

Doing Performance Ethnography Among the Dead: Remembering Lives of Japanese Migrants in the Trans-Pacific Sex Trade

Ayaka Yoshimizu

Preamble



Figure 1: Cranbrook Old General Cemetery. Photograph by Tadafumi Tamura.

What follows is an account of my performance ethnography on an elusive history of Japanese migrant women involved in the trans-pacific sex trade at the turn of the twentieth century. While this is a single-authored paper, it is inspired by works of a number of women who have engaged this history in the past and guided my journey. They include Japanese women writers from the late 1970s through the early 1990s, including Yoko Yamazaki (1972, 1974, 1981) and Miyoko Kudo (1989, 1991), who excavated stories of Japanese migrant sex workers abroad. This involved archival and fieldwork research, and travels across the Pacific, visiting cemeteries, looking for their graves, and praying for their spirits. The picture on the left, which includes myself standing by a headstone that belongs to a Japanese migrant, echoes a photograph of Kudo captured exactly at the same location in the Cranbrook Old General Cemetery during her research in Cranbrook, British Columbia.¹ This image also implicitly makes a reference to a photograph of Yamazaki at a cemetery in California,

produced during her research on the life of Waka Yamada, a feminist writer in Japan who once worked at a brothel in Seattle at the turn of the twentieth century.² My research is also built on my joint work with my former research partner Julia Aoki. This photographic image is an outcome that points to one of many, different possibilities of how this research might have evolved. Because I once imagined making a research trip to the interior towns of BC with Julia, the image, to me, is a powerful reminder of her absence and her past contributions to our research.³

My work is enabled by what is not immediately visible here—critical practices of women writers and researchers from the past and in the present.

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Figure 2: Shohei Osada, *Tairiku Nippo*, March 18, 1930, p.5. Image published courtesy of the University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections.

and theatre enthusiast. After all, he comes from a family of the *samurai* class. After he was cremated at the Mount View Cemetery in Vancouver his ashes were sent back to Japan and properly buried in his family grave in Tokyo (Usuda 2010).

But I am mainly interested in him because he was the author of “Exploration of Devil Caves,” a newspaper column series published over seventy-one installments between 1908 and 1909, and which was followed up by a second part consisting of thirty-two installments in 1912. The series presents an elaborated account of the lives of Japanese men and women involved in the sex trade in Canada at the turn of the twentieth century. Osada’s intention in

publishing this series was to cast moral aspersion on such individuals, shame their behaviour, and ultimately eradicate prostitution among the Japanese in Canada. The presence of Japanese “devil caves,” referring to brothels, was perceived as a contributing factor to the anti-Japanese sentiment that existed among people who believed in a “White Canada” and supported racist, anti-immigration policies at that time. The series exposes the identities of what Osada calls “shameful men and women,” providing their names, nicknames, and their hometowns. Stories were written in a tabloid style, with hyperbolic language, highlighting individuals’ names and some sensational phrases in a big and bold font. His style is quite theatrical and provides dramatic descriptions of violence, internal conflicts, and relationship scandals. The series proved very popular with readers. The first part was re-edited and reorganized into a book with a new title, *Kanada no makutsu (Brothels in Canada)*, and published in 1910 in Vancouver. The book version includes a map of Canada, which indicates locations of Japanese brothels, and portraits of women in photographic images.

I would like to draw your attention to one death, which happened on March 14, 1930 at 474 Pender Street, Vancouver. The name of the deceased is Shohei Osada. His death registration states his “racial origin” is Japanese; occupation, newspaper editor; residence, 300 Jackson Avenue, Vancouver; the cause of death, asphyxia due to obstruction of larynx; age at death, 52. He was single and had no family in Canada. His death was reported by his employer, Yasushi Yamazaki, the owner of a local Japanese language newspaper *Tairiku Nippo*.

Archival documents show that Osada’s passing was a great loss to the Japanese community in Vancouver. A series of obituaries were published in the newspaper for six consecutive days following his death.⁴ In these documents, he is remembered as a diligent and talented editor and writer, haiku poet, music records collector,



Figure 3: “Exploration of Devil Caves (1),” *Tairiku Nippo*, November 19, 1908, p.5. Image published courtesy of the University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections.

Ironically, however, Osada's writing on women in the sex trade remains one of the few, and perhaps the most detailed, archival documents available today that resists the historical erasure of their presence in the past. Stories of sex workers are still repressed in official Japanese Canadian history, but I want to shed light on them. By re-appropriating the Caves Series and using it as a starting point, I excavate the traces of these women in archives and places they lived and died. This paper offers one account of my ethnographic research process, which involved performative archaeological work at cemeteries and archives. Instead of trying to fill the gaps of the archive, however, I seek another way to engage the past through performance, paying attention to the embodied knowledge that was produced in my encounter with the material traces and the evocation of the untraceable past, and sharing it in an evocative way. I use images not simply to illustrate my written narrative but as part of my performance, which re-enacts and recreates my experience. My goal here is not to reconstruct the past as an objective history using knowledge preserved in archival documents. Rather, I attempt to orient myself and my readers to a neglected past that sometimes produces effects in our material world and that stretches, or unsettles, our imaginations about things that might have happened, and how they might still be part of our lives in the present and the future.

