

# Pacific Islands Women in the Eyes of the Travel Journalist Kanetaka Kaoru: Impressions from Her First Journey to the Pacific Islands in 1961

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## Abstract

In 1961 a renowned Japanese travel journalist Kanetaka Kaoru (b. 1928) paid her first visit to the South Pacific Islands to film television travel documentary program *Sekai no tabi* (“The world around us”). Her travelogue that derived from the journey recounts how Kanetaka’s opinion of feminine beauty evolved from comments on beauty by appearance to astute queries of what beauty means. Her views, which sometimes challenged the conventional sociocultural mores of the Japan of her time, developed from her own descriptions of and interaction with women, and from the responses of tourists to her appearance. In Fiji she became increasingly aware that beauty is not only about appearance, but also about the whole decorum reflecting manners and morals. In Papua and New Guinea Kanetaka’s observation of and interaction with the women prompted questions about aesthetics, which branched off to considerations of what it means to be a human being.

## Situating Kanetaka’s Journey

A woman clad in a *kimono* projects a confident smile. She spreads both arms at shoulder height displaying the draping sleeves of her *kimono*. In her left hand she holds a handbag bearing the Pan Am logo. Her eyes gaze out to the right, as if looking beyond the blank space toward future journeys. This is a photograph of Kanetaka Kaoru (b. 1928) taken at Haneda Airport in 1959, marking her inaugural filming trip for a program in a weekly television documentary *Sekai no tabi* (“The world around us”) (Kanetaka *Watakushi* 74–75).

Kanetaka’s program began amid a rapid transformation for Japan from the war defeat to economic recovery and recognition as a legitimate member of the international community. The hosting of the Olympic Games in 1964, and the preparation that preceded them represented a significant step for the Japanese in building awareness of cultural diversity across the world. *Sekai no tabi* was one of several television travel documentary programs of this period that met the public interest while foreign travel was still restricted and unaffordable for the vast majority. Unlike other programs *Sekai no tabi* rose to immense popularity and became a regular fixture in a family-friendly slot on a Sunday morning for 31 years until her retirement in 1990 (Yamaguchi 50–51).<sup>1</sup> Kanetaka garnered the admiration of a broad audience, especially young females, identifying her as one of Japan’s most respectable women as early as 1963 (“Gendai”). The program has a legendary status in Japanese television history. A public survey in 1996 by *Bungei shunju*, a monthly literary magazine, ranked the program at number four in the all-time best 100 television programs in Japan (369–71). Kanetaka’s fame is bound to continue and regenerate further interest as many of her programs are now available on pay-per-view streaming to Internet users in Japan.<sup>2</sup>

This article traces how Kanetaka’s descriptions of women in Fiji and the then Territory of Papua and New Guinea (hereafter PNG) evolved in the book she authored, *Sekai no tabi: oceania* (1962; hereafter, *Oceania*). The book originates from her first trip to the Pacific Islands in 1961, her sixth filming trip for the program. She and her two-man crew visited Australia, Fiji,

the then New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), and PNG over a three-month period. Kanetaka's approach to travel influenced both the theme and the content of her television programs and commercially published travelogues, giving them a semblance of ethnography. She identified herself as a travel journalist and took pride in her work of informing the Japanese public about the world. She claimed to have conducted extensive research before filming trips. She recorded the foreign landscape, customs, and people as much as possible on film and in the notes she made for her program (Kanetaka *Watakushi* 37+). Thus, her writing appears lacking in 'inner travel' of self-reflection and meditation – of a personal and political nature – including opinions on gender relations.<sup>3</sup> The opinions Kanetaka expresses deserve analysis for three reasons. First, Kanetaka is a female travel-writer in an age when travel-writing was a male-dominated genre. Second, the book sheds light on some of her private thoughts that her on-screen 'staged' persona does not reveal.<sup>4</sup> Third, her travelogue constitutes a rare example of a Japanese woman writing about Pacific Islands women after Japan lost its empire and while foreign travel was restricted. Thus, this article attempts to place the development of Kanetaka's views against Japanese and Western perceptions of Pacific Islands women, and the contemporary sociocultural attitudes of early 1960s Japan.<sup>5</sup>

The portrayals of Pacific Islands women by Japanese and Western writers share an overarching commonality. Scholars such as Naoto Sudo, Robert Thomas Tierney, and Fay Yuan Kleeman point to resonance between the Japanese and Western literary representations of the Pacific Islands and their women when critiqued through the lens of Orientalism. Sudo demonstrated how the Islander women get to present prospects of sex, romance, and marriage, which obliquely entice the Japanese to take up residence in the colonies, though the women also present the attendant risks of indigenization that would make it difficult for the Japanese to return and to reintegrate in mainland Japan. The mix of admiration and fear turns into a burden on the women's shoulders (Sudo 5–8, 35–38).<sup>6</sup>

