

MOKUYO-TO NO ONGAKU¹

Music and the Japanese Community in The Torres Strait (1890-1941)

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an account of the music culture of the Japanese community who resided on Thursday Island and/or worked in the Torres Strait from the 1890s-1941². While the maritime resource industry that prompted most Japanese to work in the Torres Strait has been studied in detail by Kyuhara (1954, 1977), Ogawa (1976) and Ganter (1988, 1994); the social and cultural aspects of the Japanese community have been little documented or commented on. As a result, this study primarily draws on material published in the Thursday Island newspaper *The Torres Strait Pilot*³; incidental references in other published sources⁴; and oral history interviews conducted by the authors in Wakayama prefecture (Japan) in November-December 1999⁵.

The designated period for this study commences with the first recorded accounts of the Japanese community on Thursday Island and closes with outbreak of the Pacific phase of World War Two in 1941 (when Japanese residents and contract workers in the area were first interned and then repatriated to Japan after the cessation of hostilities). Following a brief historical introduction, the chapter is divided into three parts. The first section describes the development of the Japanese community on Thursday Island in the period 1890-1905 and their participation in public culture; the second concerns the internal culture of Japanese residents and workers; and the third, aspects of cultural engagements between Japanese and Torres Strait Islanders.

(NB: Quotations from interview material gathered by the authors are indicated in the text of Sections III and IV [below] by the reference 'interview 1999').

I. THE CONTEXT OF JAPANESE INVOLVEMENT IN THE TORRES STRAIT

Historical records indicate that Japanese fishing boats exploited the marine resources of Micronesia, the Indonesian archipelago and areas of Melanesia between the 14th and early 17th centuries. Some accounts suggest Japanese navigation of areas of Australia's north eastern coast in the same period (Reid, 1954: 2) and the Japanese buccaneer Nagamasu Yamada is reputed to have visited the Torres Strait between 1628-1633, to have become aware of the area's pearl shell resources and to have landed a party on nearby Cape York Peninsula (Lack, 1960: 19). Despite this history, Japanese exploration and trading in Australo-Melanesian waters ceased by the late 1630s due a series of imperial edicts which effectively isolated Japan from contact with those European powers then beginning to establish imperial bases in the Asia-Pacific region (Frei, 1991: 17). For the next two hundred years, until US Commodore Matthew Perry's naval incursion into Tokyo Bay in 1853 (and subsequent treaties), Japan remained a largely closed society⁶. Restrictions on foreign contact were formally dismantled during the early Meiji Period, commencing in 1868, and Japanese nationals began travelling and working overseas soon after⁷.

In 1877 Queensland regional government offices for the Torres Strait were relocated from Somerset, on the northern tip of the Cape York Peninsula, to Thursday Island (Waibene)⁸. Following the establishment of administrative offices, the Island was increasingly used as base for various pearling operations and became a regular port-of-call for international steamers travelling through the Torres Strait. The first Japanese person to reside on Thursday Island appears to have been Kojiro Nonami, from Hirose in Shimane Prefecture, a sailor who travelled to Thursday Island after being discharged from his ship in Sydney in 1878⁹ (Frei, 1991: 48). After arriving in the Torres Strait, Nonami obtained work as a pearl diver and became known for his accomplishment in this occupation. Following his example, other discharged Japanese sailors began travelling to Thursday Island to take up diving and also proved competent and reliable. By the mid-1880s there were some ninety Japanese divers on Thursday Island, comprising a significant, but still minority, group within an ethnically diverse labour pool (Ganter, 1994: 101). Literally translating its English-language name, Japanese residents adopted the name of *Mokuyo-to* for their new domicile.

II. PRESENCE AND ALLEGIANCE (1890-1905)

This situation of Japanese nationals on Thursday Island altered significantly in the 1890s when the Australian maritime company Burns Philp collaborated with Japanese agents to recruit divers into the Torres Strait pearling industry direct from Japan (and from ports, such as Hong Kong and Singapore, where Japanese sailors were often discharged from employment). Japanese business interests also identified Thursday Island as a strategic site for commercial expansion in north eastern Australia. As a result, the Japanese presence on Thursday Island swelled

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dramatically during the decade, as divers, *karayukisans*¹⁰, merchants and their families moved to the Island. The interests of this new, rapidly expanding population were (informally) managed by the *Nihonjin kurabu* (Japanese association), established in 1893 in consultation with businessmen and politicians in Japan¹¹.

The generally acknowledged leader of Thursday Island's Japanese community in the period 1893-1901 was Torajiro Sato¹². Unlike many Japanese who sought employment in the Torres Strait in order to escape the poverty and limited opportunities of rural regions, Sato exemplified the emergent, internationally aware Meiji Era Japan. Initially employed as an apprentice in a trading company in Yokohama, he travelled overseas in the mid-1880s and completed a Law degree at the University of Michigan. After returning to Japan he married a woman from Wakayama prefecture¹³ and re-located to her home village of Kozagawa cho. While resident there he was identified by the Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs, Munemitsu Mutsu, as a suitable person to manage and assess the potential for developing Japanese trade in the Torres Strait¹⁴. Accepting this 'commission' he departed for Thursday Island in 1893. Upon arrival he established himself as a "merchant and general dealer" directly importing goods from "Europe, China, Japan and the Southern Colonies"¹⁵ and accrued considerable personal wealth from his business.

