

# Music and a forgotten minority: primary accounts of Japanese making music in prewar and wartime regional Australia

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## Abstract

The pre-Second World War and wartime histories of Japanese in Australia have been relatively well documented in scholarship since the 1990s, but with little discussion of evidence for expressive culture. Music and dance were an important means for consolidation of the far-flung Japanese communities of the north and northwest regions, and were also deployed in particular contexts to strengthen links with the dominant Anglo-Celtic people and other minority groups through presentational performances. Music may also have figured in the lives of a small group of Okinawans among indentured labourers from Japan, and in the work of Japanese prostitutes (*karayuki-san*) in remote coastal and inland locations. This paper presents material from recent oral history interviews with elderly individuals in Tokyo and Osaka, specifically memories of music making in 1930s Broome, Darwin and the Torres Strait, and in wartime internment camps. The paper also includes accounts of music and dance from a diary penned by a Japanese pearl shell diver in the Torres Strait during the late 1920s and early 1930s. While the experiences examined here were particular to the circumstances of individuals as contracted foreign workers or Australian-born Japanese, respectively, they

suggest that both informal and occasional formal music-making figured as significant moments of shared leisure in a range of intercultural contexts, at a time when Japanese were an economically indispensable minority largely exempt from strictures of the ‘White Australia Policy’.

Since mid-2016 I have been investigating music in the Japanese communities of ‘old Australia’, by which I mean Australian society before the end of the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> Officially mono-cultural and overwhelmingly dominated by people of British and Irish heritage, the Anglo-Celtic Australians, it was a society in increasingly stark contrast to modern-day Australia, where policies of multi-culturalism and restricted yet nonetheless large-scale immigration have received support of the major political parties since the late-1970s, and in whose civic and political bodies small numbers of both indigenous people and Australians of non-Anglo-Celt heritage have begun to play important roles. Before the War, arguably it was only towns of the north and northwest of the Australian continent that had populations of multiple ethnicities whose diversity was comparable to that of large parts of the Australian cities today. Japanese comprised ‘Asian’ communities of particular economic importance in all the major coastal towns of far north Queensland and northwestern Western Australia, as well as in the Torres Strait and Darwin. Ethnically, linguistically and socially circumscribed, nonetheless they had daily contact with the other peoples of those regions, and occasionally those interactions involved music. This is a preliminary study based on three primary sources, as the first fruit of an endeavour to chronicle musical activity among the Japanese minority in settings now unknown to almost all Australians and Japanese, and to interpret such activity in terms of the roles of musical experience (both making and enjoying music, including dance, as either performers

or spectators) in intercultural contact of the time.

Both the prewar and wartime eras are utterly distant from the forms of engagement between Japan and Australia which now dominate media narratives as well as most people's images of relations between the two countries: flourishing trade and tourism, huge Japanese corporate engagement, and waves of both short-term sojourners and 'lifestyle migrants' to a multi-cultural society since the late 1970s. The presence and experiences of thousands of Japanese in prewar Australia are separated from us not only by many decades, but most importantly by the schism of the Second World War itself, when all but a handful of people of Japanese ethnicity were interned, then forcibly repatriated to a country that some of them had never set foot in. The War and its aftermath effectively severed the history of Japanese in Australia into two halves, the older or first of which is largely forgotten today.

The settings for the lives of Japanese between the 1870s and 1940s, mostly in northern Australian sites such as Broome, Darwin, Thursday Island and Cairns, are today almost unrecognisable if compared to their prewar conditions. The people who might tell us of the songs, dances and instrumental music performed among a small minority during a period that ended nearly 80 years ago, are of course almost all dead. That musicking took place at a time and in places where even photographic visual (much less recorded aural) documentation of performance were hardly considered worth making or keeping, so the great majority of sources for my ongoing investigation are textual. In some cases there are 'shreds' of orally-based information to be found in secondary sources produced some 20 to 40 years ago, a time when there were still many alive who could talk

about their memories.<sup>2</sup> The sole scholarly investigation to have focussed on music and Japanese anywhere in ‘old Australia’ yielded an article about the Japanese of Thursday Island and the Torres Strait (Hayward and Konishi 2001), and the interview-based data therein is of particular value. Contrary to my expectations, however, since 2016 it has been possible to do a small amount of further oral history work, thanks to the generosity of a number of elderly individuals in Tokyo, Osaka and northern Australia. All of those individuals were in northern Australia at the time Japan attacked the United States in December 1941, and as a result they were forced to live in civilian internee camps in inland southern regions of the continent until their release or repatriation to Japan in 1946. The present paper includes materials selected from what two of them have told me about memories of both the 1930s and the subsequent period of internment. The other primary source referred to in this paper is a written document, a diary penned by Takimoto Shoutaro 瀧本庄太郎, an indentured Japanese marine labourer in the Torres Strait during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

After giving a brief description of contexts for Japanese presence in prewar Australia and touching on some of the questions raised for a historical investigation of musicking among the various Japanese communities, I will present salient points from the two oral accounts and the diary. In the paper’s final section I will consider what the contents of those three primary accounts suggest about music’s roles in relations between Japanese and other peoples in the ‘poly-ethnic’ north,<sup>3</sup> as well as in the artificially generated societies of wartime internment camps. The data and the interpretations proffered may not only begin to shed light on the intercultural work done by music in this all-but forgotten episode of Australian migrant labour history, but also supplement the body of research on



music and Japanese migrants in South America, Hawaii and California by scholars such as Hosokawa (1995, 2005), Olsen (2004), Waseda (2002, 2005), and Odo (2013). As the outcome of what I regard as preliminary work for a ‘pre-history’ of Japanese musicking in Australia, this paper points toward further investigation of the significance of expressive culture for crossing default divides among minority ethnic groups, migrants and the Anglo-Celtic host society at a time of conventional mono-culturalism, racialised thought and stratification.

