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RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Nippo-Kanaks in Post-War New Caledonia: Race, Law, Politics and Identity

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### Abstract

This article interrogates both the legal and social identities of Japanese-Melanesians (or ‘Nippo-Kanaks’) residing in the Free French territory of New Caledonia at the beginning of the twentieth century to the years following the Second World War. The first part of the article details how, fearing an imminent Japanese attack on New Caledonia after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the French Empire began the process of deporting nearly all Japanese emigrants residing throughout New Caledonia to Australian internment camps on 8 December 1941. French officials in New Caledonia sequestered all property belonging to the Japanese émigré community, and later sold it to the French public. Nippo-Kanaks, who were children at the time of the incarceration and deportation of their Japanese fathers, maintained a problematized legal identity as Japanese nationals residing in Pacific French territory. Although the French Empire granted French citizenship to mixed race Kanaks in 1946, French authorities in New Caledonia specifically denied French citizenship to Nippo-Kanaks, who then had to petition for French naturalization. The second part of this article interrogates the social identity of Nippo-Kanaks viewed from the perspective of Jeannette Yokoyama, a second-generation Nippo-Kanak whose Japanese father was deported to Australia. Yokoyama’s father was forcibly repatriated to Japan after the Second World War, but by writing letters he maintained communication with his family in New Caledonia. The letters that Jeannette received from her father allowed her to forge personal memories of her absent father that shaped her social, mixed race identity as a Nippo-Kanak. For Yokoyama’s father, the letters served as a means to enculturate Jeannette as a Japanese daughter from afar. Jeannette’s

memories of her beloved father, coupled with the embrace of her Japanese heritage, represent a symbolic resistance to French administrators' efforts to erase the presence of the Japanese community in New Caledonia.

## Keywords:

**Nippo-Kanak; Kanak; Japanese; French; New Caledonia; Citizenship.**

There has been a recent rise in critical interest pertaining to the naturalization and citizenship processes of Japanese emigrants and their wives residing in the Free French Empire of New Caledonia before and shortly after 1941. In this regard, Rowena Ward (2017; 2018) has examined the nationality statuses of female Japanese citizens in New Caledonia prior to 8 December 1941, as well as the citizenship statuses of women within other minority Asiatic groups in New Caledonia, such as Tonkinese and Indonesian women. Despite research published on the Japanese in New Caledonia, including works by Mutsumi Tsuda (2006; 2008; 2012) and Tadao Kobayashi (1992), there currently exists no extensive analysis on the children born between an Indigenous Melanesian (or Kanak) mother and a Japanese father, namely children identified as 'Nippo-Kanak'. Philippe Palombo (2002; 2012) briefly touches on the citizenship status of Nippo-Kanak children, basing his assessment of citizenship status on archival documents in the Archives de la Nouvelle-Calédonie.<sup>1</sup> This essay expands on Palombo's research by specifically focusing on several case studies of second-generation Nippo-Kanaks interviewed for purposes of this article, including Nippo-Kanaks who had served in the French military. Their cases differ slightly from Palombo's findings and shed a new light on the New Caledonian French Empire's political, economic leverages over the Japanese emigrant population, as well as on questions about the citizenship status of Nippo-Kanaks.

Framed by these considerations of citizenship, this article also interrogates Nippo-Kanak social identity by examining the role played by letters written by a Japanese father to his kin left behind in New Caledonia. Although the Japanese would send most of their letters from Australian internment camps, there were rare cases in which Japanese fathers, having been repatriated to Japan in 1946, would send letters from Japan to their separated families in New Caledonia.<sup>2</sup> In most cases, repatriated Japanese fathers would contact their kin in New Caledonia to inform them that they would no longer return to the archipelago due to financial constraints. Such letters were typically brief, and correspondences between repatriated fathers and their New Caledonian families would no longer continue (Michel 2018). This article presents the testimony of second-generation Nippo-Kanak Jeannette Tomiko Yokoyama (b. 1936) who recounts her childhood memory of receiving her Japanese father's letters. The atypicality of Yokoyama's case is underscored by its rarity: Yokoyama's testimony remains the only one of its nature in which a Japanese father would continue maintaining close contact with his family in New Caledonia, particularly keeping open communication with his Nippo-

<sup>1</sup> On studies examining the citizenship statuses of mixed-race youth across the French Empire, see: [Stoler \(1992\)](#) and [Saada \(2012\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> Japanese internees were repatriated to Japan from Melbourne, Australia, on 21 February 1946, onboard the *Koei Maru*, which arrived in Japan on 13 March 1946 ([Ward 2017](#): 63).

Kanak daughter whom he would ‘raise’ from afar.<sup>3</sup> Yokoyama’s letters were didactic in nature in which her father, Tomiki Yokoyama, would write to her about his Japanese culture, further offering affectionate instructions to his former Kanak cohabitational partner on how to raise Jeannette as a Japanese girl in his place. Jeannette’s mother would burn all letters and photographs from Tomiki for fear of being caught by the abusive Frenchman whom she was forced to marry after Tomiki’s deportation.

The paradoxical presence and absence of Jeannette’s father manifested in the disembodied voice of each letter allowed him to channel his shared Japanese heritage with his daughter from afar. As a child and adolescent, Jeannette’s social identity was Japanese and Kanak, as opposed to her legal identity that was strictly Japanese. Her legal identity existed in a liminal zone until she officially became a French citizen through marriage. Jeannette’s Nippo-Kanak social identity was nevertheless structured by the paternal affect and Japanese ethos channeled through her father’s letters. Yokoyama’s letters served as vessels through which she became a recipient of her father’s memory and cultural heritage—a heritage that the French Empire sought to eliminate through the deportation process. Accordingly, Yokoyama’s letters became a means to enculturate Jeannette to the Japanese culture that she could only experience from New Caledonia. Jeannette’s relationship with her father through his instructional letters constituted a resistance to the erasure of Jeannette’s Japanese identity prompted by her own father’s incarceration and deportation. Accordingly, Jeannette’s personalized memorialization of her father through each letter allowed her to reconstruct whom her father was—namely, as her own father *in absentia*—during the most formative years of her adolescence. As Jeannette shared during her interview, the personal memory of her Japanese father has served as the framework of her Kanak identity today in which her Japanese identity and essence have long flourished.

