

Japan and the Ocean:
A Transnational History of Hyakushō and the Making of
the Arafura Zone



Manimporok Rontakan Gerungan Dotulong

St. Cross College

University of Oxford

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Abstract

This dissertation chronicles the lives of a group of people thus far unknown to History – people for whom the challenges posed by nature formed the principal driver of historical change and whose seaborne ways of life, in turn, challenged the agents of industrial modernity in Japan and the colonies of European empires in the Western Pacific in the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. These people were ‘hyakushō’, ordinary seafolk who used their rich local knowledge of the sea to navigate changing social and ecological conditions. Joined by a whole host of vagrant and unruly characters, they left the Japanese archipelago for the bluer waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Here, they created autonomous spaces for themselves and likeminded others in what I call the ‘Arafura Zone’, a place ruled by ocean currents and monsoonal winds. By examining Japan’s historical relationship to the world’s oceans through the making of the Arafura Zone, hyakushō emerge as the central actors of a new transnational history of modern Japan.

Fundamentally, this dissertation is concerned with the question of how the course of history is shaped by nature – by which I mean not just ‘the environment’ but also the living systems that are inseparable from it. I look at how hyakushō’s local knowledge of nature informed technological change in the early Meiji era and how this knowledge led hyakushō to embrace a life in which the ocean shaped the patterns of everyday life. The movements of hyakushō were underpinned by a sense of time and space that diverged from the temporal and spatial regimes of state actors concerned with the modernization of Japan according to Western models. I argue that this nature-centric historical trajectory forces us to rethink the meaning of the ‘Opening of Japan’, which has until recently mainly been discussed in terms of Japan’s incorporation into global industrial civilization. I also examine the ways in which environmental hardship facilitated the emergence of practices of care across racial boundaries on the industrial seascape (the decks of ships, boomtowns, and courthouses), and how those practices evolved into more expansive forms of mutual aid across a multitude of cultures in the wider Arafura Zone. Hyakushō’s relations with a heterogeneous cast of people were based on a nature-centric intellectual common ground that subverted the intrinsically hierarchical and racialized order of the international community of ‘civilized’ nation states of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The story of hyakushō and the making of the Arafura Zone offer interventions in the subfields of transnational history, environmental history, and oceanic history as they relate to

the historiography of Japan. By examining non-state actors, processes, events, and ideas that fall outside of state-centric frameworks of historical research, this study shows how transnational approaches constitute a distinctive way of doing history. Transnational history might thereby be differentiated from international or diplomatic history, instead of becoming another way in which nations, states, empires, and their institutions reassert themselves as the central units of historical analysis. As oceanic history, this study consciously avoids retelling the story of ‘globalization’ from the deck of a factory ship or the administrative centers of port towns and the civilizations to which they belong. Instead, it tells a history ‘from below the waves’ that is capable of shedding light on actors whose agencies reveal differently envisioned futures and implicit notions of historical progress that evade historians’ interpretations ‘from above’. This is what makes my study an environmental history as well, in the sense that it focuses on the dreams, desires, motivations, and intellectual worlds of ordinary people as understood through their relationship with nature (thereby offering an alternative to narratives that focus on environmental decline or management). In sum, this dissertation shifts attention away from the land to the ocean to examine the transnationalism of ordinary ‘Japanese’ seafolk in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – I show how their temporality, spatiality, and cross-cultural practices of mutual aid constituted a type of modernity that undermined Western civilizational discourse.

Introduction

While Saigō Takamori was fighting Japan's newly installed Meiji government with arms, and Itagaki Taisuke was fighting it with 'the people's rights' instead, 'the people' were just on their way out. In 1874, the same year that Itagaki invoked European natural rights theory and the political discourse of liberalism to lay the foundation of modern Japanese subjecthood, an ordinary boy by the name of Nonami Kojirō decided to pack up and leave. After the announcement of the new land tax reforms, it was probably not a difficult decision for Nonami, or "Japanese Nona" as he later came to be known, to sign on the ship of a British merchantman in Yokohama in search of a better future.¹ As the first Japanese shellfish diver to make a name for himself in the Arafura Sea, Nonami paved the way for an entirely different type of change in people's social lives than was brought about by state actors who sought to transform the country in the image of the modern nation state of the West. His departure marked the emergence of a transnational world inhabited by non-state actors far beyond the confines of the Japanese archipelago – a world ruled by the currents and the winds of the ocean.

From ancient Chinese texts mentioning the fishers of Wa to the global popularity of sushi today, the imprint of the ocean on the cultures of the Japanese archipelago appears extensive. Yet, surprisingly, there have been few histories of Japan that have sought to tackle the question of the role that the ocean played in shaping the archipelago culturally. In this dissertation, I examine the historical significance of the ocean from the perspective of those who knew it most intimately – 'Japanese' fishers unknown to history. This is a history that focuses on the everyday acts of people whose lives became deeply intertwined with the currents of the world's oceans. It is a history that hinges on the stories of people whose tanned skins made contact with the water on a daily basis, rather than those who sought to rule the waves from their administrative centers and ivory towers. I dive deep into the local pasts of these oceanic commoners, in order to better understand their historical backgrounds as abalone foraging *ama*, skipjack tuna fishers, whalers, and other types of seafolk. I examine their attempts to grapple with rapidly changing circumstances in the nineteenth century to gain a better grasp of their sudden appearance abroad in the decades leading up to, and following, the twentieth century. I see the practices they developed and the futures that they envisioned as opportunities to expand our understanding of what Japanese history might entail. In this

¹ Arthur Stockwin and Keiko Tamura, eds., *Bridging Australia and Japan: Volume 1: The Writings of David Sissons, Historian and Political Scientist* (ANU Press, 2016), 97.

narrative of modern Japanese history, a focal shift from the land to the ocean entails a move from elite and state-centered, national, international, and global approaches to those that are non-state and commoner-centric, local, and transnational.

This dissertation explores the establishment of transnational networks of ordinary fishers and their supporters that connected rural Japan with insular Southeast Asia and Australasia between the 1880s and the 1930s. It pays close attention to the ways in which these people relied on their local knowledge of nature to create livelihoods in entirely new ecological contexts. These ordinary ‘Japanese’ co-created, alongside others who were more indigenous to the Indian and Pacific Oceans, a largely non-state space beyond the purview of the imperial powers of their day.² Here, in what I call ‘the Arafura Zone’, monsoonal winds and ocean currents heavily shaped the patterns of everyday life. I explore how the nature-centric temporality and sense of space of those who I call ‘Arafurese’ gave way to voluntary and self-organized social interactions revolving around mutual aid. My central argument can be summed up as follows: as part of the nineteenth century ‘Opening of Japan’, ordinary seafolk forged transnational connections between Japan and the wider world by way of their nature-centric mentalities, defining their own notions of historical progress and concomitant ways of life in the process.

Understood as Japan’s encounter with Western modernity, the Opening of Japan has long served as an anchor point for the study of Japan’s connections with the wider world. As the American whaling industry expanded into the North Pacific, Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan in 1853 in order to demand the right to access the ports. His arrival marked the moment when the country opened not only to Euro-American commodities and technologies but also to the ideas of historical progress that accompanied them. The arrival of modern Western whaling triggered a chain of events that would lead to the education of samurai elites in the most prestigious educational institutions of the West, the overthrow of the old feudal order, the embrace of Western political discourse, rapid industrialization and, starting in present-day Hokkaido, the beginnings of a colonial empire.

While Euro-American whalers contributed to opening Japan to a vision of historical progress that could realize its integration into industrial civilization, another culture of whaling

² I understand ‘indigeneity’ as a strategic concept deployable in attempts to highlight the disadvantages incurred by individuals and communities in the face of globalized state and market forces throughout history – and thereby synonymous with ‘pre-contact’, the ‘dispossessed’, ‘colonized’, ‘marginalized’, ‘peripheralized’, ‘wretched of the earth’, and ‘people without history’. At the same time, however, I take into account the deep history of human migration through which we must recognize that indigeneity, at any one time, is a matter of degree and not simply something that one is or is not.

gave rise to a competing conceptualization of time and space. The accumulation of a local knowledge of nature among whalers, but also among traditional skin-diving abalone foragers known as *ama* (among others) over extended time, formed the basis of a life that entailed long periods on the waters and frequent exposure to new and foreign locales. The centrality of the ocean in their everyday lives impacted on the ways in which they continuously sought to improve their lot, leading them to create transnational connections across and beyond the Arafura Sea. Once abroad, their understanding of time and space was further modulated by the ecological realities of the Arafura Zone, allowing them to establish a common ground shared with others who were more indigenous to the region. It was the ocean that shaped the understanding of both time and space of these seafolk, and it was a nature-centric worldview that informed their relations with the world beyond Japan. From their perspectives, then, Japan's nineteenth-century Opening involved a form of connectivity that falls outside narratives of the expansion of industrial civilization or 'globalization'.

The protagonists of this story are 'Japanese' seafolk who have remained mostly nameless due to the small role they played in the (global) history of Japan's transformation into a modern nation state. Here and there, scholars have attempted to argue for the historical relevance of these nameless and faceless actors by situating them in histories of empire or transcontinental flows of capital and labor.³ These attempts have mostly discussed the agencies of ordinary Japanese actors as reproducing global structural dynamics of state, empire, and capitalism and vice versa. Although such approaches contribute to the integration of Japan into a framework of global history, they tend to confirm the marginal status of these actors (instead of re-centering them) and do not take their agencies fully into account.

The historical significance of ordinary Japanese who made their way into the Arafura Zone is to be found in their own dreams, desires, actions, decisions, motivations, intentions, and imaginations which have been deemphasized through the framework of global history. This dissertation reads the traces of these highly mobile ordinary people across a multilingual (Japanese, Dutch, Indonesian, and English) set of sources in archives found on different continents. It makes use of conventional archives on the national as well as regional and local levels, but also redefines what an archive might be by identifying historical evidence in the

³ They have appeared most prominently in the Australian historiography of 'the pearling industry', itself a marginal offshoot of the global history of mineral accumulation. See, for example, D. C. S. Sissons, 'The Japanese in the Australian Pearling Industry', *Queensland Heritage*, iii, 10 (1979); Julia Martinez and Adrian Vickers, *The Pearl Frontier: Indonesian Labor and Indigenous Encounters in Australia's Northern Trading Network* (Honolulu, 2015); Steve Mullins, *Octopus Crowd: Maritime History and the Business of Australian Pearling in its Schooner Age* (Tuscaloosa, 2019).

land(and sea)scape, material culture, and oral traditions. In doing so, I found that the vocabulary and grammar of global history – while incredibly useful to analyze structural historical forces that find their origin in Europe – often fall short in describing and interpreting the lives of those who are affected by these forces. As will become apparent throughout the chapters of this dissertation, the terms ‘migrant’, ‘settler’, or ‘labor’ elide as much as they reveal. I have therefore chosen to use the term *hyakushō* instead – a term which privileges the local historical contexts out of which these actors emerge, rather than structural patterns modeled on European history with universal pretensions.

As the historian Amino Yoshihiko has argued, the term *hyakushō* has mostly come to be understood as synonymous with *nōmin* (‘farmer’), even though this has completely reduced the manifold meanings immediately apparent in its more literal translation: ‘a hundred (*hyaku* 百) names (*shō* 姓)’.⁴ Amino contends that the centrality of water in the world of *hyakushō* has been obscured due to a heavy emphasis on agricultural or land-based developments and relations in the historiography of Japan. Contrary to the prevailing idea that the majority of the population of the Japanese archipelago made their living by farming throughout much of Japan’s medieval and early-modern history – Amino finds in the ‘dustbins of history’ that many were in fact only doing so on a part-time basis.⁵ *Hyakushō* were engaged in a variety of non-agricultural activities, especially in areas of Japan where constraints of the land made it impossible to grow crops on a large scale. Mountains make up a large part of the geography of Japan, and these restrictions were therefore present almost anywhere on the archipelago. Besides farming, *hyakushō* were fishing in the rivers and at sea. They could be owners of massive early-modern cargo ships known as *kitamaebune* or the dockworkers that loaded and unloaded them. They could be crafters or artisans. And, as we will see, they could be foraging and dealing in marine products such as abalone.⁶ If the labels ‘migrant’, ‘settler’, and ‘labor’ explain the appearance of ordinary Japanese at the intersection of the Indian and Pacific Oceans in terms of an escape from poverty (and by extension, a pursuit of material wealth) – the term

⁴ Yoshihiko Amino, *Rethinking Japanese History*, trans. Alan S. Christy (Ann Arbor, Mich: Center for Japanese Studies, the University of Michigan, 2012).

⁵ In Amino’s case the expression should be taken quite literally. The fusuma documents on which some of his historical arguments are based were painstakingly extracted from Momoyama era (1568-1600) and Tokugawa era (1603-1868) sliding doors in which they were recycled as insulation.

⁶ Various medieval and early-modern sources, both in the form of written works and material culture, attest to this idea. In the eighth century document *bungo no kuni fudoki* we see that local *hyakushō* were understood as *ama* who lived on boats – leading to the area being named ‘ama-gun’ (ama district), as discussed by Hiroko Tabata, “Ōita Ni Okeru Ama No Keifu: ‘Usuki Hakushikishi’ to Tōjibune,” *Kumamoto Daigaku Shakai Bunka Kenkyū*, no. 13 (2015): 159. In terms of material culture, the discovery of disposable wooden tablets which were used for labeling marine products such as dried abalone during their transit to economic centers form a direct link between *ama* and *hyakushō* that has yet to be explored comprehensively by historians.

‘hyakushō’ helps us see it as an extension of their local histories, as I will show in the following chapters.

As a first step in disentangling the local histories of hyakushō from the framework of global history, it is necessary to start asking new questions. My dissertation is therefore concerned with the larger question of how nature shapes the course of history.⁷ Throughout each chapter, I ask how ocean currents gave rise to certain cultural practices, how knowledge of the sea ensured continuity of certain ways of life, and how natural hazards could engender transformations in human socio-cultural organization. It is through such questions that hyakushō emerge on the center stage of their own histories as fully-fledged historical actors. They show us, firstly, how ordinary Japanese non-state actors in the nineteenth century formed ocean-spanning connections to faraway places with highly heterogeneous groups of people based on an intellectual common ground that was rooted in nature. And secondly, that such connections were not created merely by chance by humans who had no power over their own lives but rather that they were outcomes of conscious decisions to engage in voluntary and cooperative interactions.

This history of hyakushō in the Arafura Zone offers several interrelated interventions into the historiography of Japan. These, in turn, have implications for three fields of study: 1) transnational history; 2) environmental history; and 3) ocean-centric history. I will first discuss these implications. Then I will proceed with a discussion of the sources and methodology that I have relied on to research and write this dissertation. Lastly, I briefly discuss the problem of chronology in modern Japanese history and provide chapter outlines to show how this dissertation offers a competing nature-centric timeline.

An Intervention in the Transnational History of Japan

This study joins a growing body of literature that is paying renewed attention to the ways in which ordinary people in Japan began to relate to the wider world from the nineteenth century.⁸

⁷ By nature I mean both ‘the environment’ as well as the living systems that are inseparable from it. My understanding of nature is largely in line with the critical realist conception of nature articulated by, for example, Kate Soper. I “insist on the independent reality of a natural domain or mode of being”. At the same time, however, I acknowledge that “there is nothing that can be thought or talked about as ‘nature’ [...] other than in human talk and thought”, even if the “talk and thought (whether this be scientific, poetical, eco-political, or whatever) can, and often does, refer to entities or processes conceived as existing independently of their representation, and in some cases as also unaffected by that representation.” Kate Soper, “Realism, Humanism and the Politics of Nature,” *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, no. 98 (2001): 55–71.

⁸ See, for example, Bill Mihalopoulos, *Sex in Japan’s Globalization, 1870–1930: Prostitutes, Emigration and Nation-Building*, 1st edition (London: Routledge, 2011); Hiroko Matsuda, “Becoming Japanese in the Colony: Okinawan Migrants in Colonial Taiwan,” *Cultural Studies* 26, no. 5 (September 1, 2012): 688–709; Martin Dusenberre, “Writing the On-Board: Meiji Japan in Transit and Transition,” *Journal of Global History* 11, no. 2

However, I see their global interactions as separate from those of Japanese state actors, who were mainly interested in emulating modern European empires. I argue that *hyakushō* were primarily non-state actors because of how their thought and action ran counter to the agendas of state actors such as government officials and bureaucrats, but also to those of less official figures who consciously contributed to the making of the modern nation state (for example, writers and intellectuals). In centering the narrative on non-state actors, along with events and processes that have otherwise been considered peripheral to the state-centric narratives of international history, the history of *hyakushō* in the Arafura Zone is an inherently transnational one.

Transnational approaches have steadily made inroads into the discipline ever since the transnational ‘turn’, but ongoing debates regarding its nature have left historians without a clear consensus on how to define it or understand its objectives and overarching methodology.⁹ There are now as many understandings of how one might do transnational history as there are historians interested in working with actors, processes, and events that cannot be confined within the borders of a single nation state. In terms of the transnational history of Japan, we might crudely distinguish between two methodological tendencies. One sees any kind of cross-border movement, parallel, and consequence of both material and immaterial things (e.g., people, trade, technological transfer, convergent beliefs, and diverging practices and sensibilities) as potentially transnational. The transnational approach hereby becomes synonymous with or complementary to global, world, comparative, international, and diplomatic approaches to history writing – applicable, in principle, to all historical connections that link together multiple nation states in the present.¹⁰

Another tendency sees transnational history as capable of exploring distinctive types of connections that pose a challenge to the analytical centrality of the state and the nation. It offers opportunities to scrutinize the ways of speaking about history, calling into question the meaning of seemingly innocuous terms such as ‘development’, redefining contested ones such as ‘progress’, reconsidering reductive binaries such as colonizer/colonized, West/East, civilized/uncivilized, and suggesting altogether new terminologies. It envisions what history

(July 2016): 271–94; David R. Ambaras, *Japan’s Imperial Underworlds: Intimate Encounters at the Borders of Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁹ Akira Iriye, “The Transnational Turn,” *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 3 (2007): 373–76.

¹⁰ See, for example, Sheldon Garon, “Transnational History and Japan’s ‘Comparative Advantage,’” *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 43, no. 1 (2017): 65–92. Beyond the circles of transnational historians of Japan, Fiona Paisley and Pamela Scully offer another example of this style of transnational history in *Writing Transnational History*. For them, forced mobility, settler colonialism, the effects of the slave trade on individual lives, bureaucratic tools and structures, and international humanitarianisms and rights discourses all fall within the scope of transnational history. Fiona Paisley and Pamela Scully, *Writing Transnational History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

might look like from the viewpoints of those who fall outside state-centric frameworks, or just within its peripheries, and questions historians' reliance on conceptual crutches such as racialism, nationalism, gender binarism, and all other forms of essentialism that have historically assisted those who 'see like a state'.¹¹ This type of transnational history shifts attention away from nation, state, empire, marketplaces (which never really exist independently of states), industrial civilization, and Western modernity, and explores competing social imaginations (regardless of whether they materialized or not) that might be of greater assistance in writing a history for the present and the future.¹²

To date, the most representative example of this way of doing transnational history (in the historiography of Japan) might be found in the work of the 'Oxford School' of Japanese History, the intellectual environment in which this dissertation was conceived. We might look at the work of one of its members, Sho Konishi, as an example. Konishi demonstrated how transnational connections involving the revolutionary Lev Mechnikov between Russia and Japan at the non-state level reveal the Opening of Japan as a world-historical moment that produced a nature-centric and symbiotic vision of human progress. Mechnikov's historical role has never been easily reconcilable with narratives of the modern transformation of Japan according to the model of the Western nation state. From a transnational perspective, however, his encounter with Japan reveals forgotten ideas and practices through which the archipelago became an important locus for the formulation of worldly cultures of solidarity – cultures that do not fit very well within spatial and temporal schemas of Western civilizational discourse. While others have joined the effort to rethink the ways in which Japan related to the wider world, they tend to privilege actors, processes, and events that reiterate the temporal centrality accorded to the West. Whether we see Japan's global connections as the consequence of the arrival of Matthew Perry, or as a longer process that begins with earlier Sinocentric pathways through which Western knowledge entered the country, they remain part of the story of the expansion of industrial civilization in which the West is ahead in time. The evolving historiography may point to local manifestations of, or local reactions to, individual elements of this metanarrative of Western modernity, but it has not attempted to shed light on fundamentally competing conceptualizations of time and space.¹³ Where the work of Konishi

¹¹ James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Revised ed. edition (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999).

¹² On the urgency of moving beyond the state as the telos of history see Joan Wallach Scott, *On the Judgment of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

¹³ Examples include, respectively, Federico Marcon, *The Knowledge of Nature and the Nature of Knowledge in Early Modern Japan*, 2015; Daniel V. Botsman, "Freedom without Slavery? 'Coolies,' Prostitutes, and Outcasts

has managed to illuminate such spatio-temporal understandings, this dissertation shows how it is in the everyday movements and interactions of ordinary people that they were expressed.¹⁴

Hyakushō Mobility as Environmental and Oceanic History

As hyakushō sought to survive and maintain their livelihoods in the face of rapidly changing circumstances, we see how their local knowledge of the sea inspired socio-cultural transformations that significantly contributed to the well-being of the communities in which they were embedded. Coming into conflict with the state over the ‘proper’ way to relate to nature, friction emerged between hyakushō and the state, leading to the creation of migratory pathways from the Japanese littoral straight into the tropical waters of the Arafura Sea. There, hyakushō related to others on the basis of an intellectual common ground revolving around a shared understanding of nature. Through this process we are presented with not just a transnational history but an ecological or environmental history too.

Environmental history has been around longer than transnational history has, and it may come as no surprise that its historiography stabilized around certain approaches. One might tell a story of how people learned to manage nature, molding it into whatever shape necessary to fulfil their visions of the future. Another recurring trope is to be found in stories of environmental degradation brought upon by human hands. In the environmental historiography of Japan, we might turn to the work of Conrad Totman, Thomas R. H. Havens, or Ian Jared Miller for the former approach and Brett Walker for the latter.¹⁵ The narrative arcs that their studies rely on continue to contribute much to our understanding of how humans have related to the environment in the past, but the assumptions, aims, and outcomes at the heart of their studies are now being called into question. Informed by critical and nuanced understandings of

in Meiji Japan’s ‘Emancipation Moment,’” *American Historical Review* 116, no. 5 (December 1, 2011): 1323–47.

¹⁴ Examples of the work of other members of the Oxford School that practice this type of transnational history include: Natalia Doan, “The 1860 Japanese Embassy and the Antebellum African American Press,” *The Historical Journal* 62, no. 4 (December 2019): 997–1020; Lewis Bremner, “The Magic Lantern as a Lens for Observing the Eye in Tokugawa Japan: Technology, Translation, and the Rangaku Movement,” *Modern Asian Studies* 54, no. 3 (May 2020): 691–729; Yu Sakai, “Survive to Be Critical: The Wartime Graphic as a ‘Masquerading’ Media in the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905,” *War in History* 28, no. 4 (November 1, 2021): 797–824; Alice Bethany Susan Baldock, “Body (of) Knowledge: Women, the Body, and Dance in Postwar Japan,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 81, no. 2 (May 2022): 365–79; Chinami Oka, “Arai Ōsui and the Transnational Reimagination of Civilization in the Late Nineteenth-Century United States,” *The Historical Journal*, April 26, 2022, 1–21.

¹⁵ Conrad D Totman, *The Green Archipelago: Forestry in Pre-Industrial Japan*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Thomas R. H. Havens, *Land of Plants in Motion: Japanese Botany and the World* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2020); Ian Jared Miller, *The Nature of the Beasts: Empire and Exhibition at the Tokyo Imperial Zoo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Brett L. Walker, *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan* (Seattle ; London: University of Washington Press, 2010).

the different shades of green in environmental thought, a new generation of historians is grappling with a different set of concerns. They ask both complementary and contradictory questions: whether the boundaries between human and natural histories ever made sense; how nature served as an active agent rather than a passive backdrop for history; why humans continue to play the role of main historical actor; and when it is that actors who were once considered less-than-human will ever take center stage in history. Ultimately, these environmental historians do so because contemporary crises tell us that history may have taken a couple of wrong turns, that certain intersections may be worth revisiting, and that there are unbeaten paths worth exploring.¹⁶

I engage with the questions raised by this new generation of environmental historians by turning towards the ocean and the people who lived with it. The ocean-centric histories of hyakushō, and those with whom they came to collaborate and coexist, shed light on a group of actors whose thinking challenge the presumed universality of a dualistic understanding of nature and culture. Hyakushō's daily interactions in both the familiar ecological context of the Japanese littoral and the unfamiliar contexts of the Arafura Zone reveal a more complicated picture in which the modern conceptual separation between nature and culture seems absent. The ecological underpinning of their everyday lives fed back into an understanding of time and space that was fundamentally at odds with Western modernity.¹⁷ The ocean brings together transnational and environmental approaches to the study of history – offering entirely new ways to talk about ‘modern Japan’, as I will show in this dissertation, as well as insights transferable to the study of other times and places.

The ocean has clearly left its imprint on the societies and cultures of the Japanese archipelago through time, yet the historiography of Japan has devoted remarkably little attention to it. In the mid-1990s, David Howell and Arne Kalland took to the ocean to suggest that Tokugawa era socioeconomic developments could be read as part of a global history of industrial capitalism.¹⁸ By the late 2010s, the baton had been passed on to Peter Shapinsy, Noell Wilson, Jakobina Arch, and Manako Ogawa. Shapinsky's *Lords of the Sea* suggested that sixteenth century mariners, pirates, and other seafolk active in the waters surrounding the Japanese archipelago were masters of their own littoral estates, vying with Tokugawa era

¹⁶ See, for example, Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019).

¹⁷ See Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

¹⁸ Arne Kalland, *Fishing Villages in Tokugawa, Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995); David L. Howell, *Capitalism From Within: Economy, Society, and the State in a Japanese Fishery*, First Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

landholders for political and economic influence. Wilson's *Defensive Positions* showed how those same landholders began to lose their grip on the country as they outsourced their coastal defenses – picking away at the Tokugawa regime's monopoly on violence long before the archipelago faced the military threats from Europe in the nineteenth century. Jakobina Arch turned to whalers of the Tokugawa era and casted them as proto-industrial fishermen, whereas Manako Ogawa studied how Japanese fishermen contributed to the industrialization of fisheries in Hawai'i since the late nineteenth century. Where the historiography of Japan has ventured into the ocean, it has mainly produced stories that are synecdoches for the development of global industrial civilization that would come to be spearheaded by the West.

Scholarship on Japan's historical relationship with the ocean largely fits into a category that we might call global maritime history. It is a tradition that is most often traced back to the work of Fernand Braudel on the Mediterranean, and has since expanded to cover the world's major oceans and many of its minor seas.¹⁹ This genre has and continues to produce a wealth of knowledge on the formation of transoceanic trade networks, and the goods and the political power that travel along its routes. It is ultimately concerned with 'civilization', in the singular sense, by looking at seaborne manifestations of state-led urban societies based on agriculture. Unbounded human connectivity is the red thread of global maritime history, and for many of its practitioners this connectivity is a force that produces, over the long term, societies that look remarkably like one another.

My study of Japan's historical relationship with the ocean distinguishes itself from this framework by taking some cues from what Ryan Tucker Jones has called history 'from below the waves'. This is a different species of oceanic history, one that pays attention to "the specificities of discrete locations in the ocean, both across horizontal space and through the water column" and "see[s] as crucial the ways in which marine animal and marine human communities are structured, how they change, and how they change each other".²⁰ Through this unique methodology, historians discuss otters, whales, kelp, and ice sheets as important non-human actors in historical narratives. Bringing environmental approaches into the study of human relationships to the ocean, it has proven helpful in identifying the limits of a certain type of human agency in shaping the course of history, attributing agency to non-human actors

¹⁹ There have been rich discussions on the historiography of seas and oceans in the past few decades: Jerry H. Bentley, "Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis," *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (1999): 215–24; Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, "The Mediterranean and 'the New Thalassology,'" *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006): 722–40; David Armitage, Alison Bashford, and Sujit Sivasundaram, eds., *Oceanic Histories*, Cambridge Oceanic Histories (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

²⁰ Ryan T. Jones, "Running into Whales: The History of the North Pacific from below the Waves," *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 2 (2013): 352.

and nature instead. ‘History from below the waves’ thus provides a new perspective onto global maritime history, expanding its reach and showing its limits through the study of complementary topics, actors, processes, events, places, and times. Yet, despite the use of the term ‘from below’ – a phrase that draws attention to the overlooked and the downtrodden – ‘history from below the waves’ does little to challenge how hegemonic power structures shape our knowledge of the past. This dissertation utilizes the ocean to introduce new ways of speaking about places, times, and people and their ideas that reject incorporation into the framework of global maritime history and the type of ‘history from below the waves’ that it mobilizes. Insofar as I study oceanic history ‘from below (the waves)’, I do so in order to arrive at the forgotten imaginations of the future in the past, which we can only begin to remember by changing the ways through which we practice history.²¹

My project acknowledges the urgency of creating a historical common ground in the here and now, but it sees the recognition of historical difference as crucial part of this task. While the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty may consider the project of recognizing historical difference – to ‘provincialize Europe’ in his words – as having reached its limit, I see it as a promise unfulfilled. In the face of the challenges posed by the Anthropocene, Chakrabarty now urges us to be ‘lumpers’ rather than ‘splitters’, arguing that it is only through narratives that show how humans have collectively ended up becoming a natural force capable of transforming the planet into an uninhabitable place that catastrophe can be avoided.²² Yet is it not through the global efforts to reduce and even eliminate difference that ‘we’ have ‘collectively’ brought ourselves to this historical moment? Instead of becoming trapped in the binary of difference and sameness, scholars have recently suggested that a critical understanding of relationality is more productive in attempts to ‘overcome difference’ – we are different but related.²³ By examining how a heterogeneous group of ‘Japanese’ seafolk (who could barely understand each other’s languages) collectively created new ways to forage the seabed, and how these people collectively overcame environmental hardships alongside ‘Filipinos’, ‘Malays’, and ‘Aborigines’, this dissertation turns to moments in history where such relationalities are made apparent.

²¹ In this sense, my oceanic history builds on the work of Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic - Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 1st edition (London: Verso Books, 1993); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso Books, 2012).

²² Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

²³ See, for example, Moe Suzuki, “The Limits of Humanisation: ‘Ideal’ Figures of the Refugee and Depoliticisation of Displacement in Virtual Reality Film *Clouds Over Sidra*,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, March 10, 2022.

Sources and Methodology

Various obstacles stand in the way of studying the history of *hyakushō*, their movements beyond the Japanese archipelago in the late nineteenth century, their interactions with ‘Filipinos’, ‘Aborigines’, ‘Malays’ (among others), and the ecological conditions that shaped their everyday lives throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. Firstly, the range of *hyakushō*’s movements has resulted in the dispersal of documentary traces across a large geographical space encompassing multiple seas, oceans, archipelagos, and continents. Researching their history therefore necessitated the use of multi-lingual archival research involving Japanese, Dutch, Indonesian, and English languages. Secondly, the documentary traces that they left behind are thin – amounting to no more than a sighting of their appearance here, the impact of their actions there, and suggestions of their movements and actions somewhere in between.

Like vagrants, sojourners, indigenous peoples, deserters, nihilists, anarchists, and communards, *hyakushō* have a tenuous relationship to official and colonial archives. As the wayward and the unruly, they often evaded state power, refused to consent to it, or otherwise engaged with it in a manner that would benefit themselves. Their fragmented appearance in official correspondences must therefore be read through a critical lens. Historians might do so by rejecting the archive’s claim to objective historical truth and thinking twice about taking the observations, definitions, and categorizations contained therein at face value. Critically rereading and circumventing the archive is not a particularly new practice, as the historian Ariella Aïsha Azoulay observed. We have by now plenty of ‘alternative histories’ that shed light on the marginalized and the obscure by reading documents from the colonial archive ‘against the grain’. Although these studies have often helped to ‘fill the gaps’ in the literature and allowed historians to go ‘just a little bit further’ than their predecessors, they rarely attempt to undo the “imperial disciplinary grammar” that structures the writing of history. Throughout this dissertation, I show how the materials on *hyakushō* in archives such as the Dutch National Archives, the Queensland State Archives, and the Archives of Hokkaido have the potential to tell a history that is underwritten by a non-imperial grammar.

For Chapter 1, for example, I utilized source material pertaining to the Development Agency (Kaitakushi) housed in the Archives of Hokkaido. State institutions such as the Development Agency kept a close eye on marine resource use in the early Meiji era, and as a result, they left behind a paper trail that reveals how the state came to formulate and subsequently enforce its policies on sea use. Although the close observations of these

institutions are colored by a deep suspicion of ordinary people's capacities to self-govern the seas, they constitute detailed first-hand accounts of grass-roots technological transformation when read against the grain. In Chapter 2, I make use of several national archives in Japan, the Netherlands, and Australia, which house the records of state actors who attempted to closely observe movements of non-state actors between and across countries.²⁴ Independently, the various state actors based in different countries were unable to arrive at a complete picture of the movements of *hyakushō* across the Arafura Zone (and were therefore unable to see it as a coherent space). Taken together, however, their observations allow us to reconstruct a larger picture of a transnational space that was created and maintained by *hyakushō* themselves.

A close and critical reading of documents related to investigations into causes of death (inquests) by the government of colonial Queensland allowed me to partially reconstruct the conditions on the ships traversing the Arafura Sea in the late nineteenth century for Chapter 3. These inquests, which recorded the deaths of *hyakushō* working in the Arafura Sea as well as statements regarding the nature of death made by their fellow crewmembers, offer not just fragmentary insights into everyday life in the Arafura Zone: they are testimonies to the ways in which *hyakushō* navigated their encounters with state actors. Hidden between the lines are the ways in which non-state actors conceptualized death, violence, and nature differently from the state actors who summoned them to court to determine the legality of the loss of life.

By combining such insights derived from official and colonial archives with less official historical sources, in community archives, material culture, and oral traditions, I have been able to supplement the fragmentary documentary traces with rich evidence of the cultural and intellectual worlds that *hyakushō* inhabited. For Chapter 1, for example, I used source material obtained from local archives in areas in Japan where *hyakushō* scoured the coastlines in search of marine invertebrates.²⁵ Many of these sources have not been deemed important enough to be collected in national archives, but we can find them in *kōminkan* ('community

²⁴ I utilized two sets of sources in the Dutch National Archives: *Memories van Overgave* ('Handover Reports'), written by Dutch authorities of a given administrative region in their colonies at the end of their appointments to brief their successors on the region's state of affairs, as well as the *Mailrapporten* ('mail reports'), which are briefings of the state of affairs in the colonies forwarded by their respective governors-general to the Dutch Ministry of Colonies. I introduce these sources as a new angle on existing research in Japanese and Australian archives about 'Japanese migrants' that changes the way we think about the movements and actions of these actors. Dispersed across local and national archives in Japan, the Netherlands, and Australia, these seemingly disjointed materials become deeply interconnected through the figure of *hyakushō*.

²⁵ Such as the Kushimoto Town Library, the Wakayama Prefectural Library, the Shiokaze no Kyūkeijo in Shionomisaki, the community centers of the villages of Susami, Tanami, Koza, and Taiji on the southern coast of Wakayama prefecture, as well as the libraries of Tateyama and Katsuura and the Shinkeiji temple in Chiba prefecture.

centers'), small libraries, an abandoned school, and local museums²⁶ in individual towns and villages in Wakayama, Mie, and Chiba prefectures. In addition to primary source material, such as diaries and photographs, these local 'archives' hold a wealth of secondary source material written by local historians that had a chance to interview a large number of *hyakushō*. Moreover, in terms of material culture, I am reading the lone statue of a fisher-doctor at the back of Shinkeiji Temple (Katsuura village, Chiba Prefecture), the 'whale ebisu' in Taiji village (Wakayama Prefecture), as well as the giant clam-worshipping Asaki Shrine (Izumo village, Shionomisaki, Wakayama Prefecture) as primary source materials. In several cases, I treated the entire village or town as an archive. For Chapters 2 and 4, I utilized interviews conducted by Ogawa Taira, Shimizu Akira, Noreen Jones, and Regina Ganter, as well as interviews I personally conducted during a 2019 research trip to the villages on the southern coast of Wakayama. I have made use of the diary of Takimoto Mankichi which can be found in the Rekishi Minzoku Shiryōkan of Susami Village in Wakayama Prefecture, the diaries of Takimoto Shōtarō, and the sketchbook of Fujita Kenji.²⁷ I have personally inspected a wide range of objects relating to *hyakushō* and the Arafura Zone which can be found in community centres known as *kōminkan* and in peoples' personal homes on the southern coast of Wakayama as well as Chiba prefectures, and Dobo on the Aru Islands (mainly graves). Moreover, I made use of various uncatalogued primary source materials pertaining to returnees in the Kushimoto Town Library.

In sum, this dissertation makes use of a wide range of sources in different languages – some of which are documentary (newspaper articles, state-level correspondences, documents in local archives), whereas others are material or part of an oral tradition. I read these sources both along and against the grain in order to uncover the story of a cast of historical actors that has rarely been understood as being historically significant. Many of these sources have never before been used in the historiography of Japan, but as I show, they are capable of illuminating an untold yet important transnational, environmental, and oceanic history of modern Japan centered on nature and mutual aid among non-state actors.

²⁶ Some of these local museums were too rarely visited to warrant being opened at any time of the year. I am indebted to Mr. Okamoto of the Susami village *kōminkan* for allowing me to access, on such a short notice, the permanently closed Susami-chō Rekishi Minzoku Shiryōkan in Wakayama.

²⁷ The latter two have been independently published by professors Kamada Mayumi of Nagoya University of Commerce and Business and Matsumoto Hiroyuki of Nara Women's University. Hiroyuki Matsumoto, *Mokuyōtō Shinjugai Gyogyō No Kiroku: Takimoto Shōtarō Nikki (Taishō 14, Taishō 15, Shōwa 3, Shōwa 4, Shōwa 5) [Records of the Thursday Island Pearl Shell Industry: The Diary of Shōtarō Takimoto (1925–1926, 1928–1930)]* (Nagoya: Self-published, 2016); Hiroyuki Matsumoto et al., eds., *Fujita Kenji Sukecchibukku Nishi Gōshū, Kosakku Tsuisō (Taishō 14–Shōwa 23) [Fujita Kenji Sketchbook - Recollections from Cossack, Western Australia (1925–1979)]* (Self-published, 2018).