Performing the Archive

In her essay entitled "Future Future," Flora Pitrolo (2015) reflects on archives of performance and discusses the impossibility for them to fulfill their mission as what Jacques Derrida calls "house arrest." From the institutional point of view, the archive ought to be a permanent dwelling place for historical documents, in which they are systematically classified and filed, physically secured and guarded. The archive also bestows the meaning of the documents "in privilege" and renders their initially private secrets public and non-secret (Derrida 1995, 10). However, archives of performance, Pitrolo writes, "thrive on the very unavailability of the material they are meant to safeguard" (para. 3), because performance consists fundamentally of movements and their disappearance. Performative moments are often found in "bodies, gestures, glances, sighs" that are impossible to *arrest*. In these archives, therefore, "absence is particularly present" (Pitrolo 2015, para. 2). Instead of showing us the truth about what is archived, the archive of performance overwhelms us with the impossibility of truth.

Doing archival research on migrant sex workers, I also encounter absences. Just like performances, lives of migrant sex workers are difficult to arrest in documents.⁵ Osada's writings suggest that most of Japanese migrant sex workers in North America from the turn of the twentieth century were transient migrants who did not settle in any one specific region or even country but continued moving on across borders, escaping from regulations, seeking new opportunities, or being traded by brothel owners. This also meant that they moved across multiple jurisdictions that might or might not have documented their transitory presence.

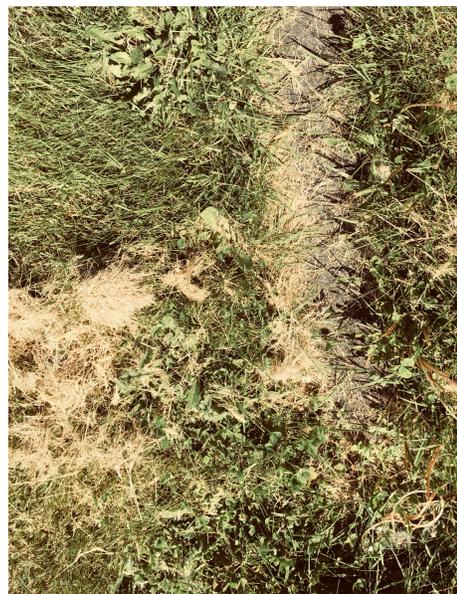


Figure 4: Mountain View Cemetery, Vancouver. Photograph by author.



Figure 5: Mountain View Cemetery, Vancouver.
Photograph by author.

It is also difficult to follow their movements by relying on official documents because they lived and worked in the underground economy. They usually had nicknames, sometimes more than one, and changed them according to the situation. Some women used forged passports. In general, official archives do not tell us much about the lives and deaths of “Oriental” women. When they do, those documents are erroneous, negligent, and above all, racist. On their death registrations, for example, these women’s names are spelled wrong, the last and first names are reversed, sections are often left blank, and their religious denomination can simply be “Jap.”

I know, I believe, these women existed but the archive tells us little about their lived experiences. As stated, perhaps the richest documentation of their lives in brothels can be found in Osada’s book *Brothels in Canada* (1910), under the section “Everyday Life of Prostitutes.” By cross-referencing the sex worker called Maple within his writing, I can infer that his descriptions of her illustrate a day in a brothel in Nelson, BC. This writing is ambivalent. While biased and disdainful, his detailed description of a moment of women’s lives in the brothel attests to the presence of a vibrant community of those who survived the underground.

She would wake up at around noon, rubbing her sleepy eyes almost closed. Her oversized flat face is white-spotted with face powder from the previous night, making her look like a child deer. “What’s with you, Ms. Maple? Wake up, it’s already noon,” she would run across her neighbour guestrooms to recruit cleaning helpers though not necessarily force them to get up. She’d rather roll an extra amount of Durham cigar powder and have a smoke before going to wash her face with a towel in her hand. As she gazes vacantly at the course of smoke, another woman would approach her on tiptoe from behind, yelling, “Boo!!”

“Stop romping around! Go wash your face now,” yells a pimp, who has been working hard to prepare a meal in the kitchen for a while. Pimps are responsible for all the work in the kitchen.

They would stamp into the kitchen just like ducklings chased down by a bully along the stream outside the back door. They would then wash their faces, do all the regular cleaning and sit at the table still with their pajamas on.