At the time of Sato's arrival there were some five hundred Japanese nationals present on Thursday Island¹⁶, approximately half of who came from Wakayama prefecture¹⁷ (Hattori, 1894: 20-21). The sizeable proportion of Wakayamans merits comment. Although isolated from the nearest metropolitan centre, Osaka (let alone faraway Tokyo), by lack of road and rail links until the mid 20th century, the coastal fringe of Wakayama exemplified the paradoxes of (simultaneous) isolation and connectivity discussed by Clifford (1997). While Commodore Perry's arrival in Tokyo Bay in 1855 precipitated the demise of Japanese isolationism, the first contact between Japanese and visiting US ships occurred some sixty-four years earlier in Wakayama. The contact occurred when the Boston merchant ship *Lady Kendall* moored off the Kii peninsula, at the south eastern extreme of Wakayama, and tried (unsuccessfully) to trade otter skins with the local population. Departing after thirty five days without having conducted commerce, Captain Kendrick nevertheless noted the friendliness of his reception, which passed into local folkloric memory¹⁸.

With the lifting of restrictions on overseas travel in the 1870s, young men from Wakayama's fishing villages were quick to seize the opportunity for travel and the possibility of economic advancement offered by working overseas. As Ganter has summarised:

Tokyo was further away in the imagination of these villagers than was Thursday Island. To the young boys, who at age 17 had been neither to Tokyo nor abroad, the distances involved were merely conceptual. In some villages it was common for the more enterprising among them to go to Thursday Island if they had the chance, whereas other villages looked to America or Brazil to escape the narrow career opportunities and poverty at home. (Ganter, 1994: 119)

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By 1897 new arrivals from Wakayama and Ehime prefectures boosted the number of Japanese nationals resident on the Island (on temporary or semi-permanent bases) to approximately one thousand. Japanese thereby comprised the largest ethnic group, outnumbering Euro-Australians by a ratio of almost 2:1 and other ethnic groups (such as indigenous Torres Strait Islanders, Aborigines, Filipinos, Malays and Chinese) by far greater ratios (Ganter, 1994: 105)¹⁹. Due to their status as foreigners in Australian territory, Japanese residents were excluded from the institutions and employ of local government and operated as a separate community with their own social and economic institutions and infrastructure²⁰.

The rapid rise in numbers and (perceived) insularity of the Japanese on Thursday Island caused considerable alarm among the Island's Euro-Australian population and administration; a feeling exacerbated by Japan's victory over China in the War of 1894-95 and fears over Japanese aspirations in the South Pacific. As the leader of the Japanese community and business sector, Sato was faced with the difficult task of attempting to maintain good relations between Japanese residents and the Australian administration and community at a time of considerable Australian anxiety over Japanese imperialist expansion (in a region in which British/Australian control had only recently been asserted). One means by which Sato attempted to maintain smooth relations between the Japanese and Australian communities was through organising public displays of solidarity and support for the British Empire. One such event was the Japanese contribution to the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in June 1897. For this occasion, celebrated by several days of sport²¹ and cultural festivities, the Japanese community staged a free entertainment at the School of Arts. An (unattributed) report in *The Torres Strait Pilot* weekly newspaper described this in the following terms:

On Monday Evening the Japanese of the island gave a free entertainment in the School of Arts, the hall being packed and the verandas crowded with eager ones. The whole affair was strictly carried out after the Japanese fashion of portraying tragedy and comedy and some eleven acts were performed by a good number of actors and actresses, of more or less grace and beauty. (June 26th 1897: 1)

The report ended with the emphasis that "cheers were given by the Japanese present in honour of the Queen" (ibid).

The patriotic purpose of the concert was emphasised in a statement written by Sato and published on the front page of *The Torres Strait Pilot* on June 26th. Sato's missive can be read as a very precise attempt to characterise the nature – and allegiances – of the Japanese community with regard to both the nature of British-Japanese relations (or, more particularly, how Britain might like these to be seen) and their own specific position. After obsequiously praising Britain's role in world politics and culture – and comparing British-Japanese relations to those between a "kind mother" (ie Victoria/Britannia) and a "well beloved and good tempered daughter" (Japan) – Sato concluded:

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The Japanese of Thursday Island sincerely express their love and respect for Her Majesty and have attempted in these Jubilee celebrations to show genuine and heart felt enthusiasm and they are particularly gratified that their lot is cast among such loyal subjects of her Majesty's in this colony as Thursday Islanders. (ibid)

Sato's public statement confirms the extent to which the Japanese community was dedicated to preserving its status (and, indeed, mere continued presence) in the Torres Strait by being seen to support Australian/British authority and its patriotic symbols. Although the majority of the Japanese community on Thursday Island escaped the strictures of the Australian Government's 'Immigration Restriction Act' of 1901 that enshrined the 'White Australia' policy in law (since employees in the pearl shelling industry were specifically exempted), the (racist, protectionist) writing was clearly on the wall for Thursday Island's Japanese community.

Continuing to assert their support for British Imperial authority in the region, the Japanese community organised another celebration in June 1902, upon the coronation of Queen Victoria's successor King Edward. For this occasion they mounted what its promotional bill described as a "grand Japanese Opera specially written for [the occasion of] the Coronation" by local merchant Mr Maeshiba and his wife, involving a "full company of Japanese performers . . . singing – dancing – acting . . . all in ancient Japanese style". An (anonymous) reviewer in *The Torres Strait Pilot*, who was at pains to emphasise his (?) unfamiliarity with the genre, nevertheless gave a detailed and appreciative review:

The public were informed by the bills that the opera was specially written by Mr and Mrs Naeshiba [sic] for production in honour of the Kings coronation; but in our ignorance of things Japanese, it is not within our scope to reflect on its literary merits, which were undoubtedly high . . . if the appreciation of the large Japanese audience is to be a standard of judgement. The performers had evidently gone to great expense and exerted their artistic skills to the utmost in preparing the dresses and costumes for the various characters; and the temporary stage at the School of Arts was arrayed with artificial blossoms which bestowed quite a pleasing effect on the spectators. In fact, the whole performance in every detail was illustrated [sic] of the finer and higher side of Japanese life. The various performers were well received; and a somewhat new phase of approbation displayed itself in numbers of the audience throwing cash rolled up in paper to those whom they favoured. About 50 pounds, Mr Glover informed the audience, had been bestowed on the performers in this way during the two nights²². (Torres Strait Pilot July 5th 1902: 1)

