

Sandakan

Brothel No. 8

**an episode in the
history of lower-class
Japanese women**

Yamazaki Tomoko

**Translated by
Karen Colligan-Taylor**



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Osaki's Story—The Life of an Overseas Prostitute

The date of my birth, well, I'm not exactly sure. I'm certain of the month and the day, January 29, but I don't know what year it was, although I think I'm about seventy-two this year. When my son, Yuji, got married, he went to get our family register from the town hall, and according to it, he said, I was born around 1907 or 1908. But that's wrong. My mother and father were in no rush to go to a place like the village hall, so they didn't report my birth; then, when I was close to ten and was about to go abroad, my brother registered my birth for the first time. But my own honest calculation and the calculation made by the village hall differ by ten years, and so my neighbor, who is the same age as I, is able now to get money for the elderly from the government, while I don't get a speck of dust.

My father—his name was Yamakawa Manzo—comes from a family who have been farming in this village for generations, but I don't know how much land he had. He fell sick and died when I was four, and I don't remember his face or what he was like. If my older brother were still alive—Yasukichi is four years older than I am, so he would have been eight when Father died—he would have known something about him, but he passed away a long time ago. I've heard, though, that Father just couldn't resist gambling whenever he had a chance, so eventually he lost all of his farmland and my parents ended up working together as day laborers in the fields of a wealthy man.

My mother's name was Sato, and she came as a bride from the

Kawashima family in the same village, but she wasn't a very kind woman. It's not very nice to speak of one's own mother in this way, but since I'm not lying, I hope you won't mind my saying so.

Even if you had land, you could barely eke out a living here, so I'm sure my parents' life as day laborers must have been really difficult. Because, you see, they also had three children—my older brother, Yasukichi, my older sister, Yoshi, and me. Even so, we somehow made ends meet while my father was still living, but when he became ill and died, we just couldn't make it. Eventually we had to sell the large house we'd lived in until then. When we sold the house we had nowhere to go, but my mother's older brother was very fond of his younger sister, and so he built a small house close to the one we had sold and moved us all in there. It was so small I wonder if you could have laid out even four full tatami mats. I was about four or five at the time, and I just couldn't understand why we moved to such a tiny place. I was told that I caused all kinds of trouble, crying to my mother, "Let's go back to Osaki's house."

After that my mother put even more energy into her work as a day laborer. My older brother, who had just turned nine or ten, said he would go to work as a baby-sitter for a nearby farming family, so Mother wouldn't have so many mouths to feed. Even so, our life didn't become any easier. There were days when I would have nothing to swallow but water from morning 'til night. Even when noon came around, or when the sun had set, I still hadn't had even the neck of a sweet potato to eat. It's bad enough for an adult, but let me tell you, when you're a young, growing child and need food the most, it's really miserable not to have one bite to eat all day.

According to the official copy of her family register, Yamakawa Saki was born on January 29, 1909, the second daughter of Yamakawa Manzo and Yamakawa Sato at No. 1,629 of XX Section, XX Village in Amakusa County, Kumamoto Prefecture. Her brother, Yasukichi, was born on March 27, 1896, and died on September 19, 1947. Her older sister, Yoshi, was born on July 11, 1898.

After we had lived this sort of life for a number of years, there was talk that my mother would get married. The wife of my uncle Tokumatsu, my father's older brother closest to his age, had died, and my mother was told that as the widow of his younger brother, it would be convenient for her to

become his next wife.¹ I don't know how old Uncle Tokumatsu was then, but he had six children by his first wife, and his oldest daughter was only three years younger than my mother. So, when my mother went as a bride to my uncle's house, this oldest daughter no longer lived there. She had gone to Java to work as a prostitute. I don't know why, but she came home deaf, and ten years after my mother went to her home as a bride, this girl died. Poor soul.

I wonder how old my mother was when she went to Uncle Tokumatsu's place. With all those small children at his place, my uncle would have had a hard time with no one to cook, and since at our place we were so poor there were times we couldn't even eat sweet potatoes, the two households might as well join—this was his reasoning for marrying my mother. Actually, he had promised that in return for her hand in marriage, he would take care of the three of us children.

When I heard this from my mother, I was embarrassed, and I didn't say either that I agreed or didn't agree, but my brother, Yasukichi, was really against the idea. I've forgotten now why he opposed it so strongly. After all, this happened sixty years ago. My brother was someone who held the spirits of the deceased in deep respect, and he must have said something like, "I can't make any excuses for this to our dead father." Nevertheless, my mother did go as a bride to my Uncle Tokumatsu's place, but it was decided that we three children would stay in our tiny house and take care of ourselves. I remember how my eyes filled with tears as I thought in my childish heart that a mother who would just abandon her children and go to another man's place could no longer be my mother.

According to the official family register, Yamakawa Saki's mother, Yamakawa Sato, was born on March 6, 1873, and was remarried to Yamakawa Tokumatsu on December 15, 1913, at No. 1,657 of XX Section, XX Village, Amakusa County.

Around that time my older brother had stopped working as a babysitter, and had taken a job as a pit worker at Mitsubishi Coal Mine nearby, but when my mother left, he quit and tried to stay at home every day. He rented some fields not far from our house and began growing barley and sweet potatoes, and my older sister and I threw ourselves wholeheartedly into helping him. Since this wasn't enough to keep us going, when I was

seven I got a baby-sitting job for two years at the home of Shoda Joi. I took care of a little boy named Yoshinori, but because I was small for my age, when I would tie Yoshinori on my back with my obi, his feet hung down right next to mine. They fed me lunch and dinner, and I earned a salary of four yen per year. Because I had to work like this, I didn't spend even one day of my life in school. Neither my older brother or sister, nor I, went to school. It wasn't just my family that didn't go to school, though. At that time, unlike today, there were many children in my village who didn't go to school, and it wasn't a bit strange. But because I didn't go to school, I can't read at all, not a single syllable. You young people are really fortunate. You can read books and newspapers to your heart's content. You can write letters to anyone you want. I'm like a blind person with open eyes. Even when I went abroad I couldn't write home a single letter saying something so simple as that I was in good health and hadn't been sick. When I sent money home, I had to ask someone to write the letter for me each time, and when letters came I had to have someone read each one. You probably wouldn't understand, but it was really humiliating.

I'm probably talking about too many different things. No matter how hard the three of us worked, a child's income was no match for that of an adult. By the time winter arrived, the barley box and potato tub were empty, and days would go by when not only was there no barley gruel, but we couldn't even sip potato broth. Unlike the big house we lived in before, this little house didn't have anything like tatami. We were able to keep a fire going from dried twigs we gathered in the hills, but when the three of us would sit with empty stomachs on the wooden floor, we could think of nothing but food. On those nights as I sat thinking, my mother's face would appear in my mind—but she was no longer our mother, and I hated her. If I spoke of her in this way, it would anger my brother, so I just bit my lip and remained silent.

Once she went to Uncle Tokumatsu's place, my mother hardly ever came to visit us. Although she lived in a different neighborhood, it was within the same village, and she could have dropped by now and then. I'd like to think that the reason she didn't come wasn't because she didn't feel sorry for us, but because she didn't want to cause any trouble for Uncle Tokumatsu and her stepchildren.

In this situation, it was my mother's older brother, who built our house, and her older sister, my aunt, who had no children, who often visited us, saying, "How are you doing, have you been eating?" We've made some rice cakes, my aunt would say, bringing some over on a tray, or she would drop by with new potatoes, saying they'd just been digging some. Their kind words gave us strength. "The three of you should try and get along well together. If you have any trouble, feel free to come talk to us."

In the meantime, my older sister, Yoshi, turned ten or eleven, and it was arranged that she would work as a maid in the home of Shoda Toichi whose house was in our neighborhood. Shoda Toichi was not that well-to-do, so he had other reasons for taking my sister on as a maid.