“I made my Chinaman treat me chow mein last night and it was good,” “Me like egg foo young better,” “I’ll report that to your Cantonese man,” “Who cares? I rather want to go back to Japan and eat okame soba noodle and unadon rice bowl.”

Talking big. Sensing the pimp’s disapproval, the women would stop talking and gobble down their chazuke bowl soup.

They'd have half an hour of idle chatter, leave behind laughter that is so loud that it'd pierce through the ceiling, and move back to their guestrooms. One would start her shamisen practice, just like the rain drops, and then continue reading Mamushi no Omasa (Omasa the Viper). Another would look for a mystery novel she has started. There is a greedy one who would send a pimp off to town to get candies or fruits and fill her mouth full. There are yet others who would put thick make-up on their shameless faces behind the doors and go out to town for shopping.

(Shohei Osada, *Brothels in Canada*, *Tairiku Nippo*, 1910: 19-21)

But the archival documents produced by members of the Japanese community in Canada, such as the *Tairiku Nippo* newspaper, are often male-authored and sexist, reflecting the patriarchal structure that regulated the community then.⁶ How do we start remembering lives of sex workers without reproducing sexist and racist discourses that frame existing archived documents?

Diana Taylor, in *The Archive and the Repertoire*, compares two economies for transmitting historical knowledge: the archive and the “repertoire” of performance. She suggests that traditional archives, which privilege Western epistemologies, are in fact limited as repositories of cultural material. She studies embodied practices of memory and argues: “by taking performance seriously as a system of learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge” we can expand our way of engaging the past (2003: 16). Benjamin D. Powell and Tracy Stephenson Shaffer critique Taylor’s oppositional view of the archive and repertory performances, asking: “What are the ways that embodied practice is enacted in the archival process itself? How can archival texts and narratives be produced as extensions of the processes of embodied practices?” (2009: 9). What if we treat an archive as a critical site of performance, instead of a repository from which to extract historical “facts”? What if I orchestrate available archival materials differently through my performance? Perhaps, then, I can point to an alternative way to remember women’s lives.

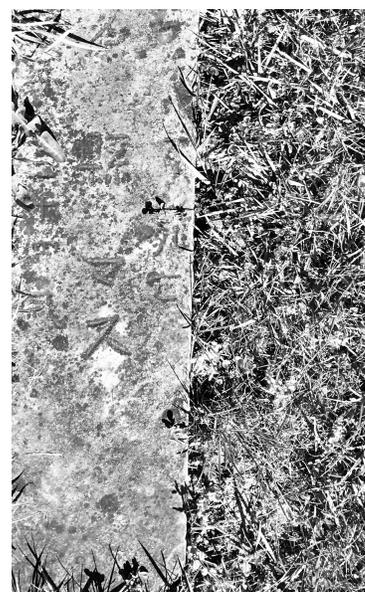


Figure 6: Mountain View Cemetery, Vancouver. Photograph by author.

In Pitrolo’s essay, she develops a notion of “unhappened event” to describe the performances that the archive fails to arrest. An “unhappened event” is not the same as an event that never happened; “it is not an absence but an almost, a never which feels like a might have been” (2015: para. 13). If an “event” is a process of “coming out” or a “becoming” of something, and understanding based on a Latin etymology, then an archive “sucks the event back into the formlessness it came out of at the same time of its coming out, posits the event as real and then drags the event out of the sequentiality of the real, out of maps, calendars, annals, that is, out of the very stuff of the archive” (Pitrolo, 2015: para. 7). If we approach it critically, we can reappropriate the archive to activate our imagination of the event in its multiplicity of possibility, its becoming. The task of a performative approach to the archive would be to turn these possibilities into another event, or an unhappening-in-becoming. I follow Powell and Shaffer, in their adaptation of Peggy Phelan, and argue that performance here is not “a discrete object that disappears,” as suggested by Pitrolo, but rather “continually produc[es] systems, sites, and modes of critical inquiry” (Powell and Shaffer, 2009: 2).

How do we remember unarrested lives?

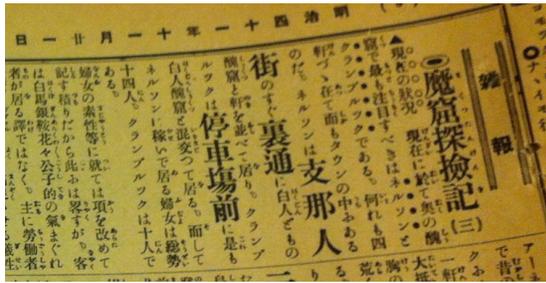


Figure 7: “Exploration of Devil Caves (3),” *Tairiku Nippo*, November 21, 1908, p.5. Image published courtesy of the University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections.