While details about the Maeshibas' backgrounds remain unclear, the family name suggests that the husband (at least) was from Wakayama prefecture²³. Assuming this to be correct, and despite the grandeur of its designation, the review of the

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performance in *The Torres Strait Pilot* suggests that the “Japanese Opera” performed in 1902 – and possibly the previously discussed 1897 Jubilee “entertainment” – belonged to a genre known as *Murashibai* (‘village play’) which was popular in Japan from the late 18th to early 20th centuries. This form had affinities to *kabuki*²⁴ (possibly the “Japanese Opera” referred to above), using the same principal source tales, but was performed in rural locations by amateur actors accompanied by professional singers, shamisen²⁵ players and/or percussionists hired for the performances. The costs of mounting the productions were usually met local businessmen. The form became so attractive to villagers in the 19th century that it was subject to various restrictions and repressions by local and national authorities concerned about the amount of time and energy communities were expending on its production. Most *Murashibai* venues appear to have been in remote (usually coastal or mountainous) locations. In Wakayama, for instance, venues were clustered on the south east coast of the Kii peninsula, the region that provided a significant proportion of the prefecture’s employees in the Torres Strait. *Murashibai* performances usually involved the enactment of a narrative of moral enlightenment and/or ‘poetic justice’. In this regard one possible interpretation of the published claim that the 1902 Thursday Island performance included reference to the Queen is that she was referred to in its narrative and/or concluding moral emphasis²⁶.

The musical and theatrical events offered by the Japanese community can be seen as cultural replications and adornments of the political position they were trying to publicly present themselves within. Despite Sato’s departure to Japan in late 1901²⁷, the Japanese community continued to stage public manifestations of their support for British rule in the region. One particularly successful venture occurred in July 1903 in the form of the visit of three Japanese warships (under the command of Admiral Kamimura) on a ‘goodwill’ visit²⁸. The (unattributed) lead article in the *Torres Strait Pilot* immediately following the departure of the fleet concluded with the comment that:

*Nothing could have exceeded the kindness which was displayed by the Japanese on board the warships, and their visit will be for a long time a pleasant recollection. (July 11th 1903: 1)*²⁹

One of the principal successes of the visit was the performance of the Japanese navy brass band. The article cited above praised the band at some length:

The interest in the visit was considerably enhanced by the band, the like of which was never before heard here, and it may be a long time ere such music may be heard again. (ibid)

It also detailed that:

It may be interesting to know that the local Japanese Club paid all expenses of their [the band’s] stay on the island during Friday and Saturday; and the clubhouse was largely patronised by residents³⁰ on Friday evening when the band played from 7.30 to 10, concluding their programme with “God Save The King” and their own National Anthem. (ibid)

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There is a neat convergence between the role, performance and appreciation of the visiting Japanese band on Thursday Island and the very precise political characterisations of British/Japanese relations expressed by Sato some six years previously; since the brass band tradition, and the style of music performed by the naval band, derived from the British brass band movement of the mid-late 1800s³¹.

The visit also bears out another parallel sketched by Sato, which he described in terms of Japan being:

. . . inspired by the knowledge of the great power possessed by a good and effective navy, she trusts some day to be the England of the east and play her part in international politics. (The Torres Strait Pilot, June 26th 1897: 1)

The efficacy of such naval power was soon demonstrated in Japan's victory over Russia in the War of 1904-1905, an event which further intensified:

. . . a distinct Australian feeling of geopolitical insecurity towards the growing regional power of Japan [which] was at the same time complicated by Japan's alliance with Great Britain in a political tie that took into account world affairs in the Northern Hemisphere only, and made Australians painfully aware of their isolated situation in the Southern Hemisphere. (Frei, 1991: 63)

This, in turn, fanned an intense, albeit ill-founded, perception of Japanese territorial 'hunger' for Australian soil that persisted until the contraction of Japanese military power after World War Two (only to re-emerge in the 1970s in terms of a fear of Japanese economic expansionism).

In 1905 an Australian Senate resolution amended previous interpretations of the 1901 Immigration Act to limit the number of non-whites allowed into Australia on fixed term contracts to an equivalent to the number of those departing on the termination of same. This provided a severe restriction on the volume and flexibility of recruiting procedures for Japanese divers. One result of this policy was that the pearling lugger fleets operated by Reg Hockings and James Clarke relocated from Thursday Island to Aru, in Dutch New Guinea (outside the national orbit of the Act), halving the number of boats based on Thursday Island, causing a downturn in the Island's various service businesses and leaving Japanese divers in (near-exclusive) dominance of the local industry³². Flexing their industrial muscles, Japanese divers organised a strike for better conditions in 1906 and won a number of concessions from employers. While successful, this action appears to have had a detrimental effect on the Japanese community's (carefully established) image as a pliant, authority-respecting population.

In 1908 a public inquiry into the pearl shelling industry and economy of Thursday Island heard statements from members of the Island's Euro-Australian community. Japanese merchants were singled out for criticism on the grounds that they imported the majority of their goods from overseas and had an (allegedly

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coercive) near-monopoly on the custom of Japanese inhabitants. As a result of such perceptions, anti-Japanese feeling ran high amongst the Euro-Australian population and the cultural-political initiatives discussed above declined sharply as the former Japanese community on Thursday Island was replaced by a shifting group of employees who were contractually obliged to reside upon their boats and only stayed on Thursday Island, in Japanese guest houses, during the annual summer suspension of their trade³³.