Toichi had an older sister named Otoku. The villagers would call her "Otonjo," but anyway this Otonjo opened a brothel in Rangoon, Burma. Toichi wanted prostitutes to take to Otonjo's brothel, and so there was no doubt this is why he set eyes on my sister, Yoshi. It wasn't long before my sister was forced to accompany Toichi to Otonjo's brothel and start working as a prostitute. Shoda Onami, who lives just a little bit up the road from me now, became Toichi's wife in Rangoon.

Shoda Toichi, now there was a bad man. He took every cent Otonjo saved at her brothel. After they returned to the village together, she went crazy, running around town saying whatever came into her head. Toichi shut her up in a single room at the back of his house, which never saw the light of day, not providing her with sufficient food and drink, so that finally he allowed her to die before his very eyes. But Toichi, too, is long gone. Onami is still strong, and owns a store in town. Remember when you said you wanted some soap the other day, and you went out and bought some? That was her store. But she keeps everything about her return from abroad strictly to herself.

What happened to my sister Yoshi? First she was sent to Rangoon, and from there she moved to Singapore and then to Java, and in the year that the current emperor was enthroned, she returned to Amakusa.²

She said she set up house in the South Seas with a seaman bom in Kyoto, but he got sick and died, and she came home with his ashes. After that she never returned to the South Seas, but joined up with Shoda

Kaikichi, elder brother of Shoda Onami. Yoshi died just last spring. She was one or two years short of seventy-five.

According to the official family register, on May 1, 1914, Yamakawa Yoshi was married to Daizaburo, the second son of Tanaka Mitsuyoshi, of No. 694 of XX Section, XX Village, Amakusa County. On February 26, 1922, she was divorced by mutual agreement. On March 7, 1936, she married Shoda Kaikichi of No. 1,125 of XX Section, XX Village, Amakusa County.



Osaki's older sister, Yoshi. The photograph was taken in Rangoon around the middle of the Taisho period (1912–1925). Most *karayuki-san*, including Yoshi, were illiterate, so they would send photographs home to show their families that they were in good health.

Since the last war no girls from anywhere have gone to the South Seas, but when I was small, girls from this house and that house would all go. They didn't come just from families without two parents. Even from this one village there were more than twenty young girls who went abroad at the same time I did.

Those who went to foreign countries to work as prostitutes had all kinds of difficult experiences, and in many cases we don't know where they finally went, so we don't have information on all of them. Among those I know, Shoda Osana across the river below lives in a big house, and she even has foreign chairs and a refrigerator. Osana went as a bride to the home of one of my distant relatives, and she gave birth to one girl, but for some reason she left that house, and she was taken by a different boss than ours to Phnom Penh. She got together with a Frenchman there named Gagnon who was quite wealthy, and it seems that she lived in luxury. This Frenchman died a long time ago. His younger brother from France took all of his property, so Osana went to court and did quite well for herself. Even now she receives funds from abroad every year, and so she's able to lead an easy life. You could say that Osana is the most successful of all of us who went abroad.

Okazu, who lived below here, also became the mistress of a Frenchman when she was abroad, and continued to live quite well after her return. She died a year or two ago. If I'm not mistaken, Shigemura Natsuno was sold to a place in Tientsin. I heard a rumor that Yamashita Tatsuno's older sister—I've forgotten her name—became the wife of a Chinese, and after that she never returned to Amakusa. I haven't heard of any letters from her either; I wonder if she's still living. There are many more than these, but other than Osana and Okazu, not one of them has any good thoughts of the past or the present.

Even within my own family, many of us went abroad. First there's me and my sister, Yoshi. Then there was Haru, my father's oldest brother's daughter—that's right, she would be my cousin, wouldn't she? She was in Rangoon for twenty years, and the man named Ryoji, from Shimabara, who became her husband had spent a long time in the South Seas also. My sister Yoshi's first husband, the sailor, also worked in the South Seas, and her second husband, Shoda Kaikichi, was a clerk for a brothel in Rangoon, and his younger sisters, Onami and Oyae, worked as prostitutes at the same brothel. Kitagawa Shintaro, the man who became my husband, also worked abroad, and Uncle Tokumatsu's oldest daughter went to work in a brothel, as I mentioned earlier.

I wonder how many of us that makes. Six women and four men, you

say? This many people went to the South Seas from one family alone, so if you look at other households I imagine it would be about the same. [See the chart on the next page.]

It was the year I turned ten that it was arranged for me to go abroad. We children couldn't get anywhere by ourselves, farming rented land. My brother Yasukichi was becoming a young man, but someone who didn't own a single paddy or field wasn't treated as a respectable man, so no one offered to come as a bride. I felt really sorry for my brother and I wanted somehow to help him become a real man. I saw that the girls in my community were getting a lot of money for going to work abroad, and in my child's heart I thought that if I just went abroad my brother would be able to buy some farmland, build a large house, receive a bride, and become a splendid man. That's how I decided to work abroad.

Genealogy of Kitagawa Saki.

*Refers to family members who spent time Southeast Asia or China between the late Meiji and early Showa periods (approximately 1900-1930). Over half of the family in Osaki's generation went abroad in search of jobs.



If you head for Oe from Sakitsu, and then veer farther west, you reach a place called Takahama. There was a boss named Yoshinaka Taro who had gone from Takahama to the South Seas and done very well. One

evening this boss dropped by our house. My brother and the boss sat at the hearth and talked deep into the night. As the conversation drew to an end, it was concluded that for the sum of three hundred yen I would be taken by the boss to Sandakan in Borneo.

Kneeling and bowing his head to the floor, my brother Yasukichi begged, "Please consider going to work abroad." Thinking that it was to make my brother a man, I replied "OK, I'll go," but when the boss told me to keep my word, I somehow felt uneasy, and sulkily responded, "If Ohana goes also, I'll agree to work abroad; if you don't take Ohana, I won't go."

According to the official family register, Yoshinaka Taroza was born on July 28, 1876, the eldest son of Yoshinaka Torajiro and Komu, at No. 1,013 of XX Section, Takahama Village, Amakusa County.

Ohana was my closest friend from early childhood. She was a year younger than me. She lived just a glance away from my place, and her father cultivated a few fields, but Ohana wasn't really a child from that family. It seems that she was born in another village, that her parents had died for some reason, and that she was taken in by the Shoda family when she was two. I've mentioned the name Shoda over and over, but that's because it's a very common family name in these parts. Still, even though she had someone to call "Father, Mother," they weren't her real parents, and because they had children of their own, she always felt second-class. You can see how she would be a good companion for someone from a house with no parents at all.

When I met Ohana the next day, I told her what I had heard about going abroad, and just as Boss Taroza had said, I told her, "If you go to work abroad, every day is like a festival, you can wear nice kimono, and every day you can eat as much white rice as you want. Won't you come with me?" Ohana answered without a moment's thought, "I'll go."

According to the official family register, Shoda Hana was born on January 10, 1901, the fourth daughter of Yamashita Tokitaro, head of the family at No. 1,669 of XX Section, XX Village, Amakusa County. On April 28, 1917, she was registered as the adopted daughter of Shoda Yoshimatsu and Shoda Kimi.

No, it wasn't only Ohana. Another friend, Takeshita Tsugiyo, was also there when we were talking. Tsugiyo said, "I want to go abroad to work

too. Let me go with you.” Tsugiyo’s home was located in a rocky area near the mountains where you can’t grow decent radishes or potatoes no matter how much fertilizer you apply. This happened after we left for the South Seas, but Tsugiyo’s older brother had to go to Brazil to work. Because that’s the sort of family she came from, you can see why Tsugiyo would say, “I want to go abroad too.”

According to the official family register, Takeshita Tsugiyo was born on July 26, 1902, the eldest daughter of Takeshita Saburo and Takeshita Tayo, at No. 2,992 of XX Section, XX Village, Amakusa County. She died on February 9, 1962, at No. 410 of XX Section, XX Village, Amakusa County.