Chapter Outlines

As nature, more so than the nation state, was central to the history of *hyakushō*, this dissertation is organized according to a chronology in which nature plays a central role.²⁸ Chapter one sees the decades leading up to the 1880s not as a key moment in the transformation of the Japanese archipelago towards the model of the modern nation state of the West, but rather as an important period in which local knowledges of nature came to inform technological change. It examines how *hyakushō* reappropriated the technology of the diving machine, a process that was made possible by a local understanding of nature intrinsic to the sea-based cultures of places such as Wakayama Prefecture and Chiba Prefecture in Japan. Chapter two looks at how *hyakushō* began to create a non-state space centering on the Arafura Sea since the 1880s. I argue that their efforts resulted in the creation of the Arafura Zone, a massive oceanic space in which ecological particularities of the intersection between the Indian and Pacific Oceans structured everyday life. Chapter three examines the processes by which harsh environmental realities came to shape everyday life on the decks of ships crossing the Arafura Sea. It shows how the interactions between ordinary ‘Japanese’ fishers and various others in the 1880s and 1890s led to the emergence of a shared sense of community. Chapter four zooms in on the effects of Tropical Cyclone Mahina, a natural disaster that struck the Arafura Zone in 1899. The chapter posits the event as an important factor in accelerating, intensifying, and enlarging the interactions revolving around mutual aid that were beginning to appear in the previous decades. It concludes by examining, in the decades following the disaster, the emergence of a transnational subjectivity among *hyakushō* and members of their support networks – all manner of people (draft evaders, ‘illegal’ migrants, peddlers, sex workers, and others) whose relationship to modern nation states was tenuous at best. The organization of time in this thesis thus provides a new chronology for the history of Japan that emerges out of the origins and turning points of the developments that make up the historicity of *hyakushō* rather than the nation state.

Chapter One – Local Knowledge of the Sea and Technological Change in Early Meiji Japan

²⁸ Even when historians attempt to introduce new perspectives on modern Japanese history, they tend to build their chronologies on the familiar dates of events and processes that, in fact, recenter the making of the modern Japanese nation state. I am here referring to such dates as 1853 (the moment that Matthew Perry ‘opens’ Japan), 1868 (the Meiji Restoration), 1894-1895 (First Sino-Japanese War), 1904-1905 (Russo-Japanese War), or 1937-1945 (Second Sino-Japanese War and the Second World War).

The first chapter focuses on technology and how it was actively selected, altered, and then adopted by *hyakushō* (fishers, farmers, and other ordinary people) in order to improve their lives in the decades leading up to the 1880s. This period, which forms part of a key historiographical trope known as the Opening of Japan, is marked by an influx of technologies that rapidly changed the social fabric of the archipelago. One of these technologies was the diving machine (*sensuiki*). As it began to be used to forage abalone, it irrevocably changed an older culture of marine invertebrate fishery. The technological transformation was celebrated for its potential to liberate ordinary people from material necessity and toil. However, unlike other modern technologies introduced in the process of Japan's 'opening', the diving machine neither contributed wholesale to the strengthening of a national and centralized economy, nor did it drive a wedge between humans and nature. Rather, it fostered the creation of local and decentralized economies, and simultaneously kept nature at the forefront of the experience of everyday life. Through a critical examination of particular usages of technology, we see how it was in fact the understanding of nature held by *hyakushō* that informed the process of technological transformation. The history of the diving machine as used by *hyakushō* problematizes the prevailing and unchallenged assumption that technological change in the period of the 'opening of Japan' was primarily driven by a desire to model the country after the modern nation states of the West. Focusing on *hyakushō* rather than the elites that sought to modernize Japan in the image of the West changes our understanding of this particular juncture in modern Japanese history.

Chapter Two – The Arafura Zone: a Nature-Centric Space and Time

Chapter two examines the growth of networks of *hyakushō* as they began to create new livelihoods revolving around the Arafura Sea since the 1880s. In so doing, they connected rural Japan with far-flung places such as Thursday Island, Palmerston (Darwin), and Broome in Australia and the Aru Islands in Indonesia. The movement of ordinary people out of late-nineteenth-century Japan has so far largely been understood in terms of modern Japan's encroachment on the South Seas (*nanyō*) – that is to say, as part of the history of settler colonialism and empire. Yet, *hyakushō*'s movements knitted together a patchwork of places that barely registered in the spatial imaginations of not only Japanese, but also Dutch and Australian state actors.

The nature-centric mentality discussed in Chapter 1 served as the basis for the formation of a self-organizing network of voluntarily associating actors that would later grow out of Japan and make its way into the confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. *Hyakushō*'s daily lives

came to be shaped by the ecological particularities of the Arafura Sea, and thereby gave birth to a nature-centric conceptualization of space and time. In the process, *hyakushō* shaped the contours of what I call the ‘Arafura Zone’, and ‘opened’ Japan to the wider world in ways that are overlooked by narratives of globalization and the expansion of industrial civilization.

Chapter Three – Death, Nature, and the Creation of a Communal Seascape, 1880s-1890s

From the moment they arrived in the Arafura Sea in the 1880s, *hyakushō* began to face the harsh environmental realities of its waters. Their line of work entailed dealing with the threat of death and the passing of their friends and colleagues on a frequent basis. As long as such deaths were not caused by human hands, state actors regarded them as ‘natural’ – an understanding that was deeply tied to a state-centric conceptualization of a violent human nature. *Hyakushō* held different views of the idea of violence in nature, seeing it not so much in human nature as in environmental nature. This competing understanding of violence resulted in a very different sociality, giving rise to a set of practices aimed at reducing suffering, feelings of social isolation, and the likelihood of dying. Such practices proliferated not just among *hyakushō* but included members of their multi-ethnic crews as well. The period 1880s-1890s thereby reveals the beginnings of a communal seascape consisting of people from all corners of the Arafura Zone.

Chapter four – ‘Japan’s’ encounter with Tropical Cyclone Mahina, 1899

Chapter four takes a closer look at the ways in which the ecological particularities of the Arafura Zone shaped *hyakushō*’s everyday lives after a catastrophic tropical cyclone struck in 1899. It discusses how the impact of ‘Tropical Cyclone Mahina’ was felt most intensely among a heterogeneous cast of characters who all had tenuous relationships to nation states and empires. Mahina served as a catalyst for the development of many more voluntary interactions of mutual aid between *hyakushō* and others across the waters of the Arafura Zone. These are most clearly seen in the forms of hospitality, linguistic receptivity, and material exchange that characterized relations between *hyakushō* and those who were more indigenous to the Arafura Zone.

Despite the known dangers associated with life in the Arafura Zone, non-state actors including draft evaders, gamblers, smugglers, illegal migrants, vagrants, sojourners, peddlers, and sex workers continued to flock to its waters in the post-Mahina years. Increasingly, there came to emerge a sense of belonging to a community, a place, and a time that had little to do

with Japan, Australia, the Dutch East Indies, or the American Philippines. This chapter makes use of oral traditions and other unwritten materials, as well as the writings of people such as Takimoto Shōtarō and Fujita Kenji – ordinary fishers who wrote down their experiences in diaries and sketchbooks – to show how the years following the disaster of 1899 saw a further concretization of a transnational ‘Arafurese’ subjectivity.



Figure 1 – Statue of the diver Tandokoro Harutarō at Shinkeiji Temple, Katsuura, Chiba Prefecture, Japan.
(Photographed by author)

I

Local Knowledge of the Sea and Technological Change in Early Meiji Japan

All the way in the back of the grounds of a temple in Chiba Prefecture, Japan, a monument commemorates a person dressed in a bulky diving suit carrying a big metal helmet. Unlike the many prominent figures that we remember from the tumultuous beginnings of Japan's modern era, this person was so ordinary that few care to remember how to pronounce the characters that represent his name – possibly Tandokoro Harutarō, or perhaps Tansho Shuntarō. Yet, in his memory a group of volunteers gathered the funds to erect a roughly three-meter tall statue made of concrete, long after the man had lived and walked the earth. More so than the person, the statue appears to commemorate the 'diving machine' (*sensuiki*) and its significance for the communities and networks that relied on it for their livelihoods.

As the statue of Tandokoro Harutarō shows, there were people that very consciously considered the diving machine to be an immensely important part of their lives. From the prefectures of Wakayama to Chiba, through Mie and Kanagawa, and quite likely extending further along and beyond Honshu's Pacific coastline in both directions, local museums and community centers keep countless numbers of diving machines as curiosities to this day. The material culture corroborates Meiji era (1868-1912) eyewitness accounts of diving machine users that used to forage abalone across the entire littoral zone of the archipelago. How and why did people become so familiar with the new technology and how did it come to proliferate so widely across the archipelago?

This chapter delves into this question by tracking a group of historical actors who left few documentary traces of their existence. In order to write their histories, I have had to rely on fragmentary evidence across various different sources, such as the commoner-oriented newspaper *kanayomi shimbun* and other newspapers, local monuments, as well as the painstaking work of the local historians who excavated oral testimonies, family archives, and material culture. Where these people do appear in documents, they largely do so as the voiceless and observed, becoming objects of the observations of state actors instead. However, such documents can also be read between the lines, allowing the historian to unearth hidden aspects of the lives of historical actors that have otherwise been invisible. This chapter therefore also uses the records of a state-led investigation to understand the popularization of the diving machine as a technology among ordinary seafolk.



Figure 2 – Honshu’s Pacific coastline (outlined) on Google Maps, June 2022.

In the hands of Japanese fisherfolk the diving machine proved to be a highly effective means to gather marine biota – particularly abalone – from the seabed. Those who tried their hand at machine foraging earned, within the span of several weeks, enough to feed their friends and families for years. For many, the diving machine offered a glimpse of a future of post-scarcity in harsh times, becoming a highly meaningful technology for their everyday lives. The technology offered something other than material salvation too. It served as a conduit for an older culture of marine invertebrate fishery to adapt and thrive in the face of a rapidly modernizing Japan.

The appearance of the diving machine coincided with the nineteenth century ‘opening of the country’ (*kaikoku*), the historical moment out of which the very idea of a ‘modern’ Japan emerged. Consisting of a metal helmet worn on top of a rubber and canvas suit connected to an air pump via a hose on a boat, it was a machine in the sense that its individual components worked together to achieve a singular purpose. The diving machine allowed people to repair Euro-American ships entering Japan in increasing numbers. It also allowed people to salvage the wrecks of those that foundered on its many rocky shores, enabling the retrieval of sunken items with diplomatic value. Moreover, it allowed people to perform construction work underwater in order to lay the foundations for bridges or support structures for wharves and canals, strengthening the country’s infrastructure. In a figurative sense, the diving machine was one of the many building blocks that supported the creation of a more prominent edifice. Like the welding device that joins the rail tracks together or the steamroller that puts the tar on the road, it was a tool that contributed, however invisibly, to the making of the nation state – a project led by elites hell-bent on reforming the country according to the modern societal models of the West.

Seafolk repurposed the technology of the diving machine to suit the very specific needs and ways of life stemming from the ocean-centric cultures of the littoral zone of the Japanese archipelago. *Ama* divers who were well-versed in the arts of foraging various plants and invertebrates from the seabed were among the first to utilize the technology of the diving machine to forage abalone. They were joined by whalers, skipjack tuna fishers, shipwreck salvagers, farmers, rice wine (*sake*) brewers, and mechanics who would begin to use the diving machine in largely the same way. We might refer to this diverse cast of non-state actors whose livelihoods revolved, or otherwise came to revolve, around the ocean, as *hyakushō*.²⁹ These people ‘hacked’ the machine – using the technology not as it was intended, but rather in entirely new ways discovered through whimsical and playful experimentation.³⁰

In this chapter, I argue that the Opening of Japan entailed processes of technological change that relied heavily on the established practices and local knowledge of nature of ordinary people. Technological change was therefore not just the product of Japan’s encounter

²⁹ Although *hyakushō* is, today, often understood as ‘peasant’ or ‘farmer’ in both English and Japanese, I join scholars such as Yoshihiko Amino in using the term to describe a category of ‘commoner’ whose livelihood was, in one way or another, bound to the sea (see explanation on p. 9*).

³⁰ The term ‘hacking’ has come to acquire many meanings over time but I refer to it in the cultural sense, as an activity among hobbyists and tinkerers who undertake projects “not solely to fulfill some constructive goal, but with some wild pleasure taken in mere involvement” – like the hackers of the Signals and Power Subcommittee did at the MIT Tech Model Railroad Club in the mid twentieth century. See, Steven Levy, *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution* (Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984), 6–8.

with the West and the actions of elites who aimed to shape the country in the image of the modern nation state of the West. Indeed, the history of technological change from the perspective of ordinary people seems to give the Opening of Japan an entirely different meaning than historians have hitherto ascribed to it. Hyakushō modified and embraced new technologies such as the diving machine in line with their ocean-centric ways of life, local knowledge of the sea, and their particular understanding of nature.

I begin by following the traces of people who contributed to the popularization of the diving machine to show how non-state actors encountered new technologies and how such encounters led to their creative repurposing or ‘hacking’. I then ask what it was that motivated these people to invest time and energy into the adoption of new technology by looking into their backgrounds as *ama*, whalers, and skipjack tuna fishers. Lastly, I examine the conflicting understandings of the relationship of humans to the environment between state actors on the one hand, and non-state actors on the other, which came to be revealed through state-led investigations into the uses of diving machine technology among hyakushō.

As the starting point of the dissertation, this chapter presents the consequences of centering nature as the principle driver of historical change. It shows not just the often overlooked grassroots contribution to the history of technological change in nineteenth century Japan, but also forces us to consider their alternative outcomes. As we will see in the following chapters, the untold histories of technological change among ordinary Japanese fishers drastically alter our understanding of their later appearance beyond the archipelago in Southeast Asia and Australasia.

I.1 ‘Bottom-Up’ Technological Change

In 1877, a shipwreck salvager and a fisher struck a deal that radically improved the material conditions of the locals of Nemoto village, now known as Shirahama in Chiba Prefecture. The salvager was a resourceful man named Masuda Mankichi who would do anything to earn a living. A year earlier, an article in the satirical newspaper *Kanayomi Shimbun* described his early career:

Masuda Mankichi, a peasant boy from Ōmi Province, was in the business of putting sweets in boxes of citrus fruits at Hodogaya Station and selling them at the port. A foreigner living on the 30th plot saw the potential that this smart young man harbored and

hired him for the position of ‘trading house and trading group mopping chief’, which led to him receiving his nickname – *gomi man* (‘trash man’).³¹

The article ridiculed Mankichi because his plans to make money using the diving machine to salvage shipwrecks seemed like a waste of time. The invention’s potential would be wasted on “hauling up a great deal of rubbish”, and “regardless of whether the endeavor of salvaging wrecks was actually profitable or not, the machine was supposedly being used to accomplish the task of enriching the country.”³² Instead, it could have been an invention that enabled ordinary people to overcome obstacles of mythical proportions. Perhaps such people were the readers of the *Kanayomi Shimbun*, who were drawn to the colloquial style of the paper that made frequent reference to the popular folktales of Kabuki plays and woodblock prints. In the author’s words, the diving machine was:

a strange and extraordinary machine that allowed people not only to overcome the jewel-snatcher of the popular folktale *ama*, the legendary fishmonger Zhang Shun of the tale Suikoden, and the treacherous waters of the tale of Torii Matasuke, not to mention the teachings of Kappa, but also make a roundtrip to the bottom of the great ocean in search of the Dragon Kingdom.³³

However, Mankichi would soon defy the expectations of the author. With the help of ordinary fishers, he repurposed the diving machine into a technology that would reshape their future.

Mankichi called on locals from all over the country for assistance in salvaging parts of ships that had sunk due to violent winds and tall waves in an advertisement that appeared in the *Yokohama Mainichi Shimbun*, on the 5th, 7th, and 8th of May in 1877. These parts had been accumulating on the empty seabed over the years, Mankichi pleaded, as he attempted to communicate that some good would come out of salvaging them. Shipwreck salvagers were often independent entrepreneurs looking to make some money by retrieving sunken parts of ships that still had some value, even if only as scrap metal. They could also be hired to retrieve specific items with personal or diplomatic value. Mankichi himself was part of a small group of entrepreneurs that made a living doing exactly these things.³⁴ He referred to the method by

³¹ *Kanayomi Shimbun*, 10 June 1876 (Meiji 9)

³² *Kanayomi Shimbun*, 10 June 1876 (Meiji 9)

³³ *Kanayomi Shimbun*, 10 June 1876 (Meiji 9)

³⁴ *Kanayomi Shimbun*, 10 June 1876 (Meiji 9)

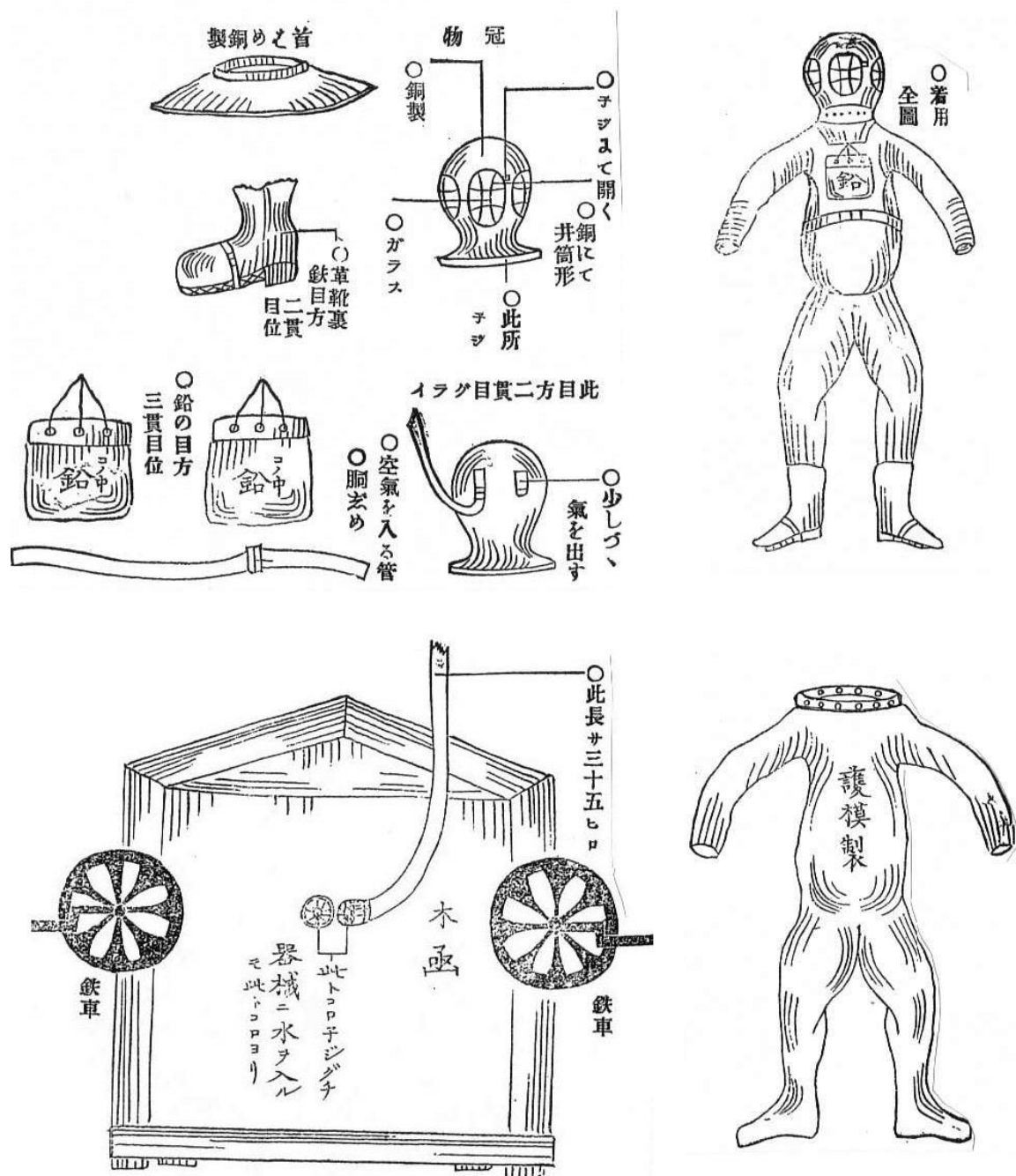


Figure 3 – Diving Machine as depicted in the *Kanayomi Shimbun*

which this operation was to be conducted as *kaitei chinbotsuhin nama-age*, which meant that the sunken parts were to be lifted from the bottom of the sea with one's bare hands. Fisherfolk knew that this work would have to involve long periods underwater, and that only the 'diving machine' could enable such a feat at the time.

The words of Mankichi's advertisement reached the eyes and ears of fishers indirectly. The *Yokohama Mainichi Shimbun* was a very different type of newspaper than the *Kanayomi*

Shimbun and therefore attracted a different readership.³⁵ Mori Seikichirō, a fisher from Nemoto Village, heard about Mankichi's article from his friend the blacksmith Kikujirō in the neighboring village of Tateyama, who himself had only heard about the article from Fujiya Matsugorō, living somewhere close to Kanagawa Station in Yokohama. Seikichirō lived among *ama*, fishers who were adept at diving and foraging marine invertebrates and plants from the seabed. Recognizing the potentially powerful effects that the technology might have in marine invertebrate fishery, Seikichirō went to see Mankichi in Yokohama to discuss the possibility of using the diving machine for foraging abalone instead of salvaging shipwreck parts. The idea sparked Mankichi's interest, and he decided to give it a try. They agreed that Seikichirō should provide the boat and the necessary supplies and Mankichi should bring the diving machine, consisting of a suit attached to a pump. A year later, the diving machine was brought to Nemoto and the two began foraging abalone on the seabed. Coming back to shore with many more abalone than would have been possible in the same amount of time using older foraging methods, Mankichi and Seikichirō's efforts garnered much attention from the locals, who welcomed their innovative method with open arms and loud cheers. Others similarly heard of the diving machine's potential through informal knowledge networks.³⁶

Early Meiji-era documents tell us that fisherfolk were experimenting with the diving machine in many other parts of the archipelago and in largely similar ways. In the family archive of Mori Seikichirō's descendants, we find mentions of people who began to use the diving machine to forage abalone in other fishing villages on the Bōsō Peninsula, such as Katsuura, where the statue of Tandokoro Harutarō clad in his diving suit is located, but also in the prefectures of Kanagawa and Ibaraki. The number of diving machines used to forage abalone in a prefecture would multiply exponentially and just as quickly diminish within the span of six months. This happened, for example, in Ibaraki Prefecture in 1879, where the number went from one to thirty between January and July, equating to as many as thirty different crews or roughly 270 people.³⁷ As noted in the newspaper *Yomiuri Shinbun* on 14 July 1880, quiet villages became places bustling with activity as soon as machine divers arrived and returned to normal as soon as they left. The same process would reoccur in a neighboring prefecture, suggesting that the same people were continuously moving around. There were

³⁵ Laurie Anne Freeman, *Closing the Shop: Information Cartels and Japan's Mass Media* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 26.

³⁶ Toshio Ōba, *Bōsō Kara Hirogaru Sensui Gyogyōshi [The History of the Expansion of the Diving Machine Fishery from Bōsō (Chiba Pref.)]* (Nagareyama, Chiba Pref: Ronshobōshuppan, 2015); Ichirō Ichiki, *Masuda Mankichi: Nihon Sensui No so [Masuda Mankichi: The Pioneer of Japanese Diving]* (Tokyo: Nihon sensui kyōkai, 2018).

³⁷ Ōba, *Expansion of the Diving Machine Fishery*, 57.

people who happened to be in Ibaraki and witnessed the new uses of the diving machine there, and decided to try it out back home in Mie with the help of fisherfolk from Shizuoka. The practice spread, reaching the prefectures of Shimane, Nagasaki, Wakayama, Mie, Shizuoka, Kanagawa, Chiba, Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate, and Hokkaido.³⁸ Some of these places were adjacent to each other, others were far removed from each other. They marked disparate locations on the immensely long coastline of the archipelago, more quickly accessible by sea rather than land. Through the unofficial circulation of knowledge made possible by the connections of fisherfolk, the practice of using the diving machine for the purposes of foraging abalone quickly spread from one prefecture to the next. This widespread technological change was markedly different compared to those that historians have tended to focus on when they study nineteenth century Japan. It did not emerge out of modern state-controlled circuits of knowledge production, comprising schools, universities, and government bureaus, relying instead on mostly informal and non-state knowledge networks. Moreover, it spanned across a vast stretch of the archipelago and connected a vast number of places into a network that had no real center, creating a shared sense of decentralized space for those who went back and forth between its nodes.

This was a process of technological change that was driven by commoners rather than elites, or to be more specific, *hyakushō* rather than samurai. Masuda Mankichi, born as Nakamura Mankichi, grew up in Kutsuki village, one stop on the Saba Kaidō (Mackerel Road), a trade route that connected the ports on the coasts of the Sea of Japan to the urban centers of Kyoto and Osaka. He spent some of his younger years in the Wakasa Bay area³⁹, a shipping hub where massive cargo ships known as *kitamaebune* regularly anchored. This allowed Mankichi to become familiar with the maritime trade network that dealt in marine products such as kelp, ‘herring fertilizer’ (*nishin shimekasu*), salmon, and various dried goods.⁴⁰ When he headed to Yokohama in 1859, just as the port opened to trade with the West, he started working as a gofer for some of the trading houses that were recently established in the so-called foreigners’ quarters. He then became a fireman, pulling his weight in the Pig House Fire of

³⁸ Ōba, *Expansion of the Diving Machine Fishery*.

³⁹ Koichiro Washio, *Hyōden Masuda Mankichi: sensui no oya: nihon no daibingukai no rekishi wo tsukutta otoko* [A Critical Biography of Masuda Mankichi: Diving Pioneer: the Man behind the History of the Japanese Diving Club] (Tokyo: Self-published, 2012); Ichiki, *Masuda Mankichi: Nihon Sensui No so* [Masuda Mankichi: The Pioneer of Japanese Diving].

⁴⁰ *Kitamaebune* ships were owned by wealthy *hyakushō*, and serviced by less fortunate ones. The area surrounding Wakasa Bay was long known to be populated by *hyakushō*: Robert Flershem, “Some Aspects of Japan Sea Trade in the Tokugawa Period,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 23, no. 3 (May 1964): 408. Masuda’s network of likeminded *hyakushō* seems to have started here Ichiki, *Masuda Mankichi: Nihon Sensui No so* [Masuda Mankichi: The Pioneer of Japanese Diving].

1866. Changing careers once again, he began making a living repairing ships, salvaging shipwrecks, and collecting shells for the Noordhoek Hegt family.⁴¹ His life was eventful, but not extraordinary. It was ordinary people like Mankichi and the fishers that he came into contact with that began investing time, energy, and resources in transforming a piece of technology from a minor implement in the making of the modern nation state into one that could better help people deal with the material problems of their time. These people, whose lives revolved or otherwise came to revolve around the ocean, were *hyakushō*.

Mankichi and Seikichirō's experiment in Nemoto village was likely not the first of its kind. Earlier mentions of the arrival of an apparatus that could fulfil a similar function suggest that the practice of using the diving machine to forage abalone may have been taken up by ordinary fishers on the archipelago as early as 1834.⁴² If not in 1834, however, the diving machine may have arrived in Japan on one of the many illegal landings that foreign ships made on Tokugawa territory, or on foreign ships entering Japan at newly-opened treaty ports in the mid-nineteenth century, as it became common to find a diving machine on board in case the ship's hull needed to be repaired. Between the 1830s and the 1870s, then, the diving machine

⁴¹ It is likely that the large number of shells that were donated to the Amsterdam Zoological Museum in the late nineteenth century by two brothers of the Noordhoek Hegt family were collected by Masuda Mankichi. See: Benthem Jutting, van W.S.S., "A brief history of the conchological collections at the Zoological Museum of Amsterdam, with some reflections on 18th century shell cabinets and their proprietors, on the occasion of the centenary of the Royal Zoological Society 'Natura Artis Magistra,'" *Bijdragen tot de Dierkunde* 27, no. 1 (1939): 177.

⁴² Tokugawa officials ordered a diving bell, which could be seen as its predecessor in terms of functionality, at least twice (in 1793 and in 1810). Some have noted that the order was met with delays and did not arrive in Japan until 1834. See, Minoru Omori, "The Eisch Boek in Dutch-Japanese Trade," in *Asian Trade Routes*, ed. Karl Haellquist (London: Routledge, 1991), 201–2, 207. This seems to be confirmed by a history of Nagasaki, written in the late nineteenth century, which mentions that a 'diving machine' (*sensuiki*) ordered by the Tokugawa regime had arrived at Nagasaki in the fifth year of Tenpō (1834) (Ushiji Inokuchi, 長崎小史 [*a Short History of Nagasaki*] (Tsutaya Shōten, 1893), 23.) Whether it was the diving bell or a diving machine in the form of a helmet and suit attached to an air pump is unclear. It is possible that it was the diving machine that the 1834 shogunal order brought into the port of Nagasaki, rather than the more costly diving bell. Primary materials pertaining to the chief trader Hendrik Doeff (1777-1835) at the Dutch trading outpost of Deshima in Nagasaki Prefecture show how the Dutch themselves had to place an order for a 'parelduikersklok' ('pearl diving bell') in London because it was known to be manufactured there. Specific instructions were given to remove any markings that would give away its British origins. See, Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Collectie 171 H. Doeff, 1796-1918, nummer toegang 2.21.054, inventarisnummer 16. The newer diving machine was just being developed in the workshops in London (John Bevan, *The Infernal Diver: The Lives of John and Charles Deane, Their Invention of the Diving Helmet and Its First Application to Salvage, Treasure Hunting, Civil Engineering and Military Uses* (London: Submex, 1996).) whereas the diving bell was a much older piece of technology that had often been produced in various other places. Moreover, the newer diving machine would have likely had a price that was more appealing to the Dutch for whom the shogunal orders were not particularly lucrative. A strict protocol accompanied the shogunal trade orders around this time, such as a fixed maximum price (measured in piculs of copper bars), the limit of a single ship per year, and a guarantee that the shipped goods did not come anywhere else than the Netherlands (Susan Legêne, *De Bagage van Blomhoff En Van Breugel: Japan, Java, Tripoli En Suriname in de Negentiende-Eeuwse Nederlandse Cultuur van Het Imperialisme* (Amsterdam: Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, 1998), 160.)

increasingly drew the attention of ordinary fisherfolk who would have played, experimented, and tinkered with the technology.

For the many communities that dealt in dried marine products (*tawaramono*), the diving machine would become a revolutionary technology. These products were mostly bought by traders and resold to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), a long-established trade route that had already existed in the days of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). They were often given as expensive gifts and were in high demand. The marine products, which included dried abalone but also shark fin, sea cucumber, kelp, and other goods, were being closely monitored alongside silver and copper as part of the Tokugawa regime's attempts to manage the flow of resources from various parts of the archipelago that went to Qing China through the southern domains.⁴³ After the nineteenth century 'opening' of Japan, the trade not only persisted but grew, as witnessed by the Chinese envoy to Japan He Ruzhang (1838-1891), who saw many merchants taking dried abalone and dried sea cucumber back to China.⁴⁴ The diving machine allowed hyakushō to leverage this trade by foraging unprecedented amounts of abalone. Suzuki Tsuneo, a diver who was foraging in Ibaraki in 1879, made 438 yen in the span of two weeks, an amount that would have allowed him to buy enough rice to feed his family for at least the next twenty years.⁴⁵ Tsuneo had been in contact with Masuda Mankichi earlier that year and invited him to Ibaraki in order to see what would happen if they used the technology in order to fish for abalone there.⁴⁶ When it became apparent that the diving machine could be used in this way, Tsuneo and others like him seized the opportunity to radically improve the material conditions of their lives and those of their communities.⁴⁷

From the 1870s, as the realization of the immense potential of the diving machine in transforming the marine invertebrate fishery spread in the networks of fisherfolk, they began to create its constituent parts on their own.⁴⁸ European traders in Yokohama were known to supply the machine and its parts, but its unexpected popularity meant that they were often out of stock. Mankichi contributed a great deal to the popularization of the diving machine. He

⁴³ Robert I. Hellyer, *Defining Engagement: Japan and Global Contexts, 1640-1868* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2020).

⁴⁴ Yasuzo Horie, "Foreign Trade Policy in the Early Meiji Era," *Kyoto University Economic Review* 22, no. 2 (53) (1952): 1–21; Matsuura Akira, "The Trade in Dried Marine Products from Nagasaki to China during the Edo Period," in *Copper in the Early Modern Sino-Japanese Trade*, ed. Keiko Nagase-Reimer, 2016, 118–56.

⁴⁵ Hokkaidōritsu Monjokan [The Archives of Hokkaido] (HMb). *Kaitakushi bunsho* [Documents of the Development Agency]. *Hōgyo shikōgan* [Abalone Fishing Enforcement Request] by Toda Suikō, n.d.

⁴⁶ *Ibaraki Town History, Volume 2* (Ibaraki, 1987).

⁴⁷ Hokkaidōritsu Monjokan [The Archives of Hokkaido], *Kaitakushi bunsho* [Documents of the Development Agency]. Yūgen sekinin naigai sensuigyō ukeoi kaisha sōritsu no shishu [Thoughts on the Establishment of Limited Liability and Non Limited Liability Diving Contract Companies], December, Meiji 22 [1889].

⁴⁸ Ichiki, *Masuda Mankichi: Nihon Sensui No so* [Masuda Mankichi: The Pioneer of Japanese Diving], 156.

regularly brought it with him to Okuyama, a popular entertainment area in Tokyo's Asakusa district, where he mimicked the style and energy of Kabuki actors as he demonstrated how the technology worked.⁴⁹ The *Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shimbun* of 10th June 1880 mentions that Mankichi gave a similar demonstration for the Meiji emperor, who had heard of the invention and its promising capabilities and wanted to see it in action with his own eyes. The emperor visited a small workshop in Akabane which was able to manufacture a full suit on custom order, as people like Uchida Giemon and Mizunuma Sotoei found out. There the emperor saw how Mankichi wore the diving suit and dove into a pond in order to fetch a little Edo-era coin as the suit was being supplied with oxygen via a manually-operated pump. As word of the diving machine's potential spread and demand rose, people began creating them locally. Workshops specifically catered to the creation of this new technology emerged around the Tokyo bay area, such as that of Tanaka Ginzō (1841-1931), who created and repaired parts of the diving machine in his shop in Ishikawa town.⁵⁰ An atmosphere of autodidacticism and improvisation permeated the halls of the workshops as hyakushō playfully experimented with the technology and adapted it according to their needs.⁵¹

A socially transformative process ensued as the diving machine was passed on from the hands of artisans to the hands of fishers, creating local economic opportunities that did not rely on approval or expertise from the political center of Tokyo. The diving machine had a wide appeal among ordinary people because of the way in which it fostered decentralized and local economies, which characterized commoner life since Tokugawa times when town and country enjoyed high degrees of autonomy. As long as they paid their dues, rulers left commoners largely to their own devices, and ordinary people consequently managed the commons as they saw fit. Entrepreneurial commoners, such as the Tokikuni family⁵², prospered as they found the best ways to manage their affairs of their own accord. The degree of autonomy gave rise to practices of mutual aid all across the archipelago. Shrewd village heads knew how to raise funds by manipulating rulers into thinking their villages were suffering from famines and use the acquired resources to bolster cooperative support structures known as *kō*.⁵³ Such *kō* could be relied upon for aid during harsh times, in the face of a natural disaster or man-made catastrophes. The underlying logic of shared material security that formed the rationale for the

⁴⁹ Washio, *Masuda Mankichi: Diving Pioneer*, 59.

⁵⁰ *Yokohama City History Draft, Manners and Customs Series* (Rinsen Shōten, 1985).

⁵¹ Ōba, *Expansion of the Diving Machine Fishery*.

⁵² Amino, *Rethinking Japanese History*.

⁵³ Tetsuo Najita, *Ordinary Economies in Japan: A Historical Perspective, 1750-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

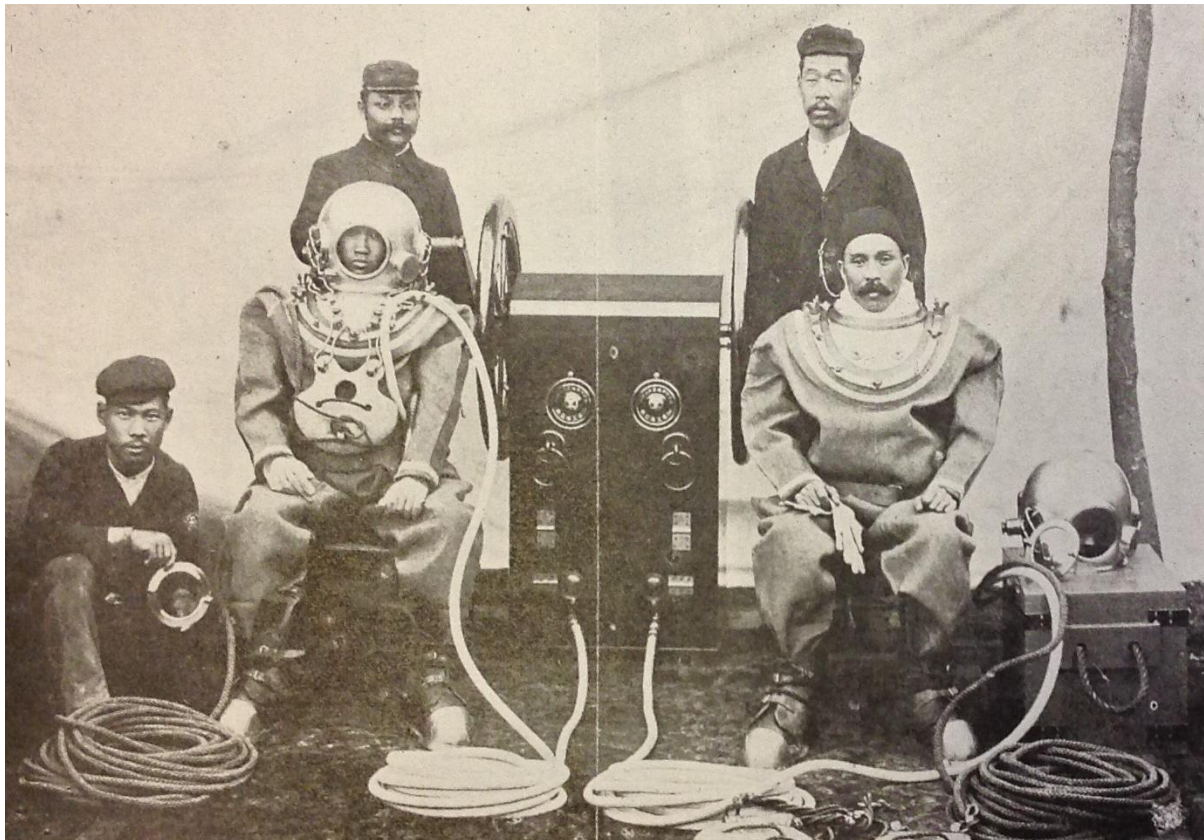


Figure 4 – The diving machine in late Meiji era Japan.

creation of these self-organized entities explain, in part, why those who found out about the immense potential of the diving machine did not mind sharing their knowledge. The free circulation of knowledge concerning the diving machine stood in direct opposition to processes of knowledge production cultivated by the state in exclusive institutions that fell under its control.