III. A 'CLOSE KNIT' CULTURE

Aside from those strategic engagements with the broader community of Thursday Island detailed above, the only (semi-)formal musical entertainments on offer for the Japanese on Thursday Island in the period 1880-1910 were occasional entertainments at the *Nihonjin kurabu* building. This served as a meeting place that catered primarily for the more established and affluent male members of the community, facilitating social interaction, serving as a place to celebrate festive occasions and also, on an irregular basis, featuring amateur entertainment in the form of skits and/or songs. Together with the *kurabu* centre another source of entertainment occasionally enjoyed by Japanese crewmembers in the 1920s and 1930s was that provided at Thursday Island hotels such as the Royal and Grand³⁴. While these establishments do not appear to have offered live music during the period prior to World War Two; impromptu singing and the playing of gramophone records served to familiarise Japanese crewmembers with popular English language songs. Interviewed in 1999, for instance, Yutake Higashi recalled hearing (and learning) songs such as *It's a Long Way to Tipperary* and *My Darling Clementine* in such establishments.

Along with such occasional entertainments, the principal places in which Japanese nationals engaged in musical activities were the decks of the boats on which they were employed. Boat crews often comprised individuals from the same (or a nearby) village and their interaction often served to reinforce local community identity and camaraderie. The most common form of musical activity on boats in the first decades of Japanese employment in the Torres Strait appears to have been the unaccompanied singing of regional and/or popular songs. The material was mainly drawn from the repertoire of then-popular Japanese folk song forms such as *rokyoku*³⁵, *goeika*³⁶ and *kouta*³⁷. In the 1930s *kayokokyū* songs (often relating racy stories of love affairs) became popular with divers and, following the outbreak of conflict between Japan and China in 1931, the patriotic/military song genre *gunka* also came into vogue.

One particular *kouta* composition, *Daiba No uta* ('The Divers' Counting Song') has been identified by several informants as being a favourite of Japanese divers in the Torres Strait until the mid-1930s. This song is an adaptation of a lewd Japanese drinking song *Banzai kazoe-uta* ('The Hurrah Counting Song')³⁸. The practice of adapting existing song structures and melodies to accommodate new lyrics was common in Japanese music prior to World War Two. A version of the song recalled by veteran diver Teruji Takimoto (from Susami village, Wakayama)

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in the early 1970s describes the homesickness and arduous and dangerous life of divers. In (the authors') English translation³⁹ this comprises:

One – We calmly travelled far away to find jobs, relying on a letter [ie an employer's letter of invitation⁴⁰]

Two – Whenever two people meet, they talk about those who are going overseas to gain money

Three – Although I am homesick, I came to Thursday Island to do what was expected of me

Four – At night, when I don't have to work a pump, I dream of talking with those who are at home [in Japan]

Five – Everyone feels hardship here, whether they are from Manila, Malaya, China or Aborigines

Six – Divers should obey their strict orders and work

Seven – Recently we have to work seven days a week, even if we don't want to

Eight – We cannot return without a breeze to fill our sails since there is no mountain in the sea

Nine – Because we use a mixed language we cannot [clearly] understand what we are saying and we have to reverse the order of our words⁴¹

Ten – Although we agreed to come here, we firstly had trouble with daily life at sea, secondly with food and thirdly with language

Eleven – It will be a long time before I land back in Japan

Twelve – I had the courage to leave Japan since I thought I would find a mountain of treasure, instead I have found a mountain made of needles

Thirteen – I have suffered a lot, and will be thirty six [when I return to Japan] but I dream of the life of an eighteen year old

Fourteen – If I die [here] I will not be able to realise my dreams, so I want to return to Japan sooner [ie before the end of the contracted period]

Fifteen – Divers take shells from the border between Heaven and Hell in a vain attempt to gain money

Sixteen – You can see our plight from our emaciated and sunburnt bodies

Seventeen – Someone has said that it is [the poor quality and limited amount of] food, rather than [absence of] sex that causes us most discomfort

Eighteen – I think that I will return home and care for my parents when my contact is finished

Nineteen – I am thinking of my family back at home and wish to return to Japan soon

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Twenty – Our life span is estimated at fifty years, I am now a hot-blooded twenty five year old; therefore I won't die away from home

(Original version transcribed in Ogawa, 1976: 158-160)

Despite the account of isolation and adversity related in *Daiba No uta*, several individual divers had a more profitable experience in the trade. On some boats, at least, accompaniment to singing was provided by instruments such as the shamisen, shakuhachi⁴², guitar and violin that had been purchased by successful divers. Some divers, such as Sugiji Iwata from Susami, were known for their vocal abilities and their skills were prized by their colleagues. By contrast, instruments left on other boats were played by crewmembers with minimal skills (Yutaka Higashi, for instance, recalls such a situation regarding the shamisen left on board the lugger *Minerva* by a diver in the early 1930s [interview 1999]). During annual lay-ups of the fleet at Thursday Island, these instruments were often taken to the guesthouses where social performances involving members of various boat crews occurred.

From the late 1920s on gramophones began to become available to some boat crews and record playing became an important part of their social life. Japanese records produced during the late 1920s and 1930s helped popularise the *kayokyoku* style (discussed above). Records were obtained from Japan by ordering titles from entrepreneurial crewmembers of ships regularly travelling between Japan and Thursday Island (who would purchase disks on their return to Japan and then deliver them on their return trip). Some individuals were notable collectors of records, the celebrated diver Tsurumaru Tadokoro, for instance, was reputed to have a collection of over three hundred. Similarly to the musical instruments discussed above, gramophones and records were taken to guesthouses during the annual lay-up on Thursday Island. In the mid-late 1930s a number of Thursday Island cafes also played Japanese songs on gramophones to attract patrons⁴³.