When they came home from playing that day, both Ohana and Tsugiyo faced their parents and said, “Please, let me go abroad to work.” I don’t remember clearly, but it’s likely that Boss Yoshinaka visited their parents as well, stacking up bills before them as he promised, “If you give me your children, I’ll give you three hundred yen for each one.”

In this way it was decided that the three of us would go abroad, but when the decision had been made we had mixed feelings, sometimes very happy and sometimes sad. I don’t know whether my brother told my mother, or whether she heard it from someone else, but she knew that I was going abroad, and she came to visit for the first time in ages. She brought me a new kimono that she had made. I was so happy— after all, it was the first time in my life I had received new clothes since I was born. It was a black cotton kimono with white stripes.

When I returned from the South Seas for a visit, my mother told me that in order to make this kimono, she had to conceal the whole process from my Uncle Tokumatsu. It had been no easy task, she said. She had no secret savings to buy thread, so she had to walk through the village borrowing cotton thread, promising, “I’ll return it in no time.” She used the thread to set up her loom and weave cloth, and she would sew late at night without sleeping. As she wove and sewed, she worried and cried for me, her daughter who was to be sold and sent away, and her eyes became red and swollen.

It was with such thoughts my mother had made this kimono, but when I arrived at Sandakan, Taroza became angry and said, “How do you think

you're going to be able to work as a prostitute with a shabby kimono like that?" So, I took out the stitching, filled the material with kapok, and made it into a mattress. It's the very same mattress you are using now. I used it all the time at Sandakan, but when I returned to Amakusa for a visit, I brought it home with me.

Don't you think I've talked enough about the kimono? So, this was the way my mother made me the kimono, but she wasn't able to go so far as to make a new sash. Even so, she somehow managed to get her hands on someone's used sash—it was a red Hakata obi—and she tied it around my waist. For the first time since I was born she put a decorative comb in my hair, and when I had bundled up a few underskirts in my *furoshiki*, my packing was complete.

Then Yoshinaka Tarocho came to get me, and finally we were ready to set off. Ohana and Tsugiyo's fathers took off from work to accompany them, and my mother came with me. You know that path through the rice paddies we walked in on together, well, we all walked singlefile down that path to Sakitsu, and below Tenshudo in Sakitsu we boarded a small boat and went to Takahama. My mother couldn't tolerate being in vehicles, of which boats were the worst, maybe because when she was young she got sick on a steamship and even threw up blood. This time, too, her face turned ashen as she accompanied me to Takahama.

My mother snuggled close to me in the boat, the tears rolling down her cheeks. "You're going off to work in a distant country, so this will be our final parting in this lifetime. I wonder if we shall ever be able to meet again?"

I fell into a deep silence and tried to comfort my mother, wiping away her tears with a hand towel. "Mother, please don't worry so much. Three or four of us are going, but I'll somehow endure any hardships and be the first to return."

In Takahama, at the harbor where we were to board a boat bound for Nagasaki, we parted from the mothers and fathers who had come to see us off. As soon as our boat started moving, Tsugiyo and Ohana's fathers cupped their hands to their mouths and called out over and over "Tsugiyoo—Come home in good health as soon as you can!" "Ohanaa—

You're not to get sick, now!" but my mother could only stand there crying and was never able to say a word. Even though I had felt for some time that my mother had no compassion, when I saw my mom like that I felt sorry for her, and I remember that my heart went out to her as I thought, "It's a long way from Takahama back to our village; how on earth will she make it?"

The trip from Nagasaki to Borneo was dreadfully long. No sooner had we had arrived at Nagasaki than we had to board a steam train and ride to Moji. From there we were put on a huge steamer, which took seven days to reach Keelung in Taiwan. We stayed in Keelung for about forty days, waiting for another boat. At last the boat left, and seven days later we arrived in Hong Kong. We stayed there another forty days waiting for a boat; from there it took ten days to reach Sandakan in Borneo.

We thought we had come to terms with the fact that in order to work abroad we would have to part with our parents, our brothers, and our sisters, but from the moment we parted from our parents in Takahama we grew deeply homesick. All of us—Ohana, Tsugiyō, and I—fell totally silent, unable to speak about anything. But it was painful, being silent so long, and finally I said, "What are you thinking about? I don't think we'll ever be able to return to our parents. What should we do?" At this, both Ohana and Tsugiyō started crying loudly. I was so upset that I soon joined them.

Then Boss Taro, the same man who had been so gentle until then and had treated our parents so kindly, flew into a rage, and shouted, "If you want to go home, you can leave any time. Stop that bawling!" If until now the boss had been a Buddha, he was suddenly transformed into Emma, King of Hades. We were terrified, and fell silent again, keeping our lips sealed all the way from Nagasaki to Moji by train, and then from Moji to Hong Kong by ship.

The trip had its frightening moments, but we were just children, and there were many things that we found really interesting. We had never set one foot out of the village, so even a look at Tenshudo Chapel in Sakitsu was a first, and you can imagine how strange everything else must have been—boats, trains, inns, tile roofs. At the inn we were served polished white rice for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I remember that the three of us feared that if we ate such a luxury three times a day, every day, we might

face some kind of divine punishment, and for a while we were afraid to pick up our chopsticks.

Our eyes really popped out when we arrived in Hong Kong! We heard that Hong Kong was called “the London of the East,” and that it was even more lively than Tokyo. I don’t know what Taroza was thinking, but when it grew dark he took us sightseeing through the town. Of course, he didn’t buy us a scrap of cloth or a single thing to eat. We simply walked through the streets. But, when we saw neon lights of red and blue and yellow flickering on and off, we were thrilled. After all, we were raised in a village that didn’t even use oil lamps, let alone electric lights. At times like this my longing for my brother and mother, and my fear of traveling to a strange land, vanished like a puff of smoke, and I would say, “I didn’t know there were such beautiful things in this world. It’s like heaven. I don’t need to go home.” Ohana, Tsugiyo, and I would hug each other and laugh for joy.

I left Amakusa at the height of the summer heat, but when we arrived at Sandakan it was already the end of the year. Of course, even if we talk about the end of the year, since it was the South Pacific, it was even hotter than Amakusa in the summer. Not only were the trees full and green, but flowers were blooming. It really didn’t feel like December, and I thought that the South Pacific was a very strange place.

Sandakan is the largest port town in the English colony of Borneo, and there is nothing which may be ranked with it save Jesselton [Kota Kinabalu] in the northwest. It is located in the eastern corner of the English colony of North Borneo. It is 1,000 miles from Singapore; 1,200 miles from Hong Kong; and 660 miles from Manila. The town is four miles from the port, and the port itself is five miles wide and fifteen miles long. Because the water is very deep, it is impossible to construct a landing pier, but many large ships can anchor in the bay at the same time. The population of Sandakan is about twenty thousand, and it is said that the greater part is Chinese. Sandakan is a small city facing south onto Sandakan Harbor, and flanked by low hills to the north. As I gaze out on the city from my warship, the city roofs, all painted a bright red, present an unusual scene.³

—Tazawa Shingo, *Nangoku mita mama no ki* [A Record of Observations of Countries of the South Seas] (Tokyo: Shinkodo

Shoten, 1922).

In Sandakan the majority of the brothels were managed by Japanese, nine all together. Brothels managed by Chinese took second place. Korean or local girls were not employed by the brothels, so they took in men secretly. This was called undercover prostitution. But even if they conducted their business in this way, the Korean girls had the prettiest faces and the best figures. I heard that in the Philippines there were brothels with white women, but in Sandakan there wasn't a single one. [See [Table 1.](#)]

After dinner I strolled through the streets enjoying the evening spectacle, making a special point of looking in on the "flower and willow" quarters. This was a flourishing area, with seven or eight Japanese brothels and fourteen or fifteen Chinese brothels facing each other on opposite sides of the same street. After that I passed by the front of a gambling house run by the Chinese with government permission—quite a grand place.

—Miho Goro, *Hojin shinhattenchi toshite no Kita Boruneo* [North Borneo as a New Region for Japanese Development] (Tokyodo Shoten, 1916).