Currently, the interior caves that most deserve our attention include Nelson and Cranbrook. Each has four caves, and they are located inside the town. Nelson has them stand side by side with white caves on the backstreet of Chinatown; Cranbrook has them also mixed with white caves in front of the CPR station. In total of 14 women work in Nelson, and 10 in Cranbrook. (Shohei Osada, “Exploration of Devil Caves,” 21 November 1908)

Japanese brothels developed along the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) stations and in interior mining towns in the last decade of the nineteenth century and were quite vibrant for approximately two decades. To write the Devil Cave series, Osada left Vancouver for interior towns on September 2, 1908, to collect stories. He stayed in these towns until he returned to the *Tairiku Nippo*'s office in Vancouver on November 14, 1908. During this two-month period, he spent most of his time in Cranbrook and Nelson, the places that he identifies as the two major towns for Japanese prostitution.

I followed his footsteps and visited these two cities with a hope of finding something more about the history of Japanese sex workers. At the very least I would be able to get an embodied sense of the places in which they once lived and worked. As it turned out, I found myself spending most of my time in cemeteries, looking for graves that might have belonged to Japanese sex workers, putting flowers on them, and praying for their spirits. This was not an improvised decision, but is in fact a conventional practice that has been done by previous Japanese women writers, including Yamazaki and Kudo.

The process of my embodied engagement with the unarrested lives of Japanese sex workers started with my encounter with the presence *and* absence of Japanese headstones in cemeteries in Cranbrook and Nelson, and was followed by my archival research of official death records back in Vancouver. While archives tell me more about the elusiveness of the past I am studying than anything else, they do provoke further imagination. Pitrolo writes: “Weak, in essence, by being devoid of past or of past present, the unhappened event has nowhere to go other than the future” (2015: para. 15). It’s the very realization that “there is always a lot that we’re not seeing” (Pitrolo 2015: para. 14) that enables us to keep remembering the lives of the neglected and marginalized of the past, present and future.

Below I re-enact my research process as I performatively mimic, as I cite, the voices of archival documents—Osada’s reportage and official death records—although in my iteration they make a different gesture. By juxtaposing them with photographic images, excerpts from my fieldwork journal, and a reflective account of my encounter with Japanese headstones in the cemeteries, I

explore a way to remember, as I actively create a memory of the lives of women in the underground, trans-pacific world.

I use pseudonyms for all the women I encountered at the cemeteries and in death records, following the conventional nicknaming practice of people who lived in the underground economy.

Cranbrook

Cranbrook currently has four devil caves and in total about ten prostitutes. Cranbrook has a well-known cave district, which is often spoken together with Nelson, and its pioneering history is also complex. However, its way of doing things is very different from that of Nelson and Cranbrook is relatively more open. Of course, Cranbrook acquired such an open attitude because there are stores run by straight Japanese people nearby, which have their workers mixed with vagabonds, and they went through a number of troubles because of these relations. This is the primary difference from Nelson. The wives in Nelson only serve alcohol and never get involved in prostitution, but in Cranbrook everyone has their clients. In Nelson some hired prostitutes do not have their own men, but those in Cranbrook all have men. These men can vary from the lovers they made in this country, devils brought from Japan, to their actual husbands. Simply put, there are no women who are single. In Cranbrook many straight business people visit caves. They are rarely embroiled with each other. (Shohei Osada, "Exploration of Devil Caves," 24 November 1908)

April 17, 2018.
The first night in Cranbrook turned out disastrously.
I was lying on the bed,
hearing Tad's snoring coming from right beside me,
and could not fall asleep for some reason.
Something was wrong with my stomach but I couldn't immediately tell.
Finally, I felt like vomiting and headed to the washroom.
I made two trips and everything I ate that evening,
the entire Bison burger,
was out and gone.
 (Ayaka's journal)

The General Section of the Old Cemetery in Cranbrook has a little section at the northern edge where Chinese and Japanese people were buried in the early twentieth century. I found three graves with Japanese women's names inscribed on them. But Osada writes that the Japanese community in Cranbrook had both "cave fellows" and "straight fellows" intermingled with each other. There is no way for me to tell which group these three women might have belonged to. If they were indeed sex workers, I find it is in fact incredible that there are individual graves erected for them. In Japan during the same time period women in the sex trade could have easily become *muenbotoke* or, literally, "spirits without (family) ties." They would be abandoned, remain unclaimed, and buried in collective graves without their names identified.

Grave #1

Being familiar with the modern, “invented” tradition of Japan and its patriarchal family system, I automatically expect an unmarried woman to be buried together with her father’s family or a married woman with her husband’s. Either way, one would normally see only one last name in a family section, because children always inherit their father’s name and the last names of all incoming women are converted to their husbands’ family names upon marriage.