### **Australian contexts**

The ‘forgotten’ minority in my title is also a contested one, as it has been argued that until the 1970s almost no Japanese migrated to Australia other than war brides, and therefore that the great majority of Japanese who were in the country before 1942 were not residents but foreign workers on short-term assignments or contracts. Yet the fact that many of those workers renewed their contracts multiple times so as to spend decades in Australia, and the case for treating them as migrants or residents, have been elucidated in the meticulous scholarship of both Regina Ganter and Pam Oliver.<sup>4</sup>

The Japanese constituted prominent populations in several towns of the north and northwest regions, such that, for example, ‘(A)t the outbreak of World War II (in Dec. 1941), Thursday Island was the largest Japanese community in the country’.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile in 1920s–1930s Sydney there were at times comparable numbers of middle-class Japanese engaged in business and various trades, many of whom had active, often warm relations with Anglo-Celtic people and families in their daily and social lives. There were (at least) many hundreds of people of Japanese ethnicity who lived much or most of their lives in Australia before



Figure 1 Entrance to the Japanese section of the Thursday Island graveyard. (Photographed by the author, August 2017.)

the War, and among those there were many who bore children and raised them there. Moreover it should be emphasised that hundreds of Japanese also died in prewar Australia, as visitors to the Japanese graveyards on Thursday Island and Broome can bear witness.

The histories of these diverse groups of Japanese have been fragmentarily documented by researchers since the 1990s, and more recently deployed in a movement to generate awareness of a Japanese-Australian or Nikkei Australian identity.<sup>6</sup> Yet they remain untold and unknown to almost all Australians (and certainly to almost all Japanese), and thus far the documentation contains almost

nothing at all about music, or indeed sonic or aural elements of individuals' experience, despite the existence of a handful of suggestive visual records.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to musicking and music-theatrical performance among the far more numerous ethnic Chinese, whose unbroken history in Australia from the 1850s has been investigated by several music and drama researchers since the 1990s, documentation of Japanese music in prewar Australia is scant and remains almost wholly unaddressed by scholarship.<sup>8</sup>

### ***The north***

When speaking of Australian society as culturally diverse most people tend to refer to the urban society that has developed since the 1960s. Yet things have always been different in the fabled north (which I will use to mean the entire northern perimeter, from Cape York and the Torres Strait in the east to Broome in the northwest). In those regions of the continent the early-C20th vision of an Australia in which Anglo-Celtic 'whites' vastly outnumber all other peoples was never realised; white Australians in fact have often been outnumbered by people of indigenous and Asian ethnicities.<sup>9</sup> It is in the fundamentally diverse societies of port towns and islands of the northern regions that the majority of Japanese lived and worked from the 1880s through 1941.

That was a time of openly anti-Asian exclusionary practices in daily life and administrative policy, given their fullest expression in the infamous Immigration Restriction Act of 1901—the origin of the so-called White Australia Policy enforced for many decades, weakening only in the 1960s before being terminated in 1973. In the north, however, the principal form of Japanese labour remained the dangerous work of diving for pearl-shell and other marine products. For what



Figure 2 'A Japanese pearl-shell diver in the sea near Thursday Island' (*Kyōiku kenkyū* 97, April 1912)

was one of the world's largest pearling industries and the dominant supplier of pearl-shell during the 1910–20s, the Japanese divers were indispensable, and their skill is what enabled thousands of Japanese—divers, their onboard support workers and the onshore affiliates for both—to reside (and often die) in an Australia panicked about race and officially closed to Asian migrants.

### ***Japanese in the north***

Japanese worked in the Torres Strait from as early as the 1870s. From the first, those who came were mostly young men looking for opportunities in the pearl-shell industry and in shell fishing, for both of which the base was Thursday Island (TI). From 1883 on, Japanese were engaged as divers in numbers that

spiked dramatically during the early 1890s, so that by the middle of that decade there were nearly 800 Japanese on or ‘associated with’ TI. On the mainland, in northern Queensland, Japanese were important for some local economies, as relatively well paid ‘model workers’ for another industry—sugar cane.<sup>10</sup> And in Western Australia large numbers of young Japanese men were based in Broome and other northwestern coastal towns; a continual and dramatic increase in their numbers similar to that of Torres Strait in the 1890s occurred in Western Australia during the 1900s.<sup>11</sup> In Broome they were never a majority in the local population, as they were at times on TI, but they dominated the regional pearl-shell industry labour force as divers; even as late as 1925, 193 out of the 210 licensed divers in Broome were Japanese.<sup>12</sup>

On the whole the Japanese in prewar northern Australia, like other Asians, were paid fairly low wages for difficult, often dangerous labour in work and living conditions that very few Anglo-Celts would tolerate. They were subject to discrimination in economic terms under diverse state laws that prevented ‘aliens’ (a category that eventually came to include naturalised British subjects of Asian origin) from owning pearl-shell luggers in Queensland, the Northern Territory (which was then part of South Australia) and Western Australia,<sup>13</sup> and they experienced race-based social oppression in the form of both official and unofficial segregation, which seems to have been somewhat more severe in Broome and some other Western Australian coastal areas than in the Torres Strait.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, Japanese men were for decades the dominant workers in diving, which was the most prestigious and risky of jobs in the pearl shelling industry, but therefore often quite lucrative—and extremely so when compared to contemporary levels of remuneration for comparable physical labour back in Japan. This, combined

with a generally acknowledged racial hierarchy that positioned them as ‘superior’ to other Asian and non-white peoples (with the sometime exception of Chinese) gave them a status above other maritime labourers, and emphatically above that of indigenous peoples.<sup>15</sup> In the Torres Strait that status was most graphically enacted at the outdoor picture theatre on Thursday Island, where it is claimed that during the 1920s among Asians and non-whites, only certain Japanese could pay to sit upstairs on the soft seats together with the Europeans under a roofed section.<sup>16</sup> At the TI public school only Japanese and Chinese were allowed to study together with the white children, while children of other ethnicities (indigenous, ‘Malay’ and Filipino) who were not at the Catholic convent school were required to go to what was called the ‘Coloured school’.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, while the Japanese workers based at TI flourished during much of the prewar era, under Queensland legislation implemented soon after the death in 1904 of the Government Resident John Douglas, who had supported their relative autonomy, Torres Strait Islanders were put under the administrative power of the state’s Protector of Aborigines. From 1912 they were not permitted to live on TI except when hired as housekeepers, nor travel without permission.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Karayuki-san***

Almost all the men who came from Japan were unmarried, and even among the married ones, those permitted to bring their wives were only a handful of men on commercial visas.<sup>19</sup> Those circumstances presented a business opportunity for men who made a living providing young women called *karayuki-san* (a euphemism for women from poor families who went overseas to work, the majority of them as prostitutes, regardless of what work they had been told was available) to brothels throughout Asia and the South Pacific.