While there is no evidence of original Japanese compositions about working in the Torres Strait being written in the 1930s, the lyrics of a song written by a Wakayaman who stayed home provides an illuminating perspective on the context of the divers' departures and work. This song, *Tonan-maru o okuru uta* ('A Farewell Song for Tonon-maru'), was written by Sumi Kaneda, a school teacher from Izumo village, upon the occasion of the departure of the first boat load of divers to travel direct to the Arafura Sea (rather than to the Torres Strait), on board the ship *Tonan-maru*. In (our) English translation, the lyrics declare:

*Our military frontier on land is north China,
While our sea defence is Aru,
Sailing directly from Izumo, the Tonan-maru,
Assumes responsibility for the rise of Japan*

*The [ship's] destination is Aru,
About 15,705 kilometres far away from here,*

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*However the local men are going bravely,
Away on a small ship to gather pearls*

*The mariner's compass points the way,
Clearly marked on the charts,
Let's go forth, the boiler and engine have started well,
Let a favourable wind blow*

*Go forth to Aru battling high waves,
Congratulations to ten brave divers from Shionomisaki,
Who are leaving for the Arafura Sea*

(Original version transcribed in Ogawa, 1976: 231-232)

This song offers a particular context for the divers' departures. The opening verse sketches the political background of the conflict between Japan and China that began in 1931 as a result of Japanese expansionist intrusion into the country and associated this with the maritime mercantile frontier of Aru and the Arafura Sea. In this perspective, departure for the southern pearling grounds is not simply beneficial for the Wakayaman economy, it is represented as a national patriotic act (and the departing sailors are valorised within this context). Taught at local primary schools in the 1930s, and sung by school students, such as Yuzuru Kuhara, who went on to become divers themselves; the song appears to have been a significant motivational aid for Wakayaman involvement in both the Arafura Sea and Torres Strait.

IV. REPERTOIRE EXPOSURE AND EXCHANGE

One of the results of pressures to limit the Japanese near-monopoly on crewing pearling boats in the mid-1920s to mid-1930s was an increase in the number of Torres Strait Islander, Aboriginal and Papuan members of lugger crews in the immediate pre-War period. Such pressures also resulted in Japanese mariners taking employment in the *bêche-de-mer* and trochus shell trade, often as captains of predominantly Torres Strait Islander crews. The experiences of arduous work on luggers and of communication difficulties between Japanese captains and (multi-racial) crews described in *Daiba No uta* (above) were also the subject of songs written by Torres Strait Islanders at this time. While these songs do not appear to have survived into the contemporary repertoire of veteran Torres Strait Islander singers such as The Mills Sisters or Seaman Dan, two compositions have been described by Lachlan Nicolson⁴⁴, a former resident of Lindeman Island in the Whitsunday archipelago. Nicolson lived on the Island in the 1930s, when his family employed a number of Torres Strait Islanders at their small resort. Several of these employees had previously worked on luggers. One individual, Dicky Lahou, from Poid village, Moa Island, was described by Nicolson as an accomplished singer and dancer⁴⁵. Two songs in Poid's repertoire concerned work on luggers. One concerned living conditions on the lugger *Trenton* on a voyage to gather *bêche-de-mer* at Bell Cay. The second was a humorous song which mimicked the familiar Japanese mispronunciation of the 'l' sound as an 'r' on the part of a Japanese lugger captain (and the confusion caused by this)⁴⁶.

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The proximity between crewmembers of different ethnic origins on board luggers for extended durations also resulted in a significant degree of cross-cultural exposure to different music styles. A number of Japanese divers have recalled that Papuan crews, in particular, regularly sang as they worked on board ship. One instance of a performance has been provided by Seike Ukio, who worked with a crew comprising Japanese, Torres Strait Islander and Papuan members in the 1930s. Interviewed in 1986 he recalled that some Papuans, whom he described as “very superstitious”, continued to perform traditional customs on luggers:

On a full moon they'd spread the coconut mats on deck and started dancing like a festival for the moon or something. They'd strike the tin-cans for drums. This was in the middle of the night, mind you, when everyone was sleeping. (quoted in Ganter, 1988: 49)

Shipboard contact also allowed Torres Strait Islanders, Papuans and Aborigines to hear Japanese music. As would be expected, responses to this music appear to have varied, with some crews showing a marked indifference to the material performed. However, Shin'ichi Horimoto and his fellow Susami villager Kazuji Tsumura have recalled that indigenous Torres Strait Islander and Papuan crew members showed particular interest in (and respect for) the performance of *goeika*, sung to farewell deceased colleagues and also sung by divers for their own pleasure⁴⁷ (interview 1999). Yuzuru Kuhara has also recalled that some Torres Strait Islanders attempted to learn Japanese popular songs by working out chord patterns and melodies on the guitar whilst listening to gramophone recordings played in cafes on Thursday Island (interview, 1999).

Along with these (essentially informal) practices, there were also instances of conscious teaching and learning of repertoire between Islanders and Japanese crews. Yutaka Higashi has recalled that one facet of a strong friendship he formed with a Yorke Islander named Jack Moseby⁴⁸ involved the pair teaching each other songs⁴⁹. Returning to Japan in the late 1930s, Higashi continued to remember one of the songs he learnt⁵⁰, a Yorke Island song which he sang occasionally at senior citizens' gatherings in Wakayama until the 1990s (and for the authors during an interview in 1999)⁵¹. Based on the extract we heard, and Higashi's explanation that the song concerns a lugger in a south east gale, the song appears to be (or to be related to) a song currently known as *Black Swan* that appears to have been popular with Torres Strait Islander lugger crews in the 1930s⁵².

