008: 108), the new law allowed for the stripping of French nationality in three cases: '(1) carrying out acts against the internal or external security of the French state; (2) committing acts benefiting a foreign state that were incompatible with being a French citizen and were contrary to France's interests; (3) failing to carry out the obligations resulting from laws on military recruitment.' Security concerns, including conscription (or military recruitment), were therefore central to the terms for the withdrawal of French nationality. From 1928 until 1935, male French nationals had to complete one year of compulsory military service. In March 1935, the period was extended to two years.<sup>11</sup> Applications for denationalisation from French males of military age were considered in the context of whether they had completed military service or not. New male

<sup>7</sup> 'The 'Record of Naturalisations, 1926–1938' (ANC 127W 47) shows that Colomina Frederic, a Spanish citizen born in New Caledonia became French on 4 December 1926.

<sup>8</sup> Bertossi and Hajat (2013: 6–7) argue that France had similar concerns after the end of the Second World War.

<sup>9</sup> In line with Japanese custom, Japanese names are written surname first.

<sup>10</sup> Shiramitsu Juhei and Julia Quenneville were married in Bourail in 1925 (ANC N19 Acte de Naissance Quenneville Julia).

<sup>11</sup> In 1996 France suspended military conscription and formally ended the practice in 2001.

French nationals of military age were also expected to complete military service. The concern was that denationalisation was aimed primarily at avoiding military service.

To date the implications of the changes to the nationalisation laws as they applied in France's Overseas Territories, including New Caledonia, have been minimal. Plender's (1974: 718) account of the standardisation of the nationality laws across territorial France in 1973 does not explain how the previous laws were applied differently in the overseas territories vis-à-vis metropolitan France. Between May 1927 and December 1941 35 Japanese took French nationality. Of these JF nationals, five men (Shibata Heizo, Horio Kanafou, Mori Zenkichi, Sugiura Masajiro, and Goto Sutekichi<sup>12</sup>) became French before the changes took effect on 10 August 1927. The date is important as it meant that the changes introduced by Vichy regime did not apply to them, although they were used to denationalise Goto Sutekichi in February 1942 (see below). The French New Caledonia-born wives of Shibata and Horio—considered the first and second Japanese to take French citizenship—both lost their French nationality and became Japanese subjects when they had married. Shibata's wife Maria was reintegrated to French nationality on the same day her husband became a French national on 9 February 1927 (ANC 157W 106). The New Caledonian-born wives of Japanese who took French nationality after 10 August 1927 did not lose their French nationality.

In July 1940, the Vichy regime implemented *non-legislative* changes to the rules governing French nationality. Under these changes, anyone who had become a French national by decree since 10 August 1927 could have their nationality revoked 'without cause' (Weil 2008: 88). An earlier decree issued on 12 November 1938 determined that French nationality could be stripped from naturalised French nationals should they be deemed to be 'unworthy of the title of French citizen' (Marrus & Paxton 1995: 56). Under this earlier change, the Council of State approval was required before the withdrawal of nationality could take effect but under the Vichy changes, denaturalisation was an administrative decision without judicial oversight. The Vichy change saw around 5,000 naturalised French nationals living in metropolitan France, including around 4,000 Jews who were 'returned' to Germany, lose their French nationality (Marrus & Paxton 1995). In early 1942 these changes were used to denationalise 13 JF nationals who had become French after 10 August 1927. Importantly, the Vichy changes were introduced prior to New Caledonia deciding to align with the Free French government in exile and therefore the laws remained applicable in New Caledonia.

## The internment of the Japanese residents of New Caledonia

The war in Europe and the deteriorating political situation in the Pacific saw the French administration become increasingly concerned about the presence of over 1,000 Japanese residents in New Caledonia. In June 1941 the French administration asked the Australian government for permission to send 700 Japanese to Australia for internment in event of war (ANC 107W 2852 Letter from Sautot to Ballard, Australia's Official Representative in New Caledonia, 26 June 1941). In reply, the Australian government agreed to accept 300 Japanese should war erupt (ANC 107W 2852 Letter from Ballard to Sautot, 4 August 1941). No reason was given for the lower number.

Immediately after the Free French—with whom New Caledonia was aligned—declared war against Japan on 8 December 1941, the French administration began issuing notices for the arrest of the Japanese residents. The original plan was to arrest only those Japanese between

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12 Goto Sutekichi is often referred to as Suekichi in documents in the ANC's collection.

the ages of 18 and 50 years, but many of those arrested were over 50 years of age (NAA A2670 282/1940 Supplement 2 to War Cabinet Agendum No. 282/1940: 4). Itami Utanoshima, a cobbler in Koumac, for example, was 70 years old when interned (ANC 34W 17).<sup>13</sup> The Japanese were initially interned in a number of small local camps across New Caledonia but were later concentrated to the former penal colony in Nouville.