Figure 8: Grave #1, Cranbrook, BC. Photograph by author.

I am perplexed by one of the graves I found in Cranbrook. “The grave of Sadayo Murata,” the inscription reads in Japanese. What confuses me is an English inscription below, which reads, “T. Fukuda.” What can this mean? Is this person a man or a woman? Is T buried together with Sadayo? Or is T the one who erected this grave for her? What is T’s relationship to Sadayo? Her lover? Employer? Co-worker?

I also realize that I had before never visited the graves of strangers in my life. Graves are supposed to be familiar and intimate sites, where visitors are

supposed to say to the deceased, “Thank you for looking after us, ancestors!” The grave visit affirms and reinforces family ties defined by blood relations.

At the same time, these graves do not feel alienating. Why would they? I meet strangers all the time in my life. Most of them are alive, and some of them happen to be dead.

Now, what shall I say to her?

Hello, nice to meet you.

Death Registration

Name of the Deceased: *Sadayo Murata*

When died: *January 14, 1905*

Where died: *Cranbrook, BC*

Sex: *Female*

Age: *20 years*

Rank or profession: ***House Keeper***

Where born: *Japan*

Certified cause of death, and duration of illness: (blank)

Signature of informant: *W. R. Beatty, Undertaker*

When registered: *January 16, 1905*

Religious denomination: *Methodist*

Medical Certificate of Death

I hereby certify that I attended Sadayo Murata of Cranbrook BC, who was apparently aged or was stated to be aged twenty years: that I last saw her on the 9th day of January, 1905, that she died on the 14th day of

January, 1905 at Cranbrook; that the cause of her death was tuberculosis of lungs and that the disease continued about six weeks.

Signature: S.W. Connelly, Cranbrook BC.

April 18, 1918.

Weather in Cranbrook is winter cold.

*A bit of shower,
dark.*

According to a brief report in Tairiku Nippo,

*Osada had fever while he was in Cranbrook
and was hospitalized in St. Eugene Hospital as of September 21, 1908.*

*Is my sickness
a coincidence?*

*Dave went through Dr. King and Dr. Green's Day Book,
which the Cranbrook Archives had just recently acquired.*

*He could not find anything
that might be related to Osada's hospitalization.*

(Ayaka's journal)

(*Dave is an archivist at the Cranbrook History Centre)

Grave #2



Figure 9: Grave #2, Cranbrook, BC. Photograph by author.

Some headstones have additional inscriptions that indicate the date of death, the age at death and even the hometown of the deceased. The Japanese inscription of this grave reads, “The grave of Toku Iketani.” Below, the English inscription reads, “Native of Wakayamaken, Japan; Aged 32 Yrs; Died 16 Dec. 1909.”

According to her death registration, she had an alias, although both her “official” first name and the other first name do not sound rightly Japanese. Perhaps these were mis-transcribed by the person who was

filling out the form. It seems that the official record decided that she had two last names, as well: one which sounds a little bit more western (and thus must be official); another which is in agreement with the name inscribed on the headstone, and accurately Japanese (or “alien,” and thus must be an alias).

Osada always identifies men by their last names and women by their given (nick)names. Quite frequently, he calls women so-and-so's (men's family name) Omitsu, Ochiyo, Otama, and so forth, informing us which man the woman belongs to. This, of course, reflects the Japanese patriarchal family system, which only recognizes men as heads and treats women as their possessions.

Thus, women's identities were made unstable, tentative and unidentifiable in oppressive ways, but women themselves also used multiple names tactically to disguise their identities. Osada writes about a woman who went by Okan in the pleasure district back in Yokohama, and upon arrival in Canada, started using another nickname, Omine. Besides, she has her “real” name given at birth. He

describes her as an “experienced and crafty warrior prostitute,” who deftly “hides” and navigates her life amongst regulative social entanglements (“Exploration of Devil Caves,” 29 January 1909).

Death Registration

Name and surname of deceased: ***Aiano Iketain alias De Iketani***

When died: *Dec 16, 1909*

Where died: *Cranbrook Hospital*

Sex: *Female*

Age: *32 years*

Rank or profession: ***House Keeper***

Where born: *Japan*

Certified cause of death: ***Shock following operation***

Duration of illness: *24 hours*

Name of physician: (blank)

Signature, description and residence of informant: *Hospital Record, W. R. Beatty Undertaker, Cranbrook BC*

Signature of registrar: *J. F. Armstrong*

*April 18, 1918.
I just realized
that the Old Cemetery
was located
right across
from our hotel room
over
the CPR tracks.
(Ayaka’s journal)*

Grave #3

I am struck by the name inscribed on this grave: Misao Kimura. In Japanese “misao” means chastity. How transgressive would it have been for a woman whose name meant chastity to get involved in the sex trade? Osada’s Devil Cave series briefly mentions a woman whose nickname was Misao. “How foolish is it to name a prostitute Misao,” Osada writes, amazed that her pimp would have apparently given her this nickname. In fact, sex industries make a profit by selling contradictions. Virginity appeals. Women perform purity. Each sex act is special.