Table 1

Occupations Held by Japanese Residents of the Region

Because Sandakan is the capital of the country, the population of resident Japanese is relatively large. The following is a description of the occupations held by the Japanese residents of this region:

Occupation	No. of Households	Male	Female	Comments
Photographer	1	2	1	Husband/wife with one assistant
General store	1	2	1	Husband/wife with one clerk

Employed at government printing office		1		
Laundry	1	2		
Inn for travelers	2	7	2	Two couples; four employees; one child
Carpenter		2		
Prostitute	7	7	21	19 prostitutes
Concubines to Westerners			6	Five live in Patopote
Confectioner	1	2		
Concubines to Chinese			1	
Concubines to Malays			4	
Concubines to Filipinos			1	
Concubines to East Indians			1	
Rubber plantation laborers		1	1	Man and wife
Confectioner		1	1	Couple in Patopote

Palm plantation owner	1	6	5	Man/wife owners; his parents; employees
Palm plantation owner	1	1	1	Couple
Palm plantation owner	1	1		
Total households/ establishments = 16				
Total men = 35				
Total women = 46				

Source: Miho Goro, *Hojin shinhattenchi toshite no Kita Boruneo* [North Borneo as a New Region for Japanese Development] (Tokyo: Tokyodo Shoten, 1916), p. 85.

The nine Japanese brothels did not have names, as would an inn, but were simply referred to by numbers, as Brothel No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, No. 4, and so on. The brothel owned by Taroza was No. 3, and it was here that we were forced to live. This is something I didn't learn until later, but in most cases a brothel owner will buy his girls from a procurer. But Taroza was a trafficker himself before he owned a brothel, so rather than pay a large sum to some procurer for his girls, he would simply return to Japan and buy the girls directly.

This is how we came to be sold to Taroza's brothel, but we weren't forced to work as prostitutes right away. At that time Brothel No. 3 kept two prostitutes, Ofumi and Oyae. At first Ohana, Tsugiyo, and I ran errands and worked as maids for Taroza and his wife, as well as for Ofumi and Oyae. Ofumi and Oyae were only three or four years older than we,

probably 13 or 14; I'm sure they weren't even 15 yet. Later Ofumi became my closest friend. She was from Oe. Oe is the village just over the mountain from Sakitsu, the place we got on the boat. In Oe there is a Catholic chapel, Tenshudo, just as in Sakitsu. Oyae was not from the Amakusa Islands; she said she was born in Shimabara.

According to the official family register, Yoshimoto Fumi was born on January 18, 1900, the fifth daughter of Yoshimoto Naojiro and Yoshimoto Tayo, at No. 7,400, Oe Village, Amakusa County.

When Ohana and I arrived at Brothel No. 3, Ofumi and Oyae were already working as prostitutes. Although customers sometimes came during the day, generally the girls were free at this time, and they would take naps or amuse themselves. At night, however, they would paint their faces with white powder and lipstick. Sitting in front of the house, they would wait for an opportunity to catch a man passing by. At Brothel No. 3 we had only Ofumi and Oyae, but next to us was Brothel No. 2, and next to that, Brothel No. 5. Girls would come out of those brothels, too, to sit in front and wait. The entire street seemed to be lined with prostitutes. When a man came by, they would call to him in Japanese, English, Chinese, or a native dialect, depending on where he was from. When ships came into the harbor we might also see Americans or French. This clamorous crowd of prostitutes would suddenly dwindle as now one, then two, and then another would disappear, customer in hand. But in a short time they would be through with that customer and would descend again from the second floor to line up outside and attract another man. This would go on all night long.

Those of us who had not yet debuted as prostitutes would refer to Ofumi and Oyae as *oneesan*, older sister. Watching them every evening, I would ask Ohana and Tsugiyo, "Do you think we'll have to do that when we get older?" Although I had some idea of what a prostitute was, no one explained to us exactly what went on and we didn't ask. We really didn't know anything.

Our boss, Taroza, kind enough until we left our village, turned into a demon once he boarded the ship. After we arrived in Sandakan, he became even worse, with never a kind word. Wheezing through his chronic

asthma, he would abuse us with his filthy language as he drove us to work harder, constantly reminding us that, “I’ve got good money invested in you.” As old as I am, I can still hear that voice right next to my ears. Even Taroza’s wife hated him, but she never once treated us kindly.

According to the official family register, Yoshinaka Taroza’s wife, Moto, was born on October 9, 1898, the eldest daughter of Kawakami Tsunejiro and Mishi, at No. 5874 of XX Section, XX Village, in Amakusa County.

But the two older girls, our *oneesan*, treated the three of us as if we were really their younger sisters. Ofumi, especially, would stick up for us whenever the boss or his wife said horrible things. “After all, the three of you are from Amakusa, just like me.” We’re good friends, even now. Ofimi also returned safely from abroad, and is now living in Oe, the village where she was born. I haven’t seen her in four years, but she should be doing fine, living with her son, Matsuo.

So this was the kind of life we led until we were initiated as prostitutes, and we weren’t unhappy about coming to the South Pacific. This was partly because we didn’t fully understand our sisters’ work, but the main thing was that we were able to eat white rice morning, noon, and night. In Amakusa the only time we saw white rice was at New Year’s, O-bon, and at local Shinto festivals, and even then a parentless child like myself couldn’t count on so much as a taste.⁴ Here, we had plenty to eat every day. The rice was different from Japanese rice, though. It was Siamese rice. Japanese living in Sandakan called it “purple rice.” It wasn’t sticky, it was loose, and when cooked it wasn’t white, but a pale pink. When we arrived as children we took one look at this rice and clapped our hands for joy, exclaiming, “Red rice! Red rice!”⁵

We even had fish to go with our rice. Although Amakusa is surrounded by the sea, and our village is just a short distance from the harbor of Sakitsu, we had never before eaten fish. Deserted by my father through death and abandoned by my mother in life, I was lucky at least not to have stepparents. Ohana, on the other hand, was taken into the Shoda family, so all year long she had to swallow their complaints; that was her food. Which was better: that, or life with rice and fish on your tray?

By the time our sisters went to work in the evening, our chores were

done, so we would often wander down to the sea. In Sandakan the water was so clear you could see right down to the ocean floor. It was beautiful. Black porgy and large fish with red and green stripes—I'm not sure what they're called—would swim by. We would roll up the hems of our kimono and wade out into the shallow water. The fish weren't afraid of people, so they would come right up close. We would entertain ourselves by chasing after them, or collecting the most beautiful shells you can imagine.

My village is not on the coast, but you can follow your nose to the sea, sniffing the salt air. Because Sakitsu is on a bay, you can swim and collect shells there too, but I had never once been in the ocean. Even though I was just a child, I was somehow always busy working. When I went to the South Seas I was able to play in the ocean for the first time. After wading in the water we would stroll along under coconut trees or through flowers as red as blood. Ohana, Tsugiyo and I would say to each other, "I'm so glad we came to the South Seas. Maybe I'll never go back to Japan."

It was two or three years after our arrival that we were forced to take customers. I had just turned thirteen. I will never forget that day when, right after lunch, Taroza faced the three of us and said, "Starting tonight you're to take in customers, just like Ofumi and the rest." Ohana, Tsugiyo, and I immediately retorted, "We aren't taking customers; no matter what you say, we refuse!" Then Taroza flew into a demonic rage, yelling, "Not going to take customers? What do you think you're here for?" Clinging to each other, we responded, "You brought us here when we were little without ever mentioning that kind of work, and now you tell us to take customers. You liar!"



From left to right: Osaki, Ohana, and Tsugiyo, in a commemorative photograph taken the day before the girls took their first customers. They are dressed in their best kimono.

He didn't flinch. Then, like a cat drooling over a captured mouse, he said, "I've invested two thousand yen in your bodies. Pay back the two thousand yen and you can forget the customers! Well, let's have it! Hand it over. If you can't pay me back you'd better just settle down and start taking in men tonight." How could we even think of repaying two thousand yen when we didn't have a single sen?⁶ So in the end we lost, and no matter how much we hated it, we had to start taking customers that night.