On 19 December 1941, less than two weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbour, the first ship carrying Japanese internees departed Nouméa bound for Australia. Between then and May 1942, 1,121 Japanese were sent to Australia for internment (NAA MP508/1 255/702/2102 Cable 357 to Secretary, Office of Dominion Affairs from Department of Army, 6 July 1942). Among them were 10 former-JF nationals. All Japanese sent to Australia were repatriated to Japan either as part of the September 1942 Anglo-Japanese Civilian Exchange or after the end of hostilities (Ward 2016). The effect of this repatriation was the virtual elimination of the Japanese population of New Caledonia.

## Japanese-French nationals

As noted above, between 1927 and 1939 35 Japanese became French nationals. Whilst Shibata and Horio are recognised as the first JF nationals, they were not the first to apply. Yamamoto Kenzaburo applied in 1921 but his application was refused. Yamamoto's second application in 1929 was approved and he became French by decree in 1931 (ANC 107W 2852 Letter from Gabriel Georget, Commissioner of Police, Nouméa, 20 December 1941).<sup>14</sup>

Most JF nationals lived in Nouméa but a number resided outside the capital. As was the case with the Japanese population as a whole, many of the JF nationals were married or in relationships with women with whom they had children. In cases where the parents were married, the children were Japanese by birth; but where their parents were unmarried the children could be French, Japanese or citizens of their mother's country. Children born after 10 August 1927 to French mothers were eligible for French nationality at birth. By December 1941, a number of the JF nationals had died (e.g. Mori Zenkichi died in 1936) or in the case of Ishikawa Bumpei, had returned to Japan (ANC 34W 28 and ANC 34W 17). An estimated 26 remained in New Caledonia in December 1941.

The reasons behind the decision of Japanese people to take French nationality were a mix of economics and the personal. In 1920 the French administration imposed an annual poll tax of 25 francs on each non-French worker and to avoid paying the poll tax, Ishikawa (2007: 78) claims, some Japanese decided to apply for French nationality. This change would explain Yamamoto Kenzaburo's application in 1921. For men with children, the decision was also practical as their children would probably live in New Caledonia and therefore French nationality would be more appropriate. However, it must be acknowledged that 35 out of the over 5,000 Japanese who had lived and worked in New Caledonia between 1892 and 1941 is not a high proportion; it is therefore clear that the overwhelming majority did not see the value or necessity of becoming French nationals. Conscription was not a concern as only one JF national was made to undertake conscription: Okada Jintaro (b. 1891 Hiroshima Prefecture

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<sup>13</sup> The 34W series comprises 'Arrival Cards' for non-French citizens who arrived in New Caledonia. Many were completed a long time after a foreigner's arrival and hence the information is not always accurate. The series is not complete as a number of cards were lost before they were transferred to the ANC's collection.

<sup>14</sup> The copy held in the ANC's collection is a carbon copy. It is presumably addressed to the Governor but the addressee's details are not shown.

who arrived in New Caledonia in 1914) (ANC 34W 32). Okada became a French national on 23 February 1933 and was conscripted in 1935 at the age of 44 (ANC 350W 26). The reasons why only Okada was conscripted are unclear but it may have been due to his relative young age (under 50 years) and that he lived in Trianon, a suburb of Nouméa (ANC 350W 26). His duties during conscription were not particularly onerous (such as digging roads) and he only attended for a few days. While Okada was the only Japan-born JF national to be conscripted, as French nationals a number of sons of JF nationals were conscripted and/or enlisted in the French forces. For example, Sakamoto Kaneo Claude, the son of Sakamoto Kan'ichi who took French nationality in 1930, was conscripted in May 1940 at the age of 20 and served until 1945 (ANC 350W 39).

## Outbreak of war and the internment of the JF nationals

As mentioned earlier, at the outbreak of war in the Pacific a number of the JF nationals were arrested and interned. Good character references and the intervention of the Governor saw many JF nationals released within weeks. Anzai Shoji, for instance, was interned on 31 December 1941 and then released on 17 January 1942 on the order of the Governor (ANC 34W 2).