## The Legal Identity of Nippo-Kanaks

Nippo-Kanak children traditionally assumed the citizenship of their Japanese fathers through *jus sanguinis* (the right of blood), and Kanak wives would also assume the Japanese nationality of their husbands. The French administration in New Caledonia would grant Nippo-Kanaks Japanese citizenship on behalf of the Japanese government, yet no proof exists that the Japanese government officially recognized them as Japanese nationals. While Philippe Palombo argues that the French administration regarded Nippo-Kanaks as *sujets français* (French subjects) (2012: 454), there exists select cases in which French officials in New Caledonia denied granting ‘sujet français’ status and French citizenship to Nippo-Kanaks after December 1941.<sup>4</sup> Oral testimonies from the few remaining Nippo-Kanaks alive who

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3 Given that this article only examines the topic of Japanese letters in tandem with Yokoyama’s case, I am aware of the potential dangers of generalization and subjectivism. This article thus illuminates an interpretation of Nippo-Kanak identity seen specifically from Yokoyama’s perspective and shared oral history, which may offer salient entry-points into assessing how Nippo-Kanaks have both personally and collectively faced the traumas of losing their Japanese fathers during the incarceration and deportation processes. Although there is no physical evidence of Yokoyama’s letters to date, Jeannette has provided in her oral testimony what she recalls hearing from her mother, who would dictate each letter to her. Jeannette indicated that she cannot recall for how long the exchange of letters lasted between her father and her family (Jeannette Yokoyama 2016 & 2018).

4 The passing of the February 1919 Jonnart Law allowed the New Caledonian French administration to grant a legal, colonial identity to the autochthonous population of New Caledonia called ‘sujet français’ that barred members of the Indigenous populace from certain rights and privileges only allocated to those holding French citizenship (Girault 1938: 146). Notably, Nippo-Kanaks were excluded from maintaining this legal status.

shared their experiences of naturalization processes for purposes of this article were strikingly inconsistent with one another. Their testimonies on the naturalization processes also differ from what is recounted in archival documents. This section will demonstrate that the French Empire did not automatically grant French citizenship to Nippo-Kanaks despite the passing of Law Lamine Guèye on 7 May 1946 that in theory abolished the ‘sujet français’ legal identity and granted French citizenship to Kanaks and to mixed race Kanaks.<sup>5</sup>

The reason for not granting Nippo-Kanaks French citizenship pertains to the politics associated with the sequestration of Japanese property. In this regard, the French administration could legally seize and sequester Japanese property in New Caledonia if Nippo-Kanak inheritors—namely, the children of the deported Japanese—were viewed legally as Japanese citizens and thus children of enemy aliens.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, French administrators did not automatically grant French citizenship to Nippo-Kanaks who had completed their service in the French military, despite having provisionally granted Nippo-Kanak soldiers French citizenship at the onset of their military service. Nippo-Kanaks who had served in the French military were reconverted to Japanese citizens by the French government. From 1952 their fathers’ properties were subsequently sequestered and later auctioned to the French public in New Caledonia (Palombo 2008: 339, 341). The lack of clarity on the legal identity of Nippo-Kanaks—whether they were seen as French or Japanese citizens—defined and problematized their placement within society as continually marginalized. The New Caledonian French Empire’s prescription and revoking of citizenship for Nippo-Kanaks constituted a praxis by which French administrators could exercise state-sanctioned forms of socio-political control. Such control would operate over a vulnerable mixed race populace that was not only deprived of their Japanese fathers’ properties, but also dispossessed of their own legal identities.

Before 8 December 1941, the Japanese in New Caledonia had earned a respected reputation among European settlers and with members of the Kanak communities through interracial marriage, cohabitational unions, and a hard work ethic.<sup>7</sup> Japanese men would often own neighborhood stores that both French and Kanak clientele would frequent. Such stores would sell kimonos; sandals; Japanese-brand cameras; and groceries, particularly sugar and bread items (Normandon 2018). Japanese shopkeepers would maintain favorable relations with Kanak clientele, often opening shops near Kanak tribes to facilitate Kanaks’ access to provisions. These stores would often be the meeting point where other neighboring Japanese would come to socialize with the Japanese shopkeeper. There were thus economic exchanges between Kanak clientele and Japanese shopkeepers, and the cordial relationships between Kanak clientele and Japanese shopkeepers were largely underwritten by mutual trust and

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5 Law Lamine Guèye guaranteed French citizenship to all autochthonous and half-autochthonous populations, albeit in theory, across the overseas French Empire. The French administration in New Caledonia ultimately granted Nippo-Kanaks the opportunity to become naturalized French citizens after all property belonging to their Japanese fathers was sequestered and sold by the New Caledonian French government after 1952. On the politics of Law Lamine Guèye and French citizenship in overseas territories, see Cooper (2014: 88–89, 129).

6 The French Empire deported nearly all Japanese men in New Caledonia, save approximately twenty-five, to Australian internment camps to prevent the possibility of war with Japan. Neither Nippo-Kanaks nor Kanak wives/cohabitational partners were deported in this process (Archives de la Nouvelle-Calédonie [hereafter ANC] 107W 58–52, ‘Liste des Japonais naturalisés français à maintenir dans la nationalité française,’ report dates 1942).