Rod Edmund and Michael Sturma are a few of numerous authors who demonstrate a feedback loop between the Western perception of Pacific Island women and Western representation of them. The travelogue forms part of the literature on the Pacific Islands. Contemporary Pacific Islands scholars identify the linkage between the male-dominated writing on Pacific Islands women and imperial domination, and reject the Western patriarchal gaze on Pacific Islands women that turns them into fetish objects (Teaiwa; Trask). Yet, the Western perceptions of Pacific Islanders are by no means monolithic. The diversity becomes more apparent in Western women's travel-writing on Pacific Islands as Claudia Knapman's survey of over forty books of Western women's travel-writing demonstrates. She has found that some female travel-writers challenged the boundaries between 'us' and 'them' and questioned the worldview and the values inherent to their own societies after observing the Pacific Island societies (46–47). Margaret Jolly analyzed portrayals of Melanesian and Polynesian women from her case studies of Beatrice Grimshaw – a female journalist who was based in PNG and visited the Solomon Islands in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (105–111). She demonstrated that Pacific Islanders were often placed on a Polynesian–Melanesian spectrum.<sup>7</sup> Polynesian women in Western writing were prized for their putatively enticing physical features and congenial traits that beckon the Western male conquest of Polynesia. Conversely, the women aroused fear of the potential entrapment in romantic liaison, especially when considering that the sailors spent weeks and months at sea. Jolly surmised that the depictions of the Melanesians tended to appeal to hardy masculine settlers because the Melanesians were likened to “darkness, danger, evil and cannibalism (and perhaps the darkest menace of all, the sexuality of the black man)” (108,

parentheses in original). These tropes divided the Pacific Islands into ‘good and bad uncivilized’ zones. In what seems to resonate with the notions of noble and ignoble savage, the Polynesians represented a good un-civilization of innocence and purity, and the Melanesians personified a bad un-civilization of bestiality and barbarism (Jolly 305, n.15).



Kanetaka Kaoru (left) in kimono meets Ruci Koroi (right) in ‘masi,’ a receptionist at Fiji Visitors’ Bureau for a shooting of *Sekai no tabi*. Photograph by Stan A. Whippy, published in *The Fiji Times*, 8 April 1961, p. 1.

### **The Fijian Beauty: Different Kinds of Beauty**

Kanetaka’s views of Pacific Islands women developed chronologically. Fiji is the first chapter of *Oceania* and features examples of how her superficial observations evolved into questions of ethnicity. Soon after her arrival she noticed Fiji’s women with curly hair and dark complexions, without attaching any judgment.<sup>8</sup> Then, Kanetaka observed how Fijian villagers made coconut oil, and learned that it “is the only cosmetic item they have” (118).<sup>9</sup> In Kanetaka’s interpretation, the Fijian women’s beauty rested on their preservation of tradition:

I went to see a modern Fijian girl who lives in town, and how she applies her make-up before going to work. On the dresser were a small jar of coconut oil and a comb. It was very simple . . . After combing the hair, she put coconut oil on her face and arms. That was all. Healthy shine is the Fijian women's beauty. It reminded me of how Negro [sic] women in America wore make-up. They put white powder on their faces, and put lipstick on.

One day foreign culture will arrive in Fiji. We may not see what makes Fijians beautiful. White powder and lipstick are fine . . . I secretly hope that Fijians will keep their carefree nature for good. It is their happiness. (118)

Kanetaka appreciated the beauty of the Fijian woman for her use of the single traditional 'cosmetic' item despite adopting a modern urban life. For the average Japanese reader, Kanetaka's praise of beauty of dark-skinned people may come as a surprise. It challenged prejudice in Japan against people of darker hue that is said to date back to the Heian-era aristocrats (AD 794–1192) holding sun-tanned peasants in contempt. This prejudice found a new expression in the five-color scheme propounded by the Meiji-era intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi. The scheme placed the dark-skinned people on the lower rungs in the ladder of civilization (Russell "Other" 90–99; Ishikawa 411–13).

Though Kanetaka's praise may be novel, it resonates with the imaginative and symbolic figure of "the South Seas maiden" that Sturma's study of Western representation of Pacific Islands women has identified. One aspect of "the South Seas maiden" is the preservation of feminine beauty by adhering to the indigenous wisdom of simplicity that others lost along the way to civilization (3). Kanetaka applauded the simplicity of coconut oil for bringing out the innate beauty of the Fijian women. However, she was equally concerned about the march of modernity that can blemish their 'healthy shine.' The notion of contamination was also extended to the adverse effect on their 'carefree nature' and 'happiness.' This is a role the travelogue plays as salvage ethnography; the traveler witnesses the islanders before colonialism and modernity destroy the timeless and the traditional (Holland and Huggan 96–7; Youngs 95). Thus, the sight of Afro-American women represented entrapment by the cosmetic industry and accentuated Kanetaka's pleasure in finding a timeless simple past in Fiji.