The arrest of the JF nationals was in accordance with the Governor's advice to the Public Prosecutor on 17 December 1941 that he intended to issue a decree that the JF nationals who had shown solidarity with the Japanese cause be denaturalised (ANC 107W 2852 Letter from Governor to the Public Prosecutor, 17 December 1941). JF nationals who had demonstrated that they were 'worthy to be part of the French family' were to remain free. This latter condition was largely ignored outside Nouméa and many JF nationals resident in rural areas were interned. The internment of the non-suspect JF nationals necessitated the Governor's intervention to have them released. For example, Sakamoto Itsuki, a resident of Voh, was interned in late December 1941 and released in January 1942 after the intervention of the Governor on the undertaking that he would be placed under surveillance by the local police (ANC 107W 2852 Letter from Governor to Chief of Police, Voh, 28 January 1942). Despite his initial release, Sakamoto was re-interned in April 1942 and remained interned until July 1946, even though he remained French. After his release Sakamoto returned to Voh where he lived for a number of years.<sup>15</sup>

In line with the Governor's 17 December proposal, JF nationals who had become French after 10 August 1927 and were considered 'suspect' were approached about renouncing their French nationality. Some agreed to renounce their French nationality but others did not. On the 10 and 21 February 1942, the Governor signed decrees revoking the French nationality of eight men (Inada Sokieki,<sup>16</sup> Kosaki Kinshichi,<sup>17</sup> Goto Sutekichi, Imamura Keita, Miyake Hanzanburo, Sakamoto Kaniba, Tsubashima Yaichi,<sup>18</sup> Yamamoto Kenzaburo<sup>19</sup>) who had agreed to relinquish their French nationality (ANC 107W 2852 Decrees signed by

<sup>15</sup> Sakamoto Itsuki died in Nouville on 12 June 1975, Maire de Nouméa: Service à la population [Births, Deaths and Marriages Registry, Nouméa Town Hall].

<sup>16</sup> Inada Sokieki is listed in the NAA as Sueki. He is sometimes listed as Soneki or Socieki in documents held by the ANC.

<sup>17</sup> Kosaki is listed in the NAA as Kinshichi.

<sup>18</sup> Tsubashima is sometimes referred to as Toubashima. He is listed in the NAA as Tsuboshima Yaichi.

<sup>19</sup> Yamamoto Kenzaburo is often referred to as Yamamoto Kenjaburo.

D'Argenlieu, 10 and 21 February 1942). Goto's denationalisation had to be consensual as he had become French prior to the August 1927 changes.

A third decree issued by D'Argenlieu on 21 April 1942 forcibly revoked the French nationality of another five men (Anzai Shoji, Katoushita Hideo, Yamamoto Seiji, Sukita Suekichi,<sup>20</sup> Kiko Masago) who had not agreed to relinquish their French nationality (ANC 107W 2852). In effect, this third decree formally revoked the French nationality of JF nationals who were not considered to be worthy members of the French national family.

The issue of the three decrees enabled the now former-JF nationals to be (re)interned or placed under house arrest. The issue of the decrees also facilitated the transfer of most of the former-JF nationals to Australia for internment in late May 1942. Anzai Shoji, mentioned above, was re-interned on 11 May and sent to Australia later that month, together with all but one of the former-JF nationals (Sakamoto Kaniba) (ANC 34W 2). Sakamoto Kaniba was hospitalised on a number of occasions with an illness that prevented him from travelling. When not in hospital, Sakamoto was interned with many of the other Japanese men in Nouville (ANC 34W 38).

The reasons behind the decision not to denationalise some JF nationals are more complex than whether the men's actions were suspect or not. In at least one case, the decision was a pragmatic one. According to the U.S. Naval Liaison Officer, Okada Jintaro, the operator of the salt works, was not interned by order of a local French Army quartermaster as 'there was no one else to make the salt' (U.S. Naval Liaison Officer 1942). Presumably someone was found to take over Okada's work as the U.S. Naval Liaison Officer also notes that Okada was told by the 'Police Commissioner that he is not to leave his house' (U.S. Naval Liaison Officer 1942).