Figure 3 A Japanese prostitute in Sachs Street (now Grafton Street), Cairns c.1902. (Reproduced with permission of the Cairns Historical Society)

In 1897, when there were about 1,000 Japanese in the Torres Strait, there were fifty-four *karayuki-san* on TI alone.<sup>20</sup> Interviewing former indentured workers in the 1970s, Ogawa documented the following account of a group of *karayuki-san* who arrived on TI in 1913-14:

The girls had their hair all done up and dressed in a Japanese *hakama* with black socks in black high heel shoes. They strode on the main street. Residents all came to watch them. The girls were just like movie stars or Takarazuka performers. They didn't look like they were stowaways.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, an account of Chinatown in Cairns of the 1900s portrays Japanese prostitutes as a kind of daily spectacle there:

People of every coloured race in the world congregated there, including a great many Japanese prostitutes who in the late afternoon and evening would promenade in groups of 2 or 3, all dressed in most gorgeous kimonos.<sup>22</sup>

*Karayuki-san* were active as sex workers in all the major towns of northern Queensland, as well as in Broome and Darwin, various mining towns in Western Australia, and in ports around the country visited by Japanese crewmen, including the southern cities. A considerable body of research on Japanese prostitution in Australia shows that on the whole the business was highly profitable—more profitable in Australia than any other site where *karayuki-san* worked in Asia and the South Pacific. So much income was generated that some women were able to make substantial contributions and investments of capital important for the infrastructure of the Japanese communities where they were based. It is also clear that the customers of Japanese brothels included men of all the ethnicities in northern Australia, including Aboriginal men from Cape York.<sup>23</sup> That much is reflected in reports of the 1890s–1910s in the *Cairns Post* and other Queensland newspapers, and in what Henry Reynolds recorded as a “jibe constantly made about Cairns was that it was the place where white men lifted their hats to Chinamen and that prominent townsmen ‘dined with the Chows and slept with the Japs’”.<sup>24</sup> In one of his pioneering articles on this subject, the historian David Sissons even suggested that in towns other than those of the pearling regions the Japanese brothels may have served exclusively non-Japanese, as a way of avoiding trouble that could arise when attachments were formed between individual women and Japanese customers.<sup>25</sup>



In light of what Sissons, Nagata and others have gleaned from the historical record, a historical investigation of musicking among the Japanese in ‘old Australia’ cannot disregard music in the context of the brothels. To give just one example of what an initial reading of the secondary documentation suggests: A figure who seems to have been the first (self-declared) professional teacher of Japanese music in Australia was residing in Frederick Street, Broome in 1916, presumably because of sufficient local demand for *shamisen* tuition.<sup>26</sup> While not mentioned by the two interviewees or in the written source introduced below, moreover, there is fragmentary evidence that some of the prostitutes entertained not only their Japanese but even their non-Japanese customers singing and playing *shamisen* (and perhaps other string instruments), just as did many of their counterparts back in Japan.<sup>27</sup> Thus far no mention has been found in the sources of a *karayuki-san*’s skill in dance, but further research in this area is being undertaken and may yet yield accounts of dancing in the context of sex work.

### ***Okinawans***

Among the Japanese in the prewar north were a small number of men (and perhaps some women among the *karayuki-san*) from Okinawa Prefecture, that is, the islands that had been the Ryukyu Kingdom until their annexation by Japan in the 1870s. On TI there was a boarding house in which only Okinawan and Hiroshima region youths stayed.<sup>28</sup> The overall number of Okinawan indentured workers and the routes by which they came to Australia are yet unclear, though it is known that they first came in 1922, and that there were 17 Okinawans on TI in 1939.<sup>29</sup> It is possible that at least some of them came to the Torres Strait directly from Oceania through recruitment in areas of Japanese settlement where Okinawans made up large segments of the settler population after 1925, in particular

Palau and Saipan. Many features of Okinawan culture, including both language and music, differ strikingly from those of ‘main islands’ Japan, so it is very likely that Okinawans enjoyed their own music at their designated boarding house. Okinawans who were brought to Broome and TI in the late 1950s in efforts to revive the pearl-shell industry included men who either brought or built their own *sanshin*.<sup>30</sup> There is no reason to imagine that Okinawan labourers who came in the 1930s would not have done likewise, though given the prewar language and cultural ‘normalisation’ movement in Okinawa and Okinawan labour enclaves such as those of the Osaka port area, they may have been reluctant to perform their songs and dances in front of the majority ‘Yamato Japanese’ in events at the Japan Association (*Nihonjin-kai*) headquarters. Evidence for the presence and distinctive musicking of this important prewar minority-within-a-minority has yet to be investigated.<sup>31</sup>

In the above sections I have illustrated the historical and sociocultural contexts of the Japanese communities in Australia in the 1880s-1941, and also raised the important question of whether there were significant or distinctive musical practices among *karayuki-san* and Okinawan indentured workers. In what follows, I will present data from three primary accounts: an interview-based account of an individual who had been a diver in the North and was then interned as a Japanese civilian throughout World War Two; a 1920s diary text of a Japanese marine worker; and excerpts from a narrative of a man now living in Tokyo who was the Australian-born child of a relatively successful Japanese migrant and an Australian-born woman of Japanese ethnicity.



Figure 4 Yamaguchi Masahei. Photographed by the author in Takarazuka City, October 2017.

### Primary accounts

*Yamaguchi Masahei* 山口政平 (1919–2019)

Yamaguchi Masahei 山口政平 was a sprightly 98 when I visited him in mid-October 2017 at a nursing home in Takarazuka, near Osaka. He spoke to me for over two hours, in the course of which music and dance occasionally were mentioned. He had been the youngest Japanese diver in the Torres Strait in the late 1930s, and as is evident from this photo taken in his room where a navigational map of the Torres Strait dominated the wall, seemed still to be thinking a lot about experiences he had had there. After training then working from ages 16 to 22 as a diver based on boats out of Badu and Thursday Island during 1936 to 1941, he was

sent to an internment camp for single adult men, where he stayed until repatriation to Japan in 1946.