As repressive social conditions were beginning to take form, the appearance of a technology that could amplify social mechanisms that fostered autonomy could not have come at a better time. In the early Meiji era, state actors encountered difficulties at every step of the way in their attempts to centralize the economy and create a strong nation. Implementation of the census, the telephone and telegraph systems, conscription, the school system, and most notably, the 1873 Land Tax Reform gave rise to intense movements of popular discontent.⁵⁴ With regards to the tax reforms, the state resorted to more coercive means of collection after they had trouble acquiring the projected amount of tax income due to commoners' creative interpretations of the measuring system. Large scale revolts broke out in Ibaraki, Wakayama,

⁵⁴ Roger W. Bowen, *Rebellion and Democracy in Meiji Japan: A Study of Commoners in the Popular Rights Movement* (University of California Press, 1984), 91.

and Mie prefectures among other places. They were the prefectures where diving machine users were coming from. It is likely that the popularity of the diving machine in the marine invertebrate fishery was related to how it was a technological transformation that ran counter to the state's efforts to create a centralized economy.

Some have noted how this same period saw many ordinary Japanese people resisting technological change because of a tradition-bound mentality.⁵⁵ Such an understanding privileges Western modernity as the underlying logic for technological change in nineteenth century Japan. It is a teleological understanding of technological change in which technologies that contribute to the establishment and development of a modern nation state are considered superior. Such an understanding gives 'progress' a very specific meaning that might have been comprehensible for Meiji era state actors but not so much for ordinary people. When Nakahama Manjirō, better known as John Manjirō, came back to Japan from the United States, he brought with him a sewing machine as a gift for his mother. She was not particularly grateful for the gift. While the machine allowed a reduction in the amount of labor required to create Western-style garments, it was unsuitable for the purposes of sewing a kimono. Historian Andrew Gordon writes that behind Manjirō's gift was "the modern idea that material progress would uplift humanity", but that "this was not an idea that his mother would embrace".⁵⁶ However, it is more accurate to say that Manjirō's mother simply had a different understanding of what it was that constituted material progress. It would be difficult to imagine that she would be unhappy if she received a gift that allowed her to save time and energy making something that she herself wanted to make. Technological progress simply meant different things for different people.

As historians concentrated on studying technological change during the late Tokugawa era and into the Meiji era as part of a process of modernization according to a Western model, technological progress came to be defined rather one-dimensionally in the historiography.⁵⁷ As a result, we have lost track of the plurality of meanings associated with technological progress that did not neatly fit within the familiar narrative of the making of a centralized, civilized, and industrialized nation state. These other meanings would include local, self-organized, and decentralized forms of achieving better material conditions. Tools, devices, and machines that

⁵⁵ See Andrew Gordon, *Fabricating Consumers: The Sewing Machine in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2012); E. Sydney Cawcours, "Industrialization and Technological Change, 1885–1920," in *The Cambridge History of Japan: Volume 6: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter Duus, vol. 6, The Cambridge History of Japan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 385.

⁵⁶ Gordon, *Fabricating Consumers*, 16.

⁵⁷ See, for example, David G. Wittner, *Technology and the Culture of Progress in Meiji Japan*, 1st edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009).

were adopted as part of these competing understandings of technological progress have been written out of the historiography because they contradict and problematize the larger metanarratives that have often directed the historical study of modern Japan. These technologies force us to look at different historical actors, such as Masuda Mankichi or Mori Seikichirō, rather than elites educated in the West who brought back knowledge in order to modernize what they perceived as a technologically and culturally backward Japan. However, focusing on actors that were of lower social status than samurai alone does not automatically guarantee the discovery of new insights that might challenge the established metanarrative. Hyakushō such as Shibusawa Eiichi or the earlier mentioned Nakahama Manjirō were instrumental in the process of Japan's modernization according to the model of the nation state of the West.⁵⁸ We therefore need to look at different ideas and personalities that may have led to the decision to invest time and energy into the adoption of certain new technologies. In order to do so I turn to the ocean-centric cultures of the littoral communities populating the archipelago's coastline, and the people that redefined, through their actions, what technological progress meant in the early Meiji era.

I.2 Ama

When the first diving machine was being lowered into the seas of the Japanese archipelago in order to forage abalone, the art of foraging marine biota was, in most parts of the world, already more than ten thousand years old. In the beginning, the practice must have been relatively straightforward, the limpet being simply removed from the rock with a stone. But over the course of time, the practice gave rise to a more elaborate culture. Hunger-driven movement to new areas allowed for a better grasp of the lay of the riverbank and the shoreline, as suggested by large concentrations of shell in middens found by archaeologists across stretches of riparian and littoral zones. Risk-takers went further out into the sublittoral zones, where the continental shelf is covered by seawater year-round, and developed habits that helped them deal with the difficulties of foraging underwater. While the growth of populations of marine mollusks and plants did not match the rate of human metabolism to allow for lasting settlements based on this type of livelihood alone, a return to once-abandoned foraging sites would have revealed that, given enough time, the same seabed could once again be harvested. Thus, the gradual

⁵⁸ See: Junya Nagakuni et al., *Drifting Toward the Southeast: The Story of Five Japanese Castaways : A Complete Translation of Hyoson Kiryaku, As Told to the Court of Lord Yamauchi of Tosa in 1852 by John Manjiro* (New Bedford, Mass: Spinner Publications, 2003); John Sagers, *Confucian Capitalism: Shibusawa Eiichi, Business Ethics, and Economic Development in Meiji Japan*, Palgrave Studies in Economic History (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

development of a set of practices based on geographical, physiological, and ecological knowledge enabled various cultures that foraged marine biota such as ‘the Fuegian tribes’ and ‘the Maori’ – to which we might add ‘the Anbarra’ and ‘Tasmanians’, ‘Powhatan’, ‘Greek’ sponge divers, and the divers of the Persian Gulf – to endure the many ‘ends of the world’ that History has thrown at them.⁵⁹

Joining their ranks are *ama* – mostly female divers with a long history of foraging sea snails, sea cucumbers, and seaweed in and around the Japanese archipelago. In *ama* communities, foraging tasks are divided based on the ability of the fisher and the depth of the working area. The intertidal zones are some of the harshest environments for marine life to thrive because of the sporadic access to water and nutrients from the sea, but for humans it is a comfortable environment to be beachcombing. Those who were less practiced in the art of diving – men, children, elderly, and *ama* apprentices – foraged here. Fully trained *ama* went further out into the sublittoral zone, crossing the boundary where the human and non-human comfort zones are reversed. The temperature of the water and the gusts of wind out in the open sea make the retention of bodily heat a challenging task. Abrupt changes in pressure during submersion and resurfacing affect organ systems in various dramatic ways, commonly resulting in a burst ear drum, or in worse cases, a collapsed lung. *Ama* tested the limits of the human body on a daily basis by making as many as thirty dives an hour, reaching depths of up to twenty meters, and carefully paying heed to their own bodily sensations that accompanied the changing pressures of an aquatic environment.⁶⁰ The harsh conditions for humans gave rise to the need to pass on specific and local knowledge, including breathing techniques and other habits that promoted safety and the possibility of sustaining one’s livelihood, as well as tools and practices that facilitated the challenging hunt.

From at least the sixteenth century, *ama* enjoyed a high degree of freedom to move from domain to domain as migrant fishers. Many relied on them for the supply of abalone – which, once dried, was a delicacy enjoyed throughout the archipelago and a staple commodity in the trade with China. *Ama* enjoyed special privileges in terms of residence and basic

⁵⁹ For a comprehensive survey of the ethnographic studies of shellfish gathering cultures to date see: Gregory A. Waselkov, “Shellfish Gathering and Shell Midden Archaeology,” *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 10 (1987): 93–210. For a more general overview of the role of shellfish foraging in the larger context of the history of fishing see Brian M. Fagan, *Fishing: How the Sea Fed Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017). On the idea of ‘the ends of the world’, both in the sense of the multiple endings that the worlds of some people have faced as well as the peripheral positions that Amerindian cultures have been assigned to in world history, see: Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2017).

⁶⁰ Emilio Agostoni, “Limitations to Depths of Diving Mechanics of Chest Wall,” in *Physiology of Breath-Hold Diving and the Ama of Japan: Papers*, ed. Herman Rahn and Tetsuro Yokoyama (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 1965), 143.

necessities of life because of their highly sought-after skillset. A nomadic work pattern gave stocks of marine life on the seabed surrounding the archipelago enough time to recover, and there was little expectation of a constant and predictable supply of abalone for society. The migratory and seasonal nature of the work, and the inconsistent yet sometimes highly rewarding fruits of labor thoroughly shaped the thoughts, actions, and lifestyles of those who practiced the trade. It gave them a different sense of time and space compared to those who were more closely bound to the land. Nature stood at the center of their worlds, as reflected in the rituals and customs of their everyday lives – practices that have now been crystallized in ethnographic museums through exhibitions of the material culture of *ama*.⁶¹

We have arrived at this image of *ama* culture in large part due to the work of a handful of anthropologists who have dedicated their studies to *ama*. An unchanging image of *ama* began to emerge with the work of Segawa Kiyoko, a student of the father of Japanese folklore studies Yanagita Kunio. This was the image of *ama* as a female diver specialized in foraging abalone, kelp, and sea cucumber around the Japanese archipelago. Her lineage was traced all the way down through to the *manyōshū*, an ancient collection of poems that has long been used and abused as a source for distilling a distinctively Japanese culture from a long heterogeneous history of exchange between the Japanese archipelago and other parts of East Asia. Woodblock prints of the Tokugawa era (1603-1868), many of them pornographic in nature and possibly linked to the later eroticization of *ama*, would provide further evidence for the continuity of *ama* culture throughout the times. Segawa conducted interviews and participant observation that served to bridge the gap between current practices of *ama* and their documentary past – laying the groundwork for subsequent anthropological studies of *ama*.

Today, *ama* are perhaps better known as the female ‘pearl divers’ of Japan. But this relatively recent image belies the historical trajectory of the term. In the early twentieth century, images of indigenous ‘pearl divers’ and other aspects of the underwater worlds of the western Pacific were evoked in the imaginaries of the colonial projects of modern empires in the tropics.⁶² Right at this time, the pearl company of Mikimoto Kōkichi – renowned for its role in the development of a type of aquaculture specifically geared towards the production of pearls of a specific shape and in massive quantities – employed *ama* to move oysters in and out of the water in the process of ‘pearl culturing’.⁶³ Mikimoto attempted to appeal to a global market,

⁶¹ See, for example, the permanent exhibitions on *ama* culture in the Toba Sea-Folk Museum and the Ōsatsu Ama Museum in Toba (Mie Prefecture) or the Nagisa Museum in Tateyama (Chiba Prefecture).

⁶² Ann Elias, *Coral Empire: Underwater Oceans, Colonial Tropics, Visual Modernity* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2019).

⁶³ Robert Eunson, *The Pearl King: The Story of the Fabulous Mikimoto* (Greenberg, 1955).

and *ama*, who previously dove naked but were later clothed in white suits by Mikimoto, became an enduring part of the company's international marketing strategy. Mikimoto's efforts planted the seed for the idea that *ama* were Japan's 'pearl divers', an idea that germinated in commercial representations of *ama* since Japan's post-war era.⁶⁴ Moreover, picture books of *ama* made to pose as Playboy models that were brought back by G.I.'s returning from an occupied Japan and a James Bond novel and movie further established an exoticized and eroticized image of *ama*.⁶⁵

The combined result of knowledge-making practices guided by a concern for a 'vanishing indigene' and 'the male gaze' have led to the creation of a rather ahistorical picture emphasizing but a small range of *ama*'s various historical guises.⁶⁶ In foregrounding the anthropological object of *ama* (海女), represented by the characters for sea 海 and woman 女, other *ama*, represented alternatively by non-gendered character combinations 海部, 海士, 海人, and 蟹人, were pushed into the background. At the same time, the existence of male *ama* has practically disappeared from view, even though men were hardly ever absent in *ama* communities. In some villages it was primarily men that dove.⁶⁷ In others, it had mainly been women, but men started taking up the women's work of marine foraging when the number of women in the communities starting dwindling.⁶⁸ In yet other cases, men accompanied the female divers at sea, staying on the boats with rope in hand, and ready to be of assistance to the diver as she resurfaced. The distorted understanding might perhaps be attributed to the selection of sources that have been used to tell the story of *ama*. Depictions of bald male divers in Tokugawa era 'illustrated collections of noteworthy places' (*meisho zukai*), for example, have never been discussed in the historiography. Ironically, the same processes by which women are often erased from history seem to have erased men from the history of *ama*.

In fact it seems that the term *ama* simply referred to those who inhabited the littoral zones and whose livelihoods were partly or wholly based on the seas. The singular focus on *ama* as women seems to have gone hand-in-hand with a singling-out of *ama* from a much broader social class known as *hyakushō*, whose lives often centered on the seas and oceans.

⁶⁴ Dolores Martinez, *Identity and Ritual in a Japanese Diving Village: The Making and Becoming of Person and Place* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

⁶⁵ See for example Fosco Maraini's work as a photographer or the character of 'Kissy Suzuki', a character in Ian Fleming's James Bond novel *You Only Live Twice* who is supposed to represent an 'Ama diver'.

⁶⁶ On the problematic nature of the concept of the 'vanishing indigene' see: Kim TallBear, "Genomic Articulations of Indigeneity," *Social Studies of Science* 43, no. 4 (2013): 513. For the concept of the 'male gaze' see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (October 1, 1975): 6–18.

⁶⁷ Kiyoko Segawa, *Ama* (Tokyo: Kokon shoin, 1955).

⁶⁸ Kalland, *Fishing Villages in Tokugawa, Japan*, 163–79.

Considering their shared ocean-centricity and their position in the social order, that is to say as subjects ruled by samurai, *ama* might be considered as *hyakushō* – as one among the ‘hundred’ (*hyaku*) names (*shō*), where the number is a metaphor for the incredible diversity of commoner activities that persisted through the Tokugawa era (1603-1868) and the fluidity of the barriers separating them before modern divisions of labor were set in stone.

This is, however, not to suggest that the existence of an *ama* culture of nature was a scholarly fabrication. On the contrary, the close observance of the laws of nature was part and parcel of a Tokugawa era social fact – it was the norm rather than the exception. The philosophy of Tokugawa era merchant intellectuals might serve as a case in point. In order to cope with the low status assigned to the merchants in the Tokugawa social order, intellectuals such as Nishikawa Joken (1648-1724) sought instead to establish a moral social order based on principles found in nature. Popular expressions of their ideas circulated widely through works such as the *chōnin bukuro* and *hyakushō bukuro* – the ‘bagfuls’ of useful knowledge for commoners that were reprinted on a regular basis.⁶⁹ They contained, in highly readable form, the common wisdom that *hyakushō* should “not wait for benevolent assistance from above”, but rather “seize the knowledge before them to nourish nature’s gift of life.”⁷⁰ Instead of pedagogical treatises directed at commoners, the ‘bagfuls’ should be seen as discursive expressions of what was unfolding within actually existing social conditions. The Tokugawa era merchant intellectuals were putting into words the rationale that guided those practices of the everyday lives of commoners that they held up as an ideal. It was this rationale on which the particular culture surrounding the marine invertebrate fishery on the Japanese archipelago was organized.

Abundant stocks of abalone awaited *ama* whose embodied knowledge enabled them to quickly distinguish mollusk from rock and who were mobile enough to keep track of the proliferation of abalone settlements. But even the most able *ama* faced absolute physical limits that put the benthos of the deeper parts of the sublittoral out of their reach. This changed with the advent of the diving machine, which allowed people to overcome these limits. Those who witnessed how the diving machine was being used to forage abalone noted little distinction between *ama* utilizing traditional methods and machine foragers. They were doing the same work, in the same places, and often in collaboration with each other.⁷¹ A diving machine crew

⁶⁹ Tetsuo Najita, *Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan: The Kaitokudo Merchant Academy of Osaka* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

⁷⁰ Najita, 47.

⁷¹ Hokkaidōritsu Monjokan [The Archives of Hokkaido]. *Kaitakushi bunsho* [Documents of the Development Agency]. Reply from the Chiba Kangyōka to the Hakodate branch of the Kaitakushi, dated 11 August 1881.

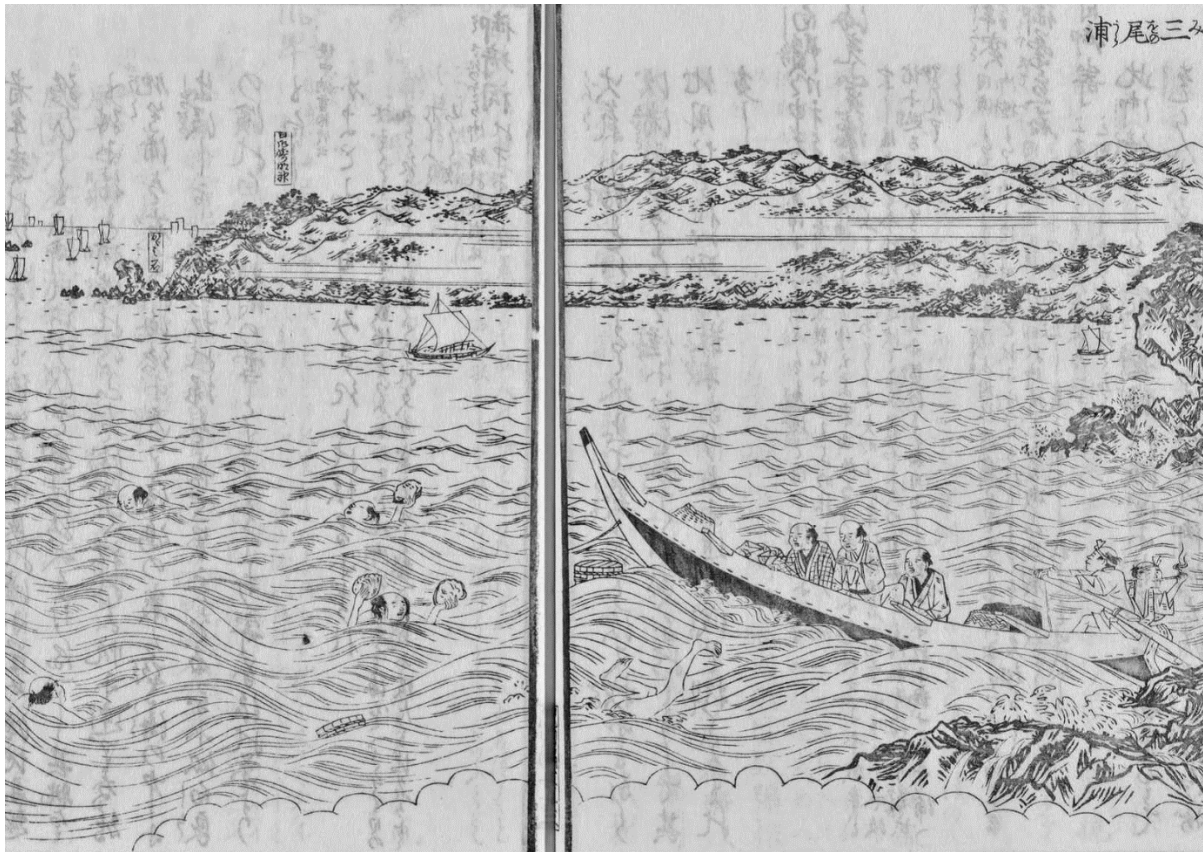


Figure 5 – Male divers foraging abalone in the Kii Domain in the Tokugawa era

typically consisted of around nine persons – two divers, two crew members operating the air pump, one member in charge of holding the hose, and three members to navigate and perform other tasks. The divers roamed the ocean floor for two or three hours at a time, all the while collecting the fruit of the sea in a netted bag that they called *tamari*. They alternated their sessions so that one diver could take his or her time to rest while another continued to work – a single crew could thus make do with only one diving machine. The same people moved back and forth from one fishing ground to the next, frequently crossing over prefectural boundaries. The crews thus combined the diving machine and older *ama* practices and tools, such as the *tamari* and breathing methods.⁷² Witnesses to this technological transformation were presented with a vision of the future of *ama* culture, which now began to include a broader range of *hyakushō*. In the following section I discuss how another local knowledge of nature among these *hyakushō* further paved the way for people to quickly recognize the potential of the diving machine as a technology that could improve everyday life.

⁷² Hokkaidōritsu Monjokan [The Archives of Hokkaido]. *Kaitakushi bunsho* [Documents of the Development Agency]. *Danjo hadaka ama oyobi sensuikikai saihō genba zukaisetsusho* [Illustrated handbook of male and female naked Ama and diving machine abalone foraging scenes], n.d.

I.3 How Oceans Think

In 1881, three years after the experiment in Nemoto, Masuda Mankichi visited the southern tip of Wakayama Prefecture. This was a region that was home to *hyakushō* whose daily lives were intimately connected to the sea. The purpose of Mankichi's visit was to salvage the wreck of the *Heiun Maru*, a ship chartered by the Inada family of the Tokushima domain to transport people and goods to Hokkaido.⁷³ The ship had foundered on the rocks off the coast of Susami village. Salvaging shipwrecks was not an easy task and Mankichi would have once again had to ask for help from the locals. It is highly likely that, just like in Nemoto, local fisherfolk that agreed to help Mankichi quickly realized the potential of using the diving machine for purposes other than salvaging shipwrecks. As heirs to a long legacy of ocean-centric life revolving around skipjack tuna fishing and whaling, people in Wakayama saw the arrival of the technology of the diving machine as simply another development in an ongoing process of finding the most sensible way to relate to the ocean at any given time.

The relatively recent (re)discovery of nature's agency and the further intellectual explorations that it prompted in fields and disciplines such as Science and Technology Studies (STS) and anthropology have put into words what many so-called 'pre-modern peoples' had long known and often embodied.⁷⁴ That is, nature or the physical world is suffused by forms that have a logic of their own. This logic of nature gives rise to the ways in which natural phenomena 'think' – to borrow an expression that emerged out of anthropology's so-called 'ontological turn'. Living beings harness these 'effortlessly efficacious' forms, in equally or less effective, and more or utterly ineffective ways, but always according to "form's strange logics and properties".⁷⁵ This is an agentic and 'non-modern' understanding of nature in which the human is decentered and everything from rocks to whales are imbued with agency. The longer cultural history of *hyakushō* in such places as Wakayama suggests that *hyakushō* too tended to act in accordance with 'how oceans think'.

In the seas surrounding the Japanese archipelago, as anywhere else, the currents do not just flow in each and every direction. In a general sense, their directionality is the product of

⁷³ Shortly after the Boshin war, in which the Inada family fought under the Imperial banner, the family faced the consequences of siding with the official winners of the civil war while being lawfully bound to its losers. They were sent off to Hokkaido as punishment.

⁷⁴ This development is perhaps best represented by the work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. See for example: Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-Structural Anthropology*, trans. Peter Skafish (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2014).

⁷⁵ Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 160.

the combined effect of solar radiation and the rotation of the earth that gives rise to global ocean circulation. Winds, generated by the redistribution of heat within the atmosphere, transfer energy from the sun into the upper layers of the ocean, producing friction and motion. The same energy creates differences in seawater temperature and salinity, which in turn give rise to vertical density-driven movements. The circulations are modulated on a large scale by the rotation of a spherical earth at the global level, and on much smaller scales by the lay of the seabed on the local level. The waters of the ocean are constantly in motion according to a multitude of seemingly random patterns and constraints in which we nevertheless find order.

The locals of Wakayama, previously the Kii Domain, did not have to wait until Euroamerican explorers and modern scientists began to decode such patterns and constraints in order to arrive at a working understanding of the natural laws that governed the waters. By the time the two captains that continued James Cook's third voyage into the Pacific had discovered the main branch of the Kuroshio Current in 1779, pragmatic knowledge of its effects had already been well-established in the various localities dotting the littoral zone of the Japanese archipelago. A colored map of the Izu Islands in a book for Tokugawa customs officers published some thirty years earlier depicts an indigo blue belt between the islands of Hachijo and Mikura. The phenomenon is described as flowing eastwards like a river.⁷⁶ Such information would often be based on the knowledge of local fishers. A note from the Nibuguchi Domainal Office in the fishing village of Arita in the Kii Domain (now Kii-Arita in Wakayama) dated 1794 describes the effects of the Kuroshio Current:

This fishing village is mostly preoccupied with fishing *katsuo* (skipjack tuna), mainly from the end of the second month until the fifth month. According to the fisherboss, some will fish until early winter. I hear that when the *shiigoze* falls they eat *katsuo* without even counting them. I also hear that when it rises, they eat not a single one.⁷⁷

The description was based on the knowledge of local informants for whom the sea was a living being imbued with as much agency as any other being, human or otherwise. This was made explicit by the use of *goze* (御前, indicating respect or affection) after the term *shio* (汐

⁷⁶ Correspondence between Hideo Kawai and Benson, as described in Keith Rodney Benson and Philip F. Rehbock, *Oceanographic History: The Pacific and Beyond* (University of Washington Press, 2002), 90.

⁷⁷ *Kushimoto Chōshi [Kushimoto Town History]* (Kushimoto, 1995).

‘current’), indicating personhood.⁷⁸ In the same year, a traveler makes a related observation based on local information at a village several kilometers further south:

At Shionomisaki, there is a unidirectional current regardless of the morning or evening tide. In the span of twenty to thirty years, the fisher villages go into decline as the *noborikudari shio* rises and the number of fish decrease, and the same villages thrive as it falls and the amount of fishing work increases. It is a mysterious current.⁷⁹

The *noborikudari shio* was probably not the only peculiar phenomenon that caught local fishers’ attention. Today, Wakayama fishers also speak of a *furiwake shio* (bifurcated current), a frequently recurring event observed in the vicinity of Susami in which fishing efforts are reported to be highly successful.⁸⁰ A working understanding of the natural order did not only allow people to maximize their chances of securing food it was also a requirement for survival. As a famous traveler noted in his journal:

It is said that the sea between the Izu Peninsula and an uninhabited islet 130 to 140 ri south of the Peninsula there is a region called the Kuroshio, where a strong stream 30 to 40 ri wide is found. This stream is like a large river in the sea and has surges of water rolling back against the stream. It is further said that at some distance from the Bōsō Peninsula the water flows eastward and that ships, if caught in this stream, can never return.⁸¹

When Mankichi arrived in Wakayama in 1881, intimate knowledge of the sea had been accumulating in such places as Susami for many decades, if not centuries. He himself came to realize how essential this knowledge was in order to live in such an environmentally challenging place, surrounded by tall mountains on the one hand and, on the other, a violent ocean that had produced a coastline just as rocky. Mankichi led the salvaging operation of the *Normanton*, a British vessel that had sunk off the southern coast of Wakayama and whose captain came to be notoriously known for securing all the lifeboats for his British crew and

⁷⁸ According to the entry for 御前 in Haruhiko Kindaichi and Takaki Kokubo, *Gakken zen'yaku kogo jiten*. (Gakkenkyoikushuppan, 2014).

⁷⁹ *Kushimoto Chōshi [Kushimoto Town History]*.

⁸⁰ Junichi Takeuchi et al., “Bifurcation Current along the Southwest Coast of the Kii Peninsula,” *Journal of Oceanography* 54, no. 1 (January 1, 1998): 45–52.

⁸¹ Benson and Rehbock, *Oceanographic History*, 89.

leaving others to die. He found himself in Wakayama again during the salvaging operation of the *Ertuğrul*, an Ottoman frigate whose crew was rescued by Wakayama villagers. For Mankichi, the shipwrecks must have served as a reminder of the importance of taking nature's observable principles seriously – as Wakayama villagers would demonstrate through their local knowledge and the customs of their everyday lives.⁸²

The 'mysterious' local effects of the Kuroshio are some of the many elements that contribute to what the biological oceanographer Hiroaki Saito calls 'the Kuroshio Paradox'.⁸³ The paradoxical nature of the current lies in the fact that its surface water contains relatively low amounts of nutrients and photosynthetic plankton – the reason for its perceived dark color and hence its name ('black current') – but nevertheless supports abundant fish populations in the regions through which it flows. It continues to remain paradoxical because it is a highly complex phenomenon, requiring the type of multidisciplinary research involving physics, biology, geology, and chemistry that oceanographers have only really begun to conduct since the twentieth century.⁸⁴ The contradictory aspects of the Kuroshio may still stand in the way of a full scientific understanding, but pragmatic solutions to everyday problems rarely require such presumably complete understandings. It was a situated knowledge that allowed ordinary fisherfolk to live along the Kuroshio's seemingly whimsical path. Long before outsiders came to describe its local effects, be they domainal officials, travelers, or explorers, and long after they left, this local knowledge of nature nurtured the diverse cultures of hyakushō of Wakayama.

One of these cultures was the culture of whaling. Of the villages of the southern tip of Wakayama, Taiji is now best known for its whaling history, although neighboring villages such as Kushimoto, Kōza, Shionomisaki, and Ōshima had always simultaneously been engaged in the same trade. Unlike modern whaling practices utilizing factory ships and bomb lance harpoons, the whalers of Wakayama set out with a large number of rowboats, carrying manual harpoons and hand-knit fishing nets. One person would be appointed to swim up to the whale, climb on top of it, and thrust a blade into its blowhole in order to attach a fishing net. When a whale was successfully brought ashore, villagers ate their meat and made their baleen into

⁸² Washio, *Masuda Mankichi: Diving Pioneer*; Ichiki, *Masuda Mankichi: Nihon Sensui No so [Masuda Mankichi: The Pioneer of Japanese Diving]*.

⁸³ Hiroaki Saito, "The Kuroshio: Its Recognition, Scientific Activities and Emerging Issues," in *Kuroshio Current: Physical, Biogeochemical, and Ecosystem Dynamics*, ed. Takeyoshi Nagai et al. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2019), 1–11.

⁸⁴ As Saito mentions, the corpus of research on the Kuroshio, specifically, expanded after 1965, but it has yet to incorporate and build on the large amount of work done in earlier decades, mostly written in Japanese and Russian: Saito, 5.

combs, *shōgi* board game pieces, musical instruments, and signature seals. They extracted whale oil from their blubber and their bones, using it as fuel, lubricant, and insect repellent. From the preparatory phase to the moment whalers set out on their boats, and from the moment the whale's corpse is hauled onto the shore to the act of dissecting and processing its body, several hundred people were directly involved, and many more indirectly. It was therefore not just a single village that contributed to and benefited from such a big catch, but all the surrounding villages as well.



Figure 6 – ‘Whale-ebisu’ in Taiji village (photograph taken by author, 2019)

This whaling culture transcended the official domainal boundaries, connecting places much further away in a decentralized knowledge network that conferred its benefits to a

multitude of seemingly disconnected spaces.⁸⁵ The technique of net whaling, for example, is said to have originated in Taiji village. This technique, which involved a number of ‘chaser boats’ that surrounded the whale on three sides and subsequently chase it into large nets, came to be used in many other whaling villages. Against the wishes of those who wanted to monopolize the knowledge, local whalers shared it with others and the practice quickly spread to Shikoku and Kyushu islands.⁸⁶ The whalers’ expectation that such technological advances ought to be shared may have played a role in the widespread adoption of the diving machine much later. A sense of moral obligation accompanied the transmission of knowledge. Whalers’ guilds too seemed to be guided by the type of organizational consciousness central to the cooperative social structures known as *kō*.⁸⁷

By the nineteenth century, a transdomainal culture of whaling was firmly established, bringing together whalers and villages in all cardinal directions and producing divisions of labor and forms of celebration and commemoration. In her study of the whaling culture of the archipelago, Jakobina Arch argued that the whaling practices of places like Taiji were a largely commercial activity rather than one that was based on local subsistence practices. She shows how expansive this trade was, that it relied on remote markets, and that it entailed large-scale social organization. Arch attempts to dispel the myth that Japanese postwar whaling activities were sustainable subsistence activities with a continuous nine-thousand-year-old history. This was a narrative promoted by pro-whaling lobbyists that tried to secure an exception to the moratorium on commercial whaling established in 1986 by framing its whaling culture as an indigenous one. Arch is right to scrutinize such an overtly politicized rendering of the history of the local whaling cultures in the interests of what became a thoroughly industrial enterprise. That the whaling culture of such places as Taiji exhibited aspects of a ‘commercial’ culture is, however, well-established. Examples of the culture of Taiji whalers appeared in the famed Tokugawa era author Ihara Saikaku’s *Storehouse of Wealth*, a popular text written for a wide audience. It was a text that demonstrated the ways through which merchants might live successfully, and attempted to tackle questions pertaining to the unpredictability and uncertainty of the everyday lives of merchants.⁸⁸ The culture of whalers of Taiji was, in the

⁸⁵ For example, the technique of net whaling, by which chaser boats would surround a whale on three sides and chase it into a large net, is said to have originated in Taiji village. The technique rapidly spread to the Tosa and Saikai whaling bases, in present-day Kōchi Prefecture and Saga Prefecture.

⁸⁶ Kumano Taiji-ura hogei-shi hensan-iinkai, *Kumano No Taiji: Kujira Ni Idomu Machi [Kumano’s Taiji: A Town That Challenges Whales]* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1965).

⁸⁷ Najita, *Ordinary Economies in Japan*.

⁸⁸ See Najita, *Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan*.

eyes of Ihara Saikaku and his readers, a successful example of how ordinary people dealt with the precarity of everyday life.

How do we determine whether peoples' livelihoods are commercial or whether they constitute subsistence activities? The distinction relies on assumptions rooted in the discourse of classical political economists and their critics, from Smith to Malthus and Ricardo to Marx. This discourse is, in turn, inseparable from an understanding of history that posits small-scale nomadic hunter-gatherer societies as one of the earliest starting points of human cultural development in a linear trajectory. By way of early sedentary and agricultural societies, increasingly larger in scale, we find, at the end of this trajectory, modern industrial and 'globalized' civilizations. The degree to which something is considered a 'subsistence' activity directly accords to its vertical position within this trajectory, somewhere towards the lower end. The reverse is true in considering the term 'commercial'. Ultimately, we find nature at the bottom of the hierarchy and culture at the top.

For the whalers of Wakayama, this dichotomous understanding of the world (central to Western civilizational discourse) would have made little sense. Their practices may have involved large numbers of people. It may have produced a distinctive division of labor. They may have had to rely on remote markets in order to sell their goods and secure their sustenance. And, they may have pursued these practices in the hopes of achieving material progress. But for them, nature was not conceived as being separate from human culture. Ihara Saikaku, who visited Taiji in the seventeenth century, observed that the people rendered thanks at 'a shrine of a Whale Ebisu' (*Kujira ebisu no miya*).⁸⁹ The shrine gate (*torii*), somewhere between 10 and 30 feet tall, was made of whale bones. Today only a dilapidated reconstruction of the whale bone gate remains standing. Overlooking the gate is a time-worn Whale Ebisu. The monument looks nothing like a real cetacean or an Ebisu, the iconic fisherman deity carrying a pole and a bream. Instead, the Whale Ebisu reminds us of the material culture of whale-mourning practices ubiquitous throughout the archipelago.

The practice of mourning but also worshipping whales was rooted in an understanding of cetaceans as deities or persons who gave themselves as gifts from the sea to the land. In the summer of 1837, a pilot whale washed ashore at Hayanote, by the western coast of present-day Ehime Prefecture. The fishing community of Akehama-Takayama gratefully consumed the whale, which had saved them as they struggled with the famines of the Tenpō era. The fishers buried some of its bones, made a grave at the shore, and conducted a funeral service. They

⁸⁹ Ihara Saikaku, *The Japanese Family Storehouse: Or the Millionaires' Gospel Modernised*, trans. Geoffrey Sargent (Cambridge University Press, 1959).

made sure to remember the gift generation after generation, eventually leading to the posthumous naming of the whale following locally inflected Buddhist traditions.⁹⁰ Such events and the way in which people dealt with them were memorable but not anomalous. 155 whale graves and related monuments are known to exist on Honshū, Shikoku, and Kyūshū islands, and it is quite likely that many more have yet to be found.⁹¹ The memorials show how people strove to keep in mind that the whale's death had, at one point or another, been an important or even necessary part of their life.⁹² When a whale washed ashore, villagers would take from it its meat, but also make sure to erect a monument in order to commemorate how it gave its life in order for the village to live. Again, we are reminded of the Tokugawa-era merchant intellectuals' understanding of nature as a gift that nourishes life. In many ways, this understanding of a natural gift economy bears semblance to that of the Iñupiat, the Yupik, and the Chukchi of Beringia. As described by the historian Bathsheba Demuth, for the people of Beringia, "a whale [...] giving itself holds open a future where today's recipient—the killer—will be called upon to give." So too were hyakushō beholden to a "reciprocal ethics, acknowledging that all life shifts between consuming and providing."⁹³ They did so without distinguishing between human or non-human or culture and nature. Implicit in their way of life was a vision of time that stood outside of modernization theory or other forms of Western civilizational discourse.

Up until the nineteenth century, Taiji's livelihood depended in large part on the whalers' successes, but things changed rapidly after a disastrous event locally remembered as *ōseminagare*. As local historians recall, one day in 1878, the whalers took a great risk in order to ensure survival of the village, which had been struggling with its declining food stocks. They attempted to take down what was an unusually large *semi*, also known as the North Pacific 'right' whale,⁹⁴ with her offspring, breaking with a long tradition that warned against simultaneously whaling mother and child. The local saying goes 'don't you even dare dream of a *semi* with calf.' Nevertheless, after deliberating for hours, those who were in charge decided to cast their nets. The mother whale was only partly caught. Startled and agitated, she broke free with tremendous force, escaping in southeastern direction to the open sea. Without

⁹⁰ The whale was accorded the name *Rin'ō-inden hōkkai-zenka* (or *zenki*) *daikoshi* or Great Follower of Amida Buddha in the Kingdom of Fish, containing two of the highest titles normally reserved for provincial lords. Mayumi Itoh, *The Japanese Culture of Mourning Whales: Whale Graves and Memorial Monuments in Japan* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 158.

⁹¹ Itoh, *The Japanese Culture of Mourning Whales: Whale Graves and Memorial Monuments in Japan*.

⁹² Nelly Naumann, "Whale and Fish Cult in Japan: A Basic Feature of Ebisu Worship," *Asian Folklore Studies* 33, no. 1 (1974): 5.

⁹³ Demuth, *Floating Coast*.

⁹⁴ *Eubalaena Japonica*, also known as the North Pacific 'right' whale.

heeding the time of day, the whalers took to the sea. Taking down a whale was a time-consuming process. It was night by the time they managed to subdue the whale. The darkness, weather, and the massive weight of the whale's carcass conspired to prevent the whalers from returning. It is said that 184 whalers met their end as they were swept away by a strong current.⁹⁵ The practice of whaling in the region forever changed after this encounter, prompting many former as well as aspiring whalers to look for different forms of sustenance.⁹⁶

Mankichi arrived in Wakayama three years after the *ōseminagare*, and the diving machine that he brought with him would have been seen as a welcome alternative to whaling. Aspiring diving machine users who did not have an *ama* background could tap into a repository of local knowledge concerning the ocean that had thus been accumulating over generations through a process of 'natural pedagogy'. We might think of this as a system consisting of cognitive mechanisms that enable the transmission of knowledge through all sorts of unspoken and unwritten behavioral cues etched into customary ways in which humans interact with nature that could be observed and passed on from one generation to another.⁹⁷ Practices of whaling, but also skipjack tuna fishing, and foraging abalone, kelp, and *tengusa* were some of the avenues through which such knowledge of the natural order was transmitted.