## Repatriation

The decision on where the Japanese from New Caledonia would be repatriated—wherever they were interned—was under the control of the New Caledonian authorities as the initial interning administration. Former-JF nationals Imamura Keita and Yamamoto Kenzaburo were nominated by the Japanese government to be repatriated as part of the proposed, albeit unsuccessful, Second Anglo-Japanese Civilian Exchange (NAA MT885/1 255/18/308 Memo to Australian Department of External Affairs from Ballard, Official Representative New Caledonia, 12 November 1943).<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, the French administration approved the inclusion of Imamura but opposed the repatriation of Yamamoto on the grounds that he was 'dangerous' (NAA MT885/1 255/18/308 Memo, 12 November 1943). Approval for Imamura to be included was given even though he was accused of suspicious acts as early as November 1941 (ANC 107 W 2852 Letter from Lt-Colonel Jardin to Governor, 29 November 1941). Together with most of the Japanese from New Caledonia interned in Australia, all former-JF nationals were repatriated to Japan in February 1946. In October 1945, the Australian Government approached the French administration about the possibility of repatriating back to New Caledonia the Japanese from New Caledonia who had been interned in Australia (NAA A1066 IC45/1/11/5 Cablegram No 142 External Affairs to Ballard, Australian Government Representative, Nouméa, 17 October 1945). The Governor's response was that 'all these internees to be repatriated to Japan' (NAA A1066 IC45/1/11/5 Cablegram No 154

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20 Sukita Suekichi is listed in the NAA as Sugita Suekichi.

21 For a discussion of the circumstances surrounding the failure of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Anglo-Japanese Civilian Exchange see Fedorowich (1997) and Ward (2015).

The Australian Official Representative, Nouméa, 31 October 1945). Kurtovitch (2013), in his play, 'L'Arrestation du Japonais' (The Arrest of the Japanese) suggests that this was part of the French administration's strategy to eliminate the Japanese community so as to claim and sell their assets. Kurtovitch's claim needs further examination but the Governor's argument that some JF nationals need to be denationalised so their 'belongings can be confiscated' (ANC 107W 2852 Letter from Sautot to the High Commissioner for France in the Pacific, 5 February 1942) gives weight to his view. Kurtovitch's claim is further supported by the fact that the assets of the repatriated Japanese were seized and sold off in the late 1950s with the French administration keeping the proceeds (Palombo 2003).

In January 1946, 29 Japanese from New Caledonia interned in Australia signed a petition requesting that they be repatriated to New Caledonia rather than Japan (NAA A1066 IC45/1/11/5 Letter signed by Anyei Morio, Compound Leader 14C Compound, Loveday addressed to Minister for External Affairs, 31 January 1946). The petitioners included the former-JF nationals, Goto Sutekichi and Inada Sueki. There is no record of a reply but as the repatriation ship SS Koei-maru that transferred many Japanese internees back to Japan left Melbourne on 21 February, it is possible that the Australian authorities did not bother to reply. Yet, it shows that some of the former-JF nationals wished to return to New Caledonia.

All former-JF nationals interned in Australia were on board the SS Koei-maru when it departed Melbourne. With their repatriation to Japan the only chance of a continuation of a Japanese community in New Caledonia rested with the members of the Japanese community—many of whom were JF nationals—who remained in New Caledonia. These men were not given their freedom until July 1946, by which time they had been interned or held under house arrest for nearly four years, and most were aged in their late fifties if not older. Yet, the French administration attempted to expel these men as well and it was partly due to the lateness of the French administration's request that they were not repatriated to Japan via Australia. After their release most found it difficult to return to their previous life and none regained the social respect or economic position which they had had prior to the outbreak of war. The loss of prestige experienced by these men, compounded by the 'wall of silence' that emerged due to the repatriation to Japan of the men sent to Australia, effectively ended the community. That is, mechanisms external to the community led to the inability of the community to continue or sustain itself.

## Conclusion

This paper explains how the denationalisation and subsequent internment of 13 JF nationals resident in New Caledonia were facilitated by changes to the French nationality laws introduced by the Vichy regime. While these changes were driven by conditions in metropolitan France, they were used effectively against the Japanese community in New Caledonia to the long-term detriment of that community. The denationalisation of the JF nationals facilitated the transfer of 12 former-JF nationals to Australia for internment, which, in turn, led to their repatriation to Japan after the end of hostilities. Their denationalisation and internment therefore prevented the sustainability of the community after 1945. The denationalisation and internment of the Japanese community arose despite the fact that the Japanese community had enjoyed a level of respect and was reasonably well integrated into the local community prior to the outbreak of war. This sudden change of attitude reflects how in times of conflict opinions towards an immigrant community can change quickly and in the process diminish the sustainability and viability of the immigrant community. This paper also shows that two of the former-JF nationals sent to Australia petitioned to be allowed to return

to New Caledonia but their request was not granted, thereby indicating that attitudes do not immediately revert back once conflict ends. Finally, I have suggested here that there were probably some economic reasons behind the denationalisation and internment programs, but more work is needed to better understand these reasons, particularly in light of the Governor's refusal to allow the Japanese to return to New Caledonia and the deliberate confiscation and sell off of the Japanese' assets.

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