Like many indentured labourers, Yamaguchi had found he needed little if any English in his daily life on the boats, nor even onshore during the lay-up months of January–February when staying with others in the marine workers’ boarding houses. He proudly told me, however, that he’d once learned the words of the then-national anthem “God Save the King” so that he could sing it together with other patrons before the screening of films at the Thursday Island picture theatre.<sup>32</sup> As for singing in Japanese, he said that being a shy teenager he’d rarely if ever sung with or for fellow workers he lived amongst on the boats and in boarding houses on TI, and that in any case he knew very few songs because he’d left Japan when still very young. Nonetheless it became apparent that he was fond of singing and still had a fairly strong voice and a good ear. Yamaguchi may well have developed that as a young adult in the Hay internment camp; surviving documents and testimony by individuals who were in other camps (such as Joe Murakami, as below) suggest that Hay was the most lively of the camps in terms of performance activities of diverse kinds, for the reason that its occupants were mostly single men who, due to lack of family and child-rearing responsibilities, had a relatively large amount of time to devote to leisure activities while interned.<sup>33</sup>

On the day we spoke, the only melody that Yamaguchi recalled from his time in Australia was what he called a folk song (*min’you*) that had been sung at Hay by a certain Mr. Minami, a man from a farming family in Kanagawa Prefecture who worked in the camp as a cook, then was transferred to the military pris-

oners' camp at Cowra (when authorities found out that he had been a Zero pilot), where he subsequently participated in the mass breakout of August 1944. Yamaguchi sang a snatch of song that he called 'Minami's hometown song ミナミさんの地元の歌', and which he said was one Minami had often sung in the camp (to himself, but loud enough for Yamaguchi to hear repeatedly) 'out of sadness' (despondency/ feeling down / ミナミさんがね、小さい声でね、えらいひとりシヨボンといて、しやんねんね ).

早苗ナ一、早苗とる手も 麦踏む足も  
*Sanae na, sanae toru te mo mugi fumu ashi mo*

The rice seedlings, the hands that bear them,  
and the feet that stamp the barley, too

揃た 揃たよ 村中が揃った  
*Soro(t)ta soro(t)ta yo, murachuu ga sorotta*  
have gathered, gathered - all in the village have gathered

瑞穂踊りに コリヤエ  
*Mizuho odori(ru)ni. Koryae.*  
to dance the Mizuho Odori. *Koryae!*

In fact this song, titled 'Mizuho Odori 瑞穂踊り', is not from rural Kanagawa Prefecture (near Tokyo), where Minami came from, and it is not a folk song that can be strongly associated with any 'hometown 地元'. What Yamaguchi sang for me was a slightly shortened version of the first verse from a popular song composed by Nakayama Shimpei 中山晋平 with lyrics by Okazaki Shukurou 岡崎淑郎,

which had been sung by two of the leading *uguisu geisha* (literally ‘bush warbler geisha’, sometimes also rendered as ‘nightingale geisha’),<sup>34</sup> Kouta Katsutaro 小唄勝太郎 and Ichimaru 市丸, on a Victor SP (78rpm) disc released in July 1941. Given its central image of *mizuho* 瑞穂, one of several ancient literary terms for Japan, this became a much-favoured song of the war years (in effect becoming a *gunka*, in the broadest sense of that term), often sung or played for community dancing such as that done during Obon.<sup>35</sup>

It may be that Yamaguchi had mistakenly remembered this song on the day that I spoke with him, substituting it for another song that Minami used to sing in the Hay internment camp. Or it may be that this indeed was the song Minami often sang to himself, but Yamaguchi simply had not known (and continued not to be aware) of its popularity and its commercial origins. A third possibility is that Minami used to sing the first verse and tune of the ‘Mizuho Odori’ but thereafter made a variant of the song (*kaenta* 替え歌) using new lyrics about his hometown in rural Kanagawa.

During our conversation, the musicking experience that Yamaguchi was able to recall most vividly from his time in the Torres Strait was prompted by my showing him a photograph I had come across in the Cairns Historical Museum (Figure 5).

It took him all of one second to identify this scene as a performance like those he had seen in an ‘Island(s) Festival’ (*shima no matsuri* 島の祭り, as he called it), which according to him took place annually in the first days of June (六月)).<sup>36</sup> He then said:

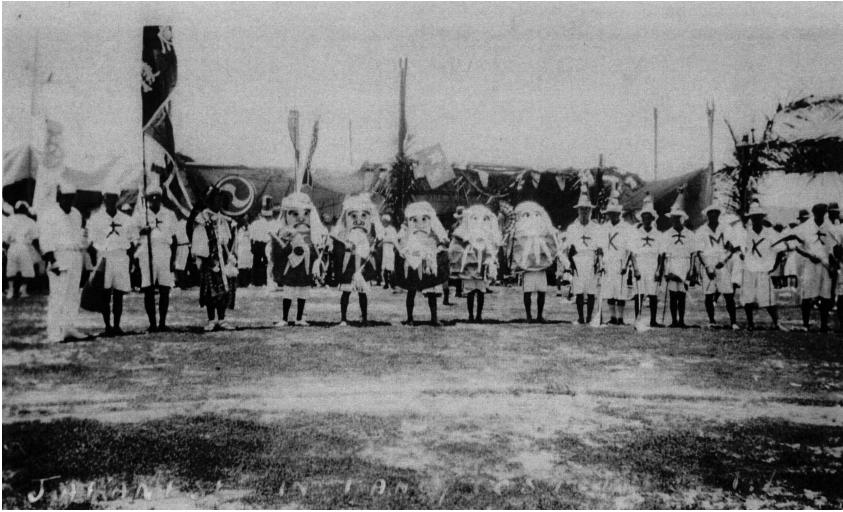


Figure 5 'Japanese in fancy costume', a mid-1920s photograph of Japanese performers on Thursday Island. (Reproduced with permission of the Cairns Historical Society)

I saw Islander dances together with Masumoto, who used to work with Takami. I saw just this sort of dance ... Japanese didn't often dance together (like this). When they did, it was done with folk songs I didn't know since I (had left Japan when I) was still just a kid. ... They'd form a circle, but also sometimes dance in a row, moving first to the left then back again ... And there was another time when *we* had to do a dance. I found it a bit strange yet fun all the same. We had no idea what the dance meant, but that's just the sort of thing that happened ...<sup>37</sup>

Takami (Kazuyoshi) and Masumoto (Yoshikazu) were Japanese working in cultured pearling whom Yamaguchi met in the 1960s.<sup>38</sup> So it seems that in this response Yamaguchi was either conflating prewar and postwar memories, or else

describing a vivid memory of Islander dances seen in early June during a post-war visit, then relating prewar memories of a Japanese group dance, triggered by the fact that the dance group photographed in the 1920s was made up of Japanese, not Islanders. It is significant, however, that at first Yamaguchi took the costumed group for Islanders; presumably there are aspects of the costuming similar to those he recalled from watching Islander dancers.