7 The population of the Japanese in New Caledonia peaked in 1918 with 2,458 inhabitants and progressively decreased to 1,110 inhabitants by 1933. By November 1941, there were 1,104 Japanese residing in New Caledonia. For more statistical details on the Japanese population in New Caledonia including the gender balance, see Ward (2017: 58).

support. These frequentations between Kanaks and Japanese would generate an upstanding image of the Japanese among Kanaks, and tribe leaders would often encourage adolescent female Kanaks to become partners or wives of Japanese men on the basis that Japanese men ‘would never physically abuse Kanak women unlike male Kanaks who would often take recourse to alcohol’ (Yoshida 2018). Additionally, kinship links with the Japanese would allow Kanaks access to resources that would otherwise be unavailable if a Kanak woman did not wed or enter into a cohabitational union with the Japanese man. Marriages between Kanaks and Japanese were historically far less common than cohabitational unions.

The legal statuses surrounding married and cohabitational unions were complex, primarily because the New Caledonian French government regarded Nippo-Kanaks differently in terms of citizenship from other mixed race Asians and Kanaks in New Caledonia. Furthermore, there are numerous identity cards that show Japanese males having fathered Nippo-Kanak offspring, but on these cards the French administrators never listed the nationalities of the mixed race children. Such is the case with Kama Seenchi’s identification card ([figure 1](#)). Seenchi’s Nippo-Kanak daughter Marie-Joséphine Apatyée recounted, ‘J’ai été reconnue par la mairie de Touho comme citoyenne française, mais je n’en ai jamais vu la preuve’ [‘I was recognized by the mayoral bureau of Touho as a French citizen, but I never saw documented proof of this’] (Apatyée 2018).<sup>8</sup> Later, Marie-Joséphine married a Kanak man from Tiwaka, which allowed her to obtain French citizenship through her marriage.

The French administration in New Caledonia would change the citizenship of Kanak women marrying Japanese men from ‘French subject’ to ‘Japanese.’ Such was the case for Marie Anne Wamytan who married Otojiro Nakamura in 1925. Nakamura opted to become a French national, a status the French government in New Caledonia granted to him in 1930. This meant that Wamytan’s legal identity was reconverted to French subject status following her husband’s naturalization (Formis 1999: 11–12).<sup>9</sup> As another case shows, the New Caledonian French government did not necessarily make accurate changes to Kanak women’s citizenship statuses on their identity cards upon marrying a Japanese. For instance, the nationality indicated on the identification card of the Kanak wife of Katsutaro Yamamoto, named Marie Madeleine of the Ita tribe in Poindimié, reads ‘Française (indigène)’ [French (indigenous)].<sup>10</sup> French officials often did not specify cohabitational partner status (*concubinage*) on the identity cards of Kanak women. That Marie Madeleine, a Kanak woman, was listed as a ‘French indigenous subject’ on her identification card despite being married to a Japanese man leads credence to two possibilities. First, when completing identity cards French administrators perhaps did not distinguish cohabitational partners (or *concubines* in French) from actual wives. In French law prior to 1941, all Kanak wives of Japanese men would have legally been Japanese by marriage. However as Ward notes, ‘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 ... [C]ompleting the registration formalities was difficult due to the lack of Japanese consular representation in Nouméa before March 1940’ ([Ward 2018](#): 49). To date there exists no documented proof

8 Marie-Joséphine passed away shortly after this interview in August 2018.

9 At least twenty-five Japanese, having become naturalized French citizens, were not stripped of their French citizenship during the deportation process (ANC 107W 58-52 ‘Liste des Japonais naturalisés français à maintenir dans la nationalité française’). A justification for their exemption was that their children were enlisted in the French military.

10 See [figure 2](#). Similarly, the Kanak wife of Kama Seenchi, Françoise Kabo, has ‘French’ listed as the citizenship on her identity card despite her marriage to Seenchi.

that a representative of the Japanese government validated any registration (Michel 2018). Second, the French could have labelled the birth nationalities of Kanak women married to Japanese men without making any updates to the information on their identity cards after their marriage. Thus, it is possible that French administrators did not update the identity cards of Kanak women married to Japanese men to reflect their change in legal identity from 'indigenous French subject' to 'Japanese citizen.' Accordingly, assessments of the citizenship of Kanaks and Nippo-Kanaks strictly from archived identity cards must take into consideration the frequency of erroneous information potentially contained on each card.

'CAP DES PALMES'  
Embarqué le 19.1.1942

Nom: **SEENCHI** N° M<sup>le</sup> **1279**  
Prénoms: *Kama* Dr: \_\_\_\_\_  
Né le *1889* à *Kobé*  
de *Seinchi Joopi* et de *Seinchi Kama*  
Adresse: *Bouho Bouvako*  
Nationalité *Nipponaise* par filiation, mariage, naturalisation  
Célibataire, veuf, profession *cultivateur*  
Marié à *KABO, Françoise* (mar. du 8.10.1930 à Poindimié)  
Né le *17. Juin. 1907* à *Bouho* Nationalité *Française*

ENFANTS	NÉ LE	A	NATIONALITÉ	OBSERVATIONS
<i>Auguste</i>	<i>11.7.1911</i>	<i>11.7.1911 Bouho</i>		
<i>Alice</i>	<i>12.11.1916</i>	<i>12.11.1916</i>		
<i>Maria Françoise</i>	<i>12.11.1917</i>	<i>12.11.1917</i>		
<i>Jacques</i>	<i>21.12.1920</i>	<i>Bouho</i>		
<i>Henni Camille</i>	<i>18.10.1922</i>	<i>Poindimié</i>		

Arrivé le *21 Dec. 1910* par *Kato-hira Maria*  
Adresse antérieure: \_\_\_\_\_  
Passport N° \_\_\_\_\_ délivré le \_\_\_\_\_ à \_\_\_\_\_  
Autorisation N° \_\_\_\_\_ en date du \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 1 Identity card of Kama Seenchi, deported in January 1942. The column *nationalité* that should indicate the nationalities of his five children strikingly remains empty. The card labels Seenchi as the husband of Françoise Kabo, a Kanak of the Kokengone tribe near Poindimié, New Caledonia (ANC 34W 39) © Archives de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, used with permission.