Living in accordance with the same natural order were abalone. Fissures, crevices, rock ledges, and the underside of boulders make up the anfractuositities of the abalone's preferred habitat. The higher the complexity of the bedrock, the larger abalone settlements tend to become.⁹⁸ Their rocky habitats serve as shelters to protect them against the elements as well as their predators. From here female and male abalone broadcast their eggs as well as their sperm during the spawning season, allowing fertilized eggs to turn into larvae out in the open sea. They seem to wait until a storm event before broadcast spawning, ensuring that the larvae will be transported by stronger currents and eddies up to several kilometers away.⁹⁹ Larvae are

⁹⁵ A picture scroll depicting this event can be found in the Taiji Whale Museum.

⁹⁶ On how the practice of whaling changed due to the shifting fortunes of separate factions within the whaling guilds after the *ōseminagare* see, Jakobina Arch, *Bringing Whales Ashore: Oceans and the Environment of Early Modern Japan* (University of Washington Press, 2018).

⁹⁷ I borrow the term 'natural pedagogy' from Gergely Csibra and György Gergely, "Natural Pedagogy as Evolutionary Adaptation," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 366, no. 1567 (April 12, 2011): 1149.

⁹⁸ Jacques Clavier and Pierre Chardy, "Investigation into the Ecology of the Ormer (*Haliotis Tuberculata* L.), Factors Influencing Spatial Distribution," *Aquatic Living Resources* 2, no. 4 (October 1989): 195.

⁹⁹ See, for example, R. Sasaki and S. A. Shepherd, "Larval Dispersal and Recruitment of *Haliotis Discus Hannai* and *Tegula* Spp. on Miyagi Coasts, Japan," *Marine and Freshwater Research* 46, no. 3 (1995): 519–29; Toshihiro Onitsuka, Tomohiko Kawamura, and Toyomitsu Horii, "Reproduction and Early Life Ecology of Abalone *Haliotis Diversicolor* in Sagami Bay, Japan," *Japan Agricultural Research Quarterly: JARQ* 44, no. 4 (2010): 375–82; Yoichi Miyake et al., "Population Connectivity of Ezo Abalone on the Northern Pacific Coast of Japan in Relation to the Establishment of Harvest Refugia," *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 440 (October 28, 2011): 137–50.

dragged along by the currents until they are ‘recruited’ by an abalone settlement in a shelter elsewhere. Groups accommodated strangers to form larger settlements of abalone that could span across vast distances in accordance with the currents of the ocean.

Where previously *ama* and other hyakushō could only see part of the trail of successful abalone settlements, the diving machine allowed them to see the full extent of their dispersal. They traveled up and down the littoral zone of the archipelago, each taking from the settlements according to their needs and foraging in one area while another recuperated. They withheld themselves from foraging altogether during seasonal bans agreed upon in the triannual gatherings at Shionomisaki Shrine. Representatives of the eighteen villages of the southern tip of Wakayama often met at such gatherings to discuss matters related to various types of fishing (including whaling).¹⁰⁰ This was a gift of nature and they knew better than to exploit an area until it was utterly depleted. As a consequence, they would be flexible enough to switch from one species to another, depending on what made most sense considering the socioeconomic and ecological circumstances as there was an understanding that foraging spaces were fleeting rather than permanent.

The occupational flexibility depended on the availability of nature’s resources. It turned whalers into skipjack tuna fishers, farmers, *ama*, and machine divers at various points in time. Looking back at the past, historians tend to categorize groups of people according to the occupations or activities that best characterized them. This, however, is largely the result of using a very specific lens that sees human activities in history as gradually progressing to ever higher degrees of specialization. Hyakushō do not neatly fit within such a history, as their activities encompassed not only farming but many ocean-related forms of making a living. The diving machine is a technology that illuminates the ocean-oriented way of seeing and doing of hyakushō.

Such ways of life of hyakushō would clash with the state’s plans to order the natural world according to modern ideas of nation state formation and the human relationship to nature. As I show in the following section, the diving machine also illuminates the process by which state and non-state actors contested the different understandings of the human relationship to nature by way of technology. When the diving machine began to proliferate among ordinary fishers, state actors saw the technology as an obstacle to progress and called the way hyakushō were using it ‘disorderly’ (*rankaku*).¹⁰¹ However, hyakushō continued to use the technology despite the legal dangers with which it came to be associated.

¹⁰⁰ *Kushimoto Chōshi [Kushimoto Town History]*, 229.

¹⁰¹ Ōba, *Expansion of the Diving Machine Fishery*, 54.

I.4 Challenging the Nature of State

The contested nature of the meanings embedded in Japan's 'Opening' was most apparent in the different ways in which *hyakushō* and the state reacted to the discovery of 'Machine Reef' (*kikaine*). In the summer of 1885, diving crews from various places flocked to Chiba prefecture with the discovery of this incredibly rich deposit of abalone, twelve kilometers off the coast of Ōhara. The spot was discovered by a *hyakushō* father and son, Shōji Tōkichi and Tōjiro, who had up until then been part-time sake brewers and part-time fishers. People sang songs in praise of Shōji's diving machine boat, replacing the old hit of 'Chōshi's Big Catch' (*chōshi tairyō bushi*).¹⁰² Although the discovery of what must have been the most successful abalone settlement in recent history was a cause for celebration among diving machine users, it became a cause for serious concern among state actors. Enthusiasm turned into distress when the first arrests were made following the discovery of the reef.

The arrests came after several years of state investigations into the viability of the diving machine as a technology to be used for foraging abalone. The increasing popularity of the diving machine had alerted officials of the Development Agency (*Kaitakushi*), and by extension, the new Meiji state. They were following up on rumors of fishers utilizing the diving machine to gather abalone in Hokkaido, which had reached their ears by the late 1870s. The Development Agency was a well-endowed institution officially tasked with the colonization of Japan's northern frontier. It sought to mobilize nature for the purposes of the state using the latest technoscientific methods – for agriculture, fishery, and forestry to name but a few – imported from the West. They referred to it as a 'Western abalone fishing method' (西洋鮑漁法 *sei'yō hōgyōhō*)¹⁰³, even though nowhere in the West was abalone fishing being practiced in the same way.¹⁰⁴ Suspecting that fishers had come up via the east coast, the Development Agency sent letters down to the 'industrial promotion bureaus' (*Kangyōka*) of Fukushima, Ibaraki, Chiba, and Shizuoka prefectures. The letters enquired into the veracity of the rumor that people have been fishing for abalone using the diving machine, whether reproduction was

¹⁰² Toshio Ōba, *Bōsō awabi gyogyō no hensen to gyogyōhō [Fishery Law and the Transformation of the Bōsō (Chiba Pref.) Abalone Fishery]* (Nagareyama, Chiba Pref: Ronshobōshuppan, 1995), 10.

¹⁰³ 『明治十二年 從一月至六月 雜書 販賣科』 「三等出仕 書記官 勤業課物産係」, KBAH.

¹⁰⁴ The misnomer reflects a tendency, prevalent among those who espoused the creed of 'civilization and enlightenment', to see any societal or technological transformation in Japan at the time as having its origins in the West. Abalone fishing was practiced in some other places at the time, but almost exclusively by non-Europeans outside of Europe and without a diving machine. For a history of naked abalone diving in the Chinese diaspora in California, see Todd J. Braje, *Shellfish for the Celestial Empire: The Rise and Fall of Commercial Abalone Fishing in California* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016).

disturbed and species were being fished to extinction, and whether any countermeasures were put into place in order to prevent *rankaku* ('disorderly taking').¹⁰⁵

One after another, the industrial promotion bureaus of the prefectures under investigation confirmed that there had been sightings of fishers using the diving machine and provided details about their activities. They were present in Ibaraki in 1879 but were no longer there by the time of the Development Agency's enquiry. Within two years the divers had come and gone, reportedly 'making a quick profit in return for bringing about eternal unprofitability' (*ichiji no rijun kaerite eien no furi o maneki shi nari*).¹⁰⁶ In Shizuoka, abalone machine divers were still active, and their numbers were growing. The other two prefectures under investigation, Chiba and Fukushima, were ambiguous on the matter of *rankaku*, or *rangyo* ('disorderly fishing') as it was sometimes referred to in the correspondences. Fukushima seems to have been the only prefecture in which the investigators of the industrial promotion bureau bothered to take a boat out into the sea and talk to the divers directly. In reply to the Development Agency's investigation, the bureau stated that the divers had just come from Taga district in Ibaraki, and that they were now fishing here because there were no more abalone to be found in the previous fishing ground. How the actual divers described the state in which they left the area is unknown. As is mostly the case with state archives, the voices that are represented tend to belong to the observers rather than the observed. According to the reply from industrial promotion bureau of Chiba prefecture, abalone machine divers closely cooperated with *ama*.¹⁰⁷ Throwing back juvenile abalone into the sea, so that they would have a chance to reach maturity and bear offspring, was common practice among *ama*. Finding out whether the divers left behind a barren sea bed, or whether they had followed the old customs to ensure that abalone were not fished to extinction was, however, not a priority for state actors. Through the investigations, state institutions attempted to better control the hitherto unsupervised extraction of valuable resources which, in their eyes, belonged to the state.

In 1882, the newly created 'Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce' (Nōshōmushō) jumped on the same bandwagon, which would lead to serious consequences for *hyakushō*. It issued an order to each coastal 'administrative division' (*enkai fukun*) to find out what the best way was to supervise abalone fishing with the diving machine. Studies into the reproductive

¹⁰⁵ Ōba, *Expansion of the Diving Machine Fishery*, 54.

¹⁰⁶ Reply from the Ibaraki Kangyōka to the Hakodate branch of the Kaitakushi, dated 30 June 1881, KBAH.

¹⁰⁷ Reply from the Chiba Kangyōka to the Hakodate branch of the Kaitakushi, dated 11 August 1881, KBAH. Naked divers worked the shallower areas (磯際 *isogiwa*), while those using the diving machine agreed to work deeper offshore areas (沖合 *okiai*) that could not be reached otherwise, self-governing the commons without government intervention.

biology of the abalone began to be conducted by various figures associated with the Ministry and the Development Agency. For example, Uchimura Kanzo (1861-1930), who is more often remembered for his refusal to bow to the portrait of the Meiji Emperor, began his career as a biologist for the agency after graduating from the Sapporo Agricultural College. His research, conducted at a laboratory in Shukuzu, was used in determining the appropriate policies for the management of the seabed.¹⁰⁸ It formed a starting point to approach the problems that were raised by the abalone machine divers' actions scientifically. Should foraging be forbidden during spawning time? Should a minimum size limit be implemented for caught abalone? Or, should the use of the diving machine in fishing be prohibited entirely? Discussions went on for several years but failed to produce unanimous answers to such questions.¹⁰⁹ Some prefectures only allowed fishing with the diving machine at specific times of the year, while others banned the practice entirely. Prospective fishers were expected to make an application if they wanted to use the diving machine, but there were more divers than the applications could account for – suggesting that the communication of such expectations was poor.¹¹⁰ The implementation of a widely-varying set of regulations produced a legal grey area through which the state could arbitrarily increase its control over the marine invertebrate fishery. Divers were heavily fined and, in the worst cases, arrested for breaking the law.¹¹¹

The arrests mark two aspects of the technology of the diving machine that proved incompatible with the utopian plans of a political regime that attempted to modernize Japan according to the model of the modern nation state of the West. Firstly, it was a specific use of technology endorsed by commoners who were not trained in educational institutions modeled after those of the West. Secondly, it was not at all contributing to the creation of a centralized economy but doing the exact opposite, nurturing local communities whose 'development' was not at all a priority for the new nation state. Ultimately, however, the friction between the Meiji state and *hyakushō* was rooted in deeply contrasting understandings of nature.

One particular representation of diving machines may help to illustrate such discrepant understandings of the proper use of technology. On the opening pages of an issue of *shōkokumin*, a Meiji era children's magazine, a lone scientist sits at the bottom of the ocean.

¹⁰⁸ Awabizakanahansokujō shikenkaishisho (report on abalone reproduction), 1883, in Hokkaidō Daigaku Shokubutsuen Hakubutsukanzō (Hokkaido University Botanical Garden Museum).

¹⁰⁹ Yoshikazu Nanbu, "Hōgyō Seigenhō Ni Kansuru Iken," *Dai Nippon Suisankai Hōkoku* 41, no. 4 (January 16, 1885): 7–10.

¹¹⁰ A large number of applications has been transcribed in Ōba, *Expansion of the Diving Machine Fishery*. Although the state did not control the distribution of the diving machine, it did officially control the waters in which they were being used. The state would usually only find out after the fact or when individual fishers would try to gain an upper hand over their peers and go through the trouble of reporting them.

¹¹¹ Ōba, *Fishery Law*, 12; Ōba, *Expansion of the Diving Machine Fishery*, 128.



Figure 7 – Illustration of a diver wearing a diving suit in *shōkokumin*, a Meiji-era children's magazine

The scientist's prolonged stay underwater is made possible by the diving machine. As he meticulously observes an urchin through a magnifying glass, other sea creatures congregate around him. Gasping and gazing upward, they give the impression that they too hoped to someday become worthy of the attention of a rational and modern human subject. In the accompanying text, the author encourages young citizens of the equally young nation state to further investigate the most underexplored and peculiar of scientific frontiers, that of marine biota.¹¹² Behind this seemingly innocent depiction of the diving machine as a new medium for the deepening of a human understanding of the natural world lay an implicit understanding of how humans ought to relate to nature. It was an understanding that had emerged out of contesting formulations of the concept of nature and what it might mean for society during the formative moments of the Japanese nation state. It hinged on the creation of a dichotomy between the observer and the observed, or an active subject and a passive object, assuming not only that man stood outside of nature, but that he stood above it as its master.

The state's understanding of nature was informed by the modernizing mission that it undertook partly in order to rectify the 'unequal treaties' that were imposed on it by the West – an attempt to avoid wholesale colonization by refashioning 'Japan as a colonizer' of equal status.¹¹³ The hyakushō understanding of nature, on the other hand, was informed by long-term exposure and adaptation to the realities of nature in everyday life. It was this understanding that posed a challenge to the state actors' eager acceptance of one of the most fundamental dualisms of Western modernity in their thoughts and actions: the divide between culture and nature that gave birth to further bifurcations of modernity and tradition, the West and the East, civilized and savage, and colonizer and colonized.

Among the most conspicuous ways in which the Meiji state came to realize this dualistic relationship with the natural world was through the management of water. River improvement projects gained a new lease of life in the early Meiji period. Such projects had already been undertaken in the preceding centuries in what was effectively an arms race between the Tokugawa regime and major rivers such as the Tone or the Kiso.¹¹⁴ Despite the investment of a large sum of resources and an even greater quantity of labor, however, these attempts amounted to little more than a stalemate between the two forces. Meiji era bureaucrats picked up where a beaten Tokugawa regime left off. Foreign expertise and technology were

¹¹² *Shōkokumin* 2, no. 13 (May 3, 1889): 3.

¹¹³ The phrase is from the eponymously-titled essay by Inazo Nitobe, "Japan as a Colonizer," *The Journal of Race Development* 2, no. 4 (1912): 347–61.

¹¹⁴ Conrad Totman, "Preindustrial River Conservancy. Causes and Consequences," *Monumenta Nipponica* 47, no. 1 (1992): 59–76.

sought, and plans for the construction of levees, dams, and canals were made. Again, large sums of money were made available in order to improve the navigability of the rivers and make them more predictable.

The correspondences of hydraulic engineers employed by the Meiji state show that the initial plans were often ridden with problems. In spite of the immense amount of money made available for such projects, they were often still underfunded or simply unfeasible.¹¹⁵ The Dutch engineer George Arnold Escher was asked to reshape Japan's third longest river, the Ishikari, into a route that would provide Sapporo with convenient access to the sea. Witnessing the sheer energy with which waves crashed onto the coast in his inspections across imperial Japan's northern frontier, Escher concluded that the state's plans were simply not grounded in the reality with which it was faced.¹¹⁶ Although Escher's tasks were never brought to fruition, other river improvement projects were. The manmade catastrophes of several floods of the 1880s stand as a testament to the failure of some of these schemes which sought to improve not just the rivers, but also the human condition.

State actors' ambitions to manage water did not stop at the riverfront, but neither did the challenges they faced. From the 1870s, the state became increasingly preoccupied with governing the seas. These attempts were focused on the control of human and non-human actors that used the seas for their livelihoods. Even if they did not mean to challenge the state deliberately, *hyakushō* thwarted these attempts as they utilized the diving machine in the seas surrounding the archipelago. *Hyakushō* themselves seemed to constitute a natural force that could hardly be governed.

The Development Agency's concerns about the ways in which the sea was being used had little to do with overfishing than with the creation of conditions of 'eternal unprofitability' (*eien no furi*) for the state.¹¹⁷ Enabled primarily by the adoption of the internationally recognized three-mile limit, which projected Japanese sovereignty onto adjacent waters, the early Meiji understanding of the commons began to include the sea in addition to the land. It was a process through which the state, by way of the Development Agency, could legitimately wrest the commons from commoners' hands. The assumption of self-interest as being the prime motivator for human behavior was one of the key tenets of the state's understanding of modernity, and, as one of the most important institutions in the implementation of state-led

¹¹⁵ Louis van Gasteren, ed., *In Een Japanse Stroomversnelling: Berichten van Nederlandse Watermannen: Rijswerkers, Ingenieurs, Werkbazen: 1872-1903* (Amsterdam : Zutphen: Euro Book ; Walburg Pers, 2000).

¹¹⁶ Gasteren.

¹¹⁷ Reply from the Ibaraki Kangyōka to the Hakodate branch of the Kaitakushi, dated 30 June 1881, KBAH.

modernization, the Development Agency sought to regulate *hyakushō*'s actions based on this understanding. The state territorialized the fleeting spaces that *hyakushō* periodically utilized into much more permanent and lasting spaces of the nation state, and it did so with the help of a discourse in which commoners were conceived as being unfit to manage the commons. In the state's view, orderly conduct in relation to nature was whatever best allowed for the utilities of non-human nature to be delivered to the territorial project of the modern nation state.¹¹⁸

Although his research into abalone reproduction was part of the Development Agency's strategy, Uchimura Kanzō expressed his frustrations in the middle of the project and complained about the state's inability to see 'the utility of science', and to which we might add technology.¹¹⁹ The way in which the state delegitimized fishers' actions would not have sat well with Uchimura, who was on his way to becoming a vocal critic of the Meiji regime. Underlying the decisions made by state actors in their attempts at governing the seas was the conviction that state-endorsed specialist knowledge, even if produced far from the actual sites of application, trumped local knowledge. State actors transposed their understanding of how the social and natural world should be ordered from the soil onto the water and labelled *hyakushō*'s new foraging practices as 'disorderly' (*rankaku*).

In the Meiji state's understanding of nature, *hyakushō* were framed as the stereotypical actors in what is known as 'the Tragedy of the Commons' – the idea that without top-down regulation the commons will inevitably be destroyed by the purely self-serving choices its users would make. It would have been hard to imagine that *hyakushō* utterly depleted a settlement by taking every single abalone in a single patch without taking into account whether they have reached full maturity and were able to reproduce or not. Needless to say, they had little incentive to destroy their own livelihoods and those of their fellow foragers with whom they worked closely.¹²⁰ Which forager, after all, would pluck not only the berries from a shrub, but also the shrub itself? If at all edible or usable, the shrub would provide little nutritional or market value. As has already been shown by the economist Elinor Ostrom, 'the Tragedy of the Commons' is not an inevitable outcome of self-organized resource use.¹²¹ Nevertheless, the

¹¹⁸ For a more elaborate discussion on the state understanding of nature see: Christian Parenti, "The Environment Making State: Territory, Nature, and Value," *Antipode* 47, no. 4 (September 2015): 829–48.

¹¹⁹ Letter of June 15, 1882, Kanzo Uchimura, Taijiro Yamamoto, and Yoichi Muto, *The Complete Works of Kanzo Uchimura*. (Tokyo: Kyobunkwan, 1971), 48.

¹²⁰ Reply from the Chiba Kangyōka to the Hakodate branch of the Kaitakushi, dated 11 August 1881, KBAH.

¹²¹ Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Tragedy's intellectual underpinnings has long served as a justification for states and other hegemonic power structures to strengthen their grip over territory and natural resources.¹²²

Despite the difficulties of navigating the strict regulations and the possibility of being thrown into jail, *hyakushō* continued to use the diving machine to forage abalone. They often did it secretly, by applying for a permit to use the diving machine in order to salvage a shipwreck or in order to conduct a scientific experiment. Many had invested a great deal of resources into acquiring a diving machine, the price of which had risen astronomically by the time of the discovery of Machine Reef. They were not ready to give up their newfound livelihoods that easily. But it was more than an unwillingness to lose their initial investments that drove *hyakushō* to risk their freedom by continuing to use the diving machine. *Hyakushō* had found in the diving machine a modern means through which they could live a moral and meaningful life that was grounded in nature. Driving the adoption of the diving machine for the purposes of fishing was a local knowledge of nature and established practices of the communities of the Japanese littoral zone.

I.5 Conclusion

Between the 1870s and the mid-1880s, the diving machine became increasingly popular among *hyakushō* as they began to realize how it could radically improve the practice of foraging abalone. The practice proliferated across the various littoral communities dotting the coastlines of Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu, and even reached up to Hokkaido. The adoption and popularization of the technology had little to do with state actors' efforts to create a stronger nation or a more centralized economy. Unlike other processes of social and technological change in the early Meiji era, it was not imposed from the top by elites, intellectuals, policymakers, or engineers. Instead it was almost wholly orchestrated by commoners from the 'lowest' ranks of society, shipwreck salvagers and part-time farmers, and, more importantly, *ama*, whalers, shipwrights, and other types of fisherfolk.

The realization of the potential of the diving machine to revolutionize the fishery was rooted in the established practices of the varied cultures of the littoral communities across the Japanese archipelago. *Ama*, who had already been foraging abalone, alongside kelp, sea

¹²² See also the case of seventeenth century English elites under the Stuart crown, who would wrest the land from commoners' hands in the belief that they themselves were unfit to manage it. This was justified by a discourse of 'land improvement', through which "direct experience, collective use and intergenerational memory" was subordinated to "empirical measurement or schematic oversight" Elly Robson, "Improvement and Epistemologies of Landscape in Seventeenth-Century English Forest Enclosure," *The Historical Journal* 60, no. 3 (September 2017): 598.

cucumber, *tengusa*, and other fruits of the sea, could now go further into the sea and stay underwater much longer. Moreover, they did not have to spend as much time in the water as they used to. For *hyakushō* who would have only occasionally foraged abalone or who might not have tried their hand at it at all, but were instead familiar with whaling or fishing, the diving machine allowed for the mobilization of already existing knowledge of the ocean for a different purpose. The technology made sense to those who might have understood how oceans ‘thought’.

While the new technology did not clash with existing understandings of how people were to interact with their environment, it did clash with the state understanding of how people were supposed to interact with their environment in a modern age. The technological transformations that were approved and encouraged by state actors were based on a different understanding of nature, adopted in large part as a consequence of Japan’s encounter with the West. This new tension between state and non-state actors within a rapidly modernizing Japan contributed to an exodus of diving machine users to waters far away from home. As we will see in the next chapter, *hyakushō* would once again utilize the diving machine to transform their lives in accordance with their understanding of nature.

II

The Arafura Zone:

A Nature-Centric Space and Time

Thousands of Japanese graves can be found along the coasts of the Arafura Sea and other bodies of water that collectively form the intersection of the Indian and Pacific oceans. The graves belong to former whalers, skipjack tuna fishers and skin-diving abalone foragers, in others words, ordinary people whose lives were intimately intertwined with the sea. These *hyakushō* arrived in the waters between pre-federation Australia and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) in the late 1870s, where they dived to the bottom of the sea in search of shells of pearl oysters and sea-snails. Pearl shells provided mother-of-pearl, which began to be shipped in increasing numbers across the world for the purposes of making buttons or decorating watches, musical instruments and various other commodities. As an alternative, they sought *trepang*, or sea cucumber, a delicacy and aphrodisiac that was part of a long-established trade route leading to China. By the early 1900s, *hyakushō* had connected the mutually exclusive peripheries of the British, Dutch, German and probably the Portuguese and Spanish empires. Through the geographical distribution of marine life, nature shaped the spatial but also the temporal dimensions of the experiences of *hyakushō* abroad. On the one hand, changes in atmospheric pressure following variations in the temperature of land-masses and oceans gave rise to a seasonal reversal of wind patterns that determined when *hyakushō* could work. On the other, changes in hydrostatic pressure during a deep-sea dive altered the interaction between the human body and inhaled air, producing bubbles of nitrogen in bodily fluids and tissues that could lead to a quick retirement or death. From the moment the journeys of *hyakushō* began to the moment they came to an end, the ecology of the Arafura Sea deeply shaped their experience of everyday life.

Hyakushō went to the Arafura Sea against the backdrop of newly emerging connections between Japan and the wider world, the so-called ‘Opening of Japan’. They did so despite the dangers and the possibility of earning a living through other means. In the process, they paved the way for the establishment of self-organized networks comprised of shipwrights, carpenters, merchants, cooks, doctors, sex workers, Buddhist monks, Irish nuns and indigenous guides who knew about local flora and fauna. Their largely unofficial movements as stowaways, freeloaders and deserters connected their hometowns in Wakayama, Ehime and Chiba prefectures (among others) to Makassar (Sulawesi), Kupang (Timor), Dobo (Aru Islands), Port Moresby and Rabaul (both Papua New Guinea), Thursday Island, Palmerston (Darwin,

Northern Territory), and Broome, Cossack and Geraldton (Western Australia). (See Map 1.) Such places barely register on any conventional map that attempts to capture both Japan and insular South-East Asia or Australia. Yet they loomed large in *hyakushō*'s own spatial imaginations. As one former diver recalled, Thursday Island felt much closer to him than Tokyo ever did.¹²³ Just as Japanese state actors in the capital began to accept the geopolitical discourse of the West imprinted on a Mercator projection, *hyakushō* began to relate to the world in ways that force us to re-envision the map. An attempt to redraw the map psychogeographically can be seen in Map 2, which is a representation of space based on the intuitions and lived experience of *hyakushō* as might be loosely inferred from oral history and other anecdotal accounts.¹²⁴

People who observed how these ordinary Japanese connected their hometowns to far-flung places across vast stretches of open sea referred to them as the ‘Scotchmen of the Orient’.¹²⁵ Others described them as early migrants in a prelude to the expansion of the Japanese informal and formal empire.¹²⁶ They have also been discussed as necessary evils in the eyes of European entrepreneurs who reluctantly relied on their labour in histories of the pearling industry, framed as a marginal offshoot of the global history of mineral accumulation.¹²⁷ Whether as ‘Scotchmen’, migrants, settlers, labour or diaspora, these actors have rarely been considered beyond the context of historical narratives of state, empire and capitalism.

Yet, as *hyakushō*, they also have a history of their own. In chapter 1, I discussed how the older ocean-centric cultures of *hyakushō* informed technological change during the Opening of Japan and how they came to reject newly introduced understandings of the relationship between human and nature. Their narratives complicate the understanding that the Opening of Japan was solely and straightforwardly a moment in which Japan encountered and subsequently embraced Western modernity. In this chapter, I show how the longer history of

¹²³ See Regina Ganter, “The Wakayama Triangle: Japanese Heritage of North Australia,” *Journal of Australian Studies* 23, no. 61 (January 1, 1999): 56.

¹²⁴ For more on the psychogeographic approach to the representation of space, see Guy Debord, ‘Introduction à une critique de la géographie urbaine’, *Les Lèvres Nues*, vi (1955).

¹²⁵ George Frederick Kunz, *The Book of the Pearl: The History, Art, Science, and Industry of the Queen of Gems* (New York: The Century co., 1908), 206.

¹²⁶ See, for example, Eiichiro Azuma, *In Search of Our Frontier: Japanese America and Settler Colonialism in the Construction of Japan's Borderless Empire* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2019), 70–7.

¹²⁷ David Sissons, “The Japanese in the Australian Pearling Industry,” *Queensland Heritage* 3, no. 10 (1979): 10; Julia Martínez and Adrian Vickers, *The Pearl Frontier: Indonesian Labor and Indigenous Encounters in Australia's Northern Trading Network* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015); Stephen Mullins, *Octopus Crowd: Maritime History and the Business of Australian Pearling in Its Schooner Age* (University of Alabama Press, 2019).

hyakushō as oceanic commoners also played an important role in the emergence of vast ocean-spanning networks that connected Japan with the Arafura Sea at the moment of its birth as a modern nation state.

I argue that for many hyakushō, the nineteenth century Opening of Japan was about the formation of transnational connections that gave birth to what I call the ‘Arafura Zone’ – a massive expanse in which state actors maintained little spatial control and mechanisms of the global marketplace met with human and environmental friction. The experiences of hyakushō tell a different tale of the opening, which has up until now primarily been narrated in terms of Japan’s encounter with Western modernity. They show us how this historical moment was not just about the acceptance of the spatiality of the international community of civilized nation states and the temporality of industrial civilization. Instead, it also brought about an understanding of time and space based on the monsoonal climate and the geographical distribution of marine biota. The arrival of hyakushō in the Arafura Zone and the distinctive ways in which it discloses how the environment came to shape social developments force us to ‘ecologize’ our understanding of the Opening of Japan.¹²⁸

This chapter begins with a discussion of how we might ‘reopen’ the Opening of Japan in order to uncover interpretations of the historical event that have been overshadowed by narratives centering on the West. The aim is to build on the first chapter’s attempt to challenge long held assumptions about the Opening and seek out new historical meanings for a case that historians considered to be closed. I suggest that a transnational and ecological approach that focuses on non-state actors such as hyakushō might allow us to arrive at a new interpretation of the Opening. In the following section, I examine the non-state character of the areas surrounding the Arafura Sea in which would later hyakushō arrive. It was not a coincidence that hyakushō chose this particular place as their preferred destination, especially in light of the Meiji state’s attempts to enclose the waters surrounding the Japanese archipelago. This was a global commons where self-organizing societies created the foundation of forms of connectivity that did not primarily rely on the state or the global marketplace. From here I proceed to examine the transnational connections that hyakushō began to establish with places and peoples in and around the Arafura Sea, based on the distribution of a handful of species of marine invertebrates. These connections brought about a mainly non-state space which, while

¹²⁸ See, for example, the term ‘ecologizing’ as a way to explore historical events, processes, and actors outside of the metanarrative of Western modernity using insights derived from the study of political ecology, as conceptualised in Bruno Latour, “To Modernize or Ecologise? That’s the Question,” in *Remaking Reality: Nature at the Millennium*, ed. N Castree and B Willems-Braun (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 221–42.



Fig. 1 The Arafura Zone. This figure shows one of the possible routes to the Arafura Zone (from Japan) and an approximation of the geographical extent of the activities of *hyakushō* between the 1880s and 1900s.



Fig. 2 Psychogeographic representation of the Arafura Zone. For some, Thursday Island (centre) felt closer to Wakayama Prefecture (centre-left) than Tokyo (centre-right) did. This figure is an example of what a mental map for *hyakushō* might look like. Arrows indicate routes between Wakayama, Yokohama, Thursday Island, Palmerston (Darwin), Broome, Townsville, Kupang, Port Moresby, Rabaul, Dobo, Makassar, Singapore, and Hong Kong, which I describe in greater detail in section III.

located in the peripheries and interstices of empire and beyond, nevertheless occupied a central position in the lives of *hyakushō*. Lastly, I show how *hyakushō*'s perception of time in the Arafura Zone came to be deeply shaped by local ecological realities. More so than the mechanisms of the global marketplace or the stipulations of international law, it was the monsoonal climate that largely determined when they could work and how they could engage with others as part of Japan's opening to the wider world.

II.1 Ecologizing the Opening of Japan

The history of modern Japan's connections with the wider world tend to center around specific processes, events, and actors that situate such worldly relations within a larger process of 'globalization'. Following a long period of seclusion, Japan opened its doors to the world beyond the archipelago as the American whaling industry expands into the northern reaches of the Pacific Ocean. As discussed in Chapter 1, this moment brought new technologies and new ideas on the relationship between human and nature. It also brought new ideas on how Japan ought to relate to the outside world within the conceptual universe of Western modernity, giving rise to advocates of imperial expansion such as Nitobe Inazo, Shiga Shigetaka, and Enomoto Takeaki.¹²⁹ When historians look at the historical event of the Opening of Japan, they have tended to focus on how Japan's links with the world at large were forged in the name of commerce and civilization.

The historiography's heavy reliance on this understanding of the Opening of Japan has rendered other forms of connectivity that emerged between Japan and the wider world almost entirely invisible. In his article 'Reopening the 'Opening of Japan'', Sho Konishi demonstrated how a shift toward sources and actors that can narrate the opening in a different manner might help us to unearth such connections.¹³⁰ Focusing on the transnational connections made by a Russian revolutionary in nineteenth-century Japan, Konishi showed how the moment of the opening was instrumental in creating an anarchist vision of progress that has been written out of the historiography. Such new interpretations direct our attention to the global historical significance of events, developments, and encounters that did not directly contribute to bringing about Western modernity. Since then, others have joined the effort to tackle the essentially one-dimensional understanding of Japan's opening. Daniel Botsman, for example,

¹²⁹ See, for example: Sidney Xu Lu, *The Making of Japanese Settler Colonialism: Malthusianism and Trans-Pacific Migration, 1868-1961* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

¹³⁰ Sho Konishi, "Reopening the 'Opening of Japan': A Russian-Japanese Revolutionary Encounter and the Vision of Anarchist Progress," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (February 1, 2007): 101–30.

scrutinized the claim that it was only through the opening to the West that people in Japan began to formulate and reflect on the concept of freedom.¹³¹ He did so by examining the hypocrisies that rose to the surface in Japan's encounter with the *Maria Luz* and the way in which 'coolies' were discovered to be treated on board. To Japanese observers contemplating the notion of freedom, the case suggested that the civilized world had yet to progress as far beyond the days of the Atlantic slave trade as it had claimed. Meanwhile, David Ambaras argued that the opening of Japan was simultaneously a reopening to the Sinosphere.¹³² Ambaras illuminated the process through which 'the shady underbelly' of Japan's empire was shaped in dialogue with China through the accounts of children trafficked into China by traders, women who were portrayed as being abducted in the process of marrying Fujianese men, as well as other marginalized historical actors. The studies of both Botsman and Ambaras reinterpret encounters and introduce new historical actors, questioning the centrality of the West in the narrative of the opening. Their contributions bring, to the study of modern Japanese history, recent insights and approaches derived from international history and the study of empire: firstly, modern state-centric concepts could equally – but still tardily – be the products of alternative modernities outside of Europe, and secondly, peripheries too must be taken seriously in any account of the center. Nevertheless, the field still tends to give temporal privilege to the West and rarely challenges the peripherality of the so-called 'periphery'. To reopen the Opening of Japan is to scrutinize these dominant narratives at their roots and to find new historical significance in the event.

If Euroamerican whaling practices contributed to the 'Opening of Japan' in the terms of its encounter with Western modernity, another culture of whaling contributed to the establishment of transnational connections between Japan and the wider world that would give the 'Opening' an entirely different meaning. The *longue durée* accumulation of a local knowledge of nature among whalers, but also traditional skin-diving abalone fishers known as 'ama', and other *hyakushō* formed the basis for a life that necessitated long periods on the waters and frequent exposures to new and foreign locales. Once abroad, *hyakushō*'s understanding of time and space were modulated by the ecological realities of the Arafura Zone, contrasting starkly with those of state actors whose interests lay in the formation and expansion of the Japanese empire. *Hyakushō*'s encounter with the Arafura Zone tells us how nature informed non-state actors' understanding of time and space as they resituated themselves from one ecological context into another. By focusing on how *hyakushō* used their own local

¹³¹ Botsman, "Freedom without Slavery?"

¹³² Ambaras, *Japan's Imperial Underworlds*.

knowledge of nature to make sense of new environmental realities, we might ecologize our understanding of the Opening of Japan and, in the process, reopen it to a new interpretation.

II.2 Common Waters

The separate areas that became the Arafura Zone shared a common characteristic before the arrival of *hyakushō*: a troubled relationship with the administrative centers of modern empires and colonial states. On the one hand, we have the northern part of the Australian continent, a tropical frontier that constituted a barely habitable space for white settlers and a potential source of danger for the superiority of ‘the white race’ in the nineteenth century Australian colonial imagination. On the other hand, there was the southern periphery of the Moluccas, an area over which the Dutch colonial state struggled to exert control ever since the fall of the Dutch East India Company at the turn of the nineteenth century and the subsequent reacquisition of the colonies following the Napoleonic Wars. The two regions had one other thing in common: a fruitful relationship with the biologically productive waters of the Arafura Sea. Together, they made up a global commons where practices of commoning remained largely unaffected by ‘globalization’ – that is to say, industrial and capitalist expansion from West to East.¹³³ That the vectors of ‘globalization’ acting upon the two regions were relatively weak does not imply that the areas surrounding the Arafura Sea had always remained largely disconnected. On the contrary, they make up a sea of islands that has been historically interconnected despite becoming historiographically separate.¹³⁴ In this section, I discuss the relatively high degree of autonomy from state power characterizing the Arafura Sea whose inherent interconnectivity would later be amplified by *hyakushō*. I do so to show how the Arafura Zone emerged as a transnational space in which nature – more than the state, empire, or the global marketplace – played an important role in the organization of social life.

Marking the points of contact between the Arafura Sea and the northern coastline of the Australian continent are the settlements of Thursday Island and Palmerston (now Darwin). These were places on the Australian landmass that were considered to be firmly situated in the tropics and climatically distinct from the rest of the continent. While we may think of tropical

¹³³ On parallel processes of commoning throughout history, see Peter Linebaugh, “Enclosures from the Bottom Up,” *Radical History Review* 2010, no. 108 (October 1, 2010): 11–27.