There are a great many questions to ask about both the image I showed Yamaguchi and the context in which he himself was involved in a performance of a Japanese dance. (For example: What were the models for those costumes in the photograph that evoked Islander garb for Yamaguchi? When a group dance was learned for performance, was it always a so-called 'folk dance' associated with a particular site in Japan? How was the dance selected? If a folk dance was to be done, whose home region was that dance from, and who taught the dance to young men like Yamaguchi who were entirely unfamiliar with it?) For now, however, the point to emphasise is that in recalling his experience of the sort of dance shown in the mid-1920s photograph, Yamaguchi alluded to an intercultural context for musical performance, albeit a rare one. In the Conclusion I will return to the question of what kind of intercultural contact may have been inherent in or arisen from such a display of group dancing.

*The Takimoto Diary* 瀧本庄太郎日記

The second fragmentary account is found in a diary penned five to ten years before Yamaguchi Masahei arrived in the Torres Strait.<sup>39</sup> Takimoto Shoutaro 瀧本庄太郎 wrote the diary while working on TI- and Badu-based boats between 1924 and 1930. If one excludes the four or more entries that describe singing 'God



Save the King' at the start of film showings at the TI picture theatre, then the entire diary contains just eight references to music-making.<sup>40</sup> Of those, four concern occasions on which there was dancing (and presumably singing) by Islanders. All four occurred on Badu during the lay-up months from late December through February; three were events on public holidays (December 25, January 1 and 2) and the fourth was celebratory dancing after a wedding. Takimoto wrote that on some of those occasions large numbers of Japanese attended.<sup>41</sup> Before or directly after two of the performances, he went to visit a Badu islander named Aaron (or perhaps Aron) at his family home. Significantly, those entries are five years apart (January 1925 and January 1930), so it seems that Takimoto's good relations with Aron (described in the latter as 'my friend Aron' 友人のアロン)<sup>42</sup> lasted for most of the period he was living in the Torres Strait.

There were a good number of off-days when Takimoto did what he called *asobi* 遊び——passing the time visiting other boats whose crews were equally at leisure. During the lay-up period when many marine workers were living onshore in boarding houses, diversion in the evening would sometimes include listening to 78rpm (SP) records, though no song or tune titles are given in the diary. There are only two explicit references to Japanese group performances, but they are important because they shed light on a second context for the performance of a group dance—a more participatory one than the essentially presentational context that Yamaguchi had recalled: In 1928, November 10–11th were holidays for Japanese workers as the most important of the enthronement ceremonies for the Showa Emperor (Hirohito) were taking place in Kyoto. Japanese flags were raised on all the boats, and in the evening on the 10th there was a costume and lantern parade in the streets of TI.<sup>43</sup> Then from 6pm to 12.30am on the 11th a va-

riety show (*engeikai* 演芸会) took place at the Japanese Club, which played to a full house with performances by at least two people from each of the eight boarding houses. Takimoto and two others from his own lodging were selected, and they presented the Yasugi-bushi Dance.<sup>44</sup> This is performed with a song originally from the town of Yasugi in northern Shimane Prefecture. As Takimoto and the other two performers were from Wakayama, not Shimane, and occupants of boarding houses were grouped together according to their home region, the choice of item was likely due to the extent of both the song and the dance's popularity throughout Japan (including the *gaichi* 'outer territories' of the Chousen and Taiwan colonies) of the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>45</sup> The second group performance described was on the evening of February 2nd 1930, again during the lay up months and again at the Japanese Club, this time in an *engeikai* to mark the occasion of the founding of a 'machinery study group' (機械研究部). As in 1928, a group—this time of five men—from Takimoto's boarding house performed the Yasugi-bushi Dance (which Takimoto himself had taught to '3 or 4' younger men intensively from 10am to 3pm that day!), but other performance items by men from his lodgings are also listed as having been well received: these were drama (*shibai*, meaning short dramatic excerpts or perhaps sketches) and *ni-agari* dance,<sup>46</sup> *shinnai* dance, and *naniwa-bushi* musical narration, among others ('芝居及び二上り、新内の舞、浪花節などあり').<sup>47</sup> There is no indication as to whether live *shamisen* and vocal performance of *shinnai* music took place, nor whether a *shamisen* player was able to accompany the recitation of *naniwa-bushi*.

*Joseph Clement Kisaburo Murakami* 村上喜三郎ジョセフ

Joseph Murakami's situation was fundamentally different from those of the contract labourers Yamaguchi and Takimoto. Murakami was born in Broome in



Figure 6 Joe Murakami. Photographed by the author in Kawasaki City, late 2017.

1927, raised there until 1935, lived in Darwin from ages 8 to 14, and subsequently spent the remainder of his teen years in remote rural Victoria in the Tatura civilian internment camp complex with his parents and siblings<sup>48</sup>, from which he emerged in 1947 at age 20. His father was the photographer and inventor Yasukichi Murakami, who died in the Tatura camp in 1943 but is now acknowledged as both in effect the inventor of the diving aqualung and a leading figure and important chronicler of 1920s–1930s society in Broome, then in turn Darwin. Joe’s mother was ethnically Japanese but Australian-born and a devout Catholic.

From my discussions with Joe, it seems that up until the internment, he ex-

perienced music and performance of Japanese tradition only very occasionally. At home in Darwin there was a gramophone on which his older siblings played British, American or Australian-made 78rpm discs, but there were also a few records from Japan that people preparing to go back had given their parents, including some of recent popular songs (*ryuukouka* 流行歌), among which songs by Dick Mine stood out in Joe's memory. While Joe couldn't recall any whose sound featured *shamisen* or other Japanese instruments, he had heard *shamisen* (and specified that it was not Okinawan *sanshin*, on the grounds that he thought there had been very few Okinawans in prewar Broome) being played by indentured labourers at their boarding houses, where he and one of his sisters were sometimes welcomed, being two of just a handful of Japanese-speaking children in early 1930s Broome. Perhaps once a year in that same period, a touring troupe of Japanese actor-singer-dancers would perform simplified scenes and dances from kabuki and various Japanese folk dances in the disused function room of the old Dampier Hotel. Joe recalls the audience for those occasional performances as being solely Japanese, but a broader range of people would come to watch dancing done by female children at the Japanese graveyard for the Obon festival in August.<sup>49</sup> Apparently interest in such performance events on the part of the various ethnic groups in Broome extended to attendance at amateur *kendo* and *sumo* tournaments.<sup>50</sup>