Unlike Kanak women in marriages, those Kanak women who remained in cohabitational unions with Japanese men maintained their French subject status. Nippo-Kanak children thus presented a legal conundrum. All Japanese in New Caledonia had an identity card on which their names, nationality, place of birth, place of arrival, as well as the name of their cohabitational partner or wife appeared, but curiously many of these cards (available for viewing at the Archives de la Nouvelle-Calédonie) do not have any nationalities designated under the appropriate column for Nippo-Kanak children (see [figure 1](#)). Furthermore, on cards

that do list the nationalities of Nippo-Kanak children, some children are listed as ‘Japanese’ while others are designated ‘French-by-option.’ That is, at the time the cards were issued, Nippo-Kanak siblings would oftentimes have separate nationalities with no supplementary indication on the identity card explaining this peculiarity.

For instance, Japanese citizen, Tiju Maeda, born in Kumamoto, Japan, on 22 November 1877, was married to a woman named Oela who was originally from Dutch-controlled Indonesia. They had six children—two were labelled as *nipponaise* [Japanese] and two were marked *français par option* [French-by-option]. None of the children were granted Dutch citizenship from the mother, which indicates that citizenship prior to 1941 in New Caledonia was either patrilineal—passed *jus sanguinis* from the Japanese father—or selected by the child at the age of eighteen (with the acknowledgment that the child would be Japanese until eighteen years of age).<sup>11</sup> Interviews with second-generation Nippo-Kanaks reveal many were under the impression that they were Japanese, while others affirmed that they were French subjects (Masukata and Toyoda 2018). What is certain, though, is that they were not legally considered ‘stateless subjects,’ that is, without nationality, because all Nippo-Kanak births before 1941 were registered by Hidekio Nishiyama, the *de facto* representative of the Japanese community in Nouméa, who sent each child’s dossiers to the Japanese Consulate in Sydney for validation (Michel 2018).<sup>12</sup> These birth registries were presumably sent by Nishiyama; however, no record of such items exists at the Japanese Consulate in Sydney. The birth registries of Nippo-Kanak children kept at the local municipal level in New Caledonia furthermore do not indicate the nationality of the children (Kashima and Arawa 2018).

What further complicates the issue of Nippo-Kanak nationality, besides the lack of officially documented nationalities listed on birth registries and parental identity cards, is the means by which the French government declared naturalized-French Nippo-Kanaks as Japanese nationals after 1941 in order for their families to pay a foreigners’ tax (*taxe des étrangers*)—a tax implemented in 1920 for all non-French citizens to pay (Nakano 2018).<sup>13</sup> In some cases French administrators falsely promised the Nippo-Kanak children of deported Japanese fathers that they had successfully obtained French citizenship. Such were the situations for half-Japanese Lucien Nakano and Charlie Akinaga, who were both enlisted in the French army as French citizens-by-option at the age of twenty and twenty-one, respectively.<sup>14</sup> Upon being discharged from their military service, French officials reported to Nakano’s and Akinaga’s residences, informing them that they were Japanese citizens and were obliged to pay the foreigners’ tax. Entering the military in 1957 and having been stationed in Tahiti and New

11 French officials erroneously labeled Maeda’s Indonesian wife as Dutch (see [figure 3](#)). As Ward has affirmed, ‘Under the 1892 Dutch Nationality Law which applied at the time, Dutch women who married non-Dutch men lost their Dutch nationality’ ([Ward 2018](#): 49; [Vink 2005](#)). Accordingly, Maeda’s wife would have been a Japanese citizen when viewed from the perspective of French nationality law at the time.

12 This is contrary to Dalmayrac’s (2007) claim that Nippo-Kanak children were *apatride* or ‘legally stateless.’

13 See also Ishikawa (2007). Beginning in 1940, there was an increase in the foreigners’ tax, which was ‘considered as directed against the Japanese’ to discourage migration into New Caledonia. The tax increased from 125 francs to 300 francs per year from 1 January 1940. Numerous Japanese were ‘prosecuted for non-payment of this tax and arrears’ (National Archives of Australia [hereafter NAA] A2670 Confidential Report, Canberra, dated 4 February 1940). Other French colonies, including La Réunion and Mauritius, imposed a foreigners’ tax beginning in the late-nineteenth century that impacted Chinese and Indian emigrants. On this point, see Widmer (2005: 19).

14 Charlie Akinaga is a second-generation Nippo-Corsican-Indian; however, as Akinaga confirms, French officials in New Caledonia treated him in the same manner as Nippo-Kanaks with whom he was associated legally (Akinaga 2018).

Caledonia, Nakano recounts that shortly after being discharged and returning to Voh, two French officials presented themselves at his residence and demanded that he pay the foreigners' tax. Nakano, remarking that one of the officer's surname was Zimmerman, vehemently admonished the young officer, telling him: 'J'ai lutté pour les Français. Votre nom de famille n'est même pas français. Comment osez-vous me demander de payer une taxe d'étranger quand vous ne la payez pas vous-même? Dégagez!' [I fought for the French. Your surname isn't even French. How dare you tell me to pay the foreigners' tax when you aren't even paying it yourself. Get lost!]. The French officials, at a loss for words, promptly left his residence. Nakano's nationality was formalized as French shortly thereafter, and he never did pay the foreigners' tax upon being discharged from his military service (Nakano 2018).