¹³⁴ Historical connections between Indonesia and the northern coast of Australia are manifold: on the connections between Macassan traders and Aboriginal Australians, see for example Charles Campbell Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege: Macassan Trepangers in Northern Australia* (Melbourne University Press, 1976). On the connections between the Torres Strait and Papua New Guinea, see for example Anna Shnukal, “Torres Strait Islanders,” in *Multicultural Queensland 2001: 100 Years, 100 Communities, A Century of Contributions*, ed. Maximilian Brandle (The State of Queensland (Department of Premier and Cabinet), 2001).

environments as pleasant vacation destinations today, they have historically been anything but inviting. Palmerston attracted few white settlers since its establishment as a farming settlement at Port Darwin in 1864 and Thursday Island similarly proved to be an unpopular destination for white settlers ever since its designation as a strategic colonial settlement in the 1870s.¹³⁵

The historian Warwick Anderson showed how imperial discourses among doctors and scientists, and later policymakers and settlers as well, reveal that northern Australia was considered a site of prolific disease and degeneration – factors that strongly hindered attempts to settle the frontier. Medical reports revealed that nature was deploying an arsenal of diseases on unsuspecting visitors. These ranged from malaria, typhoid, diphtheria, and phthisis to malnutrition, scurvy, dysentery, and ophthalmia. Moreover, it was believed that the tropical climate of northern Australia had the power to severely affect the physical and mental health of those who were more acclimated to temperate regions. The detrimental effects acted not just upon a single generation of settlers but would further wreak havoc upon their children – a process of degeneration that endangered the superiority of ‘the white race’. As Anderson showed, fears of both disease and degeneration persisted well into the early twentieth century, deterring attempts to settle the frontier even as doctors became more knowledgeable of the epidemiological particularities of the tropical north.¹³⁶ Besides the fear of an inhospitable climate, however, a fear of the Other further undermined attempts to close Australia’s northern frontier.

The northern frontier had long been inhabited by ‘Aboriginal Australians’ and ‘Torres Strait Islanders’. Palmerston, for example, was founded on the grounds that the Larrakia called home. The Larrakia are known as a ‘saltwater people’ who based their livelihoods on the bounties of the sea, as one of their most important ‘dream times’ attests to: a Rainbow Serpent that traverses the Daly River into waters off the coast via Darwin harbor.¹³⁷ This was a being that connected important sites in the seascape that were not to be treated inappropriately. The sanctity of such spaces is symbolic of the considerations that the Larrakia had towards the environments that sustained them. Ignorance of such beliefs and a reluctance to respect them surely caused much tension in the history of contact between settlers and ‘Aboriginal Australians’. However, when the Larrakia encountered Captain John Finnis in the vicinity of

¹³⁵ See, for example, A. Powell, *Far Country: Short History of the Northern Territory* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1982).

¹³⁶ Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Melbourne University Publishing, 2005).

¹³⁷ On a critical discussion of the function of ‘dream times’ as history for ‘Aboriginal Australians’, see Minoru Hokari, *Radikaru oraru hisutori: osutoraria senjumin aborijini no rekishi jissen.*, 2018.

Adam Bay in 1864, shortly before the founding of Palmerston, the resulting conflict was not about the violation of such sacred spaces. Accused of pilfering the supplies of Finnis' party, the Larrakia became the target of violent and vindictive attacks. The conflict was rooted in a misunderstanding of another principle that the Larrakia held dear: social reciprocity in the absence of notions of private property.¹³⁸ Such principles likely formed the basis of successful cultural exchanges between neighboring saltwater peoples and those that came from much further since at least the early seventeenth century.¹³⁹

Makassarese, Bugis, and Bajau traversed the Timor and Arafura Seas to trade not just on the northern Australian coast but also on the southern islands of the Moluccas. These islands on the opposite end of the Arafura Sea belonged to a periphery of peripheries in the eyes of Dutch colonial authorities. Despite the Dutch colonial state's high hopes of making this territory at least as profitable as it had been in the days of the Dutch East India Company, it too was a frontier that had yet to be closed. On his visit to the Aru Islands, the ichthyologist Pieter Bleeker observed that there was no sign of a garrison of troops, despite the plans that had been made to establish one thirty years earlier.¹⁴⁰ To some, it even seemed as if colonial actors had yet to set foot here at all. Casparus F. Bosscher, possibly the Assistant-Resident of Ambon at the time, noted that indigenous customs regarding land distribution and possession on the Aru Islands and the other archipelagos surrounding the Arafura Sea seemed to have remained largely unaffected by the arrival of Europeans.¹⁴¹ He referred to the strong attachment to ancestral customs and institutions that he witnessed there, and pointed to the communal gardens that could be found on the *achterwal* (lit. 'rear shore') of the various islands and the absence of notions of private property.¹⁴² Numerous others attest to the relatively high degree of autonomy from state power that could be enjoyed in this part of the Dutch East Indies in the mid-nineteenth century. None, however, are so revealing of the 'unruly' qualities of this area

¹³⁸ For a detailed discussion of this encounter, see Samantha Wells, "Surveying Darwin: The Larrakia Meet Goyder, 1869," *Northern Territory Historical Studies*, no. 29 (n.d.): 51–73.

¹³⁹ Paul S.C. Taçon et al., "A Minimum Age For Early Depictions Of Southeast Asian Praus in the Rock Art of Arnhem Land, Northern Territory," *Australian Archaeology* 71, no. 1 (December 1, 2010): 1–10; Kathleen Schwerdtner Máñez and Sebastian C. A. Ferse, "The History of Makassan Trepang Fishing and Trade," *PLoS ONE* 5, no. 6 (June 29, 2010): e11346.

¹⁴⁰ Jeanpaul van den Haspel, "Nederlandse Koloniale Planning in de Molukken van de 19e Eeuw [Dutch Colonial Planning in the Moluccas of the 19th Century]" (MA in Colonial and Global History, Leiden University, 2015); P. Bleeker, *Reis door de Minahassa en den Molukschen archipel. Gedaan in de maanden september en oktober 1855 in het gevolg van den gouverneur generaal Mr. A.J. Duymaer van Twist.*, vol. 2 (Batavia: Lange, 1856), 244–47.

¹⁴¹ C. F. Bosscher, "Het Landbezit in Het Zuidelijke Gedeelte van Den Molukschen Archipel," *Tijdschrift Voor Indische Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 7, no. 3 (1858): 197–202.

¹⁴² Bosscher.

as the observations of the naturalist and co-conceiver of the theory of evolution Alfred Russel Wallace.

On the 8th of January, 1857, Wallace landed in Dobo, a settlement on the Aru Islands of primarily Bugis and Chinese traders. Wallace visited the Malay Archipelago in search of animal specimens that could assist in his study of the principles of evolution. His work coincided with Charles Darwin's own research efforts before the publication of *On the Origin of Species*. Wallace independently formulated the process of natural selection in Ternate¹⁴³, on the northern end of the Moluccas, a key moment in his successful career that would nevertheless forever be overshadowed by that of Darwin. However, an earlier moment in his trip to the Malay Archipelago constituted another important yet underappreciated moment in the development of his thought. When Wallace landed in Dobo, on the opposite end of the Moluccas, he witnessed how a supposedly disorderly multi-ethnic community would band together and defend itself in the face of external danger:

I was just congratulating myself on being at length able to get a boat and men to go to the mainland and explore the interior, when a sudden check came in the form of a piratical incursion. A small prau arrived which had been attacked by pirates and had a man wounded. They were said to have five boats, but more were expected to be behind and the traders were all in consternation, fearing that their small vessels sent trading to the "blakang tana" would be plundered. The Aru natives were of course dreadfully alarmed, as these marauders attack their villages, burn and murder, and carry away women and children for slaves. [...] Several praus went out in search of the pirates, sentinels were appointed, and watch-fires lighted on the beach to guard against the possibility of a night attack, though it was hardly thought they would be bold enough to attempt to plunder Dobbo. [...] A week later one of the smaller pirate boats was captured in the "blakang tana." Seven men were killed and three taken prisoners. The larger vessels have been often seen but cannot be caught, as they have very strong crews, and can always escape by rowing out to sea in the eye of the wind, returning at night. They will thus remain among the innumerable islands and channels, till the change of the monsoon enables them to sail westward.

¹⁴³ His was a version of the process of natural selection that emphasized cooperation over competition / group over individual etc., see Peter J. Bowler, *Darwin Deleted: Imagining a World Without Darwin* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 93.

Wallace had found himself in the middle of an event that powerfully demonstrated the capacity of social groups to self-organize for their own wellbeing in the absence of any colonial or state powers. He went on to describe how the islands' inhabitants cooperated with one another to create the conditions that sustained everyday life, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, but always in great detail. Intrigued by the possibility of a functioning society that existed outside of state institutions and structures, he remarked:

I daresay there are now near five hundred people in Dobbo of various races, all met in this remote corner of the East, as they express it, "to look for their fortune;" [...] [They have] the very worst reputation for honesty as well as every other form of morality [...] yet all goes on as yet very quietly. This motley, ignorant, bloodthirsty, thievish population live here without the shadow of a government, with no police, no courts, and no lawyers; yet they do not [...] fall into the anarchy such a state of things might be supposed to lead to. It is very extraordinary!¹⁴⁴

Wallace's fascination with the social conditions in Dobo prefigures his expression of sympathy towards an anarchist view of human social organization later in his life.¹⁴⁵ The accounts of his time in Dobo and the impact it would have on his thought and subsequent life suggest just how tangible the non-state character of the area surrounding the Arafura Sea was in the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁶

From the late 1870s, *hyakushō* gradually became part of this non-state space. Rather than showing how Japan came to be involved in the closing of imperial frontiers in the tropics, the arrival of *hyakushō* in the Arafura Sea marked Japan's opening to a collection of places outside of the territorial imagination of the international community of civilized nation states. The logic that bound them together was not that of industrial civilization, characterized by the global expansion of capital, the making of modern nation states, and the well-studied

¹⁴⁴ Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-Utan, and the Bird of Paradise. A Narrative of Travel, with Studies of Man and Nature* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1877), 439.

¹⁴⁵ Recalling the moment he was visited by the renowned geographer and anarchist Elisée Reclus around the turn of the twentieth century, Wallace mentions that: "We agreed that almost all social evils—all poverty, misery, and crime—were the creation of governments and of bad social systems; and that under a law of absolute justice, involving equality of opportunity and the best training for all, each local community would organize itself for mutual aid, and no great central governments would be needed, except as they grew up from the voluntary association of their parts for general and national purposes." Alfred Russel Wallace, *My Life: A Record of Events and Opinions*, vol. 2 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1905), 208.

¹⁴⁶ Further research into the extent to which Wallace's experiences and encounters during his travels in the Malay Archipelago inflected his thinking toward a 'group selectionist' perspective rather than a Darwinian 'individual selectionist' perspective may yield rewarding insights for the history of science.

transformation of everyday life that these twin historical processes entailed. Instead, it was the monsoonal climate and the geographical distribution of certain marine invertebrates that gave birth to what I call the ‘Arafura Zone’. For Alfred Russel Wallace, neither “tripang nor pearl oyster shells ha[d] any charms”, and he forever remained a stranger to the inner lives of those on the Aru Islands. Hyakushō, on the other hand, would acquire intimate familiarity with the Aru Islands precisely because of their relationship with the pearl oyster and the trepang.¹⁴⁷

II.3 The Arrival of Hyakushō

Motohata Tarōichi was fourteen years old when he first made the trip to Dobo on the Aru Islands with his cousin.¹⁴⁸ He had just completed the last part of his primary school education (*kōtōka*) and was advised by the people in his home village of Shionomisaki (now part of Kushimoto town, Wakayama Prefecture) to visit Dobo first, like other children who aspired to go to Thursday Island. Business was better there, and it was safer because they would not have had to go through the trouble of overcoming the immigration restrictions that had recently been implemented in Australia. The trip was relatively painless, and Motohata fondly looked back on his time in Dobo, remembering particularly well the delicious taste of the julienned daikon stew he enjoyed at Ueno House. Less fondly remembered or even repressed, however, were memories of the rapid adaptations that the new environment would have necessitated. Motohata would have had his first encounter with the monsoonal winds, whose powerful gusts seemed as if they could send the little town of Dobo itself off into the sea. He would have learned – possibly the hard way – that one could easily succumb to a heat-stroke when working in the sweltering heat of the tropical sun. Indigenous Aruese might have helped him recover by splashing freshwater, carried in buckets made of helmet shells suspended by a rattan handle, in his soon-to-be tanned face. Remembering the ins and outs of the training sessions for aspiring divers under the bridge on the Kujino or Koza Rivers, Motohata may have taught them, in return, how to look for pearl oysters using a diving machine.

This section looks at how, starting in the 1880s, a steadily increasing number of *hyakushō* began to head to the Arafura Sea, and through their movements and actions created a largely nature-centric non-state space. Over a hundred were present on Thursday Island in 1883, another seventy went the year after, and slightly over sixty others arrived yet another

¹⁴⁷ Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-Utan, and the Bird of Paradise. A Narrative of Travel, with Studies of Man and Nature*, 431.

¹⁴⁸ Motohata was interviewed among other returnees from the Arafura Sea by the local historian Ogawa Taira in the 1950s and 1960s. See, Taira Ogawa, *Arafurakai No Shinjū: Kikisho, Kinan Daibā Hyakunenshi [Pearls of the Arafura Sea: Oral Accounts, 100-Year History of the Kinan Divers]* (Tokyo: Ayumi shuppan, 1976), 30.

year later. By 1900, official reports accounted for just over a thousand ‘Japanese’ in the Torres Strait, at the very eastern tip of the sea.¹⁴⁹ Collected largely through state censuses, these numbers paint a distorted picture. They do not consider *hyakushō*’s mobility across and beyond the Arafura Sea and the unofficial nature of the circuits through which they more commonly moved. For *hyakushō*, Japan’s opening entailed the creation of transnational connections with peoples and lived spaces that were organized around the geographical distribution of marine invertebrates in and around the Arafura Sea as well as the oceanography of the Indo-Pacific region. The resulting transnational oceanic communities, which combined *hyakushō*’s own ocean-centric cultures with those of people who were more indigenous to this space, enjoyed a degree of autonomy from modern empires whose representatives were often treated as outsiders. What emerged was the Arafura Zone, a largely non-state space that state actors struggled to enclose both in their imagination as well as in practice.

Hyakushō navigated currents that have been rendered invisible in accounts that strictly emphasize globally operating structural forces tied to state, empire, or capitalism. From the 1880s up until at least the 1960s, stories of the life that could be had at sea or on the islands, the prestige of being a diver, and the shame of being called ‘worthless’ also motivated people to leave for the Arafura Sea.¹⁵⁰ Some of the earliest arrivals, such as Nonami Kojirō in the mid-1870s, had taken jobs as sailors or deckhands in either the official treaty ports in Japan or those that engaged with foreign ships unofficially, and coincidentally ended up working as shell divers in Australia.¹⁵¹ They quickly established a reputation as prolific divers, and subsequent arrivals could therefore simply head towards Hong Kong or Singapore and try their luck at meeting pearlers who were actively seeking Japanese labor. Minami Iwakichi and ‘Kimura’ left Wakayama Prefecture for Hong Kong in 1881 hoping for such a fate. Because of their lack of patience, however, they attempted to go to Thursday Island at the eastern end of the Arafura Sea on their own. Left stranded in Makassar on the southern end of the island of Sulawesi, they worked at a laundry shop for two years until they were finally taken to Thursday Island not by a pearler but by a crew of what they called an ‘insurance company boat’.¹⁵² On the other hand, Ebina Torakichi from Tanami village in Wakayama Prefecture was casually asked whether he

¹⁴⁹ Hirataro Ikemura, ed., *Wakayamaken Iminshi [Migration History of Wakayama Prefecture]* (Wakayama Kenchō, 1957); Sissons, “The Japanese in the Australian Pearling Industry”; Steve Mullins, *Torres Strait: A History of Colonial Occupation and Culture Contact, 1864-1897* (Central Queensland University Press, 1995); Yuriko Nagata, “The Japanese in the Torres Strait,” in *Navigating Boundaries: The Asian Diaspora in Torres Strait*, ed. Anna Shnukal, Guy Ramsay, and Yuriko Nagata (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004), 138–59.

¹⁵⁰ Ikemura, *Migration History of Wakayama Prefecture*, 191.

¹⁵¹ Sissons, “The Japanese in the Australian Pearling Industry.”

¹⁵² Ogawa, *Pearls of the Arafura Sea*, 30–31.

wanted to go to Australia while delivering skipjack tuna to a friend's restaurant in Kobe in 1884 and went with little hesitation.¹⁵³ Returning to Wakayama Prefecture in the 1890s after winning a lottery, Ebina and several others donated a significant amount of money to their local temples. Today the lanterns at Shionomisaki shrine bearing their names are barely legible, but in the late nineteenth century they served as bright beacons calling upon future generations to head out into the Arafura Zone. When Motohata Tarōichi first went to Dobo on the Aru Islands, he began his journey in 1904 by going to a trusted guest house in Kobe owned by 'Mr. Yasuhara' from the same village.¹⁵⁴ Such guest houses, which provided free accommodation, were a common sight on the way to the Arafura Zone as confirmed by the returnee Takimoto Torakichi.¹⁵⁵ Many routes also involved spending some time as a stowaway, as was the case for Yamamoto Yae (later Yae Chi) who left Japan in the coal bunker of a ship or Maeda Seitarō who arrived in Australia in a box.¹⁵⁶ Sometimes pearlers would go to Japan in order to directly recruit able divers. In 1883, the pearler John Miller met with Masuda Mankichi, by now a well-known machine diver and supplier of diving machine parts, who introduced him to fellow *hyakushō*. Along with Mankichi's son Masuda Sannosuke, they went to Thursday Island where they found that many others had come before them, not as recruits for the pearling industry but as 'castaways'.¹⁵⁷ These were likely not castaways in the literal sense of having fallen from a ship and being washed ashore, although some might actually have undergone such a fate. We might think of them instead as having followed a metaphorical current through self-organized networks of family, friends, village neighbors, and other acquaintances.

From the 1880s, this figurative current produced an unofficial infrastructure that supported functioning daily lives for a community of oceanic foragers. Carpenters arrived to build shared housing, often named after the home villages of *hyakushō* such as Izumo (Wakayama Prefecture) or Iyo (Ehime Prefecture). Shipwrights came to build luggers and other vessels that enabled free travel. There were cooks who prepared food on the luggers as well as in the towns, merchants selling magazines and other goods from home, and doctors who would be the first to provide modern medical care in these parts of the world. Sex workers came from and went back to Singapore as the concentration of human activities in towns such as Dobo on

¹⁵³ Ikemura, *Migration History of Wakayama Prefecture*, 191–92.

¹⁵⁴ Ogawa, *Pearls of the Arafura Sea*, 30.

¹⁵⁵ Takimoto Torakichi wrote of his experiences in the Arafura Zone in a volume commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the primary school in his home village of Esumi (Wakayama Prefecture). See *Esumi Shōgakkō Hyakunenshi [100 Year History of Esumi Primary School]* (Esumi shōgakkō hyakushūnen kinen jigyō jikkō iinkai, 1976), 121.

¹⁵⁶ Noreen Jones, *Number 2 Home: A Story of Japanese Pioneers in Australia* (Fremantle, W.A.: Fremantle Arts Center, 2002), 24–26.

¹⁵⁷ Ichiki, *Masuda Mankichi: Nihon Sensui No so [Masuda Mankichi: The Pioneer of Japanese Diving]*, 90–92.

the Aru Islands grew in intensity and diminished again in cyclical patterns. Buddhist monks arrived to provide spiritual relief for the living and left after providing the same service for the dead. These connections began to form years before state actors fully set their sights on the world outside of Japan and before the establishment of state-led migration companies.¹⁵⁸

Utilizing this unofficial infrastructure, hyakushō went from one ‘pearling ground’ to the next in search of shellfish using nothing but hills, mountains, and the sun and the stars to navigate, as Fujita Kenji (1903-1996) recalled in a series of sketches he made for his children.¹⁵⁹ The old diver’s experiences tell us of the Arafura Zone in the 1920s, long after the introduction of strict immigration policies that prevented the free movement of hyakushō in corridors of sovereignty and legality. Yet the freedom with which he seemed to be able to come and go as he pleased suggests that the movements of the very first generations of hyakushō may have been near frictionless. Hyakushō went back and forth through British, Dutch, German and later Japanese territories, and possibly Portuguese, French, and Spanish (and later American) territories. The celebrated bush poet Banjo Paterson captured some aspects of their mobility and autonomy in his poem ‘The Pearl Diver’, in which he noted how the Japanese diver went ‘wherever it pleased him, taking instructions from none’.¹⁶⁰ Where state authorities appear in the poem, they appear helpless as the divers dexterously skirted the legal boundaries in their ocean crossings. The tradition of bush poetry is known for its idealized depictions of the figure of the pioneer, but its authors are also known to be intimately familiar with the actual lives of the figures they attempt to mythologize.¹⁶¹ Indeed, Paterson’s poetic lines echoes in many ways retired hyakushō divers’ own recollections of their freedom in moving across national borders.¹⁶²

Against expectations of state actors stimulating the growth of urban centers as they attempted to modernize the Japanese nation state, hyakushō began developing a sense of distance to the capital and nearness to the Arafura Sea. Through my own encounters with residents of Kushimoto (Wakayama Prefecture, Japan in 2019), from where many hyakushō came, I discovered that this sense of nearness still persists today. Residents could instantly identify the Arafura Sea, indicating just how strongly the place, and a sense of belonging to it,

¹⁵⁸ See Akira Shimizu, *Gōshū Zairyū No Nihonjin Rōdōsha No Jōkyō [Conditions of Japanese Labourers Residing in Australia]* (Self-published, 1992). The majority of sex workers were not necessarily part of the transnational oceanic networks of hyakushō, but for those who were see: Hitoshi Hirakawa and Hiroshi Shimizu, *Japan and Singapore in the World Economy: Japan’s Economic Advance into Singapore 1870-1965* (Routledge, 1999).

¹⁵⁹ Matsumoto et al., *Fujita Kenji Sketchbook*.

¹⁶⁰ Andrew Barton Paterson, “The Pearl Diver,” in *Rio Grande’s Last Race, and Other Verses* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1902). The full poem can be found in appendix 1 of this dissertation.

¹⁶¹ J. B. Hirst, “The Pioneer Legend,” *Historical Studies* 18, no. 71 (October 1, 1978): 316–37.

¹⁶² See Matsumoto et al., *Fujita Kenji Sketchbook*, 53.

has lodged itself into local memory. Descendants of *hyakushō* still keep memorable pearl-shell fragments, stuffed alligators, boomerangs, ceremonial knives (‘*kris*es’), and carved Boab nuts in their homes and local public halls. It is rather ironic that this history of *hyakushō* has mainly been narrated in terms of national narratives emanating from the political center of Tokyo and those who felt closely connected to it despite their stronger affiliation with the Arafura Zone. *Hyakushō* came to acquire a transnational understanding of space, which was only exacerbated by the Japanese state’s attempts to discourage *hyakushō* from going to the Arafura Zone and to repatriate the ones that had already gone.¹⁶³ For these *hyakushō*, what constituted the center of the nation state became the periphery, and the periphery of the empire became the center of the world.

To a certain school of state and semi-state actors, which included people such as Enomoto Takeaki and Shiga Shigetaka, this imperial periphery was known as *nanyō* (‘South Seas’). These ‘*nanshin*’ (lit. advancing into the South) advocates called for Japanese migration and expansion in the interests of state and empire-building. Their efforts were directed at the creation of an informal empire in Southeast Asia, and their understanding of space was closely intertwined with a West-centric global order that conceptually divided up the world into sovereign nation states and colonial territories. As Sidney Xu Lu has shown, the term *nanyō* came to signify a space that was still up for grabs in such conceptualizations of the world. In the late nineteenth century, it was thought of as a place that was still largely ‘unclaimed’, and since “white colonists had already begun their territorial scramble there; it was vital for the Japanese to enter the fray as soon as possible”.¹⁶⁴

Much of what we know about the *hyakushō* that went to the Arafura Sea has been examined through the lenses of the *Nanshin* advocates. In order to center their historical experiences, rather than that of the Japanese empire or the state actors that acted in its interest, it is necessary to disentangle state from non-state spatial imaginations. While Japanese state actors may have seen *hyakushō*’s movements abroad as part of their plans to expand their influence in the South Seas, *hyakushō* would hardly see themselves as flagbearers of the empire. As local histories tell us, they went not to the South Seas but to the Arafura Sea – a highly specific and meaningful spatial category that would have been too microscopic for the visions of *Nanshin* advocates. Rather than the ‘South Seas’, *hyakushō* created, navigated, and inhabited what we might call the Arafura Zone.

¹⁶³ Sissons, “The Japanese in the Australian Pearling Industry,” 20.

¹⁶⁴ Lu, *The Making of Japanese Settler Colonialism*, 81.

The transnational connections that emerged out of *hyakushō*'s movements and actions thus challenged a conceptualization of the world that was structured by international law. They simultaneously erected new barriers distinguishing state spaces from non-state spaces, and state actors from non-state actors. Anxiety regarding *hyakushō*'s transgressive mobility suffuses a 270 page report forwarded by the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies to the Dutch Ministry of Colonies in response to the question of the renewal of a lease of the waters around the Aru Islands within the three mile zone of the Dutch East Indies to Australian pearlers.¹⁶⁵ In theory, the lease fulfilled the function of denying *hyakushō* access to acquiring provisions from Dobo that would allow them to forage pearl-shell and trepang outside of the three mile zone, where most of the work was conducted.¹⁶⁶ However in practice such legal obstacles could only stop *hyakushō* in their tracks if a pearler or government official was physically present to observe their comings and goings, as one Australian pearler complained.¹⁶⁷ This was rarely the case, as the Aru Islands were located on the furthest end of the reaches of administrative centers and both pearlers and state officials were welcomed neither by inhabitants nor climate. A. G. H. van Sluys, a low-ranking representative of the colonial government who briefly took up a post in Dobo, wrote of his experiences in a 1916 publication:

My wife has attempted to send me some chickens from Ambon several times but those that had arrived in Dobo without perishing on board could not survive this scalding shoal. You need not ask what kind of a place Dobo is if even an *ajam orientalis* ['oriental chicken'] cannot survive here. [...] I did not dislike the work in Dobo and would rather choose a department such as the Aru Islands than a boring and sluggish department where everything is streamlined and straitjacketed by government regulations. The government should, however, strive to provide for their functionaries, so that they are not left wanting for material support and forced to eat prison food, as was the case for myself in Dobo.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Nationaal Archief [Dutch National Archive, hereafter NA], Ministerie van Koloniën [Ministry of Colonies, hereafter MvK]: Openbaar Verbaal, K23030, 2.10.36.04, inv. nr. 623

¹⁶⁶ NA, MvK: Openbaar Verbaal, K23030, 2.10.36.04, inv. nr. 623, Letter from the Resident of Amboina Baron Alexander Johan Quarles de Quarles to the Director of Agriculture dated 5 January 1907.

¹⁶⁷ NA, MvK: Openbaar Verbaal, K23030, 2.10.36.04, inv. nr. 623, Letter from Geo Smith to Baron A. J. Quarles de Quarles dated 24 December 1907.

¹⁶⁸ A.G.H. van Sluys, "Dobo-Ervaringen [Dobo Experiences]," *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* 5, no. 2 (1916): 299–317.

Van Sluys could not even pay for a grilled fish while large numbers of hyakushō were found lying on the main street, freely gambling away their money for their entertainment.¹⁶⁹ More than thirty years after hyakushō had first set foot on the islands, the colonial government seemed to have barely acquired enough of a foothold there to adequately provide for its representatives. By contrast, hyakushō had made this place their home, and saw people such as Van Sluys as ‘ketōjin’ – an old and familiar word to describe ill-boding outsiders in early Meiji era Japan.¹⁷⁰

The distinction between outsider and insider was further emphasized by the way in which language was used, accepted, and rejected, particularly in relation to spaces and their relationship to people. Thursday Island was earlier known as Waiben, part of a ‘sea of islands’ inhabited by indigenous peoples now collectively referred to as Torres Strait Islanders.¹⁷¹ Islanders formed part of older migratory flows that connected New Guinea and other parts of eastern Indonesia with northern Australia – flows comprising people who sometimes supplemented their subsistence activities by, or otherwise wholly based their livelihoods on dealing in pearl-shell, sea cucumbers, and shark fins among other things.¹⁷² Some spoke a language in which expressions indicating wind direction (*waur*, *kuki*, *naigai*, *jei*) simultaneously signified human experiences of time and space.¹⁷³ Others understood the ocean as an old man who, with his long beard, could create waves and currents of varying strengths – implying that one could relate to non-human natural phenomena just like one could with other human persons.¹⁷⁴ The diverse and sometimes conflicting or contradictory cosmologies that produced such languages and ideas did not stand in the way of cooperation between hyakushō and those who were more indigenous to the Arafura Zone. Unfamiliar terms flowed into the language used by hyakushō, as in the case of the word ‘mabuoka’ (lit. Mabu Hill) to denote the island of Mabuig with an emphasis on the hill where the diver Takimoto Shōtarō and his friends and colleagues would often relax.¹⁷⁵ Conversely, Takimoto called one of the seas that he worked on ‘kita no oki’ (North Sea) because of its physical location relative to Badu Island,

¹⁶⁹ van Sluys, 303.

¹⁷⁰ NA, MvK: Geheim Archief [Secret Archive], K23057, 2.10.36.51, inv.nr. 153, Excerpt from personal correspondence dated 7 February 1913 with L.A.J.A. Carst, temporary interpreter for the Japanese language in Dobo. On the early Meiji era usage of the term ketōjin to refer to ill-meaning outsiders who “drank a deep red liquid that looked like blood” and stole fat from unsuspecting victims in hospitals, see Stefan Tanaka, *New Times in Modern Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 66–67.

¹⁷¹ Epli Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 147–61.

¹⁷² See Shnukal, “Torres Strait Islanders.”

¹⁷³ Hiroyuki Matsumoto, “Ethnography of the Winds: A Torres Strait Islander View of the Natural Environment,” *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology* 15 (1991): 193–235.

¹⁷⁴ NA, MvK: Memories van Overgave [Handover Reports, hereafter MvO], K23048; 2.10.39; 1242.

¹⁷⁵ Matsumoto, *Diary of Takimoto Shōtarō*.

and the exact same term came to be adopted in songs of Torres Strait Islanders such as those of Gib Gaulai from the island of Mabuiag.¹⁷⁶ The transnational connotation of ‘kita no oki’ directly contrasted with ‘nanyō’ (South Seas), a term ensconced in the international spatial imagination of Japanese state actors who would use it to refer to this part of the world. To make transnational connections to places meant making transnational connections with people.

The centrality of ecology and the lack of a clear divide between nature and culture in the intellectual worlds of those who were more indigenous to the Arafura Zone would have been familiar to hyakushō. Life in dialogue with massive bodies of water, whether in Japan or in the Arafura Sea, necessitated constant mobility, engendering suspicion toward the possibility of regimenting seas into national territories and giving rise to an understanding of ‘how oceans think’.¹⁷⁷ The intellectual common ground allowed non-state actors to coexist and collaborate on the basis of a shared sense of space and, as we will see in the following section, time.

II.4 Time in the Arafura Zone

Japan’s nineteenth century opening was marked by changing understandings of notions of time. Elites who were intent on transforming the archipelago’s social fabric so that it might cater to international commerce and civilization were informed by the temporality of Western modernity. However, this was not so much the case for hyakushō, who came to be physically absent from a Westernizing Japan. Their own changing understandings of time did not follow the accelerating and linear trajectory that had begun with the stroke of the first mechanical clock to arrive in the Tokugawa era.¹⁷⁸ While the rules of the global marketplace and the international community of civilized nation states were not completely invisible to hyakushō who went to the Arafura Sea, it was mainly the monsoonal climate that determined when they could work and how they would engage with others depending on the time of day and year. To say that the environment shaped hyakushō’s sense of time is not to say that their ‘time of nature’ was a cyclical one that lacked any notion of progress. If we must speak in terms of geometry, the temporality of the Arafura Zone is best represented by a spiral, recursively progressing towards ever higher degrees of connectivity.¹⁷⁹ In this final section, I examine how the ecology of the Arafura Zone shaped the temporal aspects of hyakushō’s experiences abroad and their interactions with other non-state actors.

¹⁷⁶ As first noted by Matsumoto Hiroyuki in Matsumoto, 26.

¹⁷⁷ I borrow the expression from Kohn, *How Forests Think*.

¹⁷⁸ This process is examined in Sebastian Conrad, “‘Nothing Is the Way It Should Be’: Global Transformations of the Time Regime in the Nineteenth Century,” *Modern Intellectual History* 15, no. 3 (2017): 821–48.

¹⁷⁹ See also, Yuk Hui, *Recursivity and Contingency* (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019).

The temporality of the Arafura Zone stretched across vast expanses of ocean to affect the social worlds of rural places in Japan such as Wakayama Prefecture, countervailing Greenwich in London as another place that could produce a temporal regime with a global reach. One generation after another, youths from Esumi, Tanami, Kushimoto, Shionomisaki, Izumo, Taiji, and other villages headed to the Arafura Sea to take up a life on the seas and the bottom of the ocean in one part of the year and the islands on the other. Upon arriving in the Aru Islands in the 1880s, hyakushō would experience how the changing monsoons determined the range of possible human interactions with the environment and the shape of social life that this produced. Between the months of September and April, a period that some referred to as the west monsoon, hyakushō dove for pearl-shell alongside other ‘Foreign Orientals’ at the so-called rear shore.¹⁸⁰ There they would have had plenty of opportunity to come to know the naked Aruese divers who worked the shallower parts of the same littoral zones. These divers bore an uncanny resemblance to the traditional abalone divers of the Japanese archipelago in that they observed the custom of offering tribute to ‘pemali’, a natural feature inhabited by spirits, before going to dive. In later years, Japanese divers trained such ‘skin divers’ to work with the diving machine.¹⁸¹ This was a collaboration that emerged out of an older cultural infrastructure connecting the Arafura Sea to islands and archipelagos in the surrounding seas. People from the islands of Seram and Gorong came to supply ‘sagu lempeng’ – brick-shaped treats baked using starch extracted from the sago palm (*Metroxylon sagu*) – to those who were working at the rear shore in return for a modest amount of shell, allowing hyakushō to learn the taste of this local staple. In an article in *De Oostpost* in 1859, a journalist expressed his surprise as he discovered that the ‘Goramese’ (indicating those who came from Gorong) travelled over five hundred kilometers in order to sell their sagu lempeng to the divers working the rear shore. What was even more bewildering to the author of the article was that they did not seem to even entertain the thought of selling their products for a much higher price than they did in areas closer to home, even though they were certainly in the position to do so. When asked, one ‘Goramese’ simply replied that it had been their custom which was passed on from one generation to the next. Many more generations of customary sagu lempeng deliveries followed as hyakushō gradually became part of everyday life on the Aru Islands in the following decades. The local custom was the historical product of a working knowledge of the undercurrents that oceanographers have now identified as transporting nutrient-rich water from the Banda Sea into the Arafura Sea on a seasonal basis. The undercurrents themselves are

¹⁸⁰ NA, MvK: MvO access number 2.10.39, inventory number 1242.

¹⁸¹ Mullins, *Octopus Crowd*, 192.

products of the so-called ‘lee effect’ which is often observed in lakes but also appears in the Arafura Sea due to its bay-like configuration, shallow water depth, and close vicinity to the equator.¹⁸² The seasonal collaborations which came to involve *hyakushō* emerged out of the ecological particularities of the Arafura Sea.

The rear shore would be worked until the start of the so-called east monsoon, when it becomes increasingly difficult to forage on the sea bed. Plankton blooms as thick as fog begin to severely hinder human vision underwater and rocky shores start to make quick work of those who do not heed the reversal of winds.¹⁸³ For these reasons, people returned to Dobo on the other side of the archipelago from roughly May until August. As fishers and others returned, the ghost town would transform into a vibrant place. They repaired the houses or built new ones, using *gaba-gaba* (dried petioles of the sago palm) and *atap* (a construction of leaves of the sago palm held together by rattan and bamboo) as material for walls and roofs.¹⁸⁴ ‘Kei Islanders’ came to the islands to sell their ‘belangs’ by the hundreds, but also lend them for free if their safe return could be guaranteed.¹⁸⁵ Belangs were small non-oceangoing vessels with a large rectangular sail suspended from the apex of a tripod mast on which *hyakushō* would have had to rely because, unlike the schooners they owned themselves, they could navigate the narrow and sometimes shallow rivers and bays without sacrificing speed.¹⁸⁶ ‘Kei Islanders’, ‘Goramese’, and ‘Ceramese’ stayed in Dobo during the east monsoon. They joined the gamblers on the streets, many of them *hyakushō*.¹⁸⁷ Alternatively, people would go out on trips to ‘beat the sago palm’ in order to make *sagu lempeng* locally.¹⁸⁸ When the east monsoon gave way to the west monsoon, divers and others could once again resume their work on the rear shore. The alternating monsoons shaped the rhythms of everyday life on the Aru Islands, resulting in a temporality that we might call ‘monsoonal time’.

Between the longer generational and monsoonal intervals, a quicker cadence, partly tidal and partly lunar, further refined the patterns of daily life. Low and high tides, spring and neap tides, and slack and riptides modulated every move of the diver. Depending on the place, a spring or a neap tide determined when a diving crew could return to port and leave it. If the

¹⁸² See for example Jochen Kämpf, “On the Majestic Seasonal Upwelling System of the Arafura Sea,” *Journal of Geophysical Research: Oceans* 121, no. 2 (2016): 1218–28.

¹⁸³ NA, MvK: MvO, access number 2.10.39, inventory number 313.

¹⁸⁴ Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-Utan, and the Bird of Paradise. A Narrative of Travel, with Studies of Man and Nature*, 430. NA, MvK: MvO, access number 2.10.39, inv.nr. 1242.

¹⁸⁵ NA, MvK: MvO, access number 2.10.39, inv.nr. 1242.

¹⁸⁶ Graeme Henderson and Ian Crawford, “Sampans, Belangs, and Junkos: The Pearling Boats of the Aru Islands,” *Expedition* 28, no. 1 (1986): 39–44.

¹⁸⁷ van Sluys, “Dobo Experiences,” 303.