Subsequent to this observation, and still in Fiji, Kanetaka made another comment on Fiji's women at the hotel in the capital of Suva:

One of them was someone who looked like a mix of my favorite actresses, Ava Gardner, Cyd Charisse and Anne Miller, and then turned this woman into an 18-year old. What mix is she? How can someone be born with wonderful looks? As far as she knows, she has six [sic] origins: from India, Britain, Tonga, China and Samoa. But she does not know the earlier ones. Some people often ask her if she is Tongan. "How rude," she says. I ask her why. "I was born and raised in Fiji; I am a Fijian," she replied. Her face tells me it is a matter of course that she should take offense at this question. (131)

Kanetaka seemed to regard the Fijian woman and the receptionist as representing different types of beauty. The Fijian woman was beautiful for her supposed continuity of the cultural tradition she represents. The receptionist was heralded as an epitome of modernity by ethnic mixing as exemplified by her comparison with three Hollywood actresses, even if it were to give her readers immediately identifiable points of reference.

The receptionist's self-proclaimed mixed parentage and Kanetaka's reaction feed into what Peter Hulme thinks is a popular theme that travel-writing promotes, "the ideal of cultural

harmony through romance” under colonial encounters (qtd. in Pratt 95). Indeed, the receptionist’s heritage, the British, Indian and Chinese heritage, testifies to the successive waves of migration to Fiji after it formally became a British colony in 1874, and bolsters the harmonious vision. Yet Vicki Luker documented that the white colonists in the tropic South Pacific thought of the women of mixed descent as “tragically alluring,” for liaison with them could cause further social and racial disarray (309).

Kanetaka’s fascination with the receptionist attests to the prevalence of the Polynesian–Melanesian beauty scale. It also reveals the limitation of the conventional cultural geography of Oceania, a product of European voyagers’ and missionaries’ accounts, placing Tonga firmly in Polynesia and Fiji, ambivalently, on the boundary between Polynesia and Melanesia. Moreover, Tonga, Samoa, and Fiji were locked in continuous shifts of political rivalry and dynastic alliance long before European arrival. The tourists’ misidentification not only offended the receptionist’s island pride, but also exposed the tourists’ preconception that privileges Polynesian appearance above the Melanesian. Kanetaka’s fascination with mixed descent women sent a message closer to the Japanese readers:

At a beauty pageant held every September those mix-blood beauties are always elected, and are called Miss Hibiscus. Miss Philippines of 1960 is one-quarter Japanese. Then I remembered a girl I met at the girls’ school [in Fiji]. Could we not have a Miss Fiji who is one-quarter Japanese? The beauty contest backed by the Tourism Bureau in this island could inspire novel imagination. (131)

Kanetaka’s comments on Pacific Island women’s beauty may endorse the colonial vision of Nanyō-Orientalism, and naïve cosmopolitanism of ‘racial harmony through romance’ which Hulme has signaled. Of the school-girl, Kanetaka reported that, “without being partial, to me she looked the prettiest of all 200 girls at the school” (102). Her comment can be read against the social tension simmering from the 1950s when ethnic homogeneity took hold of the mainstream Japanese national conscience. The children of mixed descent, especially between American-GIs and Japanese partners, bore the brunt of stigmatization, ostracism and bullying (Dower *Defeat* 211; Fish 45; Russell “Other” 104–105). Kanetaka’s statement is not merely an idealistic or sanguine forecast but also a critique of the maltreatment of children of mixed descent in Japan and the emergent national ethnic discourse.

Kanetaka’s repeated affirmation of ethnically-mixed women in *Oceania* may elicit a question about why she was so enthusiastic about those women. Though a sideline issue, newspaper and magazine articles made circumspect comments such as her “exotic look” and “slightly dark complexion” (“Gendai”; “Chotto”; “Terebi”). A newspaper article in 1971 reported her facial features were typical of the Indian aristocracy, intimating her mixed parentage. To this Kanetaka was quoted as responding, “I do not think that I have blood from there” (“Okao”). The closest hint found in printed sources is that her real given name is the English-sounding Rose, not Kaoru (Nichigai Associates 51).<sup>10</sup> Even if her mixed-parentage were true, her open denial and the use of her ‘stage name’ speak volumes about Kanetaka’s handling of the pressure toward ethnic homogeneity, and how to avoid the risk of a backlash from socially conservative groups in Japan. Against this backdrop, her affirmation of those ethnically-mixed women turned her aesthetic comment into a political one.