**YAMAMOTO** N° M<sup>o</sup> 1064

P : *Katsutarō* Dr :

Né le *2 Avril 1885* à *Fukushima-ken*  
de *Soriji* et de *Kan*

Adresse : *Poinçonné Poinçonné*

Nationalité *Nipponnais* par filiation, mariage, naturalisation

Célibataire, veuf, profession *cultivateur*

Marié à *Marie Madeleine Anglaise*

Né le *2 Avril 1895* à *Nuku-Ina (Pantini)* Nationalité *Française (indigène)*

ENFANTS	NÉ LE	A	NATIONALITÉ	OBSERVATIONS
<i>Hamako</i>	<i>11.3.1923</i>	<i>Poinçonné</i>	<i>de Fukushima</i>	<i>N° 1788</i>
<i>Eugénie</i>	<i>12.12.1924</i>	<i>—</i>		

Arrivé le *26 Mai 1914* par *Fukusawa Maru (ex n° 2622)*

Adresse antérieure :

Pas *60.847* à

Autorisation N° \_\_\_\_\_ en date du \_\_\_\_\_

*Je suis le mari de Marie Madeleine Anglaise. Je suis cultivateur. Je suis né le 2 Avril 1885 à Fukushima-ken. Je suis arrivé en Nouvelle-Calédonie le 26 Mai 1914 par le Fukusawa Maru (ex n° 2622). Je suis marié à Marie Madeleine Anglaise. J'ai deux enfants : Hamako née le 11.3.1923 et Eugénie née le 12.12.1924.*

Figure 2 Identity card of Katsutarō Yamamoto on which his wife Marie Madeleine is listed as 'French (indigenous)' despite her marriage with Yamamoto, a Japanese male (ANC 34W 46) © Archives de la Nouvelle-Calédonie. Used with permission.

There were other noted cases where Nippo-Kanaks attempted to obtain a French passport despite having completed their military service, including André Nakagawa, who appealed to a French judge sympathetic to Nakagawa's case after being told by a French passport issuing officer: 'It is regrettable, but (your military service) does not give you the right to be French' (Palombo 2002). Nakagawa was able to gain support from a certain Judge Lerat, who

furnished him with a legal document attesting to Nakagawa's eligibility to be a naturalized French citizen given that he and his mother were born in New Caledonia. With this legal document, Nakagawa was able to become a naturalized French citizen, despite having faced considerable legal pushback from the French government (Palombo 2002).

la Compagnie d'EMBARQUEMENT

29 MAI 1942

**MAEDA** N° M<sup>e</sup> 915

P : *Siju* Dr :

Né le *22 Novem<sup>bre</sup> 1887* à *Koumamoto Ken*  
*de Noakethi* et de *Zonki*

Adresse : *Sij*

Nationalité *Nipponaise* par filiation, mariage, naturalisation

Célibataire, veuf, profession *cultivateur*

Marié à *OELA (japonaise) m<sup>ort</sup> du 22.1.1920 à 16h 17<sup>ans</sup> 1/2*  
*decedé de 24.9.51 à Nouméa*

Né le *1889* à *Java* Nationalité *Hollandaise*

ENFANTS	NÉ LE	A	NATIONALITÉ	OBSERVATIONS
<i>Ka Shoji</i>	<i>10.6.1912</i>	<i>Pau</i>	<i>Nipponaise</i>	<i>(DCD 31.7.53) 17/11/1915</i>
<i>Maui Sémance</i>	<i>2.6.1913</i>	<i>Hongkong</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>par filiation 15.5.5</i>
<i>Francine</i>	<i>23.5.1915</i>	<i>Tangora</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>par mariage avec 1915/16</i>
<i>Santani Souchi</i>	<i>3.6.1917</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>français par option 1910</i>
<i>Sémantou Paul</i>	<i>11.2.1921</i>	<i>Soh</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>français par option à Soh</i>
<i>Horie Janny</i>	<i>14.2.1923</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>à Soh et de sa femme née en 1874</i>

Arrivé le *12 Mars 1901* par *Situs*

Adresse antérieure :

Pas \_\_\_\_\_ à \_\_\_\_\_

Autorisation N° \_\_\_\_\_ en date du \_\_\_\_\_

*ex 9 Hongkong*  
*et 158 Koumamoto*

Figure 3 Identity card of Tiju Maeda, deported in May 1942. Under the column for nationality, Maeda's children can be seen maintaining differing nationalities. Those who are French are designated *par option*, meaning that they opted for French citizenship at the age of eighteen and renounced their Japanese citizenship © Archives de la Nouvelle-Calédonie. Used with permission.

Although Nakagawa does not specify the exact legal documentation that he was given, it is highly probable that Judge Lerat provided a declassified document from Robert Dartnell, the head of the Judiciary Service in Nouméa, that was written at the time to the Secretary General. On this documentation, Dartnell notes that all mixed race subjects born of a Kanak mother and a foreign father after 1937 were to be granted the status of 'French subjects' (ANC 107 W). It is noteworthy that in this same document, Dartnell indicated that two Nippo-Kanak children, a certain Adèle and Olédi, were born prior to 1937. Dartnell acknowledged that '[C]omme aucune législation avant cette date ne s'est souciée de prendre en considération la situation d'un enfant né d'un père étranger et d'une femme indigène' [(A)s no legislation

before this date has been concerned about taking into account the situation of a child born from a foreign father and an Indigenous woman’], this post-1937 decree would be applied retroactively to all Nippo-Kanaks born before 1937 (ANC 107 W). This decree would thus grant all Nippo-Kanaks born before 1937 the status of French subject, but only if, like Adèle and Olédi, a request to become *français(e) par option* (French by opting) was made when the subject turned eighteen years of age. If no request was made, the French administration continued to regard Nippo-Kanaks as Japanese nationals, despite the decree of 1937.

A noted case exists with Eugène Kitahara Enzo who recalls that he maintained double French and Japanese nationality (Palombo 2002). This is contrary to Kitahara’s recollection that Nippo-Kanaks with Japanese surnames were automatically labelled as Japanese via their paternal lineage and were not granted automatic dual Japanese-French citizenship, French citizenship, or French subject status. It is also contrary to Palombo’s findings that Nippo-Kanaks were considered French subjects (2012: 454). Nippo-Kanaks could undergo a naturalization process from French subjects to French citizens only if they, once eighteen years of age, made a formal request by opting out of their Japanese citizenship at their residential mayor’s office after the passing of Law Lamine Guèye in May 1946. Kanak women who were formerly married to deported Japanese men were able to reconvert to French citizenship, and many chose to do so ([Ward 2018](#): 49).