Joe's own musical interests first developed in the context of Catholic education after the family moved to Darwin in 1935, in response to instrumental tuition given at the St. Mary's Convent School; while one of his sisters learned piano there, he was assigned to learn the mandolin. Joe continued to play forms of mandolin (deep-back then flat-back) right through the years in the Tatura camp. By

playing popular song melodies on mandolin with friends who had guitars, he also became interested in the accompaniment role of that instrument, picking up some common chord sequences and strumming patterns. He told me, however, that he had never played any Japanese tune on either mandolin or guitar. While in internment he mostly played American and British popular tunes and songs in an informal duo with Joe Bogesi, a doctor from the Solomon Islands interned in Australia because he was seen as a person of high social standing who'd been supportive of the Japanese occupation of the Solomons. Joe says that when they played together, the people who'd gather to listen were mostly other Pacific Islanders from the Solomons and some Japanese internees from New Caledonia. When asked to name a tune that they played often, he thought of "The Woodpecker Song", an instrumental based on the 1940 hit by the Glen Miller Orchestra, a version of an earlier Italian foxtrot titled *Reginella Campagnola*.<sup>51</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The presence of Japanese in northern Australia for over half a century can be seen as a mere footnote in modern Japan's vigorous economic expansion and engagement with areas peripheral to its imperial colonies and mandated territories. According to that narrative, motives for Japanese engagement in the marine industries of northern Australia were essentially strategic and opportunistic, and perhaps even nationalistic, demonstrating the skill and resilience of Japanese for turning a profit from work that 'white men' could not succeed in. When the stories and experiences of Japanese individuals (*and* the diverse peoples they interacted with) <sup>52</sup> are taken into account, however, a more complicated picture emerges—most of all with regard to the Japanese who migrated (becoming naturalised or domiciled) before 1901, but also for some of the indentured labourers

who, through extension and renewal of their contracts for many years and in some cases decades, were in effect long-term migrant workers in Australia. As Hokari Minoru pointed out (2003: 89) with regard to the history of Aboriginal-Japanese relations, while the number of people involved would seem to render the topic insubstantial and marginal in the extreme, the involvement of ‘all kind of nation’ (Chase 1981) in the marine industries of Australia’s north at a time when those in power saw the society as ‘one kind of nation’—the kind of the predominant ethnicity—renders marginality itself a minor issue for considering the significance of Japanese presence in Australia before the Second World War.

I have presented a handful of items from three primary accounts, a diary of the prewar era and interview accounts of both the prewar and wartime internment periods. The materials suggest several things about music’s roles in fostering relations between Japanese and other peoples in the societies of Thursday Island and the Torres Strait in the 1920s–30s, and Broome and Darwin in the 1930s, as well as the artificially imposed society of the civilian internment camps. Keeping in mind that all three accounts have been from ‘Japanese’ perspectives,<sup>53</sup> they nonetheless highlight a number of contexts for musicking among the Japanese themselves, and by the Japanese for others, in prewar communities and in the circumstances of subsequent wartime internment in the Hay and Tatura camps.

Firstly, it seems that in prewar Torres Strait, presentational music performance for ethnically diverse audiences, in particular performance of dance traditions, was common. What kind of intercultural contact was involved? Apparently Japanese marine workers experienced Islander dance and song on a fairly regu-

lar basis (and even learned one or more group dances), and occasionally made presentations of their own music for Islanders or other peoples in the Strait.<sup>54</sup> Such rare occasions of group presentational performance by Japanese men were suggested to Yamaguchi by the group dance photo I showed him. If indeed Japanese occasionally danced (and sang Japanese folk song) in island festivities, that would imply that certain senior workers (diver-bosses, or perhaps seniors/*sem-pai* in the TI boarding houses) felt it was important to display Japanese dancing and singing in events that were firmly centred on the musicking traditions of various groups of Islanders. The Japanese were an ethnic minority in the north, yet at the time they were the pearl-shell industry's most important labour group. From at least the 1920s they had to work on boats together with Islanders, who were of course the ethnic majority in the Strait but in many ways the most disadvantaged people there. The participation of Japanese as performers, some of whom wore a costume style that referenced Islander dancing, can be read as an intercultural gesture in which the usual racial hierarchy was put aside or even temporarily subverted for the sake of a broader sense of community, albeit a temporary one affirmed only on special occasions, which also included the Japanese Sports Carnival and the TI boat races—and in Broome *sumo* and *kendo* matches and dancing for the Obon festival in August.

Secondly, Takimoto's written account of the 1920s tells us that Japanese maritime workers commonly attended various kinds of dance (and probably song) performances by Islanders; that there were long-lasting friendly relations between individual Japanese and Badu men,<sup>55</sup> which in part were maintained in the context of musicking events; and that Japanese workers put on elaborate variety shows of their own at their clubhouse on TI. All of this corroborates evidence for

music and performance culture on TI and other islands in research by Konishi and Hayward, Neuenfeldt, Shnukal and others,<sup>56</sup> and taken together, suggests that both informal (impromptu) and occasional pre-arranged formal music-making figured as significant moments of shared leisure in contact between the Japanese and other culturally discrete communities in the north, both in the 1890s when Japanese outnumbered whites on TI, and in the decades that followed when the Japanese were an economically indispensable minority.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, Joe Murakami's situation as the Australian-born child of a relatively successful migrant in the societies of 1930s Broome then Darwin gave him little or no opportunities for *musical* contact with either indigenous peoples or the several (other) substantial non-white minorities in those towns. The musical points of reference that Joe remembers are 78rpm (SP) records at home, the music-making of contract labourers in boarding houses where he'd play as a child, a visiting troupe of Japanese entertainers, and the music tuition at a Catholic school through which he gained skill on the mandolin. It was only later, as a teenager in the isolated, artificially-generated society of a wartime civilian internment camp, that he had a musical encounter with a middle-class Solomon Islander, playing tunes of neither Japanese nor Pacific origin for men (most of them Islanders) who found themselves forced to live together in remote regional Victoria.