¹⁸⁸ NA, MvK: MvO, access number 2.10.39, inv.nr. 1243.

tide was too low it could moor a vessel before it reached the docks, but a tide that was too high made it impossible to dock in the right area. For the diver Fujita Kenji, spring tide signaled the time to return to a port, but it would have also signaled the possibility of beachcombing in previously inaccessible areas.¹⁸⁹ Before tide timetables began to be used, the estimations relied on the observation of lunar cycles. The movement of the moon simultaneously served as an important predictor of turtle migrations. On days where they did no diving work, hyakushō hunted turtles and, upon spearing them, hoisted a flag to invite others to join in the feast.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, knowledge of the relationship between lunar cycles and turtle behavior could mean the difference between life and death. Komine Isokichi (1867-1934), another diver, famously requested turtle blood when he felt ill – a habit he must have picked up as a castaway with no freshwater to drink. If it did not cure him, it at least made him some friends. ‘Ponam islanders’ fondly remembered Komine well into the twentieth century, as anecdotes about him passed on from one generation to the next – one example of how transnational coexistence and solidarity resulted from a sense of time shaped by the moon and the tides.¹⁹¹

Even though hyakushō would sometimes take up contracts with pearlers, the latter faced great difficulty in trying to squeeze every inch of labor out of the diving crew. The activities of hyakushō stretched over great distances and diving crews were often left unsupervised. The degree of their autonomy waxed and waned as pearlers attempted to restrict their freedoms by various technical as well as administrative means.¹⁹² However, even if pearlers had some influence over the crew because they paid them, either according to the size of the cargo or a fixed wage, divers were not wholly dependent as they could easily subsist on the bounties of the islands and the seas. Some spent weeks hopping from one island to the next, hunting turtles with spears and hiding among the mangrove trees whenever a storm would come.¹⁹³ Storms stirred up muddy bottoms and revealed oysters that had been previously embedded within, allowing for the much less labor-intensive practice of beachcombing instead of machine diving. When a storm subsided, the divers could once again take their luggers and seek out a ‘company ship’. Strong currents limited the number of days that certain areas could be worked, sometimes as little as eight to ten days of each month.¹⁹⁴ Unlike the laborer in the factory, whose

¹⁸⁹ Matsumoto et al., *Fujita Kenji Sketchbook*, 41.

¹⁹⁰ Matsumoto et al., 69.

¹⁹¹ Hiromitsu Iwamoto, *Nanshin: Japanese Settlers in Papua and New Guinea, 1890-1949* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1999), 55.

¹⁹² See Mullins, *Octopus Crowd*.

¹⁹³ Matsumoto et al., *Fujita Kenji Sketchbook*.

¹⁹⁴ John Bach, *The Pearling Industry of Australia: An Account of Its Social and Economic Development* (Canberra: Dept of Commerce and Agriculture, 1955), 62.

temporality was shaped by the struggle over the length of the working day, hyakushō temporality was shaped by the weather, and the challenges and freedoms that accompanied it created opportunities for cooperation that could transcend divisive boundaries of race and class.

Cooperation, coexistence, and collaboration were rooted in the mundane and the everyday – phenomena that are easily overshadowed by episodes of racial tensions and violent encounters. Vessels owned by hyakushō – which they made by themselves or otherwise acquired by registering a new boat license under a European or Australian name (a process that Regina Ganter has called ‘dummying’) – were crewed by people who cultivated an indifference to difference.¹⁹⁵ In an interview conducted by local historian Akira Shimizu, the fisher Matsumoto who first went to Thursday Island in the 1920s noted how there were ‘no real issues based on cultural differences’ and that ‘an emancipatory atmosphere made living easy’ as long as customary laws were respected.¹⁹⁶ Such statements are corroborated in interviews with Aboriginal Australians who had once worked alongside hyakushō conducted by Regina Ganter and Athol Chase. Referring to pearl-shell or trepang diving collaborations between hyakushō and ‘Aboriginal Australians’, possibly Yadhagana or Anggamudi, it was said that “[w]hen a Japanese is recruiting boys in the north, a European has little or no show of getting any boys”.¹⁹⁷ One explanation for the discrepancy might be found in the fact that the European pearler was backed by the colonial state and therefore obliged to enforce the effective prohibition of the consumption of alcohol among Aboriginal Australians – an outgrowth of the Licensed Publicans Act of 1838. Hyakushō, on the other hand, shared their drinks with Aboriginal crewmembers. They shared food too, as Sandy Yielu recalls: “We ate all sorts of Japanese tucker sometimes, but we helped out with turtle, dugong, and mackerel. They look after the boys properly”.¹⁹⁸ The diver Fujita Kenji learned to differentiate between turtles that could be

¹⁹⁵ Regina Ganter, *The Pearl-Shellers of Torres Strait: Resource Use, Development and Decline, 1860s-1960s* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 130. See also Minoru Hokari, “Anti-Minorities History: Perspectives on Aboriginal-Asian Relations,” in *Lost in the Whitewash: Aboriginal-Asian Encounters in Australia, 1901-2001*, ed. Penny Edwards and Shen Yuanfang, 2003, 89–91; Athol Chase, “‘All Kind of Nation’: Aborigines and Asians in Cape York Peninsula,” *Aboriginal History Journal* 5 (January 1, 2011): 7–19. On the notion of an ‘indifference to difference’ as the basis for coexistence see Madhavi Menon, *Indifference to Difference: On Queer Universalism* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

¹⁹⁶ Shimizu, *Conditions of Japanese Labourers Residing in Australia*, 34–35.

¹⁹⁷ Ganter, *The Pearl-Shellers of Torres Strait*, 55.

¹⁹⁸ Ganter, 56–57.



Figure 3 – Reproductions from photo albums of returnees. Courtesy of the Kushimoto Town Library.

eaten and those that could not, most likely from people like Sandy.¹⁹⁹ Hyakushō and others with whom they worked and coexisted also ate potatoes, rice, udon noodles (“macaroni soup” to some), fish and soy sauce, and briefly boiled or wholly baked sago starch as they indulged in arak (palm wine) and beer.²⁰⁰ Their collaborations at sea, fueled by the calories of their culturally-diverse diets, seemed pleasant rather than coercive. Sandy recalled how the connections made through the work of pearl-shelling or ‘trepanging’ opened up entirely new worlds: “Sometimes people from Lockhart and from the Islands made friends. I’ve been to Darnley, Murray, Yorke, Yam, Mabuiag, Dauan, Badu, Moa, when I was young. I used to dance with them”.²⁰¹ Hyakushō participated in such dances too, as Takimoto Shōtarō recalled in his diary: “Today we were about to go up the hill to take the day off, but the locals on this island held a wedding and there was a local dance. It was incredibly lively”.²⁰² The minutes, hours, days, weeks, and months that were devoid of conflict were not considered worthy of any mention in newspaper headlines or archival files, but they appear regularly in other accounts to reveal a different picture.

Such moments of coexistence hardly make for much of a spectacle, let alone history. Okayagura Utako, the author of an article in *kaigai no nihon* (‘Overseas Japan’), visited Dobo and witnessed the coexistence of persons of widely varying cultural backgrounds. She called it a lone island in the South Seas where one might find freedom from any worry in the world.²⁰³ Okayagura presented Dobo as a timeless utopia for Japanese pioneers, but in reality hyakushō were all but representative of the Japanese nation state. Their presence went against the state-centric agendas of Seikyōsha thinkers such as Shiga Shigetaka who were calling for emigration to ‘the South Seas’ (nanyō) in the interests of the expansion of Japan’s informal empire.²⁰⁴ These state actors were, after all, calling on declassed samurai known as shizoku, who had attained the level of education that allowed them to represent Japan in a civilized manner – not hyakushō who, with their ragged clothes and tendencies for ‘miscegenation’, were easily mistaken for supposedly less-civilized and timeless peoples.

Differentiation between social groups based on their countries of origin, whether or not they were part of a modern nation state, and relatedly, how far they had progressed in a

¹⁹⁹ Matsumoto et al., *Fujita Kenji Sketchbook*.

²⁰⁰ See, for example, the diary entry for the 25th day of the 11th month (lunar calendar) in the Gregorian calendar year 1925 in Takimoto Mankichi’s *Diary*; or the diary entry for 21 February 1925 in Matsumoto, *Diary of Takimoto Shōtarō*.

²⁰¹ Ganter, *The Pearl-Shellers of Torres Strait*, 56.

²⁰² Diary entry for Monday 19 January 1925 in Matsumoto, *Diary of Takimoto Shōtarō*.

²⁰³ Utako Okayagura, “Nanyō No Koto Ni Nan No Fujiyū Mo Nai Nihonjin Machi [Japanese Town of Complete Freedom on a Deserted Island in the South Seas],” *Kaigai No Nihon* 6 (1911).

²⁰⁴ Lu, *The Making of Japanese Settler Colonialism*.

civilisational and linear conception of historical time became of utmost importance to state actors that found themselves in the Arafura Zone. From the mid-nineteenth century, the three categories of ‘European’, ‘Foreign Orientals’, and ‘Natives’ were used to categorize larger social groups for either tax or judicial purposes in Dutch colonial territory – to which the Aru Islands officially belonged at the time.²⁰⁵ These and further subdivisions of persons into distinctive groups based on presumed geographical origin or cultural affiliation primarily existed for those who were ‘seeing like a state’, as they were thought to be necessary to maintain social order under colonial rule.²⁰⁶ Lagging behind in civilisational time, or being outside of historical time altogether, justified being colonized as part of a civilizing mission.

Yet, the lives of non-state actors in the Arafura Zone were, in all senses, historical. For them, progress was simply defined differently, and colonial methods of establishing order and understanding historical time would have made little sense. In seeking to improve their lives, *hyakushō* multiplied their connections and relations with other non-state actors and overcame hurdles that stood in the way of a shared coexistence. We might therefore question the appropriateness of calling *hyakushō* ‘Japanese’ – a category that only exists to refer to persons in terms of how they relate to the nation state. In addition to ‘Japanese’ then, ‘Arafurese’ may serve as a competing categorization that better captures the shared character of non-state actors whose sense of historical time was rooted in ecology rather than civilization. This was not a natural temporality understood as a cyclical and ahistorical pattern devoid of progress. For *hyakushō* and other Arafurese, progress revolved around forms of connectivity driven by the ocean currents and winds. The shared ecology of the Arafura Zone provided a different sense of historical time to which *hyakushō* and other supposedly-timeless people synchronized their clocks.

II.5 Conclusion

The arrival of *hyakushō* in the Arafura Sea in the 1880s can be traced back to the local histories of *ama*, whalers, skipjack tuna fishers and other ordinary people who were intimately familiar with the seas surrounding the Japanese archipelago. When these *hyakushō* began to move across the oceans, they relied on their local knowledge of nature to create new livelihoods for themselves in what became the Arafura Zone. Ecological features and patterns of this region formed the basis of the informal infrastructures that supported the everyday lives of *hyakushō*

²⁰⁵ Frans Husken Huskin and Dick van der Meij, *Reading Asia: New Research in Asian Studies* (Routledge, 2013), 11.

²⁰⁶ Scott, *Seeing Like a State*.

and those with whom they learned to coexist. In doing so, *hyakushō*'s sense of time and space increasingly came to be governed by the monsoonal climate, changing tides and behavioural particularities of certain marine biota.

Hyakushō's non-state encounter with the Arafura Sea forces us to rethink the centrality of Western modernity in the narration of the nineteenth-century Opening of Japan. This was a transnational encounter that does not readily fit within narratives of globalization focusing on the totalizing effects of capitalism or the expansion of industrial civilization. Nor can the resulting ocean-spanning connections be properly understood through the dichotomies of 'West versus the rest' or colonizer and colonized. A reliance on such analytical frameworks has led to the historiographical exclusion of a curiously different story of Japan's global connectivity.

Through the figure of the *hyakushō*, rather than the migrant, settler or labourer, we discover a new transnational history of the Opening of Japan in which nature formed the primary connective force between different cultures. Pearl oysters and trepang, sea and ocean currents, winds and tides came to characterize everyday life for *hyakushō*, just as they had for the area's older inhabitants, with whom the *hyakushō* would become intimately acquainted. Their appearance here might be seen as yet another turn of the kaleidoscope of constantly transforming human cultures that dot the thin inhabitable crust of the earth.

This chapter attempted to reopen such transnational moments of a closed off past by redirecting our gaze from the land to the ocean. From this macroscopic view, we saw how some of Japan's connections with the wider world were established in accordance with ecological particularities of the seas and its waterways. We also saw how Japanese fishers banked on their local knowledge of such watery worlds to establish connections that were transnational in nature. In the next chapter, I zoom in on the specific spaces where the very first interactions between Japanese fishers and the diverse cast of people inhabiting the Arafura Zone took place. It is on the decks of Australian pearling vessels traversing the Arafura Sea where we see how a sense of community would evolve through the experience of shared hardships and everyday acts of care.

III

Death, Nature, and the Creation of a Communal Seascape 1880s-1899

On a moonlit night in September 1884, “a Japanese seaman” known in the records only as “Chusan” dropped himself headfirst from the highest point on the *Jemima*. According to an eyewitness on a nearby ship:

he walked along the deck to the after part of the fore rigging and there took his cap and jacket off and laid them on the ships rail, he then got into the rigging and went up to the royal yard, stepped on the foot rope and put himself head first over on to the deck, he fell on the cable chain a little on the port side, and rebounded about a yard and a half from where he first fell.²⁰⁷

A constable and a doctor were immediately called onto the scene. “[T]he bones of the face, the forehead, and the jaw were smashed in, the brains were spattered about the deck house and the chain cable”. It was not an easy suicide, yet it was acted out in determination and perfect composure – the type that would follow intense suffering and reflection.

The *Jemima* was one of the many ships of the Australian pearling industry’s fleet upon which ordinary Japanese fishers found themselves when they first arrived in the Arafura Sea in the late 1870s. They initially arrived, via largely unofficial routes (see Chapter 2), on the decks of these vessels and were greeted by European ‘pearlers’ with both enthusiasm and anxiety. The pearling industry was a relatively young enterprise and its fortunes were all but guaranteed at the time. Japanese fishers proved to be highly skilled divers and pearlers came to depend on their labor, as well as that of ‘Malays’, ‘Aboriginal Australians’, ‘natives of Manila’, and other non-Europeans. Globalizing forces began building up an undifferentiated mass of labor, however culturally heterogeneous its constituent elements may have been. People were being brought together on the decks of ships navigating waters such as the Arafura Sea, but such confluences seemed to produce feelings of social isolation rather than a sense of community.

To be a seaman or a fisher on one of these ships meant being constantly aware of mortality. To humans, the open sea is largely uninhabitable and inherently dangerous. The deck

²⁰⁷ Queensland State Archives (hereafter, QSA); Inquests 1859 to 1902 (hereafter, I); ITM348707 (CHUSAN, Japanese Seaman per *Jemima*).

of a ketch or a schooner offered little protection from the water and the weather. Although the cabin offered some respite from the elements, only the sick found themselves there during the day, and only the tired during the night. The sight would have served as a reminder of the fragility of one's own life, and the stench of never-drying piss, pus, and shit might entice one to take it. Would that be enough to push somebody over the edge? Half a century before Martin Heidegger put his thoughts to paper, Chusan would already have known that meaningful ways of living were rooted in an awareness of death.²⁰⁸ Unlike the philosopher, however, he would have understood that it was not merely the thought of one's own death that could create an 'authentic' life. It was, instead, the ever-present possibility of witnessing or otherwise learning of the death and suffering of others that gave seaborne life a sense of purpose. Chusan's untimely death was the result of being cut off from any communal ties that could offer such meaning to life. However, the seaman's death would contribute to the creation of a new sense of community that could offer meaning through practices of mourning and care.²⁰⁹

This chapter chronicles the process through which Japanese fishers in the Arafura Sea sought to overcome insufferable circumstances, to improve life, and to orient themselves to a future worth living. From the moment Chusan died in the early 1880s up until the turn of the twentieth century, death frequently interrupted daily life of the fisher at sea, turning it into an everyday phenomenon. The frequent deaths of fishers and other members of their support networks gave birth to a whole range of practices intended to reduce suffering and prevent death. These practices, in turn, were rooted in an ethic of care whose origins can be traced back to their long history in facing nature's violence in its various guises – from the Japanese archipelago's frighteningly rocky coastline to its frequent bouts with natural disasters. Dealing with the dangers and human tragedies of the natural environment in a different geographical context, hyakushō began to create – on the decks of such ships as the *Jemima* – close bonds between themselves and various others, crossing racial and cultural boundaries in the process. A shared experience of everyday death thus facilitated the establishment of transnational ties between people who coexisted on the Arafura Sea.

Throughout this chapter, I argue that a sense of community emerged out of practices of care connecting the seabed, the decks and cabins of ships, the courtroom, coastal villages and towns, and people of widely divergent cultural backgrounds. These practices resulted from a

²⁰⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (SCM Press, 1962).

²⁰⁹ In this sense, the fishers' understanding of death was much more Bataillan/Blanchotian rather than Heideggerian. See, Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris (Barrytown, NY: Barrytown/Station Hill, 2000), 9–10.

desire to mitigate the violence of nature, sidelining state actors' conceptualizations of a world in which it was rather human nature that was violent. Hyakushō's understanding of death, nature, violence, and justice differed markedly from those of state actors, and such implicit philosophies created structural social practices, albeit temporary ones. Despite their fleeting nature, these practices informed and morphed into yet more intricate forms of mutual aid across cultures (see Chapter 4). At a time when Japanese state actors became increasingly receptive of the hierarchies of civilizational discourse, Japanese non-state actors thus came to create and circulate an embodied form of knowledge that could undo such divisive imaginations.

The events in this chapter offer a microscopic view of the emergence of a transnational sense of community in the Arafura Zone. It zooms in on the decks of ships where encounters between so-called 'colored' people – ordinary Japanese and many others – first played out. Through an examination of the everyday challenges that these people collectively overcame, I show how nature served as an equalizing force that reduced cultural differences and thereby facilitated coexistence and cooperation. In showing how death due to environmental hazards sowed the seeds for such interactions between hyakushō and others who came from all corners of the Arafura Zone, this chapter addresses the dissertation's larger question of how the ocean shaped the course of history for ordinary Japanese fishers. This culturally diverse cast of historical actors may have initially been brought together rather forcibly by the mechanisms of capitalism and the international world order governed by colonial empires. However, their daily interactions on the decks of ships and the courtroom prefigured a shared transnational future that would come to undermine such hegemonic structural forces (particularly after the events of 1899, as we will see in Chapter 4).

This history emerges out of a critical reading of coroner's inquests of death held in the Queensland State Archives – documents that make up a colonial archive destined to legitimize imperial sovereignty over geographical space and the persons found within it. The inquests are investigations into the circumstances surrounding deaths that occurred within the legal jurisdiction of the colony of Queensland, including the waters within the three-mile zone from its coastlines. In essence, they served to determine whether a death had been caused by a human hand, and thereby fulfilled a supporting function in administering colonial justice. And colonial it certainly was, because justice through the inquest was sought almost exclusively in the interest of white settler society. Because of their encounters with settler colonialism, we find among the inquests over a hundred cases involving mostly ordinary Japanese fishers, sailors, and other maritime folk, and members of their support networks such as carpenters, shipwrights, sex workers, interpreters, and shopkeepers – a motley assemblage of what I refer to as hyakushō

(see Chapter 1).²¹⁰ Although the details surrounding their deaths were recorded in the process of establishing colonial power, close readings in fact reveal a history that is fundamentally decolonial and nonimperial.

I begin by discussing how fishers and other seafolk on ships working the Arafura Sea often succumbed to the harsh physical realities of the sea, and how this environment engendered a shared trauma through recurring patterns of suffering and death starting in the early 1880s. This is followed by a discussion of how both Australian and Japanese state actors' understanding of violence contrasted with that of *hyakushō*, who saw it mainly as a prerogative of nature rather than that of humans. I subsequently discuss the daily acts of care that were continually carried out among crew members in their attempts to overcome the everyday challenges posed by nature, from the mid-1880s to the 1890s. In doing so, I show how *hyakushō* contributed to the creation of a communal seascape that formed the basis for the expansion of interactions of mutual aid among a culturally heterogeneous cast of characters in the Arafura Zone in subsequent decades.

III.1 Everyday Death at Sea

Most Japanese fishers working in and around the Arafura Sea in the late nineteenth century were either divers or crew members that supported them as they scoured the seabed for lucrative shells. From a state-centric perspective, they were one of many 'races' among the culturally heterogeneous group of people working on what were initially ships of Australian pearlers. Head (or first) divers, second (or spare) divers, tenders, cooks, and other mariners spent the better part of the year alongside each other at sea. On a working day, the head diver would be the first to go underwater, tethered to the world above sea level only by way of an air pipe attached to a suit and a lifeline made of rope or chain. The less experienced second diver would take over whenever the head diver needed a break. Tenders, who not uncommonly aspired to become divers, were in constant communication with them through the lifeline. They tended to the divers' wellbeing by paying close attention to the signals communicated through hemp or metal – a request to pump more air through the pipe, or one to haul the diver up from the depths if they encountered any trouble. Youngsters who had only just arrived in the Arafura Sea and who did not openly dare to covet the position of the diver fulfilled the underappreciated tasks that were crucial to ensure smooth sailing, as cook or deckhand. Their little world was

²¹⁰ Out of the 17,484 case files in the collection of coroner's inquests, I have found that at least 107 cases involved Japanese persons, mainly *hyakushō*; see appendix 2 for list.

stratified, but the hierarchy was a collectively agreed-upon necessity rather than an unchallenged convention. And this necessity arose from the fatal nature of life at sea.

Various dangers threatened the lives of the crew as a whole. The most catastrophic of these were undoubtedly cyclones (as we will see in Chapter 4). But ordinary winds, tides, and currents could just as easily end the lives of crew members and other passengers. The seaman Yasukawa remembers the day he went out for a leisurely sail.²¹¹ Intending to go to a nearby island, the tide carried his vessel in another direction. “We tried to get to our destination for two hours but had to give it up + went through the pass with the tide”. The small cutter could barely withstand the crashing waves, forcing them to ‘ship lots of water’. Attempting to turn back, they met with a very strong wind and were forced to ship more water over the bows. Their vessel quickly sank and a passenger, who could not swim, went down with it. The dangers lay not only in the physics of the ocean but also its biology. Sea snakes, hammerhead sharks, stonefish, and devil rays had to be taken into account when a crewmember was in the water.²¹² Their playfulness, curiosity, and sometimes hostility could easily lead to an accidental human death. While the threats of life at sea were manifold and unpredictable, two often recurring causes of death came to be particularly dreaded among shipmates and their wider support networks: ‘fouling’ and *sensuibyō* (diving disease).

Submerged in the deep sea, divers were only one breath removed from asphyxiation. Air had to be pumped from the deck of a ship down through a pipe or a hose and if anything were to happen with the equipment, a diver would last no longer than a couple of minutes. People spoke of a pipe being ‘foul’ or that it ‘fouled’ whenever something obstructed or otherwise disrupted the flow of air to a diver. Pipes could rupture if they collided with rocks due to unexpected gusts of wind powerful enough to cause anchors to drag. Hoses could tangle, either due to a diver’s confused movements or the playful inclinations of sea snakes and other fauna. Sometimes it was the life line – that is, the rope or chain through which signals were communicated – that fouled. The diver “Yamastoo” met such an end on 7 May 1894. “Supposed cause of death: Asphyxia from drowning (accidental)”. A tender by the name of Morikawa, duly sworn, stated:

[He] went to the bottom eight times. He was strong + in good health. Last time he go down about two o clock p.m. and was working against the tide. There was a strong wind also. The tide gradually carried him with it. The boat was then anchored + he gave the

²¹¹ QSA; I; ITM348815 (TAINYAMA, Male - Japanese).

²¹² Matsumoto et al., *Fujita Kenji Sketchbook*; Ganter, *The Pearl-Shellfish of Torres Strait*, 37.

signal twice ‘to heave up anchor’. We heave up anchor. [...]. The diver then walked until there was about 30 fathoms of life line out, but the depth of water was only about 9 fathoms at the time. After that he no take life line out + he no seem at work. I think something the matter then. I think life line round stone. We had the anchor heaved up so that the boat would drift. Anchor touch bottom little bit. Life line then very tight. Try pull it no good. Four men pull, no good.

“It was the life line that fouled not the pipe”, but the end-result was the same. After communication through the life line was no longer possible, the crew members operating the pumps kept pumping. Too much air may have been pumped through the pipe, and as the diver could no longer communicate to the tender that they had to slow down, the pipe “parted near the helmet”.²¹³

What followed was a chain of events that constituted a near-universal experience for divers that drowned at the time. Firstly, water entered the helmet. With no time to anticipate ‘fouling’, the transition from inhaling air to water occurred in one aspiration. The diver was immediately plunged into the second of four known stages of drowning. Going back and forth between coughing and swallowing more water, consciousness slowly dissipated in the first couple of minutes. In the third stage, muscles stiffened and jerking movements followed. In the fourth, the body’s own breathing apparatus came to a halt, along with the circulation of blood as the heart gave in. Within six minutes, the body lay head-down in the sand. For someone like the diver Otomatsu on the *Mabel*, it took thirty minutes before he was hauled back up on deck. It would take another couple of hours before his shipmates gave up on him, several days before they arrived at Thursday Island to bury the body, and months before they could take their minds off of what had happened. Several years passed as the case was buried and forgotten in the heaps of paperwork produced by the colonial administration. It took over a century before it would come to the attention of a historian.

Tenders and other shipmates did not witness the process of drowning directly – it was opaque and only seen in its conclusion. We can arrive at an approximate understanding of how it unfolded based on the study of water-related deaths in forensic science.²¹⁴ Ironically, much of the knowledge accumulated in this branch of science is indebted, but also dedicated, to cases

²¹³ QSA; I; ITM348822 (YAMASTOO, Diver per Ivy).

²¹⁴ See T. Suzuki, “Suffocation and Related Problems,” *Forensic Science International* 80, no. 1–2 (June 1996): 71–78; Bierens Joost J. et al., “Physiology Of Drowning: A Review,” *Physiology (Bethesda, Md.)* 31, no. 2 (March 2016); Reinhard B. Dettmeyer, Marcel A. Verhoff, and Harald F. Schütz, *Forensic Medicine: Fundamentals and Perspectives* (Springer, 2016).

of death deemed legally ‘unnatural’ and problematized in the court of law. I discuss the issue of how definitions of natural and unnatural deaths came to differ among state and non-state actors in the Arafura Sea further below, but suffice to say, fouling was considered quite natural in the line of work that divers and their fellow crew members chose to pursue. Their problem consciousness was not so much directed at figuring out causes of an accident in order to determine who was responsible as an individual. The drowning of fellow shipmates with whom they created intimate bonds would have led fishers to be much more concerned with developing methods to minimize the risk that it would happen again.

“Diver foul!” From moment the cry was heard on the *Mabel* until the diver Otomatsu was hauled back up onto the deck, too much time had elapsed.²¹⁵ The tender of the lugger, Matsumoto Tsukumatsu, recalled that “[t]he diver appeared dead”. The emotional distance in the statement belies the intimacy of their relationship. “I have known the diver for a long time. I knew him in Japan”. The diver took him for tender and trained him. Tsukumatsu’s carapace would have hardened little by little after every following moment. “I tried to give him some medicine, but he could not take it he was dead. We rubbed him and tried to bring him to again but could not.” In 1893 alone, the cry “diver foul” may have echoed off the decks of the *Emerald*, the *Teatfish*, the *Rotourah*, the *Moraby*, the *Esme*, the *Premier*, the *Nana*, the *Santiago*, the *Bertha*, the *Success*, the *Zanco*, the *Myrtle*, and twice on both the *Dauntless* and the *Rebecca*. Solely looking at records of colonial Queensland, the call seems to have reverberated at least a hundred times more in the final decade of the nineteenth century. How many more would have been heard outside of this limited echo chamber?

Alongside ‘fouling’, divers regularly succumbed to a condition then known as *sensuibyō* or diver’s paralysis. It was a protracted process compared to drowning. Nakagawa Toyokichi was a diver on board the lugger *Emerald*, owned by someone who went by the name Charlie Japan. He dived down three times in rapid succession on the morning of Saturday 30 September 1893. After coming up for the last time, “his face glass was taken off the helmet, he sat down and ordered that medicine be brought to him”.²¹⁶ He must have felt that something was off, and shortly afterwards he was taken below to the cabin where they undressed him. He did not utter a single word, “looked very bad + sick, and his hands were trembling + shaking”. “He couldn’t walk. There was a noise in his throat and he had difficulty in breathing”, and he died shortly afterwards. Another diver, Kasashina Torakichi, had gone down four times

²¹⁵ QSA; I; ITM348844 (OTOMATSU, or OTTO – pearl diver).

²¹⁶ QSA; I; ITM348817 (NAKAJAWA, Toyokichie).

between 8am and 1pm on the day he died.²¹⁷ He worked at a depth of 18 fathoms, taking no more than 5 minutes for each dive. He felt pain in his right shoulder and lost the ability to walk right before he died. A diver named Yamaoka suffered a similar fate on the lugger *Stork*, belonging to “Okito”. After the crew had hauled him back on board, the diver’s face “looked bad”. “He said he would stop diving that day as the tide was too strong” – unwilling to admit that the depths took a toll. Lying in his bunk, he felt “a lump going from his stomach to his chest”. The next day, the pain became so intense that it overcame his stoicism – prompting Yamaoka to complain that he felt bad and unwell. He too died shortly thereafter.²¹⁸

Today such symptoms are known to be caused by decompression sickness.²¹⁹ Bodies descending into the sea are ‘compressed’ by the weight of the water above, a process that increases in intensity with every fathom dived. The pressurized environment affects the interaction between the body and the air that it inhales, causing nitrogen – the chief component of air – to be more readily diffused into blood. When the diver rapidly ascends to the surface, the change in pressure leaves no time for the increased amount of dissolved nitrogen in the body to be excreted through the respiratory system. Excess nitrogen then separates itself violently from the bloodstream in the form of bubbles. Nitrogen was therefore the main causal agent of Nakagawa, Kasashina, and Yamaoka’s pain and paralysis, and eventual death. But perhaps also their pleasure. During descent and during a dive, the increased amount of dissolved nitrogen in the body affects the central nervous system, sometimes giving rise to feelings of euphoria. To many divers, the entire experience may have been insufferable and intoxicating at the same time.

Divers lived fast, died young, and left initially good-looking corpses. In life, they were described as being strong and in good health. By the time their bodies were examined by the Coxswain of Water Police stationed at Thursday Island, they were “in a very advanced state of decomposition”.²²⁰ The bodies of the divers Otomatsu, Senkichi, and many more had arrived at this state before being buried. We can only imagine the sort of nightmares their crewmates would wake up to in the middle of the night. They were no stranger to the transformation of capable and energetic bodies with “stout build[s] and dark complexions” into lifeless shells, and then rapidly decaying corpses under the Arafura sun. Such recurring images, of pale blue bodies turning deep indigo, would have had a strong impact on the lives of fishers and others

²¹⁷ QSA; I; ITM348853 (TORAKICHI, Kasashina).

²¹⁸ QSA; I; ITM348826 (YAMOAKA, Japanese – diver per *Stork*).

²¹⁹ See Brian Andrew Hills, *Decompression Sickness: The Biophysical Basis of Prevention and Treatment* (Wiley, 1977).

²²⁰ See for example, QSA; I; ITM348864 (SENKACHI, Yano – diver per *Petrel*).

working the Arafura Sea. They would come back to haunt not just themselves, but also the members of countless other crews and their families, friends, and acquaintances. And such fears continue to assume important roles in the stories that descendants of divers tell of their grandparents.²²¹ The result was a collective trauma that could not be located in a single event but rather in a set of processes involving drowning and decompression sickness – understood at the time as ‘fouling’ and *sensuibyō* (diving disease).

The everyday lives of ordinary fishers in the Arafura Sea were frequently interrupted by unexpected deaths of people they knew, sometimes vaguely and sometimes intimately, creating a shared sense of death as an everyday phenomenon. “I cannot account for the number of deaths among Japanese divers”, one diver recalled during the investigation into the death of his tender.²²² Crews would stop working and set sail for Thursday Island almost immediately after a death occurred.²²³ “If anyone died we’d all go back to Thursday Island to have a funeral. The boats had no radio communication but if you saw a boat go back you knew”.²²⁴ A single death was not just the problem of a single crew. Crews of faster ships would offer their ship as a hearse.²²⁵ Both acquaintances and strangers partook in the mourning process, seeing such acts as obligations rather than interruptions of their daily lives.

The frequency at which ordinary fishers were dealing with the various natural causes of death would have created plenty of opportunities for people to contemplate mortality. Everyday death proved to be a powerful motivator for the creation of a culture of care, as I discuss further below. However, as people faced frequent and violent deaths at the hands of natural forces, different understandings of what it was that constituted ‘natural death’ began to emerge. The following section shows how fishers’ definitions of natural and unnatural death materialized in stark contrast to those of state actors. Unlike the state, those who lived in dialogue with the sea saw the continual hardships posed by the environment as a far more violent struggle than that of a ‘war of all against all’ that undergirded state definitions of natural and unnatural death.

²²¹ Wakayama, 2019.

²²² QSA; I; ITM348847 (HIGASHI, Male – Japanese – diver), p. 13

²²³ QSA; I; ITM348811 (TOYOKITCHI, Nanba), p. 10

²²⁴ Ganter, *The Pearl-Shellfish of Torres Strait*, 29.

²²⁵ QSA; I; ITM348858 (HARU, Kawaoko – Japanese – diver per Kilach), p. 16; (also lugger ‘dad’ in inquest notes).

III.2 Marks of Violence

The environment subjected the multi-ethnic fishers of the Arafura Sea to highly violent deaths. On the one hand, waves, tides, and deep-sea chemistry, disease and psychological distress, and encounters with sea snakes and other animals wrought death upon the lives of fishers on a regular basis. As we saw in the previous section, drowning and decompression sickness were especially frequent causes of death, creating a shared trauma and common practices of mourning among survivors. These were ‘natural’ causes of death in the sense that it was nature that dealt the fatal blow, but that did not mean that they were accepted as inevitable. The living clung to one another to keep death at arm’s length, and they did so through the work of care.

On the other hand, ‘natural causes’ simultaneously constituted a legal category through which the sensory system of the state registered the many deaths among fishers. Doctors, constables, and coroners read such instances of death as another “body of a colored man”, a simple fact of life in the tropics, and not at all a problem that needed to be addressed through social or cultural action. Unless they were the result of a direct challenge to the state’s monopoly of violence, such deaths were considered ‘natural’, even if they were preventable by virtue of human nature. State actors’ definitions of natural death became a foil against which ordinary fishers developed an understanding of a certain manner of death as unnatural. Death due to natural causes thereby doubly fostered a shared understanding that everyday death could be overcome through the work of care.

Before he made the choice to end his life, “Chusan” was part of a crew engaged at Thursday Island on a vessel that had previously been wrecked.²²⁶ The seaman was said “to be eccentric”, but considering the circumstances, his way of living and dying was all but irrational. He attempted to communicate something urgently several days before his death, the master of the ship recalled. “I thought he wanted to go on shore, so I said he might”. When the master left the ship, Chusan came after him, but then let go of the painter and said nothing. He had been paid an amount of four pounds, three shillings, and four pence on the 29th of August after arriving with the rest of the crew on the Brisbane River. Chusan may have been living precariously, but he seemed above all to have been misunderstood and socially isolated. Despite having been aboard the ship for two months, the master barely remembered his name and hardly knew anything about him. In an effort to say something personal about him, the master remarked that Chusan’s “conduct was good and [he] was kind to all on board”. Curiously, none of the shipmates were willing to testify at court. Perhaps none of them

²²⁶ QSA; I; ITM348707 (CHUSAN, Japanese Seaman per Jemima).

witnessed the event. Perhaps none of them bore witness to his existence in the first place. Someone was quick enough to turn his pockets inside out and to leave his box of possessions bare before the authorities came, but his body was apparently as invisible in death as it had been in life. However kind he may have been, Chusan never quite managed to break the ice that separated the individual worlds of the diverse members of the crew.

A year after Chusan's suicide, in 1885, the fisher Nishi Isokichi found himself imprisoned at Port Kennedy (Thursday Island) and at death's door. According to his jailer he might have been sick, although he did not appear to be seriously ill. On the other hand, Abdool Jabul and Sally, both "Malays" who shared the same cell as Nishi Isokichi, witnessed the dire state of his bodily health: "[p]lenty pain", "he was very sick [...] he no eat anything", "[h]e wanted to die".²²⁷ An inability to walk, unwillingness to eat, and the appearance of "hectic flesh on his face" suggest that he suffered from a combination of beriberi and pellagra. The signs of serious malnutrition had in fact already begun showing before he was imprisoned on the 29th of August. Yet, for some, a much more pressing matter presented itself at the time: Nishi Isokichi was accused of stealing three pearls, which the owner of a pearl shelling station on Prince of Wales Island claimed were his.

To the coroner, the causes of death of both Chusan and Nishi Isokichi did not count as violent. Their deaths were categorized as having 'natural causes'.²²⁸ Without taking into account the active dissolution of social links that sustain human life – a process that took place on such ships as those of Burns Philp or the prisons of colonial Queensland – their deaths might seem perfectly natural indeed. Burns Philp and companies like it found their niche in providing shipping services to otherwise isolated communities on the coastal peripheries of empire, connecting Sydney to New Guinea by way of Townsville and Thursday Island. These were one of many services that transformed diverse human hands into abstract human labor. In the process, people lost access to the cultural safeguards that could prevent the setting off of biological processes leading ultimately to a self-inflicted and extremely violent death.

On the other hand, death due to the lack of nutritional variety in the diet of a criminal was also considered perfectly natural. Even if many that fell under the criminal category were barely considered human, it was generally understood that they still needed to eat. A monotonous diet of products with a long shelf-life could keep an underclass alive long enough for it to be useful for the appropriation of nature's resources in the interests of remote political

²²⁷ QSA; I; ITM348723 (NISHI ISO KILBI, Japanese Seman).

²²⁸ Lee Karen Butterworth, *What Good is a Coroner? The Transformation of the Queensland Office of Coroner 1859-1959* (Griffith University, School of Humanities, PhD Dissertation), p. 210.

CERTIFICATE OF PARTICULARS.—INQUEST OF DEATH.

I HEREBY CERTIFY, that on the *Twenty Ninth*
day of *February* 189*6*, I held an Inquest of Death
at *Thursday Island* in the Police District of
Somerset and that the following particulars
were then disclosed:—

Name of deceased:

Oko motu Tentaro Ota

Profession or calling:

Diver

Height, colour of hair, peculiar clothing,
and any other means of identity

fully identified

Where found and when:

near Piper Island Light Ship 19.2.96

Date of death:

19.2.96.

Supposed cause of death:

Paralysis

Persons last seen in company of deceased,
and names of suspected persons:

Accused:

Names, residences, and callings
of witnesses:

*Oko motu. H. Bland. Trade,
Oko Ichimoku. do. Crew.
Bado, Tokumoto do Crew*

Suspicious circumstances:

J. M. Douglas

Clerk or Justice.

NOTE.—One Copy of this Certificate to be attached to the Inquest of Death Deposition and forwarded The Honourable The Attorney-General, and a Duplicate to be sent to the Commissioner of Police. See Section 3 of "Inquests of Death Act of 1860" (30 Vic No. 3). A Copy must also be forwarded, together with the "Certificate of Information," to the District Registrar of the District within which the Death took place.