To complicate issues further, there were no means to prove that Nippo-Kanak males, once eighteen years old, passed from Japanese to French citizenship by enlisting in the military. Their change in legal identity was oftentimes never officialized on paper (Akinaga 2018). Charlie Akinaga, whose Japanese father Arata Akinaga was deported to Australia, was enlisted in the French military in New Caledonia from 1958 to 1961. French administrators falsely promised that he would keep his French citizenship upon completion of his military service. Akinaga remembers the following:

J’ai été français jusqu’au moment où les Français sont venus me voir pour demander de céder les propriétés appartenant à mon père japonais sous prétexte que j’étais japonais comme lui. Si je voulais garder les trois propriétés que mon père a travaillé si dur pour obtenir, et n’oublions que c’étaient les Français qui ont mis sous séquestre les propriétés et les biens de mon père, je devais déposer une demande de devenir de nouveau français. Après, une fois français, je pourrais racheter les propriétés de l’administration française et figurez-vous je l’ai fait. (Akinaga 2018) [I was French until the moment the French came to see me to demand that I relinquish the properties belonging to my Japanese father under the pretext that I was Japanese like him. If I wanted to keep the three properties that my father worked so hard to acquire, and let’s not forget that it was the French who sequestered all of my father’s properties and belongings, I had to place a petition to become French again. Afterwards, once French, I would be able to repurchase my father’s properties that the French administration had taken; and believe it or not, I did it.]

In 1963, Akinaga petitioned to become French. He was able to purchase two of the three seized properties formally owned by his father for 600,000 francs. He was unable to finance the purchasing of the third property, which had already been sold.

The above instances demonstrate that French officials did not always record Nippo-Kanak children’s nationalities on birth records, or if nationalities were recorded—either on their parents’ identity cards or in some form on Nippo Kanaks’ military enlistment records—these nationalities were hardly officialized. Although the Law Lamine Guèye granted Kanaks

French citizenship in New Caledonia, as well as in all French colonies, the same law excluded Nippo-Kanaks because Nippo-Kanak families presented an economic opportunity for the French administration. By excluding Nippo-Kanak families (which by 1946 meant second-generation Nippo-Kanaks and single Kanak mothers formerly married to Japanese men), from the application of Lamine Guèye, the French government in New Caledonia had the self-administered legal right to: (1) impose on these persons a foreigners' tax and (2) label them as Japanese. The latter gave French administrators the right to sequester all property and materials—namely, anything of monetary value—belonging to the Nippo-Kanak family. Ultimately, the New Caledonian French Empire would use these monies to pay the costs of the incarceration and deportation processes of Japanese emigrants to Australia (NAA A6445, 37/1941).<sup>15</sup>

Because the citizenship status of Nippo-Kanaks was never formally indicated on paper or reflected in dossiers that were presumably validated by the Japanese Counsel in Sydney, French administrators easily labelled Nippo-Kanaks as Japanese.<sup>16</sup> This placed economic constrictions on Nippo-Kanaks and Kanak widows who were too impoverished and vulnerable—as Japanese nationals—to repurchase the property formerly owned by their Japanese fathers/husbands. As Akinaga's case confirms, French officials would only resell seized, sequestered Japanese property to Nippo-Kanaks if they 're-became' French citizens. The French proposed financially exaggerated amounts to Nippo-Kanak children who wished to reclaim their Japanese father's valuables when such items were auctioned to the French public in New Caledonia in the 1950s and 1960s. By the time Nippo-Kanaks petitioned to become French, their Japanese father's sequestered items had oftentimes already been sold.

## The Social Identity of Nippo-Kanaks: Japanese Letters from Afar

Notwithstanding Nippo-Kanaks' legal identity that transitioned from Japanese to French, Nippo-Kanaks were able to maintain a social identity as Kanak with culturally inflected Japanese elements that were memorialized and transmitted from their Japanese fathers. This section examines second-generation Nippo-Kanak Jeannette Yokoyama's history and the role that letters from her repatriated Japanese father played with regard to the formation of her social identity. Yokoyama's case is atypical in that very few Nippo-Kanak adolescents received letters from their repatriated fathers, as most fathers ceased communication with their kin in New Caledonia upon their repatriation. Fathers who wrote letters from Japan did so only to indicate that they would no longer return to see them due to financial constraints, and many repatriated fathers would return to their families that they had left behind before coming to New Caledonia.<sup>17</sup> To date in the archives in New Caledonia, Australia, and Japan there are no

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15 NAA A6445, 37/1941, 'Telegram to Department of External Affairs, Canberra.'

16 There were certain Nippo-Kanaks who were not considered French citizens even fifty years after the passing of the Law Lamine Guèye in 1946. Such was the case of Yvonne Yokoyama, who is Jeannette Yokoyama's younger sister. Yvonne petitioned for a passport in 2000 but was denied on the account that she was still Japanese and did not have official documents to prove her French nationality. She later sought the help of a politician's secretary, who handed her official documentation attesting that she would be eligible to be a French citizen, much to the apparent surprise of the passport-issuing officer (Yvonne Yokoyama 2018).

17 Lucien Nakano's and Charlie Akinaga's fathers are thought to have remarried in Japan after their repatriation (Nakano and Akinaga 2018). Additionally, Kama Seenchi repatriated to Japan and is currently buried in Osaka (Apatyée 2018). There were approximately sixteen repatriated Japanese who returned to New Caledonia shortly after the Second World War (Michel 2018).

letters of Japanese internees; letters that do exist are accessible in preciously-guarded family archives.<sup>18</sup>