Japanese music (and dance) has flourished in multi-cultural urban Australia since the 1990s, but with only limited involvement by migrants and people of Japanese heritage (the chief exception being *koto* music). In constructing a fragmentary pre-history of Japanese musicking among the Japanese and people of



Japanese heritage in Australia, one must first consider one of the core functions of music in that time of (Anglo-Celtic) mono-cultural domination, namely, maintaining communities and helping to sustain the well-being of individuals. It is also important, however, to keep seeking evidence for musical experience across the default racial divides of that time. As such work progresses and yields a critical mass of data, moreover, it can be given additional perspective and application through comparison with the emerging body of work on the music of other Asian migrant minorities in Australian society *before* 1980s multiculturalism.

### Acknowledgements:



I dedicate this text to Yamaguchi Masahei (1919–2019), who is pictured with a cap on front and centre in the above photograph from the mid-1930s (reproduced from the Kushimoto Town Office Collection). His willingness to meet with and talk at length with numerous researchers since the 1980s greatly contributed to the development of a detailed picture of the circumstances of indentured Japanese labourers working in the pearlshell industry, and their subsequent experiences during wartime internment.

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- 1 Since April 2017 this work has been carried out in the context of a research project titled *Music communities of ethnic and cultural minorities in and from Japan*, funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (日本学術振興会, 科研費基盤研究 B, 17H02285). My historical study was proposed as a counterpoint, because it concerns Japanese as a minority outside Japan proper and its colonial empire, in an era when the growth of that empire cast an increasingly deep shadow over dealings with Japan and its people.
- 2 Among the most important are the Japanese oral histories recorded by Taira Ogawa in the early 1970s, by Yuriko Nagata and Regina Ganter in the 1980s–90s, and by Junko Konishi and Philip Hayward in the late 1990s, as quoted in their published research.
- 3 With reference to northern Australia, this term was introduced and disseminated through the work of Regina Ganter from the 1990s on.
- 4 Ganter 1994, 2006 and Oliver 2006.
- 5 Nagata 1999, 30.
- 6 Nagata 2015; Fukui and Kanamori 2017; and <https://www.nikkeiaustralia.com>.
- 7 To give one example, page 43 of Neville Meaney's 1999 book *Towards a New Vision: Australia and Japan Through 100 Years* (Sydney: Kangaroo Press) shows a photograph taken 'in the late nineteenth century' of a Salvation Army band in northern Queensland whose members include Japanese and three Westerners. Three members posed for the photograph with *gekkin*.
- 8 Chinese music and music theatre in Australia before World War Two is the subject of academic theses, articles and several chapters of a book (Wang 1997). For Japanese musicking of the same period, Hayward and Konishi's 2001 text on music and the Japanese in the Torres Strait is the only published scholarly article, while no theses have been undertaken in either English or Japanese.

- 9 They were outnumbered on Thursday Island in the late 1890s by Japanese, specifically, by a factor of 2:1 (Ganter 1994, 105).
- 10 By 1898 some 2,300 indentured Japanese had been brought by emigration firms to work in cane fields and sugar mills, most of them near Cairns, Townsville and Mackay (Nagata 1996, 21).
- 11 Choo 2009, 13.
- 12 Nagata 1996, 18–19.
- 13 Before Federation in 1901 there were, however, a fair number of Japanese lugger owners, and thereafter ‘dummying’ arrangements with Anglo-Celtic surrogate owners were common. The case of the naturalised British subject (the pre-Federation equivalent of taking Australian citizenship) Muramatsu Jiro is best-documented (Oliver 2006, Chapter 1).
- 14 Sickert (2003, as quoted in Kaino 2009, 42) renders the following comment about prewar Broome by an elderly resident: ‘Broome was so much more racist than Darwin or Katherine. It was the pearlers who did not want to associate with their coloured employees socially.’ See also footnote 16 below, regarding race-based seating arrangements at the TI and Broome outdoor theatres.
- 15 For example ‘...established practice that rated Islanders below Asians and Kanakas, but above Papuans and Aborigines’ (‘The Torres Strait Islanders and the Pearling Industry: A Case of Internal Colonialism’, in Beckett 2014, 115).
- 16 Matsumoto, ed. 2016: 187. If this claim is accurate (though as yet no evidence for that has been found) then the practice was in contrast to Broome’s Sun Picture Gardens theatre, where Japanese and all other ‘Asians’ sat to one side, Aboriginals and mixed-blood ‘coloureds’ sat on the other side, while only whites sat in the centre seats.
- 17 Shnukal and Ramsey 2004, 60.
- 18 Shnukal and Ramsey 2004, 44.
- 19 Nagata 2004, 146.
- 20 Nagata 2004, 142.
- 21 Ogawa 1976, p175; as translated in Nagata 2004, 145.
- 22 1959 text cited in Nagata 1996, 23.
- 23 Chase 1981, 16. See also Nagata 2004; ‘Japanese prostitutes’ ... clientele were generally Japanese men, but they also served both “Coloured” and “White” populations’ (142).
- 24 Reynolds 2003, 150. See also Robb 2005.

- 25 Sissons 1977b, 482.
- 26 Listed on page 339 of *Asian Immigrants to Western Australia 1829–1901* compiled by Anne Atkinson (University of Western Australia Press 1988). Sakata was born in December 1875 and arrived in Australia in 1895. Atkinson's source was the Form of Application for Registration under the War Precautions (Alien Registration) Regulations 1916 (Acc PP 14/1 Australian Archives, WA branch). My sincere thanks to Noreen Jones for providing me with this information.
- 27 See Calvert's late 1890s description (as quoted in Jones 2002: 56–57). It seems likely that the 'mandolin-like' instrument described in some sources was in fact a *gekkin* 月琴, the Chinese 'moon lute' that was widely played both by middle-class women in Japan at least until the first Sino-Japanese War of the mid-1890s, and until many decades later by women trained in particular Nagasaki *hanamachi* geisha houses. (See the abstract for 'Gei ni okeru Shingaku no Eikyō: Nagasaki Hanamachi no Gekkin Ensō o Chuushin ni 芸における清楽の影響——長崎花街の月琴演奏を中心に' (Influence of Popular Music of Qing in Japan: As Seen in Performance of Gekkin in the Geisha District of Nagasaki) by Nakahara Itsurou 中原逸郎 in the printed programme of the Annual Conference of the Toyo Ongaku Gakkai, November 2018.) Three *gekkin*—all of them in the hands of women—can be seen in the photograph referred to in footnote 7 above.
- 28 Matsumoto, ed. 2016, 10.
- 29 Nagata 2017, 63 and footnote 18. The figures cited had been provided by Professor Matsumoto Hiroyuki of Nara Women's University. John Lamb subsequently confirmed that in light of the extant Japanese and Australian records, they must be 'very close' (email of 10/3/2019).
- 30 Both Joe Murakami and Hirakawa Kyōzō, an Osaka-raised Okinawan who has lived on TI for well over 50 years, told me of having received such instruments from men who went back to Okinawa.
- 31 In his book *Okinawans Reaching Australia* (published in 2019 by Hesperian Press, but seen in earlier draft form), John Lamb gleans from the historical record a thorough chronicle of Okinawans who worked as indentured labourers up until the 1960s, but musical activity hardly figures in that account.
- 32 He would not sing those words for me; nor did he explicitly say he had forgotten them.
- 33 Hay Historical Society 2006 includes examples of programs for entertainment given

by Japanese internees.