It was just about that time that Ohana and Tsugiyo first had their periods. I must have been late in maturing, but I still hadn't started. It wasn't until years later that I finally started menstruating; I must have been more than twenty. The bleeding, which should have lasted only three or four days, would last for half a month or a full month, and sometimes I thought I was going to die. You would think that at least when we had our

period, we wouldn't have to take customers, but the boss wasn't one to let that get in the way. "Just stuff some paper up inside you; it's no big deal," he would say, and sent the girls to work as usual. My period was irregular until I was thirty-four or thirty-five; then it stopped completely. When I asked others, they said that women usually have their period into their forties and that they can even bear children at that age.

Well, I've gotten stuck here talking about my period, but the first customers Taroza had us take in were native men. As I said before, the brothels of Sandakan were visited by men of all colors, from sailors of British, American, and French ships, to Japanese and Chinese, but Japanese prostitutes didn't like to take in Malaysians or natives of Borneo. Whether the man was English or native, the price was the same, but the natives were black, and to make matters worse, they were not civilized in the least and were made fun of by everyone. When we slept with these men we would feel that we, too, had somehow been transformed into natives. Among the native men there was an ethnic group called Mangage, whose bodies were larger than those of white men, and who had darker skin than other native men. Just looking at them would make our hair stand on end, and no one wanted them as customers. But Borneo was, after all, their native land, so there were far more native men than whites or Chinese. It wouldn't be good for the brothel business if prostitutes were to refuse native clients. The boss assigned us to native men from the first night, so that we wouldn't reject them later. And for two years straight we were forced to take native customers.

This was how the boss got us to sleep with native men, but after our first night, we were terrified. We hadn't realized that was what men and women did. It was so horrible, we could hardly believe it. That was how the three of us felt.

The population of northern Borneo, which the British had claimed as colonial territory, is quite sparse. In an area of 76,000 square kilometers, there is a population of about 270,000. The most prominent ethnic group is the Dusun, numbering about 100,000. These are primarily an agricultural people, who follow a primitive religion and who know nothing of modern civilization. Next we have the Bajau, who number 30,000, most of whom are fishermen and are Muslim. The Murats number about 20,000. These are a savage people who are extremely skillful hunters. They move their dwellings through the mountains

and plains, and adhere to a primitive religious faith. In addition to these, native ethnic groups such as the Idahan, Brunei, Sungei (river people), Kendayan, Bisaya, Sulu, and Tidong, all of whom are Muslim, are scattered here and there, but the population of each group is small. Nowadays one almost never hears anything about the Dayak, famed as head-hunters, who are now just barely holding out in the depths of the mountains, but when the author was living in Tawau City around 1918, one would get news of them from time to time. It seems that one had to be especially cautious around the twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth of February when they held a festival.

—Ouchi Hisashi, M.D., Professor of
Medicine, Taihoku [Taipei] Imperial
University, *Nettai no seikatsu jiten*
[Encyclopedia of Daily Life in the Tropics]
(Tokyo: Nanpo Press, 1942).

In the morning, East Indians serving as soldiers and guards would perform military drills. This was a most unusual sight. Two ethnic groups were employed as police in this region. One was a people called Bengali who were of large build and dark skin, with unkempt beards; the other, men from Luzon, were of short stature, with dark skin. Both groups wore khaki-colored uniforms with short pants, and held guns over their left shoulders. In place of a shoulder strap the Bengali squadron leader wore a three-inch strip of red cloth on his shoulder. Under his command were giants of over six feet, and small men, under five feet, all mixed together. As they advanced in line, or formed columns, they presented an extremely amusing spectacle, and I could hardly refrain from laughing when I watched them.

—Tazawa Shingo, *Nangoku mita mama no ki* [A Record of Observations of Countries of the South Seas] (Tokyo: Shinkodo Shoten, 1922).

I talked it over with Ohana and Tsugiyo, and we went over to the boss and said, “We’d rather die than do what we did last night! We won’t work as prostitutes!” Taroza glared at us and replied, “Well, if you’re not going to do that, just what kind of work *are* you going to do?” We braced ourselves and said firmly, “We’ll do the same kind of work we used to do. But no matter what anyone says, we’re not selling ourselves like we did last night!” Taroza looked over at his wife and grumbled, “Osaki, you’re the troublemaker here.” But when night fell, the boss came over and

started in again about the money. “Ready to hand over the two thousand yen, now?” And with that, he sent us off to work. When it came to a sum like two thousand yen, we didn’t know what was what, but we did know it was an awesome amount and we couldn’t say anything else to his face. There was no way out of it, so we went back to taking customers.

Still, he had really cheated us. The payment my brother Yasukichi received for my body before I left Amakusa was three hundred yen. In three years it had suddenly become two thousand yen. It was the same for Ohana and Tsugiyo, and was probably no different for Oyae or Ofumi, our older sisters at the brothel. When we asked Tarocho about this, he spat out that the amount beyond three hundred yen was spent for transportation by boat to Sandakan and for taking care of us for three years. Unlike money today in the postwar era, back in the Taisho period (1912–1925) two thousand yen was not an insignificant sum. Our thirteen-year-old bodies were firmly bound by that debt of two thousand yen, and we were to pay it back by selling our flesh. If a customer went home right away, without staying the night, we earned two yen. A single night’s stay was ten yen. We were to split the earnings evenly with the boss. It was arranged that our room and board would be taken out of his share; we were to pay for our own kimono and cosmetics out of our share.

You asked if our loan payment was included in the boss’s half of the earnings. No, that’s not how it worked. The two-thousand-yen loan was considered separately from his take of our nightly income. It came out of what remained of our share. Even if we took ten customers a night and earned twenty yen, the boss would take half of that, ten yen, and if he applied an additional five yen toward the loan, then we would have five yen left. If you subtract the cost of clothes, cosmetics, and other things, there was nothing left. If a girl had to borrow spending money or clothes money from the boss, or if she lost work time by being sick, she might owe well beyond two thousand yen. The loan would snowball, and she could never break away.

Of course, clothing expenses differed according to the item, but a *yukata* [light cotton kimono] would cost about one yen, while a kimono made of various types of crepe or brocade would cost about ten yen. A Hakata obi was about two yen.⁷ We could buy these things at a dry-goods

store opened by a Japanese. We didn't buy cloth and sew our own clothes; instead, we asked the store clerk to cut and sew the material for us. There wasn't one among us brothel girls who had taken sewing lessons. The cosmetics we had to have were a paste of white face powder and lipstick. The white facial paste was ten sen per bottle and lasted for about one month. In addition to these, we also had to buy underwear and tissue papers, so all together we spent about ten yen per month on cosmetics and related items. The brothel bosses would cut a deal with the owners of the dry goods and sundries stores, encouraging them to sell us kimono and cosmetics we didn't even need.

At the end of every month the boss would pull out his abacus and calculate our earnings. Calling out our names one by one, he would announce, "Osaki, your earnings are such and such, and your debts are such and such." He only revealed the results of his calculations. Oyae could read a little, but because Ofumi, Ohana, and the rest of us were totally illiterate, we didn't know how he came up with these figures. The boss could manipulate the accounts as he saw fit. Even so, if we received the same salary on months when we had an unusually high number of customers as on months when we hadn't done very well, even we couldn't help but feel that things were amiss. If we got angry and tried to approach him for an explanation, he would refuse to hear us out, rewarding our effort with nothing but his scolding.

Still, if you were determined to pay off your loan and worked very hard, it was possible to pay back one hundred yen per month. Be it ever so little, I looked forward to nothing more each month than hearing how much my debt had shrunk. No matter how revolting the work, when the boss made it clear that we either worked or coughed up two thousand yen, we understood that we had no choice. "Ohana, Tsugiyo, every extra customer is going to count. We've got to try to pay back that money as soon as possible and go home." After we had talked it over, we worked as hard as we could. Besides, in my heart I truly believed that my reason for going to the South Pacific was not to play, but to help my brother, so I threw myself into the work, hardly stopping to rest.