Jeannette's father, Tomiki Yokoyama, born in 1889 in Fukushima, Japan, settled in Voh, New Caledonia, where at the age of twenty-five he met Andrée Cook, a Melanesian-New Hebridean adolescent of fourteen years. She became his cohabitational partner and together they raised five children, three of whom died due to illness. In their home, Tomiki would speak French while tending to his primary occupation as a farmer and tailor in Koné, New Caledonia. He was recognized as an award-winning jockey, hailed in 1936 and 1937 as winner of the prestigious Course de Chevaux in Koné, with his prized horse Gigolette.<sup>19</sup> Jeannette recounts that French officials took her father from his domicile when she was four years old. Subsequently, Tomiki was deported to Camp Loveday, Australia, before repatriating to Japan at the end of the Second World War in 1946. Tomiki would send letters addressed to his family, but particularly to Jeannette, in which he would lament his solitude being in Japan, as well as describe his longing to reunite with his wife and children (Jeannette Yokoyama 2016). Jeannette's father did not send any letters to her or her mother until after the war. After her former partner's repatriation to Japan, Andrée married Louis Maccam, a half-French, half-English violent man with a penchant for alcohol, and with whom she later raised four children. Jeannette recounted an episode in which Maccam had threatened his wife during one of his drunken fits: 'Monsieur Maccam était un homme violent. Il a dit à ma mère, "Si le Japonais revient en Calédonie, je vais te tuer" ['Mr. Maccam was a violent man. He said to my mother, "If that Jap returns to Caledonia, I am going to kill you"]' (Jeannette Yokoyama 2016).

Jeannette and Andrée would receive letters from Tomiki, whom Jeannette remembers as a caring father. Andrée would secretly read her former Japanese partner's letters to Jeannette when Maccam was not home. Andrée was initially shocked to have received her first letter from Tomiki years after her cohabitational partner's arrest, as she believed that Tomiki had perished in Australia. Each time Andrée would receive letters in French from Tomiki, she would hide them from Maccam and quickly read them to Jeannette before she would burn them in fear of her family's lives. To this day, Jeannette has no letters from her father; however, from her recollection, Jeannette recounts the following:

Dans toutes les lettres que ma mère lisait de mon père, il y avait toujours des instructions à ma mère sur comment m'élever à la japonaise. C'était clair qu'il m'aimait tant, mais il n'avait ni l'argent ni le désir de revenir surtout que ma mère ne pouvait pas sortir de son mariage avec M. Maccam. J'imagine qu'il en savait tout, mon père. C'était une triste histoire. (Jeannette Yokoyama 2016) [In all the letters that my mom would read from my father, there were always instructions to my mother on how to raise me in a Japanese way. It was clear that he loved me so, but he had neither the money nor the desire to come back especially because my mother could not leave her marriage with Monsieur Maccam. I imagine that he knew everything about the situation. It was a sad story.]

18 Mutsumi Tsuda reproduces letters written by Japanese internee Denzo Higa in Camp Hay and his Kanak wife Laura Leroi in her most recent monograph (2012).

19 Although French authorities seized all property belonging to the Japanese and their Nippo-Kanak inheritors during the sequestration process beginning in 1952, Yokoyama's prized Gigolette was not part of Yokoyama's seized property (Yvonne Yokoyama 2018).

In addition, Tomiki would share facets of his life in Japan, cultural descriptions, and his daily routines in each letter, along with giving Jeannette instructions on remaining humble and steadfast in the face of adversity. Tomiki would also offer instructions to his daughter to assist her mother and other members of her family in his place. Jeannette recounted in her interview that she would run to her room and sob each time her mother would read her father's letters to her. Jeannette would respond by writing to him, but she never knew if her father received any of her mail since he would never directly respond to what she had written in her letters. Jeannette indicated that each letter would allow her to reconstruct her father as a loving figure who attempted to be as present as possible in spirit with his family despite the physical separation. Although Jeannette has regarded herself as part-Kanak given her upbringing within her mother's side, she proudly sees her Nippo-Kanak identity as having been profoundly shaped by her discoveries of Japanese culture in each letter. Remarking how the letters would enculturate her to the Japanese values that her father would describe, Jeannette responds:



Figure 4 One of the remaining photographs of Jeannette's father, Tomiki Yokoyama, on his prized Gigolette, preserved and handed down to Jeannette by her mother © Jeannette Yokoyama. Used with permission.

J'adore la culture de mon père, ses nuances, tout ce que j'ai appris, et je suis fière de mon métissage et de mon héritage japonais que mon père partageait avec moi même s'il n'était pas ici. Tout de même, il était ici et il est toujours ici. Mes derniers mots avant de quitter ce monde seront: "Papa, merci. Je t'aime." (Jeannette Yokoyama 2018) [I love the culture of my father, its nuances, everything that I learned; and I am proud of my mixedness and my Japanese heritage that my father shared with me even if he was not

here. Yet he was and has always been here. My last words before I pass will be, “Papa, thank you. I love you.”]

Yokoyama recounted that although her father’s letters were written in French, Tomiki may have been using a transcriber: ‘C’est probable que quelqu’un écrivait ses lettres pour lui parce que dans une lettre quelqu’un avait écrit entre parenthèses que c’était la première fois qu’il transcrivait un français si bien parlé d’un Japonais’ (Jeannette Yokoyama 2018) [‘It is probable that someone was writing the letters for him because in one letter, someone had written in parentheses that it was the first time that he was transcribing a French so well-spoken by a Japanese man’].

Yokoyama added that her mother Andrée had secretly hid several photos of her former partner Tomiki, whom she had admired greatly, often calling him by the playful nickname of ‘Jockey.’

After a period of time, Jeannette and Andrée did not receive any more letters from Tomiki and concluded that perhaps he became too unwell to continue correspondence. Jeannette shared the news of her grandchild’s recent birth during the interview, indicating that her grandchild, René Tomiki Redon, was named in honor of her father. Today, she affectionately calls her grandchild by his Japanese middle-name: ‘Tomiki, mon petit jockey’ [‘Tomiki, my little jockey’] (Jeannette Yokoyama 2018).