Figure 10: Grave #3, Cranbrook, BC. Photograph by author.

Apparently, “Oriental” women had their own appeals. Osada is mortified by explicit displays of brothel signs that say, “Japanese House” or “Tokyo House,” which also sometimes include

nicknames of women in Japanese or English, such as “Hana,” “Ito,” “Maple,” or “Josie” (“Exploration of Devil Caves,” 21 November 1908). Elsewhere, he notes that Japanese women were so rare in Moose Jaw that there would be an “endless line of clients even when they charged 15 dollars for overnight stays after 2 AM” (10 December 1908).

“Misao” also means dignity.

Again, the name on this headstone does not match the name that appears on Canadian official documents. After some database searching, I found a death registration in the BC Archives that is linked to the grave of Misao Kimura. Her name on paper is Sato Kimura.

Death Registration

1. Full Name: *Sato Kimura*
2. a) Sex: *Female*, b) Color or race: **Yellow**, c) Single/Married/Widowed/Divorced: *Single*
3. a) Birthplace: *Japan*, b) Date of Birth: (blank)
4. Age: *21 Years*
5. Died on the *15* day of *Nov*, *1914* at about *2 AM*
6. Last occupation: **Home keeper**
7. Former occupation: (blank)
8. a) Place of death: *St. Eugene Hospital*; b) How long at place of death: *2 weeks*
9. Former or usual residence: *Cranbrook*
10. How long resident in city: **3 months**
11. How long in district: **3 months**
12. How long in Canada, if foreign born: **1 year**
13. a) Name of father: *K. Kimura*, b) Birthplace of father: *Japan*
14. a) Maiden name of mother: *Miki Kimura*, b) Birthplace of mother: *Japan*

The Foregoing Stated Personal Particulars are True to the Best of My Knowledge and Belief:

15. Informant: *J. Otsuji*, Address: *Cranbrook*
16. Place of burial: *Cranbrook*, Date of burial: *Nov 17, 1914*; Hour: *3 PM*
17. Undertaker: *W. R. Beatty*, Address: *Cranbrook*

Physician's Certificate of Cause of Death

I hereby certify that I attended Sato Kimura from Nov 3, 1914, to Nov 14, 1914; that I last saw her alive on the 14 day of Nov, 1914; that she died, as I am informed on the 15 day of Nov, 1914; At about 2 o'clock AM; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief the cause of her death was as hereafter written.

- a. Remote or Earlier Pathological or Morbid Condition: **Malignant Endocarditis**
- b. Immediate or Final Determining Cause: **Embolism**

Witness my hand, this *16* day of *November, 1914*

Signature: *H.W. Green*

Address: *Cranbrook*

*April 19, 2018.
Caught cold.
My throat hurt throughout the night.
This is a bad sign.
(Ayaka's journal)*

Nelson

*Compared to the situation in Cranbrook, those in Nelson have their lives in order. There is no other Japanese in the first place and the wives of the cave owners do not prostitute themselves, but instead they only serve alcohol on clients' demands, and during the daytime, they supervise the domestic economy. Prostitutes take turns and do mopping and laundry, and use the remaining time for their own studies. They were able to come to this state after the four caves had a discussion and formed something like a union and worked hard, but previously they had many women who visited gambling places. Well, it does not mean that I am eulogizing current situation of Nelson caves. I am simply introducing general facts. (Shohei Osada, "Exploration of Devil Caves," *Tairiku Nippo*, 24 November 1908)*

*April 21, 2018.
I discovered
a Japanese-owned hip ramen bar called
"Red Light"
and ordered a half-size pork ramen with a half-size caesar salad,
but this beautiful purple kale variation,
which nicely represented the contemporary culture of Nelson,
had too much garlic in it
for my stomach (still in recovery)
to digest successfully.
I feel like vomiting
again.
(Ayaka's journal)*

According to Osada, no Japanese person except for "cave fellows" lived in Nelson at that time. If this is true, there is a very high chance that women who died in Nelson back then were involved in the sex trade. Grave searching in Nelson, however, was a little more complicated than in Cranbrook. At a local archive I was given a burial index of the Nelson Memorial Park, which enabled me to locate burials of Japanese people in specific sections in the cemetery. However, there were two problems. First, some burials that appear in the index had never been marked in the cemetery; second, some early burials were not recorded or their records did not survive, and so they do not appear in the index that is available today. Nonetheless, I was able to find two graves that belong to Japanese women with the help of the index and thanks to a city worker whom I met at the cemetery. He remembered and kindly showed me the location of other Japanese graves from the time period of my interest. He told me that his wife was Japanese, implying that he is more cognizant of Japanese names.