Even if she were ‘pure Japanese,’ her travel experience gave credence to her speaking against the absurdity of race. At the outset of her travelogue, she wrote about the entry card to Australia that asks the color of the skin, the hair, and the eyes. The card prompted her to recall a “bitter experience of racial discrimination” on a previous filming trip in South Africa in which

the black press derided the honorary white status the apartheid regime accorded to her and her film crew (8–9). Intentionally or otherwise, the examples of ethnic heterogeneity from a remote society may have served as subtle rebuttal of the ethnic homogeneity discourse, and advocacy of the welfare and the acceptance of people of mixed-descent.

### **“A Typical Tahitian Woman”**

Those observations suggest Kanetaka’s growing awareness that ambiguous appearance can elicit responses from other people. Kanetaka’s travelogue related another incident in which feminine appearance and beauty became the central subject. Kanetaka took a boat ride near Suva. She and other passengers swam and then returned to the boat. After taking refreshment, the captain’s wife wrapped a sarong over Kanetaka and put a hibiscus flower in her hair. The boat then arrived at a small island:

I got off the boat without changing [my clothes]. Tourists were taking photographs. They were saying ‘Tahitian woman!’ They probably can see from my hair that I was not a Fijian woman. But who would have thought I had come from the Oriental islands of Japan? While I was thinking of how to surprise them, I heard someone say ‘A typical Tahitian woman.’ I thought again. When I passed by the gentleman [who made the comment], I put on a false air and said ‘Merci Monsieur’ in French. By now, he must be showing his photograph saying ‘This Tahitian woman was ...’ I am quite sure he is pleased to keep his dream alive. I cannot help smirking when I think of this episode. (135)

Kanetaka realized the potential of her appearance to excite the tourists, and she drew their attention to herself for her own enjoyment. Attention drawn to her appearance was not a new experience for Kanetaka. In November 1957, two years before starting her work on *Sekai no tabi*, she won a beauty contest hosted by Universal Studios in the United States (Kyōdō tsūshin), and posed for the aforementioned photograph taken before her first filming trip in 1959.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, following her television debut and repeated travel it would be difficult to imagine that Kanetaka was averse to public attention. She was confident that her playful yet modest mannerism would keep the tourists’ dream intact. In turn, their excitement encouraged her to parody their imagination. Kanetaka’s reply, ‘Merci Monsieur,’ reinforced two attendant stereotypes of ‘South Seas maiden’ Sturma finds. First, the Tahitian woman in the Western imagination has long been regarded as “the psychic center of the South Seas [that has] provided the template for the South Sea maiden” (10). Second, a stereotypical ‘South Seas maiden’ has modest mannerism and acts in deference to male authority (69–70). While her enjoyment of the tourists’ attention suggests the absence of feminist perspectives, Kanetaka’s becoming a target of “the tourist gaze” was a deliberate act that fed tourists’ “imaginary geography” of the proverbial Pacific islands (Urry and Larsen 115–16). The tourists’ mistake was a correct one, which Kanetaka exploited; it raised her awareness of gender and ethnic stereotypes, and gave her the impetus to parody them.

### **The Ogre and Ladies’ Behavior**

Thus far this article has discussed Kanetaka’s responses to Fiji’s women based on their appearance, but not their character. Kanetaka’s awareness of feminine quality began to develop beyond appearance to include character when she compared the Fijian women with a small population of ‘Europeans’ who occupied managerial roles in the colonial government and

economy. After a day's filming, Kanetaka and her crew went to see the night life in Suva. They visited The Golden Dragon – the legendary bar and nightclub. Upon entering there she was immediately struck by what she saw as the tawdry seediness. She met a Fijian couple and invited the woman to drink a highball but the woman politely declined the offer:

'It is not about the law. It is not appropriate for ladies to drink. What about in Japan?' I was taken aback. I looked around. Most Fijian women were accompanied by white men. While they looked inebriated with their ties loosened, the women drank Coke or water, and looked calm and composed. What a nice contrast this was. (144–45)

Kanetaka seemed amused at the disparity between the white men and Fijian women. White men who are supposed to be the paragon of the racial hierarchy had succumbed to the temptation of alcohol and lost their manners commensurate with their supposed superiority, whereas the Fijian women, ostensibly ranked as inferior in ethnicity and gender, had retained their composure. However, this 'nice contrast' is a reflection of colonial societies. As Kanetaka reported, the prohibition of the sale of alcohol to Fijian men was lifted in 1959, but some bars, including The Golden Dragon, still did not sell alcohol to Fijian women. She found the restriction of the sale of alcohol to Europeans was common in colonies, but found it discriminatory (145). Kanetaka seemed impressed with Fijian women's apparent pride in temperance, but overlooked one aspect of the Fijian social mores. The consumption of alcohol was proscribed by the Methodist Church – whose membership has been predominantly Fijians.<sup>12</sup> Even if the woman were not a Methodist, her response underscored her honoring the Victorian feminine virtue of temperance, and the legacy of missionary enterprise to 'enlighten' the Fijians. In contrast, the white men represented moral degradation of indulgent excess.