If I wanted to work hard to save money and reduce my loan, without ever slacking off, I couldn't be choosy about the customers, taking only

Japanese or whites. By welcoming native men who were rejected by other prostitutes, I was able to return one hundred yen per month. I truly hated this work at first, but after I had determined to save money to help my brother Yasukichi and return home as soon as possible, I went out of my way to allure every indigenous man on the streets.

Of course, the local native men paid the same as any other customer. It's just that I treated them all the same whether they were native men, or whites, or Chinese or Japanese. In order to attract native men, I needed to learn the native language. They taught me their language, word by word, until I could speak about almost anything. Of course there were other girls who picked up some of the local tongue, but none as fast as I did.

You want me to teach you some native words? Well, when I was in Sandakan I could speak the local dialect as well as Japanese, but now I've forgotten it completely. After all, I haven't used it in forty years.... I can remember about as many words as you can count on the fingers of one hand. The word for "water" is *airu*. Rice is called *nashi*. *Maakan 'nage* means "let's have some fun together." "Good night" is *tedo*, and *tedoru* means "to spend the night." "Go home" is *puran*, and when we said this, the native men would leave right away.

There was not a single native who became angry, even if we said "*puran*" as soon as they had finished their business. The native men treated us well. Never did they do anything rough. When it got out that I could speak their language, there were even natives who would regularly come from some distance just to visit me at Brothel No. 3. They all had very gentle dispositions. Having sex with them was easier for us than with other men, as they went about it simply and quickly. After the native men, the next best customers were the Americans and the English. Chinese men were kind enough, but they were persistent and clinging. Because we were so homesick we were all happy to receive Japanese men, but among them were our most disgusting customers. They treated us roughly, without the least consideration.

Besides the words I just told you, I can also remember how to count money. One yen was *sadodenge*, and two yen was *doadenge*. I can't remember how to say three yen. I think four yen was *anpadenge*. Five yen, six yen, seven yen, I've forgotten them all. Eight yen was *rappadenge* and

ten yen was *supporodenge*. Of course there were many different ethnic groups among the natives, but no matter who it was, they produced two yen when you said "*doadenge*" and four when you said "*anpadenge*," and they never tried to haggle down the price or jeer at us like the Chinese and Japanese. Since the job was the same whoever came, I tried to attract as many native men as possible so I could save up enough money to go home. Eventually I had the top earnings at Brothel No. 3. Whereas he had once said, "Osaki, you're the troublemaker here," now Taroza would look at the others and say, "There isn't one of you who draws in customers and works as hard as Osaki. You ought to follow her example!"

But even though I worked hard without discriminating among customers and paid back one hundred yen a month, the interest on my loan kept adding up. Things just didn't work out the way I had hoped.

How many men did I see in one night? Well, it's difficult to talk about. I don't know how much I can say.

Ohana, Tsugiyo, and I had shared the same room since we arrived at Brothel No. 3, but when we began to take customers we were assigned separate rooms. It was the same at other brothels as well, but because Brothel No. 3 was built by a Chinese man, it was built in the manner of a Chinese house. It was a two-story wooden house, surrounded by a brick wall. The roof was made of galvanized iron sheets, painted red, and the floors were laid with hardwood. It was only when we served liquor to the customers that we laid two or three mats down on the floor. The boss and his wife had the four-and-a-half-mat tatami room downstairs. Only that and one other room had tatami. This was a small sitting room of just three mats, where we took turns eating our meals.

Each of us prostitutes had one of the ten rooms on the second floor. They had wooden floors, but were about the size of a four-and-a-half-mat tatami room. The rooms were furnished only with a sleeping platform, a camphor wood trunk, and a basin of disinfectant. There were no curtains on the windows and not a thing you could enjoy looking at it. I love flowers. Since they were always in bloom, I would pick some any time I had a chance to get out and stick them in a bottle of water. You don't find those bright red flowers in Amakusa like they have in the South Seas.

When customers came we would lead them up to our second-floor room and have sex with them. If they left when they were done and did not stay the night, it was two yen. How long did it take for each man to come? Well, I'd say it was about three to five minutes. If the customer just couldn't seem to get on with it and took a long time, we would demand a bonus. If they stayed half the night, not from early evening, but from sometime after 11 P.M., the price was five yen. To stay the entire night was ten yen, but this meant we had to be with the same man from evening to morning, and so the entire night's earnings were only ten yen. If the customer didn't stay over, but left right away, we could take in any number of customers in one night, and so this was much better for us economically. The men who stayed overnight wouldn't let us get a wink of sleep. I really disliked these customers, but somehow I enticed them into doing things like taking me for a stroll along the beach and so on, and so there were some good times too.

We never forgot to disinfect ourselves when the man was done. Near the bed, in the corner of the room, was a basin filled with a red disinfectant solution.* Each time we finished we would carefully wash both the man's and the woman's private parts and wipe them with tissue paper. Because this solution chilled us inside, we prostitutes hardly ever got pregnant. They said it was to see if we had contracted a disease, but every seven days, without fail, we had to go the hospital for an examination. Syphilis—if you got that, you know, your body would rot. Your whole body would be covered with pustules and you would die a terrible death, or else you would go mad. We never missed an examination, because we didn't want that to happen to us.

*This refers to a disinfectant rinse. Usually the rinse consists of one thousand parts of cresol liquid soap (Lysol), one thousand parts lysoform, one thousand parts potassium permanganate, and so on. Corrosive sublimate solutions are seldom used. It is feared that especially in women a corrosive sublimate solution could be absorbed through the mucous membranes causing poisoning, and there is also the inconvenience that metal wash basins cannot be used. Moreover, because this type of solution causes proteins to solidify, it is not suitable as a disinfectant.

—Ouchi Hisashi, M.D., Professor of
Medicine, Taihoku [Taipei] Imperial

University, *Nettai no seikatsu jiten*
[Encyclopedia of Daily Life in the
Tropics], (Tokyo: Nanpo Press, 1942).

The following is extracted from a conversation with former vicepresident of *Dabao nichinichi shinbun* [The Davao Daily News] Hoshi Atsuhiko. (Mr. Hoshi spent two years, from 1919 to 1921 in Davao, working for the Department of Sanitation of the Philippine government as a syphilis inspector of Japanese prostitutes.) “In order to inspect for gonococcus, we would extract uterine secretions with a loop, transfer it to a glass and heat it over a burner. We would then add a liquid dye, rinse it with water, and look at it under a microscope. Inspection for syphilis was done by the Wassermann reaction. Inspection for gonococcus took place once a week, and for syphilis, once a month or once every two months. In either case, a schedule was observed regularly. If someone did not pass inspection, they had to stop work until the following week, and they were hospitalized in the Oriental Hospital run by the Philippine government. Gonococcus inspections were three yen per visit, and syphilis inspections were ten yen per visit. The prostitutes paid the fees. Inspections were compulsory, and a fine of thirty yen per inspection was assessed on prostitutes who did not show up.”

Most of the time we weren't deluged by customers, but when a ship anchored out in the harbor, every brothel in town was filled. While we were busy taking care of one customer, others would be lined up waiting outside the door. My very worst experience was having to take thirty customers in one night. A customer is a customer, so it didn't really matter to me how many of them bought the use of my "box," but this was far more than the usual gang, so I was totally exhausted. No matter how accustomed I had become to this work, once or twice a month I hated taking customers so much I thought I would rather die. There were times when I would break down and cry, wondering what sort of karma I had brought upon myself that forced me into this role. On days when I was feeling sorry for myself like that, I would have given anything to have a day off, but we were not given a single holiday. Couldn't we take a day off for New Year's and festivals, you ask? Sandakan was under English rule, so on British holidays the English stores and plantations would take the day off. When others had holidays, our establishments would be even busier than ever. Because Sandakan was a port town, steamers on the sea route from the Philippines would often enter the harbor, and whenever

they did we didn't get a wink of sleep. The boss wouldn't let us off even when we had our period. We simply stuffed paper way up inside and kept working. Not even when we were sick, whether it be colds, or upset stomachs, or headaches, could we take time off. Because we stretched our endurance to the limits, it was only rarely that one of us got pregnant. If a girl did get pregnant, she still had to work until the month the baby was due. I never conceived while I was doing this work, but Ofumi met someone she liked and got pregnant twice, giving birth to a boy and a girl. Both times Taroza made her take customers right up to the final month.