Grave #4

In Nelson, Japanese graves from the early twentieth century were found either in General Section #1 or #2. While these graves were not pushed toward the edge and segregated from the rest like in Cranbrook, they were clustered together in the same blocks.

This grave was found in General Section #2, but unlisted in the index. The inscription of this grave reads: “Japanese, Chika Noguchi; Born in Shizuoka-Ken, Japan; Died Oct. 30, 1904; Aged 24 Yrs.”



Figure 11: Grave #4, Nelson, BC. Photograph by author.

This headstone stands side by side with another, smaller grave. According to its English inscription, she died on May 18, 1906 and was aged one day. The headstone does not indicate her first name, suggesting that she probably did not get to be named before she died. The Japanese inscription reads: Japanese, Girl Urabe. Assuming that Chika’s headstone had already been here when the baby was buried, I wonder what brought the baby’s remains to be buried right next to Chika’s. It might have been institutional racism (to assemble or lump together “Japs” into the same location), a mother’s wish (so the baby stays close to a member of her own people), or something else. Whatever the circumstance was, the pair of Japanese headstones does look like that of a parent and a child.

Osada’s series has a digression where he briefly describes the lives of mixed-race children born of relationships between sex workers and their clients. Owaka in Cranbrook, for example, has a daughter whose biological father is an unknown “white” man. The child lives with a white foster family in town but the child visits Owaka every Sunday and calls her “mama.” In Calgary Konagaya’s wife, whose (nick)name is not indicated, gives birth to a boy whose father is a black man. Konagaya is in a rage that his wife had an “alien child.” In a different section, Osada writes about a child whose mother dies due to alcoholism and is raised thereafter by her brothel employers. There were different forms of family, full of “aliens” in the household according to the idealized and racist standards of the modern nations of both Japan and Canada. These families had extended networks that went beyond blood relations.

Chika, too, continues growing relationships in her afterlife.

Death Registration

Name and surname of deceased: ***Noguchi Chika***

When died: *Oct 30, 1904*

Where died: *Nelson BC*

Sex: *Female*

Age: *Twenty four years*

Rank or profession: (blank)

Where born: *Shizuoka Ken, Japan*

Certified cause of death, and duration of illness: ***Brain tumor, 3 weeks***

Name of physician: *W.O. Rose M.D.*

Signature, description and residence of informant: *D. J. Robertson Co.*

Undertakers, Nelson BC

When registered: 3 Nov 1904

Religious denomination: *Buddhist*

Signature of registrar: *C.D. Blackwood*

April 23, 2018.

*I used up the entire box of Kleenex
that I stole from my hotel room.*

*My nose is
red*

like a clown.

(Ayaka's journal)

Grave #5

According to the burial index, Japanese people who died in Nelson in the early twentieth century were all buried without being cremated—the standard practice in Japan today. The index indicates cases of cremation from more recent years, and I wonder if crematory services were not available back then or if these people chose burial over cremation. I did some quick research and learned that cremation was not then as widespread as it is today in Japan. To have a grave erected was also a privilege reserved only for people of a high class. Otherwise bodies were normally buried under the earth, in the river, or the ocean, unmarked.



Figure 12: Grave #5, Nelson, BC Photograph by author.

An unnamed gravedigger in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* tells the eponymous Prince, in Act 5, Scene 1, that bodies decay differently, reflecting their lives before death. (I remember this scene so vividly, because I acted the gravedigger's role in my high school English class in Japan and was forced to memorize his lines in Old English by repeating them over and over during my commute to school. But I also remember that I did not dislike my role.) I do not have the kind of archaeological

knowledge that gravediggers would have, but I can at least attend to the inscriptions on the headstones and tell something about the women's lives before death.

This grave was found in Block #30 in the General Section #1. The inscription reads: "In Memory of Waka Furuta; Died April 11, 1907, Age 28 Yrs; **Erected by her friends.**"

In his Devil Cave series, Osada highlights internal conflicts between brothel managers over popular sex workers or money, and relationship conflicts over adultery. One exception might be when he mentions how women in Nelson have "union"-like, cooperative working relations. Otherwise, both men and women in his writing generally appear deceitful, greedy and self-centred. What he does not say is the fact that such conflicts also exist among what he calls "straight fellows," who can also be as destructive as their "cave" counterparts.

A grave like this, however, proves the presence of relationships and solidarity that women constructed and were part of.

Hello Waka, bello friends.