Soon, Kanetaka noticed a couple at the next table – a white couple, a Royal New Zealand Air Force officer and his wife, who was drunk and growing rowdy. She accosted one of Kanetaka's colleagues:

She was acting under the illusion of being a queen . . . She pointed her nose up, and demanded [of Kanetaka's colleague] 'Get this one to take my photograph.' Then, a waiter brought us drinks. But the woman waved her hands and turned him away as if he were an undesirable character. I got annoyed.

I put on a false smile, and said to her 'We do not have enough exposures left.' I added 'fortunately' softly, and returned to my seat. I cannot imagine what would have happened if the woman had heard my last word. But what she heard was enough to make her so angry like a red-faced ogre. If a cannibal was said to look like this woman, then her face would cause the faint-hearted to pass out. Luckily the background noise erased her scream; I could not hear her words. Her husband made a profuse apology to us, and tried to calm her down. So that she must have hurled words of abuse at us. If I had ever heard them, I, too, would have become an ogre. But God was on my side.

With the screaming voice of this red ogre behind, I looked at the calm Fijian woman. Then I thought about the role our exterior played. If we peeled it off, what would we look like? And how would we judge people's character? (145–46)

The last two sentences above reiterate Kanetaka's awareness that personal appearance has little bearing on the personal character, and her belief has taken on a non-racist angle. Just as white men lose their dignity to alcohol, the white woman has lost hers and turns into an arrogant

‘queen’ and ‘the red ogre’. The nickname, the red ogre, expresses Kanetaka’s annoyance at the inebriated woman. Known in Japanese as *oni*, it is arguably the most immediately recognizable demon in Japanese folktales. The *oni* typically has an imposing physique and a red face, which matches with the wife’s complexion from her drunkenness and anger. As such the name provides a sharp contrast to Kanetaka’s calm composure and tactful ‘white lie’ in refusing to obey the ‘red ogre’s’ command to take photographs. Readers, who remember the wartime Japanese propaganda, would draw a parallel between Kanetaka’s reaction to ‘the red ogre’ and the wartime representation of the Anglo-Americans as Japan’s “demonic Other” that sanctified Japanese moral purity against Western racism (Dower *War* 204+). Her caustic treatment of the wife does not mean Kanetaka adhered to the wartime ideology. Nowhere in *Oceania* does she derogate other white people during the journey with as strong a label as the red ogre or a cannibal. Kanetaka’s labeling of the white woman as a cannibal suggests the deterioration of the woman’s behavior below the dignity of a respectable human being. Kanetaka turned around this much abused yet powerful symbol applied to the Pacific Islanders. Her hypothetical musing of ‘peeling off the exterior’ embodies the idea that physical appearance has little to do with personal quality and sends a message debunking the assumed superiority of the white people.

### **Kanetaka in Papua New Guinea: Encounter with a Monster**

After visiting Fiji and Vanuatu, Kanetaka arrived in PNG. Here, her opinions about feminine beauty provoked new reactions, insights and questions. She and her crew visited the coastal village of Hanuabada near the capital, Port Moresby. Kanetaka was wearing her *kimono* even in the sweltering heat, and walked around the village trying to strike up a conversation with the residents:

I saw a child holding a pink Dakko-chan doll and an old woman who was using a Japanese wash-basin. I told them that we came from Japan, the country that might have scared them. But there was little reaction. I told them that those goods they were using were from Japan. They simply nodded or gave us a blank stare. (204)<sup>13</sup>

Kanetaka was bemused by the residents’ ignorance despite her effort in donning the archetypical Japanese costume, and impressing on the villagers that she comes from the country where their goods are made. Their blank reaction compelled her to mention the Pacific War to elicit a response. The meaningless ‘nodding’ and the ‘blank stare’ confounded Kanetaka and led her to conclude that their knowledge of Japan and their historical memory were negligible. Kanetaka’s disappointment underlined her unquestioning assumption that the ordinary Papuans should know about Japan and be impressed with her presence.

Kanetaka’s narration exemplifies a strategy that travel-writers use to separate ‘the Other’ and ‘us.’ As Debbie Lisle demonstrated, the separation is made clear by plotting ‘us’ at the front, and ‘them’ at the back of a linear historical queue of progress – in a fashion similar to Johannes Fabian’s concept, “the denial of coevalness,” that creates temporal as well as special differences (Lisle 217–18). Kanetaka projected the hierarchy between the Japanese as the advancing industrializing nation, and PNG as the backward one. When Kanetaka realized that the Papuans were ignorant and indifferent and could not initiate small talk, she excluded the Papuans from her historical queue altogether.