In addition to those cases discussed above, further evidence of the assimilation of Japanese repertoire by Torres Strait Islanders was obtained by several Japanese researchers who visited the Torres Strait in the 1970s and 1980s. These researchers met elderly residents who could recall and sing fragments of Japanese songs. Michiya Hata, for instance, has recalled that Patrick Thaidai, born on Erub in 1917, but resident on Yam in the 1970s, sang him a brief extract from a Japanese song he remembered (but which Hata could not identify). He also recalls that another (unnamed) individual could remember the previously discussed *Daiba No uta* (personal communication with Hiroshi Ogawa, November 1999). Given the considerable elapse of time since Japanese divers and sailors

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worked in the Torres Strait prior to World War Two, it would appear likely that more historically immediate research would have uncovered a more broadly based familiarity with material among Torres Strait Islanders.

Along with song, dance performance was also an area of significant intercultural communication. Higashi and other divers frequently attended festivities on islands that they visited. These visits appear to have been appreciated as a welcome diversion from the often tedious and arduous nature of pearl and trochus shelling and *bêche-de-mer* gathering. While most divers appear to have been spectators at such events, Tsumura and Horimoto have recalled that one particular Japanese lugger crew, from Izumo village in Wakayama, were known for their habit of trying to learn songs and dances in the various islands they visited (interview, 1999). Yuzuru Kuhara, a member of the Izumo crew on the lugger *Felton*, confirmed this account, recalling that his crew participated in traditional island dancing on Badu, Boigu, Erub, Mer and Saibai in the mid-late 1930s. He has explained this activity with reference to two factors. The first was the crew's particular enjoyment of dancing; and the second that the *Felton* worked deep diving grounds that necessitated longer lay-ups for recovery than boats working shallower waters (interview 1999). He recalled that his crews' participation was welcomed by the Island dancers and was a source of great pleasure to those involved (ibid).

The *Felton* crew's enjoyment of Torres Strait Islander dances was strong enough to survive their four year internment in Australia, following the entry of Japan into the Pacific War, and their repatriation to Japan. In 1947/48⁵³ the crew entered a local entertainment contest in Kushimoto-cho (Wakayama) and won second prize for their vocal and choreographic performance of a song learnt on Mer⁵⁴. For this performance they wore sarongs, shell rattles tied round their wrists and darkened their faces and bodies with charcoal. This makeup and costume appears to have been applied in an attempt to provide a semblance of authenticity (rather than the stereotypical caricature of western 'blackface' minstrelsy). In this regard, the performance of the dance – by veteran divers – can be seen as a nostalgic 're-connection' with a past which the Izumo crew (at least) recalled with pleasure and with regret at its passing⁵⁵.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has described three aspects of the music culture of the Japanese population of Thursday Island in the period from 1890-1941: the (relatively short-lived) public presentation of Japanese culture to a general Island audience; the internal musical culture of the Japanese community; and the musical interaction between Japanese and Torres Strait Islanders in the 1930s. The latter merits particular comment as to its significance.

The historical importance of cross-cultural communications in the immaterial (and thereby more durationally fragile) spheres of orality and musicality⁵⁶ is often judged in terms of its influence and/or continuing presence in contemporary

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repertoires (or the mechanical record of cylinders, disks, sheet music etc.) Judged in these terms, the phenomena described above are of little significance. To make such a judgment is however to enact an historical bias which sees the (incidental) present as a privileged point of reception.

The phenomena presented in this chapter are notable for their unusually sustained, complex and reciprocal nature. While it is possible to engage in speculation as to what types of hybridity may have emerged had Japanese crews continued to work in the Torres Strait through to the present; the principal significance of the history described in Section IV is that of lived cultural experience. Although the musical activities described did not exert any significant influence on the subsequent musical culture and/or repertoires of Japanese or Torres Strait music⁵⁷; their enactments comprised both significant episodes in the musical history of the Torres Strait and of Japanese-Australian cultural relations in general. The exposure to and exchange of repertoire which took place – despite mutual unintelligibilities of language and significant differences in modality and melodies of Japanese and Torres Strait Island songs – is a notable example of cross-cultural communication, appreciation and affective bonding. In contrast to the current, commercially facilitated and reified consumption of exotic ‘otherly’ musical artefacts in the western ‘world music’ market, the acquaintance of Japanese and local indigenous peoples with each other’s music was spontaneous and culturally contextualised.

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END NOTES

1. *Mokuyo-to* is the Japanese language name for Thursday Island (literally translating the English language name) and is still in Japanese usage. *Ongaku* is the Japanese term for music.
2. Since many of the Japanese working in the region during this period were employed on short-term contracts, the term ‘community’ is used here in an expanded, inclusive sense, one reflecting the situation of a small core of medium to long-term residents providing a social and economic centre around which shorter term visitors could aggregate.