Death Registration

Name and surname of deceased: *Waka **Furta***

When died: *April 11, 1907*

Where died: *Kootenay Lake Hospital*

Sex: **Female Japanese**

Age: *25 years*

Rank or profession: **Sport***

Where born: *Japan*

Certified cause of death: **Abscesses Broad Ligaments Abdomen**

Name of Physician, if any: N.H. Wilson

When registered: *20 May 1907*

Religious denomination: **Jap**

Signature of registrar: *Perry G. (illgible)*

(*In those days, the phrase "sporting ladies" was used to refer to women who sold sex. "Sport" as an occupation category probably was equivalent to sex work.)

*April 23, 2018.
Temperature 20 Celsius,
weather pleasant.
My runny nose wouldn't
stop.
(Ayaka's journal)*

How do we remember Aki?

I found the name Aki Masunaga in the burial index of the Nelson Memorial Park. According to this record, she died on the October 26, 1914, buried on the same day in General Section #1. The block

number is unknown. The same record indicates “N” for the presence of a marker, which means that there is no grave erected for her.

I still searched for her grave several times in the cemetery...



Figure 13: Mountain View Cemetery, Vancouver. Photograph by Tadafumi Tamura.

but had no luck in finding it.

My archival database search gave me no result for the death registration of Aki Masunaga. Instead, I found a marriage certificate of a woman whose first name is Aki and a man whose last name is Masunaga. This marriage took place in Nelson, but it is dated August 17, 1917, three years after Aki Masunaga’s death according to the above burial index. The same database found a death registration for Aki Furuta, who has the same last name as Waka Futura, mentioned above. She died in Nelson at the age of 29 on October 23, 1914, only three days before the date of death of Aki Masunaga indicated in the burial index.

So is Aki Furuta on this death registration the Aki Masunaga I found in the burial index? Or are they two different Akis who happened to have died in the same month in Nelson? Or was Aki Masunaga’s date of death mis-recorded in the index and was she in fact the same person as the newly-wed Aki Masunaga on the 1917 marriage certificate?

I cannot deny my desire for the “truth,” but I give in to the incompleteness of the official records of “Oriental” women. I encounter an unarrested death.

Hello, Aki. Are you there?

How do I tend to her remains if they cannot be traced to a specific location within the cemetery? Where exactly should I place flowers when there is no headstone? The absence of the marker of Taki makes me wonder about other bodies that may lie underneath without having markers that establish their locations. I also recall a number of unnamed burials that I saw in the index. How do we remember those unnamed spirits? Unrecognized and indistinguishable lives?

I am reminded that many Japanese women in “caves” in Canada were transient migrants, who did not have the privilege to settle permanently and produce offspring in a “legitimate” way, to institutionally mark their past presence. Taki continues to be unsettled in her afterlife, and also unsettles our ways of remembering the deceased and the past.

Instead of trying to pin down their locations, I prefer to attend to the space in between graves, an ambiguous space from which I imagine Taki and other women escaping, in death, institutional arrest.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge that the places on which I conducted my research are the unceded traditional territories of the Ktunaxa and Kinbasket peoples, and of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples, and that I am an uninvited guest in their lands. I would also like to acknowledge that my current research builds on my collaborative work with Julia Aoki, which included Japanese-English translation of Shohei Osada’s “Exploration of Devil Caves” series, among other work we did together. Many thanks to Tadafumi Tamura for his photographic work, including photo-documentation of my research in Cranbrook, Nelson, and Vancouver, and post-production work. I am grateful to two archivists, Dave Humphrey at the Cranbrook History Centre and Jean-Philippe Stienne at the Touchstone Nelson Museum of Art and History, who kindly assisted me with searching relevant archival materials and locating former red-light districts and old cemeteries in town. Many thanks to Heather De Forest for deciphering old English handwriting on official records. Thank you very much to Dara Culhane for being my inspiration for performative writing and for advice on ethics, and to Josh Trichilo for reading my earlier drafts and making editorial suggestions. I would like to extend my gratitude to my friends and colleagues, Novia Shih-Shan Chen, Casey Collins, Yiwen Liu, and Sho Ogawa, for their intellectual and emotional support. I also appreciate Róisín O’Gorman, this issue’s editor, for her constructive feedback on my earlier draft, which helped me strengthen the framing of this paper. Last but not least, this research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Notes

1. See Kudo (1991, 125) for this image.
2. See Yamazaki (1981, 161) for this image.
3. See Aoki and Yoshimizu (2015) for our collaborative research outcomes.
4. Osada is also included as a key member of the Japanese community in Jinshiro Nakayama’s *The Great History of the Development of the Japanese in Canada* (Kanada doho hatten taikan), published in 1929.
5. For an elaborated discussion of “non-arrested” documents of women and the gendered nature of the archive, see Linda M. Morra, *Unarrested Archives* (2014).
6. See Yoshimizu (2018) for more discussion on the role of *Tairiku Nippo* as a site in which patriarchal discourses of women in the Japanese community in Canada were produced.

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