It is inconceivable that coastal Papuans would not remember the Japanese campaigns on their own soil, even some fifteen years later. In battles, Papuan men assisted the Australians, and were exposed to anti-Japanese sentiment and propaganda (Laracy 154 and 159). The absence of



men from the scene and the woman's deadpan response may well be interpreted as signs of reticence about welcoming strangers, especially when they were representatives of the former foe. Kanetaka then continued to stroll in the settlement and stumbled into a scene:

There was a monster covered in tattoos who did not look like a human-being, and was squatting down and making fire. The distinctively frizzy Papuan hair looked more unkempt. A red sarong with a floral pattern was wrapped around the hips. Even the fingertips had tattoos . . . When we began filming, this person looked up at last, and smiled at us. It was a woman with large and long breasts; the face, the neck and the breasts are covered with tattoos. (206)

In transmogrifying the woman into a monster, Kanetaka seemed unable to get over the tattoos as her gaze was fixated on them. She may have imposed the negative association of tattoo from the *yakuza* onto the woman.<sup>14</sup> Equating foreigners to monsters (*bakemono*) or aliens is an oft-used literary strategy to represent 'the Other.' For instance, the Westerners arriving in Japan in the mid-nineteenth century bore the brunt of the monster label, which allayed the Japanese anxiety toward the new strangers (Morton 3). Kanetaka's caricaturing is an example of the Western tendency to ascribe to the Melanesians the burden of uncouthness and 'the bad uncivilized.' Kanetaka continued to watch the same woman and her child:

Near us was a child, perhaps about two-years old. The child was in underwear and clung to that woman. We sensed no danger and we walked down to the beach and slowly approached towards them . . . Despite the looks the woman did not express suspicion to us. Rather, she is watching her own child's crying as if it was an unexpected occurrence. A crowd began to gather. From an alleyway between the stilt houses other Papuans shouted at something. Then the woman looked the other way and smiled. I wondered if she was an idiot or imbecile, and began to feel sorry for this monster. I went closer and tried to initiate a conversation, but the white guide stopped me. We left here feeling half-relieved. (207)

Witness how Kanetaka began to associate the woman's personal character. Her apparent indifference to her child's welfare raised doubts about her intelligence. Kanetaka wondered whether the woman was 'an idiot or imbecile'. Kanetaka began to feel sorry for the woman – not as a fellow human-being, but as a human who has degenerated into a monster. The guide's intervention brought relief to Kanetaka as it seemed to vindicate her suspicion about the woman as a human incapable of initiating a conversation. The intervention prompted Kanetaka to ask herself:

Around the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the uncivilized people did not belong to the human species. But when we use expressions like 'human-like' and 'un-human-like,' what is 'human' in today's understanding? (207)

As we know, Kanetaka's views on women had shifted from comments on superficial appearance and beauty of women to beauty in demeanor. In PNG, her new reflection couched in the trope of civilization informed her subsequent observations. Kanetaka found another baby – a white-looking one, but the curly hair made her suspect the baby has white-Papuan parentage:

The marriage between the Papuans and the whites is prohibited, although it is not written in the law. While I was in New Guinea, the only mixed-blood person I saw was this baby. To me it was unimaginable that a white father would respect the tattoo-covered wife as the mother of their baby, and share the day-to-day living. But everyone has his or her inclinations. Mine may be those of a far-away society. In fact, once you get used to seeing the tattooed women, [they] become

the norm. The white women may look featureless. Those women with red lipsticks and eye glasses may look monstrous in some ways. (207–8)

Kanetaka was confronted by the baby because it defied her assumption that a white–Papuan liaison is not possible; her conjecture here demonstrated changes in her response to people of mixed-descent. Kanetaka’s response to the mixed-descent women in Fiji came with a romantic gloss. In PNG Kanetaka became aware that ‘inter-racial union’ demanded the white person to abandon the culturally-conditioned notions of beauty, and even the attendant concepts of civilization, to adopt the Papuan concepts. She assumed relatively easily that the father of the baby is white and the mother Papuan. It becomes problematic when one considers the relative ease with which Kanetaka makes this assumption without bringing her own logic into question. She seemed confounded and unable to comprehend how a white man found the Papuan woman attractive – rather than speculating how the Papuan woman could find the white man attractive. However, considering institutionalized racism practiced in many societies then – including the informal prohibition of white–Papuan marriage Kanetaka notes – the discussion of the ‘white-looking’ baby demonstrates her appreciation of relativity in aesthetic values. It undermines the Melanesian–Polynesian beauty spectrum, and promotes a liberal cause of parity in aesthetic values.