I don't know about the other girls in this business, but I did not once enjoy this thing that happens between men and women. I heard that there were some men and women who had good experiences, and the women even let out cries of ecstasy, but I never felt this way. Of course, I also uttered these cries. What did they call it? Service, that's it, extra service. But in my heart I just wished that the man would hurry and be done with it and leave. If I could have worked on my own to support myself I would have had no use for a man. The only reason I got together with Yuji's father after I stopped working as a prostitute was so that I could eat. It was certainly not because I wanted a man.

Well, this is what the prostitution business was like. After he had us trained in the business, our boss, Taroza, became more foulmouthed than ever. As long as we brought in a lot of money, things were fine, but just let the customers dwindle for a while and the money grow short. There was no end to his complaints. Taroza had chronic asthma. Whenever he became angry or received some unexpected news, he would go into a coughing fit. When earnings dropped, his complaints would inevitably bring on a bout of wheezing. Since it gave him so much pain, it seemed that he could have let up on the complaining, but he went right on.

Not a single one of us, not I, or Ohana, or Tsugiyo, or Ofumi, or Oyae liked the boss. And we weren't the only ones. There was also a girl named Toshiko who came three years later than we. She was Taroza's niece, whom he brought from Oniike in Amakusa to work as a prostitute. Toshiko absolutely loathed him. Not only that. Even Taroza's own wife hated him, and she became involved with a photographer named Kinoshita. This wife of his who was also from Oniike had been sent to

work at a brothel in Oura in Nagasaki. Taroza either bought her out, or stole her away, and brought her to Sandakan to be his wife, but until shortly before we arrived, he had her taking customers as well. This didn't happen only to Taroza's wife. There were lots of other wives of brothel owners who were forced to take customers. Since Taroza's wife was from Oniike, it's possible that even though Toshiko was referred to as Taroza's niece, she may actually have been one of his wife's relatives.

As I said, we all hated the boss, but then came the big event. It must have been about two years after we started working as prostitutes. Taroza's asthma worsened, and even though he shifted from one doctor to another, none could help him, and finally he died. Under normal circumstances, the wife would have taken over as proprietor of the brothel, but as I just explained, she was having a relationship with the photographer Kinoshita. So, when the boss died, she married the photographer as if she had been waiting for this day, and they both took off for Singapore.

According to the official register, Yoshinaka Taroza died in the English colony of Sandakan in North Borneo on October 29, 1918, time of death unknown. Yoshinaka Komu, of the same residence, reported his death to the authorities on December 3, 1918.

Since both the boss and his wife were gone, you might think that we were then free to go where we pleased, but that's not how it was. I don't know what sort of arrangements had been made between them, but when the boss's wife went to Singapore, his younger sister, Toyo, came to take his place and assumed the management of Brothel No. 3. Toyo had come to Borneo at the same time as, or just a little after, Taroza, and at first she had worked as a prostitute. I heard that she worked in Jesselton. A Kilin native bought her freedom, and she had a daughter named Michiyo. This Kilin man had dark skin, and was tall and thin, and so Michiyo was also a dark-skinned child. I heard that Michiyo returned to Japan after the last war. Taroza was bom in Takahama, so Michiyo may have gone to live there. She would have been a small child of three or four when I met her, so she must be getting on in years by now.

According to the family register, Yoshinaka Toyo was bom on May 6, 1880, at

No. 1,013 of XX Section, Takahama Village, Amakusa County, the third daughter of Yoshinaka Torajiro and Komu. [Translator's note: The original text is in error as to Toyo's birth date and father's name. The author corrected this information for the translation.]

According to the family register, Yoshinaka Michiyo was born on March 10, 1906, at No. 2,301 of XX Section, Tosaka Village, Aki County, Hiroshima Prefecture, as an illegitimate child of Riyo, the younger sister of Yamagata Yakichi. Yoshinaka Taroza acknowledged the child and reported this to the authorities on May 8, 1913. Michiyo was then registered in Yoshinaka's family register.

Well, as soon as Toyo arrived from Jesselton, she sold Brothel No. 3 in a snap, thinking she would just take off with the money. Ofumi and Oyae had made arrangements to move next door to Brothel No. 4. Since they were old-timers they had probably paid off their debts, and it was unlikely that Toyo could stop them. However, she said that because the four of us—Ohana, Tsugiyo, Toshiko, and I—still owed her money, she could not let us make our own plans for the future. Then she sold all of us except Toshiko—I'm not sure of the price—to a procurer named Matsuo Yashiro who had come from Singapore. Toyo must have realized that if she told us that she had sold us to Matsuo we would set up a clamor, so she silenced us by saying, "Circumstances are forcing me to have you move to a new place, but Matsuo will take you there and see to your needs. So please go quietly." Then Matsuo took the three of us to Jesselton. We thought we were to live in Jesselton now, and although it was painful to part with Ofumi and Oyae, there was nothing we could do about it, so off we went. But this wasn't just a change of residence. Toyo had sold us to Matsuo Yashiro, but then that loathsome man sold us to someone else. In the end we were taken from Jesselton to Tawau Island. If Jesselton was new to us, Tawau was equally strange. And it seems that when Matsuo sold us to another procurer he pocketed quite a sum of money, so that when we arrived at the brothel we were told that the loan we must pay off was even higher than before. After I had worked so hard at this disgusting business to pay off my debt and send even one more sen home each time to my brother, things turned out like this.

The three of us got together and made plans to escape Tawau and return to Sandakan. We decided on the day, and when our boss and his buddies

weren't observing us, we bought tickets in advance for the boat to Sandakan. On the day we were to leave, we went out in the middle of the day as usual as if we were just going to stroll about, and then we went right to the harbor and got on the boat. Everything seemed to be going well until we were on the boat and Ohana suddenly said, "When they discover we've run away, the boss at the brothel will figure that the only place we could have gone is Sandakan, and he's sure to come after us. I've heard that there are a lot more Japanese in Singapore than in Borneo, and the brothel business is flourishing, so why don't we just pass by Sandakan and go on to Singapore?" I thought this made sense, but Ofumi was just like an older sister to me, and I really wanted to stay in Sandakan to be close to her. Besides, I thought that we might have a chance with one of the brothel madams, Kinoshita Okuni. "I'm sure that if we all went to Okuni's place and begged her, she would think of something clever to say when the Tawau boss comes to search for us," I said, looking convincingly at Tsugiyo and Ohana.

Kinoshita Okuni was known as "Okuni of Sandakan," and there was no one in the South Seas who hadn't heard her name. She was born in Futae, in Amakusa. When she was young she was a live-in mistress for an Englishman in Yokohama, and she was waited upon as "the lady of the house." When this man returned to England Okuni was past thirty. She went to Sandakan and opened a general store and a brothel. When I met her she must have been close to sixty, and she was considered in a sense to be the manager of the Sandakan brothels. Usually the bosses of these brothels were all men, who could think of nothing else but squeezing the lifeblood out of us prostitutes, but being a woman, Okuni looked out for the needs of her girls. The prostitutes of Sandakan were constantly calling upon "Okuni-san" for one thing or another.

According to the official family register, Kinoshita Kuni was born on July 7, 1854, the second daughter of Kinoshita Tokuji, at No. 2,755, Futae Village, Amakusa County.