Fig. 1 Inquest, certificate of particulars

David Brown sworn states

I am Native Police
Constable stationed at Thursday
Island, I boarded the lugger
"Kestrel" in the Harbour of Port
Murray yesterday morning the
19th instant, I saw on Board
the Head & Body of a Japanese
man, whose name I was informed
to be "Kasashima Torakichi",
I examined the body which was
naked and found no marks
of violence, ^{I observed} the body presented
the appearance as that of having
died from Paralysis, I reported
the matter & obtained a magistrate's
order for burial of the body, I
produce the Articles of the

Fig. 2 Inquest, constable statement (my underlines for "no marks of violence")

power. After all, bodily deterioration due to thiamine, niacin, and tryptophan deficiency was slow on the uptake and did little to decelerate the expansion of global capital. The health problems that might arise from feeding such a diet to an underclass of potential criminals were of little concern to constables, state-employed doctors, and other officials. The jailer of Port Kennedy on Thursday Island certainly did not seem to care much and there is little to suggest that his negligence was deviant. Both malnutrition and feelings of social isolation were allowed to run amok in lowest rungs of the hierarchies of race and class structuring the world of state actors. The resulting deaths were legally considered non-violent and ‘natural’.

To be sure, these casualties of the early years of hyakushō’s arrival in the Arafura Sea were in some sense ‘natural’. Beriberi was a natural reaction to a lack of variety in food. Suicide might be seen as a natural reaction to a lack of a sense of community. But these were natural causes of death that were easily preventable through countermeasures which had long been institutionalized through the evolution of human sociocultural forms. In the early 1880s, when hyakushō had just arrived at the Arafura Sea on the decks of ships such as the *Jemima* or in prisons such as that of Port Kennedy, they were left without access to existing worlds of practices and obligations that normally ensured nourishment and care of human bodies. Extended family members, childhood friends and rivals, and acquaintances from Wakayama Prefecture or any of the other places where hyakushō were coming from, would have mourned the deaths of Chusan and Nishi Isokichi and thought of them as unnecessary. To those who were intimately related to the deceased, the violence and unnaturalness of their deaths were likely to cause indignation.

The many portraits of death depicted in this chapter emerge out of coroner’s inquests - investigations into the circumstances surrounding death - of late-nineteenth-century colonial Queensland. The point of bringing death to the attention of the state through the inquest, was to determine whether persons subject to imperial sovereignty had engaged in acts that might be considered transgressive or subversive. State actors that served as witnesses in court, such as the coxswain, the doctor, or the constable, were expected to report on the presence of “marks of violence”. In many cases of deaths of ‘Japanese’ fishers and members of their support networks, the officials stated that “no marks of violence” could be found on the body of the deceased. This was the wording that was used even if the bodies in question were found to have “blood and matter oozing from the nose, mouth, and ears”.²²⁹ They could be “very much discolored”, “swollen and discolored”, and “in an advanced state of decomposition”, but still

²²⁹ QSA; I; ITM348844 (OTOMATSU, or OTTO – pearl diver), p. 3.

considered free of any marks of violence.²³⁰ For state actors, violence was defined as an act of inflicting bodily harm on a fellow human, and performing it was the sole privilege of the state.²³¹

In the eyes of the state, then, death by nature's hand left no marks of violence. Nature was simply considered incapable of violent acts, even as it smashed bodies into pieces and ripped them to shreds from the inside out. When "Yashalla" died crossing the fourth branch of the Johnstone River in Innisfail (then called Geraldton), nobody reminded him of the dangers of traversing the river, and there was nobody that provided advice that might have dissuaded him.²³² State actors considered *hyakushō* that died in a storm, in a river, or at sea, as having succumbed to 'natural causes of death', without considering the possibility that they may have been prevented. When "Mody" died at the Sandy Gallop Asylum on 21 November 1890, no amount of "cod liver oil, and beef-tea" could save him from phthisis, and a diet of mainly "corn flour bread + milk, and brandy" certainly did not help him much either.²³³ If a fisher died due to disease this would also be considered 'natural', even if their conditions in prisons and asylums led to death. However violent these types of death were, they were considered 'natural' and not in need of intervention. Only murder was understood as a violent and unnatural cause of death that warranted intervention. The legally enforced distinction between natural and unnatural death was a key component of the state's monopoly on violence, and this monopoly was predicated on a conceptualization of violence as an inherently human quality.

It was not just state actors associated with colonial Queensland's coroner's office that subscribed to these ideas of justice and sovereignty rooted in social contract theory. Much of what has been written about ordinary Japanese in such places as the Arafura Sea is based on the accounts of Japanese state actors who attempted to observe and discuss the conditions of *hyakushō* in the Arafura Sea.²³⁴ Acting in the interests of the Meiji government, these bureaucrats were part of efforts to project an image of Japan as an imperial power worthy of the respect of civilized nation states. As such, they saw much of the non-Western world through

²³⁰ QSA; I; ITM348875 (IWANAGE, Tetsutaro – male – Japanese – diver), p. 4; QSA; I; ITM348876 (JEROKICHI, Hori – male Japanese – diver), p. 5.

²³¹ And fellow human meant, in most cases in colonial Queensland, the white settler. See for example Mark Finnane and Jonathan Richards, "'You'll Get Nothing out of It'? The Inquest, Police and Aboriginal Deaths in Colonial Queensland," *Australian Historical Studies* 35 (April 1, 2004).

²³² QSA; I; ITM348802 (YASHALLA, Male – Japanese). (Yashalla = transcription of Japanese name that was misheard by the scribe at court)

²³³ QSA; I; ITM348781 (MODY, Male – Japanese). (Mody = transcription of Japanese name that was misheard by the scribe at court).

²³⁴ See, for example, Kanjūrō Watanabe, *濠洲探検報告書 [Australia Travel Report]* (外務省通商局第二課, 1894).

the lens of savagery and barbarism, and condemned hyakushō for being indistinguishable from ‘kanaka’ because of their associations and behaviors.²³⁵ These Japanese state actors aligned themselves with a world order based on an understanding of human nature as inherently violent – and this, in turn, fed into the reification of civilizational hierarchies of race.

Japanese non-state actors envisioned a different sense of order based on the need for humans to collaborate in the face of violent nature. A sense of injustice would have struck the growing body of hyakushō in the Arafura Zone when news of deaths such as those of Chusan and Nishi Isokichi spread through unofficial communications carried by the common wind.²³⁶ There would have been a feeling that such deaths could have been prevented. These were deaths that were considered unnatural in the sense that so little had been done in order to prevent it. As hyakushō succumbed to everyday death, they could not fathom a nature that was devoid of violence.

As I show in the next section, hyakushō’s conception of a violent nature stood at odds with the state’s understanding of it in terms of a Hobbesian conception of a ‘war of all against all’ which legitimized the various forms of state power. Hyakushō’s social contracts were not an outcome of a violent human nature but rather a nature that was violent towards humans. It was an understanding of violence as expressed in the harsh conditions of life at sea, in the deterioration of imprisoned bodies, and the self-annihilation of isolated souls. Hyakushō believed that violent nature ought to be overcome by a community that cared, and that careless social structures brought about unnatural death. Their definitions of natural and unnatural death cannot be found in government regulations, indexes, and gazettes. We find them rather in the practices of care that first came to be adopted on the decks of ships where hyakushō coexisted among many other cultural groups.

III.3 The Creation of a Communal Seascape

In this section, I discuss how hyakushō’s experiences of death on a regular basis (everyday death) gave rise to structural acts of care that contributed to a sense of community across the ships on the Arafura Sea. Aimed at alleviating suffering and dealing with environmental hardships, this repertoire of care proliferated among so-called ‘natives of Japan’, but also

²³⁵ Watanabe, 75. Japanese state actors used the term ‘kanaka’ in the derogatory sense to refer to Pacific Islander laborers, much like how it came to be used in the Euro-American colonial context. For more on the transformation of ‘kanaka’ as a Hawai’ian word for person into a racialized stereotype see Gregory Rosenthal, *Beyond Hawai’i: Native Labor in the Pacific World* (Univ of California Press, 2018), 2–5.

²³⁶ Here I borrow the term that Julius Scott uses to describe the unofficial networks of communication of unruly seafolk in the time of the Haitian revolution, see Julius Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (London ; New York: Verso, 2018).

‘Malays’, ‘Aborigines’, ‘Manilla men’, and others. It served to trivialize such nation-centric labels, which originated in colonial imaginations that could not deal with the complex cultural heterogeneity of the ocean of archipelagos that is the Arafura Zone. On the decks of ships traversing the Arafura Sea, *hyakushō* came to intimately know Pangasinans, Rotenese, Paman-speaking peoples, and Bwanabwana-speaking peoples, to name just a few examples. Despite their widely divergent backgrounds, however, their shared experiences in the face of violent nature would begin to engender a sense of becoming Arafurese.

Between the 1880s and the turn of the twentieth century, the frequent occurrence of death in the daily lives of ordinary fishers made them highly attentive to the needs and suffering of others. Crews developed practices and habits of care that came to be widely adopted on the decks of ships working the Arafura Sea. As Takenaka Yasuichi recalled: “There were no doctors to help, we had to do everything ourselves”.²³⁷ Having witnessed shipmates take their last breath in largely similar ways, they looked after each other in order to postpone that moment and, if possible, prevent it. Members of diving crews had often seen or otherwise heard of the fatal effects of decompression sickness or *sensuibyō*, but many also understood that these effects did not always result in death. Kaino, the tender: “I have often seen men sick in the same way before, once I have seen two men die of paralysis”.²³⁸ “I have seen a man paralyzed before but he did not die” stated Okamoto, another tender.²³⁹ “I never saw a man die as Ohshige died. I have seen one diver paralyzed but he got better”, another crewmate recalled.²⁴⁰ Fishers had good reasons to believe that death could be kept at bay, that suffering could be ameliorated, and that various means could be devised in order to do so.

An unofficial register of fishers’ medical histories came to be created and passed on orally. A crewmember on the lugger *Kilach*, Shirouchi Iwamatsu, knew the diver Kawaoka “for about five years, [and] never knew him to have suffered from Paralysis before”.²⁴¹ Uchida, tender of the *Petrel*, stated that he “ha[d] known the deceased a long time. He was a healthy man. I never knew him to be sick before”.²⁴² The diver Katsuyama Inosuke, on the other hand, “had suffered from paralysis before”, as a tender by the name of Sakai recalled.²⁴³ These unofficial medical histories informed thoughts on what fellow members of diving crews should

²³⁷ Ganter, *The Pearl-Shellfish of Torres Strait*, 29.

²³⁸ QSA; I; ITM348849 (KATSUYAMA, Tatsweeosuki – Japanese – diver); QSA; I; ITM348844 (OHSHIGE, Sanjin – diver per Corea).

²³⁹ QSA; I; ITM348839 (OTA, Gentano – diver per Diamond).

²⁴⁰ QSA; I; ITM348844 (OHSHIGE, Sanjin – diver per Corea).

²⁴¹ QSA; I; ITM348858 (HARU, Kawaoka), p. 14.

²⁴² QSA; I; ITM348864 (SENKACHI, Yano), p. 17.

²⁴³ QSA; I; ITM348849 (KATSUYAMA, Tatsweeosuki – Japanese – diver), p. 10.

or should not be doing at any given time. To neglect such advice would be to risk one's own life. The diver Itō Kikumatsu "suffered three times from effects of Paralysis" on a previous trip, when he went down six times in the span of a single day. Muraoka, who had been a tender for four years, knew that this intensity of diving often resulted in a diver's death and he considered the diver lucky to have survived. Considering Ito Kikumatsu's pre-existing conditions, the tender would have advised against further attempts to dive so intensively, but his advice fell on deaf ears and the diver met his end.

The oral medical histories were accompanied by on-the-spot diagnoses and improvised treatments. It was, for example, common practice to ring a bell to seek aid from nearby ships whenever somebody was "unwell", which could mean anything from feeling dizzy to being on the brink of death.²⁴⁴ Divers, tenders, and other crew members from other ships came on board to discuss treatment and offer any kind of assistance. This often amounted to a large congregation of ten to fifteen persons who came to deliver a kind of mob medicine. They would offer food or hot beverages to the unwell.²⁴⁵ They checked to see if someone's stomach "did not get hard like wood" or whether it "became distended".²⁴⁶ "Divers came on board with Smiths medicine", topical painkillers, and massage oils.²⁴⁷ People attempted unorthodox treatments, involving the insertion of feathers into one's throat.²⁴⁸

Two months before the diver Itō Kikumatsu passed away, he was part of this entourage in the final moments of the diver Ōtani Yoshimatsu:

About 1pm the 'Chris' signalled for me to come on board. I went on board in a Dinghey. The Diver was down below. He was sick. He seemed to be suffering from paralysis. I gave him some of Smith's medicine. I was with him four hours. He spoke once, but we could not understand what he said. He died at 5pm. I remained on board until he was buried on shore at 10 o'clock on the following morning at or near Cape Grenville.²⁴⁹

A tender by the name of Oki recalled how he rang the bell for Kojima, diver aboard the *Kio*:

²⁴⁴ QSA; I; ITM348839 (KOJIMA, Male – Japanese – diver); QSA; I; ITM348849 (KATSUYAMA, Tatsweeosuki – Japanese – diver); QSA; I; ITM348811 (TOYOKITCHI, Nanba).

²⁴⁵ QSA; I; ITM348833 (CHOBAI MODATE, Diver per Victoria).

²⁴⁶ QSA; I; ITM348815 (YUSHIOKA, Male – Japanese – diver per Nana), p. 7; Otomatsu Taniguchi inquest p. 9

²⁴⁷ QSA; I; ITM348844 (OTOMATSU, or OTTO – pearl diver), p. 8.

²⁴⁸ Ogawa, *Pearls of the Arafura Sea*, 62.

²⁴⁹ QSA; I; ITM348839 (OHTANI, Yoshematsu – diver per Chris), pp. 7-8.

I took off the helmet. He went and lay down on the cabin. I then took the dress off him. While I was doing that he asked me for hot water. He said that he felt unwell. When I took off the helmet he seemed to be foolish. I rung out for other divers to come on board. Ten divers came on board from different boats near at hand. Some of them spoke to Kojima, but he did not reply. They told me that he was paralyzed, and advised me to wake him up. I tried to wake him up, and gave him some medicine.²⁵⁰

The advice of fellow divers could not save Kojima, who died the following day. The advice fellow divers gave to Nanba Toyokichi, diver on the *Botamochi*, on the other hand, may have. Jann de La Santos, tender of the *Botamochi*, recalled:

After the dress was taken off the diver lay down. He complained of rheumatics in left hand, arm, and leg. Several boats were working near us. They were Cupid, Kilack, Sissy, Congo, Teazer, Chitose, and Takachiho. The divers of the boats I have named came on board and saw Nanba Toyokitch, they told him not to work until they told him that he was fit to do so. He laid up the Wednesday afternoon and all Thursday the 8th and 9th March instant.²⁵¹

While the ship's name suggests that it may have once constituted a lucky break for its master and owner Okamoto, it was ultimately not so for its diver. The following days, he stubbornly insisted on working. "I don't feel very well in my arm yet, but this is only laziness; I have not worked for a long time. If I work, it will get better".²⁵² After completing a series of dives, Toyokichi came up and sat down on the cabin hatch. He asked for the dress to be taken off, and uttered not a single word afterwards. The bell was rung and other divers came on board once again. No judgement was passed, even though everyone knew that the man's days were numbered. Still, they tried to treat his pain by carrying him down to the cabin and rubbing his body with liniments.

Rubbing often ended up becoming a final gesture of care to those who were no longer able to move or speak due to the fatal effects of decompression sickness. It was commonly practiced among crews working the Arafura Sea and constituted an important part of a repertoire of care that they rehearsed whenever a member admitted to feeling unwell. The act

²⁵⁰ QSA; I; ITM348839 (KOJIMA, Male – Japanese – diver).

²⁵¹ QSA; I; ITM348811 (TOYOKITCHI, Nanba).

²⁵² QSA; I; ITM348811 (TOYOKITCHI, Nanba).

did not seem particularly effective as a means to save lives. After the diver Nakagawa Toyokichi had lost consciousness, the crew members “put him in a bunk and rubbed his chest hard. He never regained his senses and died at half past twelve in the afternoon. We continued trying to restore him for some time, but with no result”.²⁵³ In the case of the diver Yamaoka, who felt “a lump going from his stomach to his chest”, his fellow crew members “tried to knead it down and after a little the Diver said he felt better, until five minutes to four o’c pm. next day, [when he] began to feel bad + complained that he was unwell”. The crew decided to head back to Thursday Island in the hopes of saving the diver, but he died on the way there.²⁵⁴

There was an awareness that rubbing did not really save any lives in dire situations, but people nevertheless continued the practice. Its function seemed to lay elsewhere. “We carried him down to the cabin and rubbed him with Painkiller and St Jacobs oil”, as Saera, head diver of the ketch Kobe, recalled of the final hours of spare diver Hori Tarōkichi.²⁵⁵ “We then rubbed him applying Pain Killer and Jacobs Oil, also vinegar”, Sakai recalled of the death of the diver Katsuyama.²⁵⁶ Sometimes “a mixture of eucalyptus oil and vinegar” was used.²⁵⁷ A firm massage blended the medicinal smell of liniments with the fragrances of massage oil to treat both chronic pain and sudden sores and aches. When this was performed as a final gesture, it reminded the dying that nobody should have to do so alone. The rubbing complemented other acts of care, such as keeping divers warm “with plenty of blankets” when they felt unwell, and smaller everyday acts such as assisting with undressing or making a hot cup of water.²⁵⁸ Together, they formed a repertoire that served to mitigate everyday suffering and social isolation.

From the outside, sustained contact between hands, legs, chests, and backs of bodies labelled ‘Aborigine’, ‘Malay’, ‘Manilla’, or ‘Japanese’ may have appeared as a grassroots articulation of a global color line. Stephen Clark, a pearl sheller and master of the schooner *Ethel*, witnessed the procedure unfolding on a nearby ship on the 3rd of November 1897. “I went to the cabin and saw the deceased lying down. The tender and crew were rubbing him with an application”.²⁵⁹ Unable to name the ‘application’, Clark did not seem to be particularly privy to this practice of care that was repeated over and over again among crews to help divers

²⁵³ QSA; I; ITM348817 (NAKAJAWA, Toyokichie).

²⁵⁴ QSA; I; ITM348826 (YAMOAKA, Japanese – diver per Stork).

²⁵⁵ QSA; I; ITM348876 (JEROKICHI, Hori – male Japanese – diver).

²⁵⁶ QSA; I; ITM348849 (KATSUYAMA, Tatsweeosuki – Japanese – diver).

²⁵⁷ QSA; I; ITM348876 (JEROKICHI, Hori – male Japanese – diver), p. 13.

²⁵⁸ QSA; I; ITM348815 (YUSHIOKA, Male – Japanese – diver per Nana); QSA; I; ITM348849 (KATSUYAMA, Tatsweeosuki – Japanese – diver), p. 9.

²⁵⁹ QSA; I; ITM348856 (NISHIMURA, Male – Japanese – diver per Edith), p. 8.

that felt unwell after resurfacing. Another pearl sheller, Collingwood James Outridge, similarly admitted that he was “not acquainted with the means employed for restoring the apparently drowned”, when he saw the crew of the *Mabel* attempt to treat the diver Otomatsu in the same way.²⁶⁰ Such observations may have formed food for thought for the global gamut of aspiring anticolonial, antiracist, and other antinomian thinkers of the late nineteenth century. In the eyes of a Du Bois or Tagore, knowledge of the methods of rubbing might have been seen as a marker that differentiated white master from crew of color. But the reasons for the development of highly specific practices of care known almost exclusively among the multi-ethnic crews were more than skin deep.

The repertoire of care of fishers, divers, tenders, but also islanders, coastal peoples and other seafolk, arose from an ethic that went hand-in-hand with the dangers accompanying a life at sea. It was the cultural elaboration of a more basic drive to help those whose life was in danger. And this was a scene that presented itself far too often on the open waters. Charlie Badu, a “native of Badu and a swimming pearl sheller”, was asked in court to describe how he saved the seaman Yasukawa:

At about nine o'clock yesterday morning I saw a cutter coming through the pass into Normandy Island where I was lying. She looked to be unmanageable. She was yawing about + shipping quantities of water. I sang out to my men. Come quick I think that boat sink down. I see boat sink, sink more. Sail go up + down in water. I get up anchor quick + up sail + go try to save boat. I see man in water swimming. I see boat go down altogether. I go to man who was swimming and I pick him up + take him onboard. Then I go to where boat sink quick as I can. I no see any one near boat sunk.²⁶¹

Charlie Badu was looking for the drowning man's shipmate Taniyama, “an educated Japanese” who could not swim. “I took my clothes off quick and I dive down [...] big big fellow hammerheaded shark come. I think he twelve foot long. He bad bad fellow, bite quick I no like go down again”. Charlie Badu had risked his own life to help a person he did not know and did not hesitate for a moment to consider race or nation. This is of course a common scenario told and retold in endless variations across the manifold experiences of fishers and mariners, yet it rarely amounts to more than an anecdote in the study of history. The frequency of such anecdotes in both written and oral accounts involving the exploits of seafolk, however

²⁶⁰ QSA; I; ITM348844 (OTOMATSU, or OTTO – pearl diver), p. 5.

²⁶¹ QSA; I; ITM348815 (TAINYAMA, Male - Japanese).

romanticized, allude to the existence of an embodied and seaborne ethic of care. It is an ethic that has often served as the rationale for the creation of lighthouses, lifeboat associations, and disaster relief initiatives. This ethic shone through the individual acts performed among the crews working the Arafura Sea in their attempts to reduce suffering and prevent death.

We might read the responses of ordinary people such as Itō Kikumatsu, Sakai, Saera, Charlie Badu, and Jann de la Santos to events that endangered their collective everyday lives as constituting an original text of ethics. Living and acting outside of the temporal and spatial dimensions of race and nation, these were so-called “people without history”. They had few claims as inheritors of the oaths of Sun Simiao, Asaph, and Hippocrates. Yet they acted out many of the imperatives of civilizational ethics. They created their own prescriptions, which by virtue of being passed on orally were always open to being amended. The oaths of *hyakushō* and those with whom they coexisted were never written down, but rather rubbed into the skin with painkiller, St Jacobs oil, some eucalyptus oil, and every now and then vinegar.

In this sense, shared experiences of environmental hardships brought forth a set of moral principles that began to unify the incredibly diverse cast of historical actors on the decks of ships traversing the Arafura Sea. On a conceptual level, these were universally comprehensible even if the distinctive languages spoken on the ship – Kishūben, Kala Lagaw Ya, Tagalog, Bandanese, Uradhi – were not. This conceptual common ground would serve as a basis for attempts to communicate across linguistic divides, encouraging ‘Japanese’ to learn Aboriginal dialects of the Lockhart area and ‘Aboriginals’ to learn Japanese ones.²⁶²

But the development of rigorous practices of care among *hyakushō* specifically can be traced back to another source. *Hyakushō* who found themselves in the Arafura Sea – *ama*, skipjack tuna fishers, whalers, and other Japanese seafolk – inherited through their local histories a sense of humility towards nature. Those who came from Wakayama Prefecture brought with them transgenerational traumas associated with the dangers of the incredibly rocky and, at times, unnavigable coastline of the Kumano Sea. Those who had a background as abalone-foraging *ama* from other parts of the archipelago knew very well how the stings of jellyfish or sea urchins could result in dyspnea, fainting, and a quick death.²⁶³ It was through *hyakushō*’s local knowledge that nature was seen as particularly dangerous and therefore requiring strong social bonds to placate. In contrast to state actors’ understanding of violence

²⁶² For examples of Japanese words remembered by the people of the Lockhart River, see Chase, “‘All Kind of Nation,’” 15.

²⁶³ S. Harashima and S. Iwasaki, “Occupational Diseases of the Ama”, in Rahn and Yokoyama (eds.), *Physiology of Breath-Hold Diving and the Ama of Japan* (National Academy of Sciences, 1965), p. 93.

among humans as the basis of sociality, *hyakushō* recognized dangers posed by the environment as a type of violence that could only be overcome by human collaboration.

Hyakushō's nature-centric ethic drove the improvement and innovation of acts of care, drawing on knowledge created in local places and transmitted through transnational connections. Decompression sickness or *sensuibyō* was as common among divers working the Arafura Sea as it was for those who continued to dive for abalone, often illegally, along Japan's coastline. The Meiji government's Hydrographic Department, which was one of the institutions through which the state laid claim on the seas, took notice of the problem but did little to combat it.²⁶⁴ An ingenious but up until today barely recognized solution was discovered by an ordinary diver named Tandokoro Harutarō. Having seen many of his friends pass away due to the effects of *sensuibyō*, Harutarō devised a method that could effectively prevent deaths due to diving. As part of the new generation of abalone divers utilizing 'diving machines' (see Chapter 1), Harutarō witnessed the nuances of the process of hauling up abalone from the seabed. Some had eyes that had popped out of their sockets, whereas others had not.²⁶⁵ Subsequent experimentation allowed him to conclude that physiological changes in the process of rapidly ascending to the surface could prove fatal to the abalone and possibly humans too. He suggested that divers ought to gradually rise to the surface to avoid lethal complications, a method called the *fukashi* treatment. While some divers ignored the discovery, many swore by it. Harutarō had discovered a method to circumvent an occupational hazard that almost certainly guaranteed death. Its results were measurable, as attested to by the long-lasting gratitude of divers of subsequent generations. They paid tribute to Harutarō by gathering funds to erect a modest statue and memorial in his name. The remaining funds were donated to a local hospital where further research was being conducted into the prevention and treatment of *sensuibyō*. An ordinary fisher, who tried to ensure that the deaths of his friends were not in vain, had beaten the Oxford intellectuals J.S. Haldane and his son J.B.S. Haldane in discovering the world's first effective prophylactic measure against decompression sickness. The treatment was yet another practice of care that came to be adopted among those working on the Arafura Sea.²⁶⁶

Other aspects of the repertoire of care would come to light in the courtroom rather than the open sea. *Hyakushō* adopted various practices of discursive care as a means of protection

²⁶⁴ Ōba, *Fishery Law*.

²⁶⁵ Ogawa, *Pearls of the Arafura Sea*, 62.

²⁶⁶ It was sometimes also known as the 'gantōn' treatment – see Ogawa, 66. Development of the *fukashi* treatment predated the discovery of the staged decompression method by somewhere between a decade and a year: Ōba Toshio dates the discovery of *fukashi* treatment between 1897 and 1907. J S Haldane's paper on staged decompression was published in 1908. The methods are largely similar.



Fig. 3 Mention of ‘fukashi’ treatment on the memorial stone of Tandokoro Harutarō, Chiba Prefecture, Japan

when they entered the legal arena. They had plenty of reasons to do so when they found themselves in the waters of colonial Queensland. Firstly, any deaths on colonial territory needed to be accounted for by a state official. When a member of a crew died on a ship in territorial waters, their fellow crew were forced to report the matter to the police. If they did not, they were likely to be fined if not imprisoned. Moreover, crew members often wanted to bury their fellow crew at the Thursday Island cemetery, but burials there required the permission of a magistrate, after a body had been examined by an official.²⁶⁷ Secondly, the state forbade access to certain waters largely on the grounds of diminishing populations of

²⁶⁷ See for example Oda Santaro inquest 1896, p. 5.

marine biota. More than innocent efforts at environmental conservation, these were geopolitical claims on natural resources in the interests of the state,²⁶⁸ and therefore also industrial civilization and capitalism (a process that similarly occurred on the coastlines of the early Meiji Japanese archipelago as I discussed in Chapter 1). As the historian Steve Mullins has shown, European entrepreneurs and pearl shellers, such as the ‘Octopus Crowd’, worked closely with lawmakers and state officials to execute such plans.²⁶⁹ They often employed hyakushō on three-year indentures, particularly in the first years since they arrived in the Arafura Sea, to do their bidding. To be a diver, tender, or other type of mariner initially meant being subordinate to the white pearl sheller and master of a ship, and by extension, the colonial state. But rather than being coopted in its imperial projects, hyakushō and their fellow crew members began to disentangle themselves by developing practices of discursive care within the court of law.

The need for the creation of a discursive front came gradually. Initially, divers, tenders, and other mariners who ended up answering questions in the courtroom gave information regarding the nature of the death in question quite willingly. Witnesses called to court up to the early 1890s had no qualms divulging all sorts of details of the crew’s everyday lives, seemingly unasked, right up to the moment of the death of their fellow crew member. On the morning the diver George Japan died, the cook Francisco remembers cooking meat, potatoes, and leek, recalling that the diver had some of each.²⁷⁰ With regards to the death of Nakagawa Toyokichi, a crew member stated how many shells the diver had picked up from the bottom of the ocean before he died.²⁷¹ Another stated how he had warned the diver to steer clear from going to Darnley Island, where divers had often died before. Towards the turn of the twentieth century, however, the statements of witnesses gradually become leaner and more formulaic. The tender for the diver Hamaguchi, stated the time and location where the diver went down the last time, how many times the diver had gone down, the depth of the water in which the crew was working, and several other general bits of information that would be repeated in almost the exact same fashion across inquests.²⁷² It was as if witnesses began going through a checklist, ticking off boxes that conveyed the bare minimum of information required for them to appear law-abiding. The increasingly sparse descriptions that witnesses were willing to part with suggest a growing distrust of the state’s institutions. Withholding information from the state and tailoring it as a means of protection became commonly practiced acts of discursive care.

²⁶⁸ See Parenti, “The Environment Making State.”

²⁶⁹ See Mullins, *Octopus Crowd*.

²⁷⁰ QSA; I; ITM348742 (JAPAN, George).

²⁷¹ QSA; I; ITM348817 (NAKAJAWA, Toyokichie).

²⁷² QSA; I; ITM348836 (FUKUSHIMA, Inosuke).

A related practice was the synchronization of witness statements. Crew members that were summoned to court carefully constructed non-contradictory accounts of the ways in which people had died. They agreed to state the exact same time that the crew began to commence work on the day that the crew member was struck by a mortal blow. They agreed to state the exact same time of death. The statements are sometimes indistinguishable from one another, with matching details regarding the depth of the water at which a diver was working, the number of minutes they stayed underwater each time they went down, and the exact words that they uttered before passing away. These synchronized accounts were built on knowledge of what it was that allowed them to evade the state's power to intervene and restrict their actions and movements.

They had learned the ways of navigating the legal arena through cases in which they had been disadvantaged to minimize their risks. In 1894, an incident involving a burst pipe of Japanese make turned a case that would usually be understood as a case of natural death into a case of manslaughter. The diver Shiozaki Matsunosuke died because of a pipe foul, as many others had before him, but this time the fouling of the pipe was attributed to the fact that it had been made in Japan. Witnesses in court attested that they had “never used piping like that produced”, when they were presented with “exhibit 1 – (Piping)”.²⁷³ “I have always used European piping for eight years”. In each of the witness accounts, great emphasis was placed on how the pipe was “of Japanese manufacture”, that it was “made in Japan”. Witnesses went to great lengths to emphasize that “a Japanese named Kitano”, who had brought the pipe from Japan, was to be blamed: “the diver was employed by Kitano. The gear belonged to Kitano. The boat belonged to Kitano. Kitano told me that the gear had been passed by the inspector”. The state never took much of an interest in cases of pipe fouling before, but the way in which the inquest unfolded suggests that this was a carefully prepared attempt to eliminate competition and foster a dependency on certain suppliers of equipment. Witnesses may have been bribed and trained, or they themselves may have had ulterior motives. Shiozaki's case, among others, showed *hyakushō* how the legal system might be used and abused, resulting in an increasing awareness of the need for a united discursive front.²⁷⁴

Many fishers spoke a type of English that state actors found incomprehensible, even if it was perfectly capable of enabling communication in life-or-death situations on the decks of

²⁷³ QSA; I; ITM348825 (SHIOZAKI, Matsunosuke – seaman per Ino), p. 22.

²⁷⁴ For a study of the emergence of a similar kind of critical legal awareness among Indigenous women in the Americas, see Katrina Jagodinsky, *Legal Codes & Talking Trees: Indigenous Women's Sovereignty in the Sonoran and Puget Sound Borderlands, 1854-1945*, Yale University Press 2016.

ships. When they were called to court, competent interpreters who had found their way to Thursday Island by the 1890s were there to assist. Taguchi Kametarō went to the Nagasaki Catholic Academy before coming to Thursday Island and Sato Torajirō graduated in law at the University of Michigan. These were highly educated men who seemed to be more interested in incorporating the fishers into the state-centric institutional and bureaucratic spheres rather than leaving them to their own devices. Taguchi Kametarō would often go directly to the police whenever he found out about a death. Sato Torajirō petitioned both the Meiji government and that of colonial Queensland on several occasions for various reasons, such as arranging for the arrivals of *hyakushō* to be considered legal. He was often unsuccessful, but that never stopped them from coming unofficially and illegally (see Chapter 2). Sato Torajirō was inspired by the drama of social struggle, from the Haymarket Affair in Chicago to the Freedom and People's Rights Movement in Meiji Japan. He came to Thursday Island in search of it, but never quite managed to fit in with his frock coat and expensive watch on a gold chain.²⁷⁵ Regardless of the visions and agendas of these semi-state actors, *hyakushō* used such figures to navigate the institutional hazards that lay in their way. Over the years, *hyakushō* themselves began to interpret for their kin as some acquired a certain proficiency in what was considered proper English.

One of the most striking practices of discursive care was the way in which *hyakushō* manipulated the legal system to regain a sense of autonomy over their movements and future trajectories. From the 1890s, *hyakushō* began to register the purchase of a ship under any Australian legal person willing to sell their name.²⁷⁶ Most of the ships that came to be owned by *hyakushō* therefore had European names. Over time, however, they cared less and less for such legal formalities and began to give their ships names that they preferred: the *Botamochi*, the *Kobe*, and the *Ino*. Through this process, *hyakushō* could begin to work on the Arafura Sea and elsewhere on their own terms. They themselves became masters of their ships, even as they acted entirely differently than their European predecessors had. While they dismantled the ship using the master's tools, they managed to build something else entirely through their competing conceptions of violence, nature, and death.

The decision to share fewer details in coroner's investigations, the agreements that crew members made before appearing in court, the use of highly educated interpreters, and the legal workarounds that allowed *hyakushō* to become more autonomous constituted the main types

²⁷⁵ Sanshirō Ishikawa, *Jijoden* (Tōkyō: Rironsha, 1956), 53.

²⁷⁶ As brought to light by the historian Regina Ganter, who referred to this practice as 'dummying'. See, Ganter, *The Pearl-Shellfishers of Torres Strait*.

of discursive care adopted when non-state actors encountered state actors in the court of law. Through their collective acts aimed at easing suffering and preventing death, *hyakushō* thus managed to navigate and survive harsh environments even if they were manmade. However, it was the non-human environment that ultimately gave birth to the most expansive practices of mutual aid. As we will see in the next chapter, for *hyakushō* and the many other peoples with whom they worked, the cyclone of 1899 came to establish a shared axis of past, present, and future.

III.4 Conclusion

In the period examined in this chapter (1880s-1890s), we saw how a motley crew of ordinary ‘Japanese’ fishers and a whole host of other people described by the state as ‘colored’ collectively experienced life at sea in the Arafura Zone. These decades were marked by threats to life on a daily basis. As we have seen, many died in their fatal encounters with nature, leaving their mark on the fisher community in their absence. This pervasive threat began to impact the development of their social and cultural lives, forming the basis of practices that promoted interdependent coexistence not just among themselves, but with the many others with whom they shared their spaces and times. Despite their frequent occurrence, the passing of friends, family, rivals, and colleagues never ceased to constitute a radical break from everyday life. Such deaths impacted everyday life in a multitude of ways, from the creation of a whole repertoire of care on the decks of ships to the reorganization of daily life by way of smart legal maneuverings in the courtroom. Frequent and unexpected deaths served as a reminder of the importance of creating meaningful social relations and living one’s life conscientiously.

In the next chapter, I turn to a single moment in time in which nature’s force was made powerfully clear – March 1899, when the Australian continent was hit by ‘Tropical Cyclone Mahina’. People labelled as ‘Japanese’, ‘Chinese’, ‘Malay’, and ‘Aborigine’, among others that fell under the category of ‘colored’, perished in a single blow that amounted to the highest death toll of any natural disaster in Australian history. The encounter with Mahina accelerated, intensified, and enlarged the social transformations that were occurring in the Arafura seascape towards the end of the nineteenth century. Among ordinary Japanese fishers, this had the effect of facilitating the emergence of a transnational and nature-centric subjectivity in the early decades of the twentieth century.

IV

‘Japan’s’ encounter with Tropical Cyclone Mahina, 1899

In 1899, Tropical Cyclone Mahina wreaked havoc among peoples traversing the Arafura Sea and those who populated its coastlines. The majority of its documented victims were ordinary sailors, deckhands, crewmates, and other vagrants who were mostly non-European. Contemporary observers spoke of a “great loss of life”.²⁷⁷ Scars of its severity permeate the landscape and seascape (Cape Melville, Queensland, Australia) – as well as the oral-historical record. Yet, no historiography has ever devoted more than a footnote to describing its existence, let alone its consequences. The event’s obscurity only makes sense in light of the peripheral position traditionally ascribed to the historical actors that died: the so-called ‘people without history’ and ‘the wretched of the earth’ who often fall outside or between the cracks of state-centric historiography.²⁷⁸ The cyclone of 1899 may have never been recognized as a historically significant event, but the death and destruction it caused nevertheless played an important role in the lives of many not-quite-national subjects.

For a community of ‘Japanese’ fisherfolk comprised of or otherwise accompanied by draft evaders, stowaways, smugglers, sex workers, and gamblers, the March 1899 cyclone accelerated and intensified their integration into the cultural tapestry of the Arafura Zone. As the previous chapter showed, an awareness of mortality vis-à-vis nature formed the basis of the creation of common practices and informal infrastructures of care that crossed cultural boundaries on the deck of the ships traversing the Arafura Sea. In this chapter, I show how the disaster of 1899 served as another, but much more powerful reminder of a shared vulnerability. Tropical Cyclone Mahina thereby functioned as a catalyst for even more voluntary and self-organized forms of mutual aid, constituting an important moment in the creation of a shared sense of belonging to the Arafura Zone.

This chapter is largely based on sources of oral history and unwritten sources that constitute a makeshift archive of the cyclone. These include various kinds of eyewitness accounts and hearsay, stories passed on from survivors to descendants, explanations concerning material culture, reminiscences turned into sketches, and experiences and memories retold in interviews. Some of these have been collected by myself during a research trip to Wakayama in 2019, others were recorded by scholars with a number of different intellectual agendas.

²⁷⁷ Sato Torajiro and Diplomatic Records Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

²⁷⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London New York: Penguin Classics, 2001); Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, 2nd edition (Berkeley, Calif London: University of California Press, 2010).

Together, they span across multiple levels of the process through which oral traditions become established.²⁷⁹

Although imperfect and only partly reliable, eyewitness accounts give an impression of the severity of the 1899 disaster. The majority of those that I refer to were recorded in a little booklet written to provide “some account of the Europeans who were lost [in the cyclone] [...] to the immediate relatives of the deceased and to others interested.”²⁸⁰ Other eyewitness accounts, hearsay, and material legacies of the disaster tell us about the impact the disaster had on its survivors. For these I rely on the work of a number of scholars: historians such as Taira Ogawa, who interviewed returnees from the Arafura Zone in Wakayama Prefecture in the 1950s, and Regina Ganter, who sought to document the oral history of marine resource use in the Great Barrier Reef; as well as anthropologists who conducted interviews with various indigenous communities of the Arafura Zone. Along with the ways in which the experiences of the storm were interpreted (through reminiscences or commentaries) and the interpretations of survivors’ experiences post-1899, these sources constitute the primary messages that form the basis for the oral history of Tropical Cyclone Mahina.