The question of ‘what it means to be a human’ remained in Kanetaka’s mind. At the final location of her journey, Goroka (in Highlands New Guinea), Kanetaka and the crew got to know two adolescent PNG girls. When they came to see off the Japanese visitors, Kanetaka gave a gift to Peni, one of the two girls. Within minutes before Kanetaka’s departure from Goroka, the colonist and the two companions came to see off Kanetaka and her crew. She decided to give Peni a gift of appreciation for her company – a dress Kanetaka had worn during her Pacific Islands journey. Peni tried it on, but her size is different from Kanetaka’s and she could not close the front buttons from her waist upwards. She left the buttons undone, which ended up exposing her stomach, but covering her breasts. Why the dress? Kanetaka explained:

Peni is at a good age. I didn’t want her to remain naked for good . . . Peni was so embarrassed, but she looked so happy and laughed aloud. ‘Happy?’ I asked. Then Peni coyly twisted her body in a show of self-consciousness. She is still a girl. The white guide told us that the dress would be a precious gift for the rest of her life. (252)

Kanetaka’s gift of her hand-me-down seems to mark the imposition of one civilization on another despite Kanetaka’s well-meaning wish against Peni ‘remaining naked for good.’ Kanetaka thought that Peni’s nakedness would not be appropriate for ‘good age.’ Although Kanetaka did not say, it is possible that she hoped that decking her in a dress would deter men from paying unwanted attention to Peni, whose reactions suggest her mixed emotions towards the novel gift. Yet, this was not the end to the farewell. Kanetaka asked Peni to keep the dress on, and to pose for the last scene of her program:

Peni became very serious and silent. When the interpreter hurried her into action, she screamed in protest. This looked like she was being executed. I was worried and asked the white man [what was going on]. He said she was embarrassed because she was at an age enough to know she did not want other men to see her . . . As a fellow woman, I don’t want to force something mortally embarrassing on to another female. So I reluctantly gave up and said ‘That’s enough.’ But then Peni looked so mortified. (253–54)

Witness how Kanetaka was pulled between her journalistic mission and female solidarity for a moment. As a journalist, Kanetaka felt compelled to record the success of her trip in a hurry by filming Peni as a metaphor of the conventional happy ending for the tale. As a fellow female, Kanetaka sensed the enormity of unwanted attention from males and embarrassment the dress has caused in Peni's mind. Peni's reaction propelled Kanetaka to abandon the shooting, but did not seem enough to bring relief to the 'mortified'-looking Peni.

Kanetaka then reported Peni growing comfortable around her and eventually following her to the aircraft. Kanetaka and her crew boarded the aircraft and waved their hands prodigiously at Peni. Through the window, Kanetaka noticed that Peni was looking at the aircraft without any expression:

What on earth is Peni thinking? Is she thinking 'That was the foreigner who readily gave me her precious dress. Is she a human?' I wonder if she wants to go back to the village and show it off. I left Goroka while imagining what tricks of fate my dress would play on the Papuan girl. (254)<sup>15</sup>

As the plane took off, Kanetaka returned to her civilization and Peni was left in hers. Yet again, however, the departure evoked for Kanetaka the question, 'What is it to be a human?' Although she did not disclose what 'tricks of fate' she thought may befall Peni, we know something of what Kanetaka gained; she empathized with Peni enough to wonder what Peni was thinking of Kanetaka, and whether Peni thought of Kanetaka as a human-being.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In the annals of Japanese travel-writing on the Pacific Islands, *Oceania* occupies a unique position for her authorship, the time she traveled and wrote and the popularity she enjoyed as a travel journalist. Broadly speaking Japanese literary representation of Pacific Islands women shares commonalities with the Western counterpart – the travelogue is one such medium. *Oceania* contains candid and vivid impressions that the television medium may not have permitted. Her accounts of the women of Fiji and PNG trace the progression of her observations and opinions of the women. Kanetaka's descriptions of women and her thoughts of human civilization resonate with Knapman's finding about some Western female travel-writing. Kanetaka articulated her awareness of the feminine beauty and even raised questions that tied human civilization and beauty. Initial responses were superficial comments on the appearance. However, the Fijian women's use of coconut oil prompted Kanetaka to relate questions of feminine beauty with the preservation of tradition and the potential effects of modernization. Kanetaka's affirmation of the beauty of females with mixed heritage, though seemingly idealistic, has the political undertone that challenges the ascendant paradigm of the Japanese ethnic identity. We have seen how Kanetaka turned herself into the center of unexpected attraction as a Tahitian beauty, and parodied the Western fantasy about Pacific Islands women. The ambiguity of appearance seemed to have informed Kanetaka that appearance should not determine the beauty of the personal character. The contrasting sights of the white men and Fijian women, and the encounter with 'the red ogre' showed that superiority of the white people is only skin deep when they fail to maintain personal decorum and comportment.