An important theorization of Nippo-Kanak mixed-raceness can be extrapolated from Yokoyama’s biographical context. The cultural transmission between Melanesian mothers and Japanese fathers to their Nippo-Kanak children was notably French and Kanak given their children’s minimal to non-exposure to the Japanese culture while residing in a Francophone territory. Such was the case because the Japanese culture was virtually eliminated in New Caledonia after the deportation process. Yet, as Michel Foucault has suggested in his analyses on sexuality, the structuring of social systems is made possible through the interlocking phenomenologies of kinship and intimacy, which he defines as a ‘deployment of alliance’ and a ‘deployment of sexuality,’ respectively. Foucault contends that the former signifies ‘a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions’ (1980: 106). The biological components of being Nippo-Kanak are in effect products of deployments of alliances between two distinctively different races and ethnicities, though both were subjected to the colonial power of the New Caledonian French Empire. Accordingly, the deployments of alliance between the Japanese and Kanaks under French empiric rule—although not *directly* modes of social management or state-sanctioned administerings of intimacy—created cross-racial kinship bonds *indirectly* controlled by French colonialism because of the absence of the Japanese father.

It is possible that the intermarriage between Kanaks and Japanese emigrant men functioned, when viewed from the perspective of the French Metropole, as an inevitable mode of governance—a significant transmission of French culture to the Nippo-Kanak children—that ensured that Nippo-Kanak children would not have recourse or exposure to the paternal Japanese culture. For Nippo-Kanaks, the memories of their fathers were darkened by the forced expulsion of nearly all Japanese in New Caledonia following the attack at Pearl Harbor. Nippo-Kanaks ultimately moved into adulthood with no knowledge of Japanese culture or language beyond what they were able to learn and internalize through their fathers’ letters sent from Australia or Japan. In essence, the *absence* of Japanese fathers serves as the key agent that propagated the erasure of Japanese identity for Nippo-Kanak children. The destruction of Japanese cultural presences in New Caledonia was engendered by the physical uprooting of

Japanese emigrants, thereby suggesting the double expulsion of Japanese: the physical banning of Japanese subjects from New Caledonia; and the epistemic erasure of Japanese heritage and cultural value systems of which Nippo-Kanak children were deprived.

Yokoyama's case is unique in that Tomiki's letters were didactic: they offered instructions on how Jeannette should be raised as a Japanese daughter, further enculturating her as Japanese with a Kanak heritage.<sup>20</sup> As tangible proxies, these letters offered Jeannette and her mother indows into Tomiki's quotidian routines in post-War Japan. However, the necessary act of burning all letters out of fear of Maccam's potential reprisals symbolically effaced the memory and affect imbued within each letter. Tomiki's letters thus served as affective channels of paternalism that bound his Nippo-Kanak children and Andrée to Japan, and to a parental Japanese ethos. Through his letters, Tomiki was able to re-establish from afar the family unit that had been dismantled upon his deportation, despite being physically separated from his family. Jeannette's personal and lasting memory of her father—a loving father-figure whom she would reconstruct and (re)imagine through each letter—resisted the physical act of erasure of the Japanese prompted by their deportation. Yokoyama's memorialization of her father continues today, which she has proudly transmitted to her part-Japanese descendants. Jeannette has attributed the pluri-dimensional essence of her identity as Kanak and Japanese to her father's letters—letters that imparted to her the cultural nuances and sensitivities of the Japanese that have uniquely enriched her mixed race heritage and the lives of her descendants (Jeannette Yokoyama 2018).

## Conclusion

This article has contributed to recent research on Asian minority citizenship in Francophone New Caledonia by offering an analysis on the legal identity, namely the naturalization process and citizenship, of Nippo-Kanaks before and after the Second World War. For Nippo-Kanak men bearing a Japanese surname, French officials often did not record official citizenship statuses on identity cards, even if these men enlisted as French to complete their mandatory military service. Although temporarily French citizens, these Nippo-Kanak men were reconverted to Japanese citizens upon exiting the military, which allowed French administrators to seize the properties belonging to their Japanese fathers. Nippo-Kanaks would ultimately have to petition to become French citizens after 1946 and at eighteen years of age. The opting/naturalization process entailed a legal procedure of an indefinite period of waiting during which time Nippo-Kanaks were subject to a foreigners' tax because they were still considered Japanese citizens.

Nippo-Kanak women bearing their Japanese father's surname remained Japanese nationals until marrying a French citizen, at which point they would become French citizens by marriage. Unmarried Nippo-Kanak women would remain Japanese until petitioning to become French citizens after 1946 and at the age of eighteen. Finally, a Kanak woman married to a Japanese man would be legally Japanese in the eyes of French law prior to 1941 and could reconvert to French citizenship if French officials deported her Japanese husband. The French administered empty Japanese citizenship labels on behalf of Japan, which allowed the French a strategic, politico-economic leverage vis-à-vis the New Caledonian Japanese community over which they could maintain control. Nippo-Kanaks were specifically excluded from the Law

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20 Jeannette's sister Yvonne evoked during the interview that she has no recollection of her father's letters, as she was too young to remember them (Yvonne Yokoyama 2018).

Lamine Guèye that granted French citizenship status to all Kanaks for reasons linked to the sequestration process.

The article also examined the formation of Nippo-Kanak social identity through the exchange of letters between a repatriated Japanese father, Tomiki Yokoyama; his Nippo-Kanak child Jeannette; and his Kanak cohabitational partner Andrée. These letters were didactic in nature to the extent that each letter's content would shed light on how he envisioned raising his Nippo-Kanak daughter as Japanese from afar. The letters channeled an affective, paternal bond, acting as a mediation reinvigorating a familial unit ruptured by Tomiki's sudden deportation. In Tomiki's case, the paternal influence and Japanese cultural elements encapsulated in his letters became personalized, internalized memories that forged the foundation of Jeannette's Nippo-Kanak social identity. This case shows that despite the destruction of Japanese values and the resultant ethnocide in New Caledonia after the Japanese deportation, Nippo-Kanaks were able to guard their social identity as Kanak and Japanese through their memories. In Jeannette's case, her father's letters—written in French so that she would be able to read them—allowed her to envision her imagined father in Japan whom she would never meet again. This spectral father figure appearing in letters, only to disappear each time her mother would burn them, evolved into the affectionate voice behind Jeannette's memories that continue to underwrite her Nippo-Kanak identity today.

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