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3. Initially entitled *The Torres Strait Daily Pilot and New Guinea Gazette*, and later condensed to *The Torres Strait Daily Pilot*. (Unfortunately no complete set of the publication appears to exist.)
4. Such as Foley (1991), Frei (1991) and Ganter (1994).
5. Interviews with Yutaka Higashi (b 1913) from Ugui, Nachi-Katsuura; Yuzuru Kuhara (b 1920) from Izumo, Kushimoto; and Kazuji Tsumura (b 1915) and Shin'ichi Horimoto (b 1912) from Susami.
6. Although the southern Ryukyu Islands served as a 'backdoor' for Japanese trade with China during the period of isolation and the port of Dejima, Nagasaki also allowed (limited) trade and communications with China and The Netherlands.
7. From the late 1860s on Japanese sailors began crewing on foreign ships, several serving on vessels working on Australia's north eastern coastal waters, gaining valuable knowledge of the area and its resources.
8. See Mullins (1995: 139-145) for discussion of the re-location.
9. Ganter (1994: 101) states the year of Nonami's arrival as 1876. In the absence of corroborating detail we have retained Frei's date.
10. *Karayukisan* is a Japanese term specifically describing women travelling overseas for the purposes of prostitution. During the mid-1890s Japanese owned and staffed brothels were set up in all the principal Australian ports visited by Japanese seamen (ie Thursday Island, Darwin, Freemantle, Wyndham and Cossack). See Ganter (1999: 56) for discussion of *karayukisan* in Australia and the over-estimation of their numbers in previous studies.
11. Founder members of the association included individuals with a wide range of skills and cultural experiences. Amizo Ishihara (b 1855) from Kushimoto, Wakayama Prefecture, was self-trained in English and worked as principal of his local elementary school before travelling to Thursday Island. Rokusaburo Nakamura (birth date unknown), from Hyogo, was a well-established merchant who had previously studied English and classical Chinese literature. Kametaro Taguchi (b 1858) studied at the Capri Christian School at Nagasaki and spent two years in Hong Kong and China immediately prior to his relocation to the Torres Strait. Isokichi Komine (b 1856) had previously worked as a businessman in Korea and China. Tsuneji Nagahama (b 1852), from Nagasaki, had previously owned a shipbuilding company. Another founder member, Yonosuke Okazaki (b 1856), had worked as a policeman in Japan before working in Hong Kong, Singapore and Darwin. (Information collated from Hattori, 1894: 16.)
12. While several English language sources spell his name as Satow, the acknowledged Japanese phonetic transcription does not include the final 'w' and we use this correct version in this chapter.
13. We have been unable to ascertain her name but she was educated at Tokyo Jogakkou (Women's School).
14. During this period a number of Japanese observers were highly positive about the opportunities offered by the region. In 1894 for instance, Toru Hattori

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published a short volume in Japan entitled *Nankyu no shin shokumin* ('A new colony in the southern hemisphere'), drawing on information supplied to him by a friend, Mr Matsuoka, who had resided on Thursday Island in the early 1890s. (Matsuoka's experiences are the subject of further research-in-progress by Junko Konishi.) In his book, Hattori enthusiastically advocated increased Japanese settlement in the Torres Strait. (See Frei, 1995: 31-74 for further discussion of Japanese aspirations in the Australo-Pacific region during the period.)

15. Copy from an advertisement for Sato's business published in various issues of *The Torres Strait Pilot and New Guinea Gazette* in 1897-98.
16. As a result of organised recruitment, Japanese employees comprised around 50% of the pool of divers working in the Torres Strait in the period 1895-1900 and around 65% in the period 1900-1905. (Reports of the Inspector of Pearl-Shell and Beche-de-Mer Fisheries, Thursday Island, 1885-1914.)
17. Nagasaki (twenty two individuals) and Hiroshima (fifteen) being the next most significant points of origin.
18. The encounter is now commemorated by a small exhibition at the Japan-U.S. Memorial Museum on Oshima Island, Kushimoto.
19. Further indication of the prominence of Japanese in the local population can be gained from the figures cited in *The Torres Straits Pilot* 13th May 1899 which identify a hurricane as causing the deaths of 174 individuals, 65 of whom were Japanese.
20. Australian poet and journalist A.B. 'Banjo' Patterson visited Thursday Island in 1902 and wrote an account of the pearling trade in the Straits, and Japanese involvement in it, which appeared in the *Sydney Mail* on 17th May 1902. He also published an article on the drinking culture of Thursday Island, entitled 'Thirsty Island' published in the *Bulletin* 5th April 1902. This article included discussion of the case of a Japanese diver who was reputed to have attempted to kill a colleague by obstructing his air line. This incident inspired Patterson to write his poem 'The Pearl Diver', detailing the death of a fictional Japanese diver named Kanzo Makame.
21. Including events for Japanese participants such as "Japanese wrestling" (possibly sumo wrestling) and "single sticks" (possibly kendo martial arts combat) (Unattributed, *The Torres Strait Pilot* 5th June 1897).
22. The report added that this money was to be donated to the Quetta (Anglican) Parish Institute.
23. Indeed, there is a presently a store with their family name in Kushimoto-cho in Wakayama.
24. The composite, and often lavishly staged, form of music, dance and drama that developed in Japan in the 17th century. (See the entry on *kabuki* in Hirano et al eds, 1989 for further discussion).
25. A three string, fretless, banjo-like instrument with a cat (or dog) skin covered resonator played with a large spatula-like plectrum.