In this place there is a single female boss. Her surname is Kinoshita, and her given name is Okuni. This year finds her an elderly woman of sixty-three, and she single-handedly manages a general store and one brothel. When I questioned her, she said that her assets are worth more than ten thousand yen.

She came to this place over thirty years ago, and when I asked, “When did you most recently return to Japan?” she replied, “I returned seventeen years ago. My granddaughter is now attending a girls’ high school in Nagasaki.” This Kinoshita Okuni is truly the commander of the Japanese women’s brigade in North Borneo, and whenever a newcomer arrives, she seeks Okuni’s guidance. This elderly woman goes out of her way to help her fellow countrymen, and not only do the young flowers of Japan, our *Yamato nadeshiko*, receive her nurturing care, but even many Japanese men heed her counsel.⁸

—Tsubotani Zenshiro, *Saikin no nangoku*
[Countries of the South Seas in Recent
Times] (Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1917).

I decided to pay a visit to one of the famous products of Sandakan, Grandmother Okuni. She is extremely gentle in demeanor, with a slightly elongated face. Her distinguishing feature is a birthmark, the size of a bean, on the right side of her chin, from which grow three long white hairs. In addition to her lifelong role as commander of the women’s troops, she is very patriotic.⁹ She told me the tale of the boycott of Japanese goods which took place last year over the entire South China-South Seas region. Even though this is just a small part of her story, the episode describes her vividly. “Those were really terrible times. Once the Chinese found out that a shipment consisted of Japanese goods, they burned them, one after another. So I said to them, if you don’t want that stuff, give it to me. If you give those things to me, I’ll pray to God for your happiness. They had no personal reason to deny my request, but they said if they gave the goods to me, they would be in trouble with the others, so it couldn’t be helped. Watching them bum everything was so trying for me. If I had been a young man I would have killed the ten of them at once.” Tears rolled down her cheeks as she recalled those days.

—Tazawa Shingo, *Nangoku mita mama no ki* [A Record of Observations of Countries of the South Seas] (Tokyo: Shinkodo Shoten, 1922).

At the mention of Okuni’s name, the other two took strength, and as soon as the boat arrived in Sandakan and we set foot on land, we rushed to Brothel No. 8 and told Okuni our story. “Please help us,” we begged, prostrating ourselves before her. Then Okuni answered, “I understand your whole story from beginning to end, and somehow I’d like to help all three of you. But if three of you run away from Tawau and refuse to

return, things get complicated. I know how bitter this must be for you, but one of you has to return to Tawau. I'll talk to the boss there about the remaining two of you and pay off your debt." She was as straightforward as a man, and we knew that if she promised to do something she would stick to her word to the very end. We were so relieved that tears came to our eyes.

But, no matter how hard Okuni tried to smooth things out for us, one of the three of us would have to return to that place we had been so successful in escaping. Of course none of us could bear the thought of returning, so finally we decided to pull straws. We cut long, thin strips of paper and twisted them up tightly. The one who drew the shortest strip would be the loser. It was Ohana. Ohana protested, saying "I won't go. I want to stay with Osaki and Tsugiyo." But there was no way out, and finally she returned to Tawau. That was the last time I saw Ohana as a young girl. The next time I met her, I wonder how many decades had passed. It was after the war, when I returned to Amakusa. Still, I was happy just to see her again in this lifetime. After we were deceived and sold off to Tawau, I never again saw Yoshinaka Taroza's niece, Toshiko. I have no idea where she went. I haven't seen her since then, and I haven't even heard anything about her. It would be nice if she hadn't died and were still alive somewhere.

According to the official family register, Shoda Hana was married to Shimooka Toyohiko on October 7, 1943, at No. 1211 of XX Section, XX Village, in Amakusa County. The next year, 1944, she was divorced by mutual consent. She died on December 5, 1948, at No. 1211 of XX Section, XX Village, Amakusa County.

Because Ohana returned to Tawau, Okuni was able to save face, and Tsugiyo and I were able to move into Brothel No. 8. When Okuni negotiated with our former boss, she ended up paying two hundred yen for each of us.

For us, Okuni's establishment was just like heaven. Although it was the same old business, and we had to take customers, we were well seasoned by then, and we were simply grateful that Okuni treated all of us so kindly. At Brothel No. 3, Taroza and his wife ate well, while we were served much cheaper food. In all things they treated us as if we were many times their

inferior, but at Brothel No. 8 it was completely different. Not only did Okuni treat us as normal human beings, but we always ate the same food. Okuni was fond of pork and chicken, so we found such dishes on our tray almost every day. I wasn't used to meals like this, and I had never been fond of meat. Okuni noticed this. "It's because you don't like meat," she said, and kindly bought snapper for me and served it as *sashimi*.

Okuni told us that she had learned to play the shamisen when she was in Yokohama. "This is how you pluck the strings," she would show me, and when we all had a little free time she would sing with us. Although she sang and played the shamisen, Okuni would not touch a drop of liquor. She had such a fine character, and she spoke English fluently. She loved to take care of people, and she would often help someone out even if it meant borrowing money herself. It was strange that someone who liked people so much wouldn't drink at all.

But the rest of us drank. We didn't have any *sake*, so we drank beer or whiskey. When it came to beer, I could drink a dozen bottles of Kirin beer with no effect. I was seventeen or eighteen when I went to Okuni's place, and by the time I was twenty I drank like a fish. There was no reason that I had to drink, but if I drank and encouraged the customers to drink, our liquor sold well, and if the beer sold well, I made that much more money off the customer. Even now, though, I can't get along without *shochu*,¹⁰ After I moved into Brothel No. 8 I remained friends with Ofumi and Oyae, just as before. Brothel No. 4 and No. 8 were so close, it was like the distance from your nose to your eyes. There were a number of other girls at No. 4 as well. Ofumi had hit it off with a girl named Oshimo, and she and I became good friends also. Oshimo was born in Shimoda in Amakusa. If you go beyond Oe, there's a hot spring called Shimoda Onsen. I've never been there, but that's where my friend was from. After the last war was over she did return to Shimoda, but shortly after that she hung herself from a willow tree, and so she's no longer living. I feel so sorry for her.

According to the official family register, Mita Shimo was born on January 18, 1887, the third daughter of Mita Yutaro and Mita Sayo, in Shimoda Village, Amakusa County. She died on September 9, 1946, at No. 2,961 of XX Section, Shimoda Village, Amakusa County.

Oshimo was not at Brothel No. 4 for very long. A Malay native who lived in a place called Kozatoko took a liking to her, bought her freedom, and made her his wife, and so she moved to Kozatoko. "I'm lonely, so please come visit me," Oshimo had told us, so we went to see her many times. It was just a small boat, but her husband, the native man, was the boat captain, and he also owned some forest and flatland, so Oshimo was able to clothe herself in silk kimono. It was this Oshimo who, shortly afterwards, was to raise Ofumi's child.

I brought this subject up suddenly, so you don't know what I'm talking about, but because Ofumi was a beautiful woman, any number of Japanese and foreigners came to see her regularly. She was selective about her customers and never took native men. Among the Japanese men who came to visit her, one who was especially taken by her was a man named Yasutani Kiyoji. Yasutani had a huge coconut plantation in Sandakan, and already had a wife and children. He couldn't have a permanent relationship with Ofumi, but he came to visit her often. Ofumi became pregnant by him, and ten months later gave birth to a boy. Of course she couldn't very well raise him in the brothel. So, she approached Oshimo, who had married a native man but couldn't have children, and asked, "Would you take care of my child?" Oshimo was delighted, and agreed right away. This child is Matsuo. Now he is living with his real mother, Ofimi. She gave him up to Oshimo's care when Matsuo was an infant of one month.

According to the official family register, Matsuo was born on August 14, 1925, in Sandakan of the English colony of North Borneo, to Yoshimoto Fumi as an illegitimate child. He was registered by his mother Fumi on February 3, 1926. On December 6, 1929, Nakamura Ichiro of No. 94 Yachimata-cho, Imba County, Chiba Prefecture, legally recognized Matsuo as his own child.