34 *Uguisu geisha* 鶯芸者 was a term for a series of highly successful popular singers of the late 1920s and 1930s, some of whom had been professional geisha.

35 Commentary on the essentially sorrowful content of the song, in which some verses suggest sending sons off to war with little hope of seeing them again, can be found on various websites, among them <http://www.somabito.org/hokuen/2013/01/16-a309.html>

Photographs of large groups of women dancing to this song (presumably because the men were away fighting) can be seen on this and other relevant sites.

36 It seems highly likely that what Yamaguchi called an ‘Island (s) Festival’ was in fact the Bamaga Show (now called the NPA Show) on Cape York, which was held in the first days of June, and attended by many Torres Strait islanders who often gave presentational performances of their dances. <https://www.capeyorkaustralia.com/npa-show-bamaga.html>

37 These are the words used in the interview: 「木曜島でタカミ（高見）さんと一緒に仕事しよった、マスモト（増本）という人がおんねん。その人と一緒にこれ、こんな踊り見ました。…6月のね、1日2日っていうのはね…島の祭りがあるんです…」[DE FERRANTI:] 日本人だけの踊りとかなんかしたんですか。[山口:] 「あんま少なかったけど。…民謡みたいな踊りですな…輪になったとこもあるし、一列になったとこもあるしね。左行ったり来たり…自分は…変な踊りって言ったら面白いけど、自分らで意味もなんもわからんような踊りをしとったり、あったからね。」

38 I am grateful to Professor Matsumoto Hiroyuki (oral communication, 10/2019) for pointing this out to me, as well as telling me that the Bamaga Show long weekend had been an unofficial holiday for Thursday Islanders at least until the late 1970s. Mr. Takami is in fact still running a cultured pearl ‘farm’ near TI, on Friday Island. See <http://www.kazupearl.com>

39 Matsumoto ed. 2016. My thanks to Professor Matsumoto for sending me a copy of the printed (*katsuji*) version of the original diary, which his research group produced.

40 Ibid.: 7, 11, 101, 245, 332, 337, 342, and 344.

41 「日本人、大部分上陸してあり、にぎはふ」(ibid., 332).

42 Ibid.: 11 and 337

43 Nothing is recorded about music or dancing during the parade, though it is hard to imagine there was none—at very least the beating of one or more portable *taiko*.

- 44 Ibid., 245. The dance is identified in the diary text as Yasugi-bushi 安来節, which then, as now, was more often called Dojou-sukui (鯛すくい).
- 45 On the history of the song and an associated dance, including their dissemination to Japanese colonies in the Taisho era, see <http://furusato.sanin.jp/p/area/yasugi/16/01/>. Matsumoto Hiroyuki has noted that the Dojou-sukui dance was often done at farewell parties for men returning to Japan each February. Personal communication of October 21<sup>st</sup> 2017.
- 46 *Ni-agari odori* is a form of Bon dance from Hiroshima Prefecture. From the late 1920s the dancers started holding and sounding *yotsu-dake* 'bamboo castanets' instead of the fans held in the older form of the dance, but as yet there is no evidence that the new instrument was played in Torres Strait performances.
- 47 Matsumoto ed. 2016, 342. Note that Matsumoto's editorial note following this entry says that such elaborate events organised for (at least) the entire Japanese community, including not only *engeikai* but also rowboat races and sports carnivals, were not recounted by workers who went to TI from the second decade of Showa, that is, from approximately 1935 on.
- 48 Murakami, his parents and those of his siblings who were in Australia at the outbreak of war with Japan were first interned in camp B, then moved to camp D (personal communication, September 15<sup>th</sup> 2017).
- 49 A set of six photographs ('Japanese Cemetery and Feast of Lanterns at Broome'; 4723B collection) in the State Library of Western Australia also include apparent images of Bon dancing and related Obon ornaments, at a site identified by Joe Murakami as near the town's beach. One of those same images is now on permanent display on a panel in Jimmy Chi Lane in Broome, where it is labelled as 'Festivities in a Chinatown lane'.
- 50 In a Broome Historical Society photograph (original dated November 1928) reproduced on page 40 of Norman 2017, a range of people watch 1-year old Joe on display in sumo attire at the start of a tournament. The image also includes a splendid *taiko* in the background. Such events are comparable to the Japanese Sports Day and the Japanese rowing races on TI, which were spectacles of interest to most of the TI residents.
- 51 Personal communication of September 24<sup>th</sup> 2017.
- 52 Examples of the stories told by one group of indigenous people about 'the Japanee' (as they called them) are contained in a 1981 article by Athol Chase on the period when Aborigines of the Lockhart River region in Cape York had limited contact with

whites but frequent contact with Asians, including periods of working for Japanese skippers on pearling boats.

- 53 By this I mean of Japanese ethnicity; although interned as a Japanese in wartime Australia and treated as such by some people for years thereafter, Joe Murakami is an Australian citizen by birth and regards English as his first language.
- 54 Larger-scale performances of Japanese music theatre for the entire TI community during the 1890s-1900s are documented in Hayward and Konishi 2001, but the contents of the Takimoto Diary and statements made in interviews for the current project concern the 1920s-1930s.
- 55 A comparable documented friendship was that between Higashi Yutaka and the 'half-caste' Yorke Islander Jack Mosby. See Hayward and Konishi 2001 (footnote 48).
- 56 Hayward and Konishi 2001, Neuenfeldt 2004, and Shnukal 2004, 258-59.
- 57 In the latter regard, the data gathered thus far does not corroborate Hayward and Konishi's conclusion that 'public presentation of Japanese culture to a general Island audience' was 'relatively short-lived' (2001: 58), in effect ending with 1908 legislation that confined contract labourers to living on their boats except during the lay-up.

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