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26. Information on the *Murashibai* in this paragraph has been collated from Moriya (1988: 36-204).
27. Returning to Japan, Sato went on to pursue a career in politics as an elected member of the *Nihonjin Kurabu* (Japanese Association).
28. Departing from Yokusuka in Japan, the ships *Mastushima*, *Itsukushima* and *Hashidate* visited Hong Kong, Singapore and Batavia and then sailed around the entire coast of Australia, calling in at all major ports, before visiting Thursday Island and sailing home via Ambon, Manila and various Asian ports.
29. This characterisation was born out by a report published in *The Torres Strait Pilot* on 3rd October 1903 which identifies the progress made by the local brass band by referring to an observer's comment that "they remind you of the Japanese band . . . which was not bad" (ibid).
30. A term that appears to be used here to refer to Euro-Australians.
31. The first commonly accepted Japanese brass band performance took place in Yokohama in 1869. The ensemble comprised thirty individuals from [present day] Kagoshima prefecture who performed a joint concert with the band of the First Battalion of the (British) 10th Regiment (who had been stationed at Yokohama since 1864). The ensemble was trained by the British band's captain, John Williams Fenton, and performed alongside their British colleagues after only forty days instruction and practice on brass instruments. (Gakusuikai, 1984: 8-10).
32. A number of Japanese divers accompanied these fleets when they relocated to the Dutch East Indies and many Japanese divers were subsequently recruited directly to Aru.
33. An interruption caused by an annual shift in wind direction that made operations too difficult to conduct.
34. Yuzuru Kuhara recalls that Japanese divers were fond of visiting The Grand in the 1930s on account of the attractive women who also frequented the hotel. This latter factor led them to refer to the establishment as the *Bijin* ('Beautiful Women') Hotel (interview, 1999).
35. *Rokyoku*, also called *Naniwa-bushi*, was a recitative comical/satirical genre addressed to aspects of the life of the general public. Initially popularised as a street performance form, *rokyoku* singers gained employment in the music halls that emerged in the 1880s. By the time of the introduction of gramophone recording in Japan in 1909 the form was popular enough to comprise 20% of the early Japanese releases. (For further discussion see the entry for *rokyoku* in Hirano et al [eds], 1989.)
36. A genre of songs sung by pilgrims en route to a temple or sacred mountain that emerged in the 16th century. (For further discussion see the entry for *goeika* in Hirano et al [eds], 1989.)
37. A category of 3-4 minute long songs that emerged around 1910 and which became popular by the 1930s. Genres of this song included *minyō* (local folk

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songs), *zokkyoku* (popular songs accompanied by shamisen) and *hayariuta* (popular songs). *Kouta* songs were popularised by theatrical variety shows and, later, by gramophone recordings. (For further discussion see the entry for *kouta* in Hirano et al [eds], 1989.)

38. The song appears to have been written shortly after 1842 and, at this time, belonged to a genre of popular unaccompanied song called *hauta*. However after the 1880s it was regarded as a *kouta* song. (For further discussion of the song and the genres referred to see the entries in Hirano et al [eds], 1989.)
39. We should note that each verse of the Japanese original is written in a precisely fixed form of forty one syllables per verse (5+7+5+7+5+7+5 syllables) that often requires grammatical structures to be condensed and/or modified from standard usage. Our translation is therefore – necessarily – significantly interpretive.
40. Such letters were necessary in order for intending divers to arrange transport and temporary residence in the Torres Strait.
41. This appears to refer to the difficulties of communicating via a mixture of English, Japanese, pidgin and/or Torres Strait island languages.
42. An end-blown bamboo flute with four finger holes and one thumbhole.
43. Kuhara recalls that while Chinese cafe owners would not play Japanese records (due, perhaps, to the conflict between Japan and China at this time), mixed race and/or other ethnic identity Thursday Island cafe owners were happy to oblige (interview, 1999).
44. These descriptions were recorded in an incomplete and unpublished memoir now in the possession of his son Roy Nicolson.
45. For further discussion of Torres Strait Islander music in the Whitsunday Archipelago in the 1930s and 1940s see Hayward (2001).
46. Nicolson's account includes no details of precise lyrics or melodies.
47. Divers from Wakayama would have been familiar with the genre due to the presence of a major pilgrimage trail in the prefecture.
48. Ned Moseby, a US sailor originally from Boston, took residence on Yorke Island in the 1870s, harvested *bêche-de-mer*, and married a Torres Strait Islander woman. It is likely that the Jack Moseby referred to was Ned Moseby's son (and thereby of mixed US and Torres Strait Islander parentage). This hypothesis is supported by Reid (1954) who noted that Moseby's four (unnamed) sons each owned luggers in the mid-late 1930s and gained prosperity from "the sale of *bêche-de-mer*, trochus and pearl-shell" (ibid: 154).
49. When interviewed in 1999 Yutaka could not recall precisely which songs he taught Moseby but believed they may have been some traditional children's songs.
50. During our interview he also sang a fragment of a second song melody which

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he recalls as having learnt on Mer but which we were unable to recognise or gain more information on.

51. Yutaka was interviewed by a TV crew from Mainichi-TV in the 1980s (precise date unknown), for a documentary on veteran Torres Strait divers and recalls that the program producers played a recording of his song to Torres Strait Islanders who recognised the composition. (We have been unable to locate a copy of this documentary or ascertain its title; it was however also referred to by other informants.)
52. Australian cruise boat operator Bruce Jamieson, for instance, also recalls performance of this song (which he referred to by the title of *The Lugger in the Strong South Easter*) by Torres Strait Islander lugger crews working in the Whitsunday Islands in the 1930s. (Interview with Philip Hayward, Point Clare, NSW, Australia, 1994.)
53. Kuhara was unsure of precise dates and we have been unable to confirm which year is correct.
54. Kuhara recalls that he knew the meaning of the song at the time he performed it but could not remember this information when interviewed by the authors (some fifty years later).
55. Interviewed by the authors, Kuhara emphasised that he had not wanted to quit the Straits and had contemplated residing there permanently (until international conflict intervened).
56. As opposed to more materially durable practices such as ceramics, weaving, building etc.
57. The one song that has been identified as having entered Torres Strait Islander repertoire through contact with Japanese crews in the pre-War period is *Japanese Rumba*. Since this song was written by Jack Miller, a member of the US occupying forces in Japan, some time in the late 1940s, and was not recorded (and popularised) until 1951 (Hosokawa, 1999: 127-128), this identification is incorrect. Given the dates involved it is possible that the song may have been introduced to the Torres Strait by those Okinawans recruited, briefly and unsuccessfully, as divers in 1958 (see Ganter, 1994: 126-127).

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