Kanetaka's subsequent descriptions of women were increasingly informed by the notion of civilization. This became more apparent in PNG. The first impression of the Papuan women confronted Kanetaka and led her to consign them to 'the bad uncivilized.' Soon, though, she became aware that each society holds different and equal notions of beauty. She began to see the

Papuan society through a new question, ‘what does it mean to be human,’ and concluded that a mixed liaison demanded the suspension of one’s aesthetic values. This question became a recurrent motif throughout her visit in PNG. Kanetaka’s parting gift to Peni caused a not-so-happy end but illustrated the gap between two cultures – one Kanetaka’s and the other Peni’s. Kanetaka’s sensitivity seemed to have grown, enabling her to question herself on what human qualities she may have in Peni’s eyes. Kanetaka’s journey gave her opportunities to engage with the notions of feminine beauty beyond skin-deep appearance. Though she did not offer her final conclusion, her travelogue tells us how her journey has helped her to relate the notions of beauty to tradition and modernity, ethnicity, civilization, and the meaning of humanity, which subvert the extant notions of beauty ascribed to the women of Japan and Pacific Islands.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The travel restrictions were lifted in 1964, the year of the Tokyo Olympic Games. Yamaguchi 29. In this article I follow the East Asian name order that features last name first when referring to the works by Japanese authors. Exceptions apply to authors whose original work is published in English.

<sup>2</sup> TBS-on-Demand is one of several outlets from which viewers can purchase her programs, only available to viewers in Japan. <http://tod.tbs.co.jp/item/2049/>

<sup>3</sup> Earlier feminist analyses have drawn criticism for emphasizing the achievement of political emancipation while overlooking the travel-writers’ presence and role in the broader contexts of imperialism. Mills 35; Youngs 134.

<sup>4</sup> I do not, however, intend to reconstruct Kanetaka’s private thoughts in entirety. As with any broadcaster, and writer, she was subject to the broadcasting and publication codes and the expectations from the television station, sponsors and her audience.

<sup>5</sup> For a study of Kanetaka’s impressions of Fiji related in the same book, see Ryota Nishino, “Tales of Two Fijis: Early 1960s Japanese Travel Writing by Kanetaka Kaoru and Kita Morio,” *The Journal of Pacific History*, 2014 forthcoming.

<sup>6</sup> How and whether the Japanese writers consciously appropriated the Western imagination, or whether the Japanese writers developed these ideas independently are questions that await future research.

<sup>7</sup> The geographical appellations of Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia are a European construct. I use them to subject them to criticism, not to endorse them.

<sup>8</sup> Historically, ‘the Fijian’ denotes ‘the ethnic or Indigenous Fijian’ (or ‘iTaukei’) to distinguish them from Fijians of other descent, such as Indo-Fijians, Chinese-Fijians, Rotumans and part-Europeans (or known as ‘kailoma,’ meaning ‘mixed people’). Now the ethnicity-based appellation is increasingly considered inimical to the formation of a common national identity. To foster inclusive citizenship, the current government prefers all citizens to be called ‘Fijian’ irrespective of their ethnic background. In this article I use the term Fijian for ‘ethnic Fijians’ to parallel Kanetaka’s usage in her writing.

<sup>9</sup> The translation of Japanese text into English is mine.

<sup>10</sup> *The Fiji Times*, Fiji’s established daily newspaper, introduced Kanetaka as “Miss Rose Kanetaka,” 18 Mar. 1961, and 8 April 1961.

<sup>11</sup> Kanetaka’s winning the contest was reported in the Japanese media. The report is reproduced with Kanetaka’s photograph. Kyōdō tsūshin, “Ichi’i ni Kanetaka Kaoru san: eigasha no bijin

kontesuto.” [Kanetaka Kaoru Wins a Beauty Contest Hosted by a Film Company] *News47*, 14 Nov. 2011. Web. 25 May 2014.

<<http://www.47news.jp/PN/201111/PN2011111401000057.html>>.

<sup>12</sup> Two official censuses, of 1956 and 1966, show near identical figures on religious affiliation of the ethnic Fijians. Both censuses indicate almost all Fijians were Christians (and Fijians made up 92% of the Methodist church members). Of these Fijian Christians, 83% were Methodists; 12%, Roman Catholics; 2.3%, Seventh-day Adventists. McArthur 39; Zwart 56.

<sup>13</sup> The inflatable doll Dakko-chan reached feverish popularity in the 1960s. Shaped as an infant, its arms and legs are designed to clamp onto the owner’s arm when inflated. The black body and the grass skirt readily evoke the semblance of the golliwog and Sambo. It is possible that Kanetaka assumed the doll to be Dakko-chan for its baby-like appearance. The manufacturer withdrew Dakko-chan from its corporate logo in 1989. Russell “Race” 23.

<sup>14</sup> It is often said that the members of the *yakuza* – Japanese organised crime syndicates – wear tattoos. The tattoos then carry the connotation of underworld criminality.

<sup>15</sup> Goroka is in the former New Guinea, not in Papua. Kanetaka seems to use Papuan as a generic term for the indigenous people of PNG, rather than denoting Peni’s geographical origin.

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