In reconstructing the disaster’s effects, I rely not just on these primary messages generated within the storm’s direct ambit, but also on the oral traditions that they gave rise to. Messages concerning the event and its aftermath that are no longer accessible to us as oral history – because the original messages have not been recorded – may partially reveal themselves through accounts told across generations and communities. Several of Ganter’s informants, for example, talked about Tropical Cyclone Mahina by combining their own encounter with the disaster’s material legacy and ‘historical gossip’ – the news and hearsay generated as events in one generation are carried over into the next.²⁸¹ Others discussed the cyclone in relation to their own personal traditions, which were passed on from survivors to descendants. These took on both material and immaterial forms, as I discovered in the towns and villages on the southern coast of Wakayama Prefecture. Tropical Cyclone Mahina’s oral tradition is highly fragmented, as its constituents have been scattered far and wide across time and space. Still, we can treat them as we would treat any other oral tradition, that is “as a series of successive historical documents all lost except for the last one and usually interpreted by

²⁷⁹ On the viability of oral tradition as a source for history writing see Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (James Currey, 1985).

²⁸⁰ Anonymous, *The Pearling Disaster, 1899* (Brisbane: Outridge Printing Company, 1899), 9. Hereafter referred to as ‘Outridge booklet’.

²⁸¹ Interviews conducted by Regina Ganter for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (hereafter Ganter Interviews), pp. 76-77.

every link in the chain of transmission.”²⁸² By focusing on the ‘Japanese’ perspective of the encounter with Tropical Cyclone Mahina, this chapter is an attempt to start piecing together this oral tradition and begin recovering the meaning of the 1899 disaster for the Arafura Zone.

I begin this chapter by identifying the larger network of survivors of the storm and assessing the psychosocial damage they sustained. In talking about a larger network of survivors, I mean not just the people who weathered the storm themselves, but also those who were directly related to them – and even those who were not directly related but still took part in a shared web of communication. The chapter looks at how these people lived their lives in the subsequent years – particularly through the prisms of interpersonal and cross-cultural relations, language use, and practices of material exchange. Here, I largely focus on the perspectives of the ‘Japanese’ survivors. I see this as a first step towards understanding an incredibly complex event that brings together multiple historiographical traditions, along with their associated sources, language requirements, and methodological peculiarities. It is events such as these – which I call ‘historical vortices’ – that can tell us about the transnational interactions between people from disparate sociocultural backgrounds; how their intentions and actions may have contributed to the creation of new albeit fleeting societies, practices, and cultures; and how all of this intersects with non-human actors, human bodily tendencies, and ecology – in other words, nature.

IV.1 The Disaster of 1899

At the end of February 1899, miniscule droplets of warm water in the Coral Sea rose to the summer sky. Turning into clouds, they released the energy of the sun into the surrounding air. By itself, the process would not have amounted to more than a gust or a drizzle. As part of a growing system of low atmospheric pressure, however, it may well have formed the last drop in the larger process of cyclogenesis. On the uncommonly hot and oppressive nights of the 2nd and 3rd of March, an amateur meteorologist observed the brewing storm from Thursday Island in the Torres Strait.²⁸³ “The eastern part of the horizon was terribly lit up with distant lightning, which disclosed a black, leaden, fierce-looking sky or background. The lightning was singularly severe, and an almost continuous electrical discharge, although not the slightest sound of thunder reached the ear”. By the 5th of March, the droplets had matured into a fully-fledged storm.

²⁸² Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, 29.

²⁸³ Outridge booklet.

Those who were caught in the middle of the storm could not have cared less about its aesthetics. Near the eye, the barometer had dropped to 26 inches of mercury, which is likely the lowest recorded central pressure of a cyclone in the southern hemisphere to date.²⁸⁴ The winds had attained a speed that could rip apart a schooner's hull, unless crews were quick enough to cut off their masts. The storm swept a terrifying amount of water against the surfaces of ships, shores, and up into the air. Flinging thousands of snakes onto the coast, dolphins onto fifty foot hills, and canoes high up in the trees, Mahina has come to be known as the cyclone that produced the highest storm surge that the world has seen.

From the deck of the *Zanoni*, waves could be seen breaking over the boat. A 'Japanese' diver named Gentarō and his crew attempted to shut all the hatches to keep the water out. They failed to close one and water came flooding in. The ship began to sink and the mainmast broke. Shortly afterwards, massive waves slammed the ship into the rocks.²⁸⁵ Another diver by the name of Seto, aboard the *Estelle*, saw how a powerful gust of wind blew the foremast of his boat over to the side. All through the night, Seto took it upon himself to steer the vessel, desperately trying to keep the bow from burying in the overwhelming waves frequently breaking aboard. There was a moment of tranquility when they found themselves in the storm's eye, affording a breather and an opportunity to pump out water. But shortly afterwards, the wind blew from the opposite direction and much stronger than it had before, causing "a very heavy confused sea".²⁸⁶ The boat sank almost immediately. Aboard the *Silvery Wave*, Sugimoto lay in his bunk in the forecabin, too sick to go on deck. Around midnight, he heard the captain giving the order for another anchor to be dropped, "as the schooner was dragging with the gale which was blowing". He desperately wanted to help, but was unable to leave the bed, lapsing in and out of consciousness. When he woke up, the others had been struggling for hours on end:

I went on deck as the schooner was filling fast, and I expected her to sink at any moment. I saw some of the crew, but the masts had gone, and the bulwarks were all broken. The house aft, where the Captain and officers had their quarters, was also carried away. Just then a big sea struck the vessel, and I was washed overboard, but succeeded in getting on to a plank, with which I supported myself. Immediately after I had been washed

²⁸⁴ Jonathan Nott et al., "The World Record Storm Surge and the Most Intense Southern Hemisphere Tropical Cyclone: New Evidence and Modeling," *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 95 (May 1, 2014): 757–65.

²⁸⁵ Outridge booklet, p. 33

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

overboard I saw the schooner sink; the big sea had swept right over her and filled her up.²⁸⁷

Gentarō, Seto, and Sugimoto's traumatic experiences aboard the ships in the midst of the storm only signaled the start of their arduous struggle for survival on flotsam. Albert and Moses, two "natives" from present-day Papua New Guinea, also survived miraculously. They were castaways for several days and subsisted on a case of plum pudding. The current swept them back and forth from the wreck of their ship to Boulder Rocks and then Pipon Island, both near Cape Melville. There, they buried the bodies of both strangers and people they knew who had died in the storm.²⁸⁸ Muara Newi, an eighteen year old girl from Erub Island (also on the eastern coast of Papua New Guinea), attempted to swim to the shore with her sisters after their ship had sank and managed to survive against all odds. By her own account:

The ship he go down an' th' wind tear our dresses off. But little dress underneath he cling close alla time 'cause the big waves wash him verra tight. My sister she no swim. She heavy woman; me on'y girl. She holdem hands on my shoulders, an' I swim an' swim an' swim. Seo an' Geba swim one side an' 'nother, an' try be strong an' brave. An' time pass verra hard, an' we fight, an' fight, an' fight. [...] An' sun he go down, an' wind blow us near the shore, an' sound he tell me waves he break on rocks, an' rocks he all sharp with oyster shell. An' I wait till one big wave roll an' break on rocks, an' then I push my sister an' scream, 'Swim! Swim!' An' she climb up in slack water jus' before nex' wave break. Then I push Geba an' she climb up. Then I push Seo an' she climb up. Then I wait, an' nex' slack water climb up myself, but never think I do it. I so near go down. An' all night we lie on rocks 'cause we so weak we no can move.²⁸⁹

These are accounts of those who witnessed the storm at sea. With the exception of Muara's story, they were collected in a little booklet compiled for the relatives of Europeans who died in the storm and those who mourned their deaths. It was an attempt to provide some clarity on the consequences of the storm in its immediate aftermath, which forced the authors to turn to the testimonies of those who were hit hardest: non-Europeans.

²⁸⁷ Outridge booklet.

²⁸⁸ Outridge booklet.

²⁸⁹ Gouger (Ion Idriess), "Aboriginalities. Made in Australia", *The Bulletin*, 11 (August 1927), 27.

By the 1890s, the Arafura Zone was host to an incredibly heterogeneous pool of people from all over the world who coexisted on the ship decks, islands, boomtowns, and mangroves. Some had previously been recruited to work on the fields or in the mines. Others had already been signed on as deckhands or sailors. They ended up collecting pearl oysters, trochus, and bêche-de-mer, doing so not just as poorly paid indentured laborers, but also as shareholders and free agents with access to larger slices of the pie.²⁹⁰ Scholars have tried to make sense of this amalgamation of bodies by relying on some variation of the story of ‘globalization’ – where cheap labor situated in economic peripheries is subordinated to the whims and desires of colonial, industrial, or ‘developed’ centers. This has resulted in studies of the involvement of ‘Japanese’, ‘Manilamen’, ‘Chinese’, ‘Sinhalese’, ‘Jamaicans’, and many others in the pearling industry.²⁹¹ It is here that Tropical Cyclone Mahina appears in history’s footnotes, as a disaster that disrupted an industry built on the backs of a people divided into national categories, yet united in a single global socioeconomic system.

The documentary record tells us that Tropical Cyclone Mahina took the lives of roughly three hundred people at sea.²⁹² It gives us an impression of the diversity of lost lives, but obscures more than it reveals. Among the casualties we find people from Manilla, India, Singapore, Java, Malaya, South Sea Islands, Ceylon, Egypt, Malay Islands, Malay Peninsula, Siam, Macassar, Batavia, Scotland, England, Torres Strait, Japan, Sweden, South America, Germany, New Zealand, Timor, New Guinea, Hong Kong, Bengal, and French Colonies. The way that state actors associated the deaths with the names of these places reflects how they came to grips with the geographical scope encompassed by the cultural backgrounds of the cyclone’s victims. Reading the archival record critically, however, we find that those who were caught in the storm were not just from all over the world. These were people who carried with them local beliefs, regional practices, and transnational ideas that destabilize the very notion of a single world – that is, a global system composed of nations, states, and markets.

Kanosuke Okamoto’s father, a victim of the storm, was one among many who left Wakayama in the late nineteenth century. In previous chapters, we have seen how the exodus of hyakushō could be attributed to the different understandings of the relationship between human and nature held by state actors on the one hand, and non-state actors on the other. However, another factor that contributed to their decision to go abroad lay in the fact that it

²⁹⁰ Ganter Interviews.

²⁹¹ See, for example, Martínez and Vickers, *The Pearl Frontier*.

²⁹² See Ian Townsend’s meticulously researched table of known deaths associated with Tropical Cyclone Mahina, Ian Townsend Dissertation, pp. 255-261.

provided an escape from conscription. Like many other people who left Wakayama for the Arafura Zone, he likely did so as a stowaway in order to avoid medical health screenings and other official administrative procedures that would have made him into a soldier for the Japanese empire.²⁹³ Even when the empire managed to locate these people abroad and send them a conscription order (*shōjūreiō*), as was the case around the time of the Russo-Japanese war, they would ‘politely’ refuse (“*akagami nado kuso kurae*”; lit.: ‘that red paper can eat my shit’).²⁹⁴ The enforcement of the conscription law was part of state actors’ attempts to reform the country according to the model of the modern nation state of the West. It was one of many social transformations that were deemed crucial for a collective group of people, or nation, to climb the ranks of a hierarchically-ordered cultural system with universal pretensions. Those who study Global History tend to see such developments in the non-Western world as permutations of the same set – each of which narrates a story that reifies the idea of singular world (or ‘globe’) to which humanity, in its entirety, is heir. In rejecting state-enforced military service and refusing to let their personhood be defined by the nation state, people such as Kanosuke Okamoto’s father opened themselves up to a plurality of worlds in which neither the state nor the nation were central to everyday life.

Pedro Guivarra, another victim of the storm, left the province of Masbate on the eve of the Filipino Revolution in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Although located at some remove from Manila, Masbate too was a site where revolutionary indigenous forces emerged out of the deep resentment resulting from centuries of colonial interventions in the archipelago’s social fabric. In the wake of Jose Rizal’s assassination, Masbate’s own Pulahanes militia rose up in Cataingan (etymologically: “a place of manure”), marched across the island, and sacked the provincial capital in 1898.²⁹⁵ Unlike his compatriots, Pedro Guivarra expressed discontent towards the colonial conditions within the Spanish Philippines in a different way. He sought a better life by leaving the country, like many other so-called ‘Manila men’, and ended up in the Arafura Zone.²⁹⁶ There he would interact with people such as Okamoto without any desire to contribute to burgeoning nationalist movements. These were not the Filipino-Japanese interactions revolving around the desire to secure a guarantee of independence from the Spanish Empire: they were neither diplomatic experiments emerging out of indigenous

²⁹³ See, for example, Jinzaburō Seto’s interview in Ogawa, *Pearls of the Arafura Sea*, 39.

²⁹⁴ Ogawa Taira’s interviews with returnees; Ogawa, 39.

²⁹⁵ Renato Pelorina, “Local History from Below: The Pulahanes of Masbate, Philippines (1898-1905).,” *Asian Studies: Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia* 56, no. 1 (2020): 20–44.

²⁹⁶ On how such people came to be referred to as ‘Manilamen’ see, Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr, “Manilamen and Seafaring: Engaging the Maritime World beyond the Spanish Realm,” *Journal of Global History* 7, no. 3 (October 2012): 364–88.

revolutionary movements, nor were they grassroots attempts to secure arms for them.²⁹⁷ Considering how the Tagalogs ended up turning against Masbate's Pulahanes despite the latter's revolutionary efforts, we might want to think twice about calling Guivarra 'Filipino' (or for that matter calling people such as Okamoto 'Japanese').²⁹⁸ Pedro Guivarra neither accepted the colonial conditions nor did he join the burgeoning nationalist movement whose ultimate goal was to establish a nation state for itself. Instead, he left the country and, like Okamoto, was open to exploring different social realities which did not revolve around state or nation.

Okamoto and Guivarra may have died in the storm of 1899, but they were survived by many others who shared the same ambivalence towards the totalizing projects of states and empires. Albert and Moses left Wari Island (present-day Papua New Guinea) after colonial 'pacification' had severely altered the shape of daily life in the Massim region.²⁹⁹ What was once a place in which beliefs in reciprocal and translocal forms of hospitality guaranteed a sense of freedom became, by the late nineteenth century, a reservoir of traditional lifestyles to be governed by statesmen and studied by anthropologists. The corresponding customs, discussed by the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski as 'the Kula Ring', would later become the basis for ideas surrounding the 'gift economy' – a way of understanding human material exchanges that call the assumptions and conclusions of classical political economy into question. Malinowski paints a rather ahistorical picture of the cultures of people such as Albert and Moses, but in reality of course their customs were all but frozen in time. Albert and Moses brought the cosmopolitan beliefs and desires that gave birth to such customs out with them into the Arafura Zone. There was also Douglas Pitt, who most likely witnessed first-hand the enduring legacy of slavery in post-Emancipation Jamaica. As a descendant of both the former slave population and the English aristocracy, Pitt was intimately familiar with the divisive nature of colonial life, made obviously apparent to him in the years leading up to the Morant Bay Rebellion (1865). His departure from Kingston may be understood as a rejection of the coloniality of state-endorsed social configurations, and his arrival in the Arafura Zone might be thought of as an acceptance of something that was qualitatively different. Dead or alive,

²⁹⁷ On these Filipino-Japanese interactions see Josefa M. Saniel, *Japan and the Philippines, 1868-1898* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1973); Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London ; New York, NY: Verso, 2006), 152.

²⁹⁸ Pelorina, p. 29.

²⁹⁹ Martha Macintyre, "Warfare and the Changing Context of 'Kune' on Tubetube," *The Journal of Pacific History* 18, no. 1 (January 1, 1983): 11–34.

victims of the storm tended to be fugitives of some sort in the eyes of state officials and colonial authorities.³⁰⁰

Again, the documentary record tells us that the cyclone affected over a thousand people on the shores and islands.³⁰¹ It struck the waters that have historically connected the Walmbaria, the Mutumui, Wambara, Bakanambia, Yetteneru, Barungguan, Ombila, Kawadji, Pontunj, Pakadji, Otati, Mutjati, and Yadhaigana – people who might collectively be considered part of an extended social network of Pama Malnkana (People of the Sandbeach).³⁰² Here too, we could delve into the question of how the Pama Malnkana related to the authorities of nineteenth century colonial Queensland, but by now the point should be clear: the victims of Tropical Cyclone Mahina were people whose experiences challenge any attempt to render them historical subjects of nation or state-centric narratives. “Manilamen” were often not from Manila at all, “Japanese” were hyakushō from Shionomisaki village, natives from “New Guinea” were in fact Bwanabwana, and Cape York Aborigines were actually Pama Malnkana. These were people with little interest in joining national revolutionary movements, the military, or ‘traditional’ ways of life approved by colonial institutions. In other words, they had tenuous relationships to modern nation states and the essentially singular way they sought to organize social, political, economic, and cultural life across the globe.

Victims and survivors of Tropical Cyclone Mahina were thus frontline critics of processes that are now understood as part of ‘globalization’, but that does not mean they were not fostering global interconnections in other ways. Theirs was a competing kind of global connectivity that was rooted in their realization of a shared vulnerability to the forces of nature. Stories of the severity of the disaster circulated first among friends, families, and acquaintances. Then, they seeped into the communities of those who worked the waters of the Arafura Zone, and the many other groups that were directly or tangentially related. News of the storm quickly traversed the ocean, creating long-distance and cross-cultural networks of mourning. Mahina

³⁰⁰ Information on Douglass Pitt is scarce but his descendants have gathered information on the Facebook page “Mr Douglas Pitt Family Group (Kingston, Jamaica, Torres Straits)”, <https://www.facebook.com/MrDouglasPittFamilyGroup/> (last accessed 11 June 2022).

³⁰¹ Townsend, p. 106.

³⁰² See, for example, Sutton, Peter. “The Flinders Islands and Cape Melville People in History,” in Jean-Christophe Verstraete and Diane Hafner (eds), *Land and Language in Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf Country* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2016), 85–103; Herbert M. Hale and Norman B. Tindale, “Aborigines of Princess Charlotte Bay, North Queensland, Part 1”, *Records of the South Australian Museum*, 5, No. 1, 1933, p. 69; Thomson, Donald F. “The Dugong Hunters of Cape York,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 64 (1934), 237–264; Haddon, A. C. *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits*. Cambridge: University Press, 1, 1935; The cyclone made landfall between camps of the Yinini and Eibole groups of the Mutumui people, between what is now called Cape Melville and Barrow Point in Queensland, Australia.

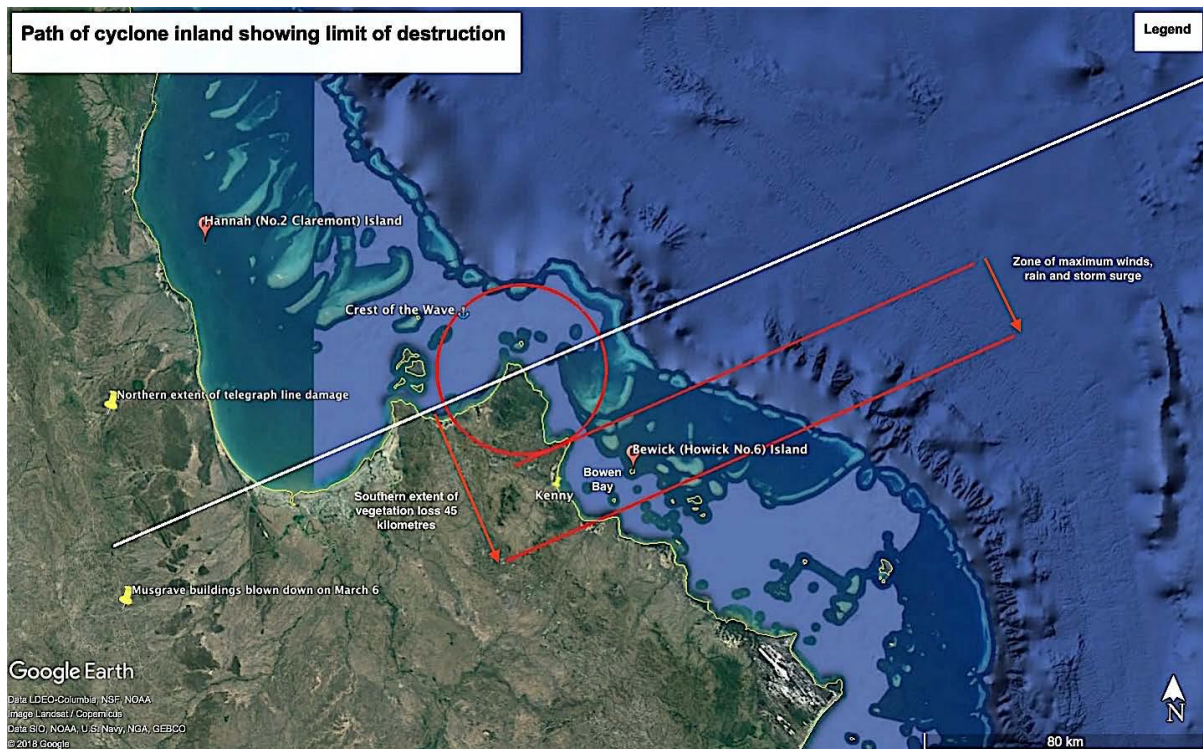


Fig. 1: Ian Townsend's estimation of the 1899 cyclone's track (white line). The area between the two red lines south of the eye represents the zone of strongest winds and rain, and area of highest predicted storm tide.
(Townsend, 2021, p. 185)

created a blueprint for the unique 'deathways' of, for example, hyakushō and members of their supporting networks, in subsequent decades.³⁰³

In a sketchbook drawn for his children, the fisher Fujita Kenji recalled the exact place where Nabiki Seigorō passed away. It was right by Mardi Island southwest of Fortescue Island (Western Australia). Fujita made sure to pass this memory on to his children, even if they had no inkling of who the person was. He paid his respects to the deceased in memory as he had likely done in practice. There was no headstone to commemorate the death. Its location was instead known as "the spot where basket stars grow." There is little we know about the circumstances surrounding Nabiki Seigorō's death, but it was one of many deaths in the communities of 'Japanese' fisherfolk resulting in watery graves across the Arafura Zone, from the Sulu archipelago to the Torres Strait. Other stories include that of Miyamoto Sannosuke, who had received permission from a sultan he had befriended to use an uninhabited island as a burial site.³⁰⁴ Or that of the skipper who was once asked to throw a photograph and pour out

³⁰³ The Historian Erik Seeman uses 'deathways' to talk about the act of dying not just as an individual biological phenomenon but one that includes its associated cultural aspects, such as deathbed scenes, corpse preparation, burial practices, funerals, mourning, and commemoration. See Erik R. Seeman, *Death in the New World: Cross-Cultural Encounters, 1492-1800*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, p. 2.

³⁰⁴ Ogawa, pp. 120-121.

the contents of a bottle of sake into the sea upon passing a seemingly uninhabited island.³⁰⁵ The photograph depicted the fiancée of a relative who was ‘buried’ there at the age of eighteen. The skipper did not know the location of this romantic tragedy but learned about it through the family’s specific way of mourning. Different ways of dying prompted different practices of remembrance and memorialization. They may have had little historical significance for the nation state, but they generated variegated narratives that had deep personal meanings and drove both individuals and groups to specific places. If these individual deaths inspired tragic and cautionary tales circulating among the oceanic community of *hyakushō*, the devastation caused by Tropical Cyclone Mahina would have produced a vast corpus of narratives to be remembered for generations to come. Only a handful of such narratives have resurfaced so far, but they offer unique insights into the transnational nature of mourning engendered by the disaster of 1899.

For Kanosuke Okamoto, the event was deeply transformative, leading him to follow in the footsteps of his father.³⁰⁶ He recalled a peculiar moment in which his father’s death was understood as part of a shared tragedy of the Arafura Zone. It was a time when he was gathering sea slugs close to the Great Barrier Reef, and one evening, when he and his crew had trouble keeping up with their sister ship, his ship went northbound alone. He noticed a single light trailing behind his own vessel and felt uneasy. When the moonlight broke through the clouds, the light that had been following him suddenly vanished, leaving no sign of any other ship in the vicinity. He did not think much of it at the time, but after two or three days, he went on land with his friend to get water and firewood in a nearby village. The islanders asked them whether they had come onto the shore on the previous nights, because they had been hearing loud noises on the coast every night. “We hear the sounds of many people running noisily and cannot sleep.” Realizing where he was, the sea slug fisher concluded that they had encountered the ghosts of not only Kanosuke’s father, but also the many others who drowned in the same waters.³⁰⁷ The islanders offered Kanosuke Okamoto closure, and he offered them an opportunity to remember a shared tragedy.

Tropical Cyclone Mahina generated a whole host of understandings of shared suffering. Several relatives of European businessmen who died in the storm decided to compile a booklet in their memory.³⁰⁸ A memorial tombstone was erected with the names of a handful of white

³⁰⁵ According to the recollection of a diving boat owner from Wakayama Prefecture in Japan, noted in Shimizu Akira 6, p. 58

³⁰⁶ Ogawa, pp. 120-121

³⁰⁷ Ogawa, pp. 120-121.

³⁰⁸ Anonymous, *The Pearling Disaster, 1899*.

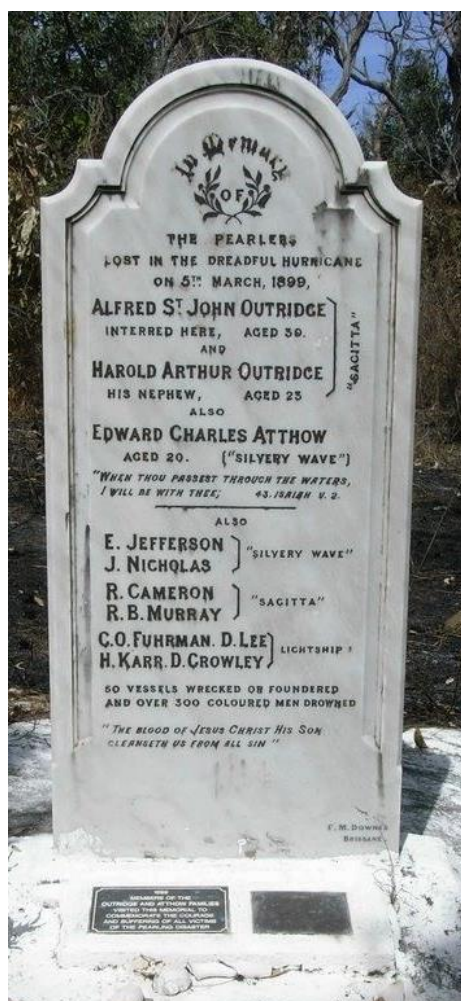


Fig. 2: Tombstone commemorating the casualties of Tropical Cyclone Mahina

men who died in the storm and a small note at the bottom mentioning that “over 300 hundred coloured men” also died (see Fig. 2). These attempts at narrating Mahina’s suffering have largely fallen on deaf ears – the way in which they treated some lives as more grievable than others did not seem to find much resonance, limiting their audience and leaving very few traces in any historiography.

Among the people that were hit the hardest, however, Tropical Cyclone Mahina was all but forgotten. Many decades after the event, the graves dotting the entire beach around Cape Melville were still being attended, “new shells and that [were] put around, marking out the graves”.³⁰⁹ How many stories about the storm’s consequences would have been told within limited and trusted confines – at the dinner table of the descendants of those who passed away in the storm or a visit to the family graves and other mourning rites? If not through their words, survivors passed on tales of shared suffering through their bodies, reaching and affecting direct

³⁰⁹ Ganter Interviews p. 324.

descendants who inherited secondhand traumas. Among the larger network of survivors, the disaster sped up and intensified the formulation of an ‘Arafurese’ subjectivity – starting with an expansion of the scale and scope of practices of hospitality.

IV.2 Hospitality

Storms are an integral part of life for those who called the Arafura Zone their home. A wide variety of marine invertebrates even rely on the turbulence associated with storms for their biological continuity.³¹⁰ They seem to wait until a storm event before releasing their eggs and sperm out into the open sea. The fertilized eggs are transported by stronger currents and eddies up to several kilometers away, after which free-floating larvae come to be adopted by settlements in comfortable shelters elsewhere. Going from shelter to shelter over many generations, groups accommodate individual strangers to form settlements that span across vast distances in accordance with the currents of the ocean. Storms thus induced a kind of non-human hospitality, which, in turn, gave way to human forms of hospitality. As shellfish settlements grow larger, they become increasingly visible to human eyes, opening up the way to human minds and bellies. Indigenous communities all over the Arafura Zone possessed long culinary histories involving shellfish of all kinds, often used shell money in cross-regional interactions, and incorporated shells into their art. To speak of ‘money’ and ‘art’ here might be slightly misleading. Material exchanges were not solely about acquiring stuff – there was no money form that served as a substitute for a commodity, and no market to mediate supply and demand. Works of art were the products of livelihoods in which ‘subsistence’ and ‘play’ were interwoven – art was created by everyone, for everyone, and at any time. These cultural mechanisms, which were translated across oceans from the Arafura Zone back into ‘home’ communities through transnational flows, will be addressed in greater detail in the next section. What is important for now is that these were, in principle, open communities: open to welcoming outsiders into their own ways of consuming shellfish, but also turtle, dugong, and

³¹⁰ Although a systematic review has yet to be conducted, there is plenty of evidence to suggest correlations between fluid turbulence, reproductive behaviour and reproductive success in archaeogastropoda: Grange, K. R. (1976). Rough water as a spawning stimulus in some trochid and turbinid gastropods. *New Zealand Journal of Marine and Freshwater Research* 10, 203–16; Tanaka, T. and Ishida, O. (1983) Occurrence of planktonic larvae of the abalone. *Bulletin of Chiba Prefectural Fisheries Experimental Station* 41, 1–10; Sasaki, R. and Shepherd, S.A. (1995) Larval dispersal and recruitment of *Haliotis discus hannai* and *Tegula* spp. on Miyagi coasts, Japan. *Marine and Freshwater Research* 46, 519–529; Moran, A. L. (1997). Spawning and larval development of the black turban snail *Tegula funebris* (Prosobranchia: Trochidae). *Marine Biology* 128, 107–14; Shanks, A. L. (1998). Apparent oceanographic triggers to spawning of the limpet *Lottia digitalis* (Rathke). *Journal of Experimental Marine Biology and Ecology* 222, 31–41; Onitsuka et al., Reproduction and Early Life Ecology of Abalone *Haliotis diversicolor* in Sagami Bay, Japan, *Japan Agricultural Research Quarterly* 44(4) (2010):375–382.

other marine creatures – and open to cultural change based on such encounters. It was the type of hospitality and receptivity that made it possible to build collective livelihoods on the basis of the ever-shifting currents and tides of the Indian and Pacific Oceans – the very same currents and tides that gave birth to life-threatening storms and cyclones.

In 1859, a fourteen year old cabin boy by the name of Narcisse Pelletier (1844-1894) was left for dead by the captain and crew of the *Saint-Paul* on a beach facing the Coral Sea.³¹¹ Teetering on the brink of death, he was rescued and adopted by the Ohantaala, a coast-dwelling people who knew neither caste nor chief.³¹² They taught him how to swim, fish, and play. He became adept at hunting, dancing, planting, and foraging. Many of these activities would alternate according to the seasons, as Amglo – the name he received as one of the Ohantaala – would come to learn. He was taught the meaning of birdsong, and the tale of Traouais – the legendary fisherman in the sky whose light shines on the earth at night. Friends and family adorned themselves with shells pierced through their noses and hung around their necks, and Amglo himself carried a cylinder of hollow wood in his right earlobe and cosmetic scars across his body.³¹³ He also learned how the dead were buried at *Manillecalgo* (burial ground) and covered with shells, fishbones, dugong and whale bones, and a turtle's head. The man who was once Narcisse Pelletier came to be fully welcomed into the ways of the Ohantaala. After living with the Ohantaala for seventeen years, Amglo was found by the crew of the pearling ship *John Bell*, who concocted an elaborate scheme to 'rescue' him. He was practically abducted from his home and forcibly taken to France, a country whose culture and language he could barely remember. The hospitality extended by the Ohantaala transformed Amglo's sense of self and the very ways in which he related to the world.

³¹¹ Narcisse Pelletier was reluctant to have his story told, but a doctor by the name of Constant Merland convinced him that he would be able to make some money from it. The following section is based on Merland's retelling: Constant Merland, *Dix-sept ans chez les sauvages. Les aventures de Narcisse Pelletier*, (Paris: 1876), trans. Stephanie Anderson 2009.

³¹² "everyone is on a footing of complete and utter equality. If the tribe possesses a common territory, individual property is unknown." Merland, p. 163.

³¹³ See also, Hale and Tindale, "Aborigines of Princess Charlotte Bay, North Queensland", 1933-36: 139.

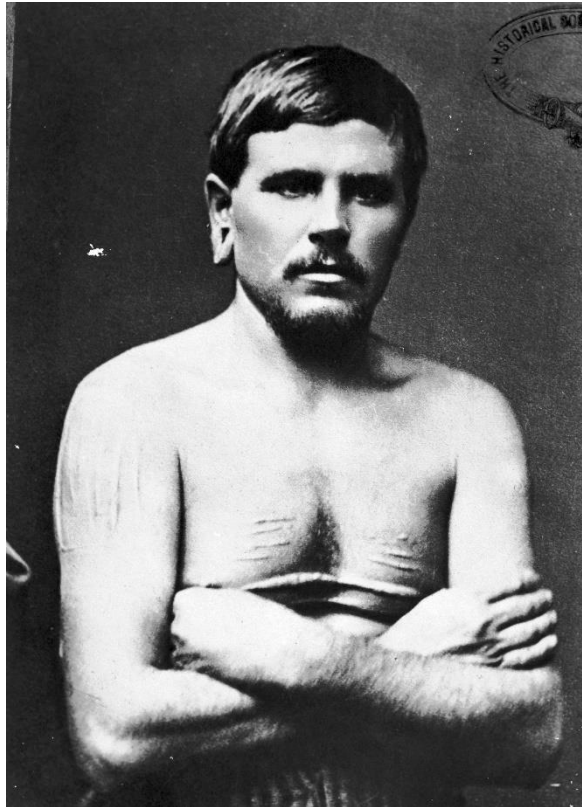


Fig. 3: Amglo, the man formerly known as Narcisse Pelletier

The adoption of outsiders into indigenous communities, regardless of the color of their skin or their cultural habits, was commonly seen in this part of the Arafura Zone. Earlier, convicts such as Thomas Pamphlett (1789-1838) and William Buckley (1780-1856), or the sailor James Morrill (1824-1865), had undergone experiences similar to those of Pelletier/Amglo. This practice of adoption was an extension of forms of hospitality deeply rooted in the cultures of Pama Malnkana, who often observed the principle of marrying with speakers of other languages (that is, outside of their own community) as well as the practice of returning deceased members of neighboring groups.³¹⁴ It was part and parcel of the openness to change that helped sea-bound cultures such as theirs to continually survive – displaying a dynamism and inventiveness in their encounters with helpless outcasts of industrial civilization, colonial administrators, and the forces of nature that scholars of coloniality and empire tend to overlook.³¹⁵

³¹⁴ On the practices of marrying outside of one's own language group (language exogamy) see, Sutton, p. 99. On the practice of returning the dead, see Merland, p. 217; In William Buckley's case it was not the Pama Malnkana but the Kulin who extended hospitality.

³¹⁵ See also Gerald Vizenor's concept of 'survivance', Gerald Vizenor (ed.), *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, University of Nebraska Press (2008).

Not all parts of the Arafura Zone of the late nineteenth century were known for their hospitality. On the other end of the Coral Sea, encounters between indigenous communities and outsiders had often been marked by intense hostilities. The ship that brought Narcisse Pelletier from Marseilles to this other side of the planet had actually crashed into a reef close to Yela (Rossel Island, Papua New Guinea) on the way to Sydney. On this “Melanesian Island”, as the narrator of *Dix-sept ans chez les sauvages* explained, Pelletier and the rest of the crew of the *Saint-Paul* “found themselves in the presence of the most inhospitable tribes in the world”.³¹⁶ Many crew members appeared to have been killed, and Pelletier himself was injured trying to escape some of the skirmishes that took place around Yela. To outsiders, particularly Euro-Americans, the coastal areas of New Guinea had come to be known as places of violent contact with so-called savages. Yet, outsiders themselves often played a role in provoking and perpetuating such hostilities. The same cultural dynamism and fluidity that made indigenous communities so hospitable could also solidify, producing uncompromising and defensive attitudes.

Impactful events continually triggered a back-and-forth between these attitudinal modes. They instigated socio-cultural changes that spread far and wide and leave us to wonder how indigenous actors could ever have been considered a ‘people without history’. In 1885, a British captain by the name of John Friar and his crew anchored at Haraharau Bay to collect wood and water on Basilaki Island, in the eastern part of the Arafura Zone also known as the Massim region (Papua New Guinea). They were welcomed initially, but something seemed to have upset the local residents – Captain Friar and several other members of his crew were killed, a handful of others escaped, and a heavy handed reprisal by a British Royal Navy corvette followed.³¹⁷ According to a local man named Bailala – whose trust was earned by the scientist Nicholas Miklouho-Maclay – Captain John Friar had it coming.³¹⁸ Several years earlier, Friar had recruited two locals at Haraharau Bay to work for him on his schooner. Terribly unhappy with the working conditions, they jumped off the ship not too far south-east of Basilaki, near Wari Island, but they did not survive. Friar made neither material nor symbolic amends for the loss of the communities they belonged to. The captain’s careless disregard for the feelings of members of the communities on which he, and outsiders like him relied, was not something peculiar to him. It was a common tendency among Euro-American captains who sought to

³¹⁶ Merland, p. 138.

³¹⁷ Clive Moore, *New Guinea: Crossing Boundaries and History*, 1st Board Book Ed edition (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003).

³¹⁸ Hugh Hastings Romilly, *From My Verandah in New Guinea: Sketches and Traditions* (D. Nutt, 1889).

recruit locals to work in the maritime industries, and they came to be known for doing so by extremely devious means.³¹⁹ Here we are offered a glimpse into a vicious cycle of hostility perfectly capable of producing what is usually considered the stuff of history.

The 1899 cyclone marked a point in which one such ring of cause and effect came to be broken. Across the Massim region, locals from the world's supposedly "most inhospitable" places welcomed strangers and adopted them into their communities around the turn of the century. "Jimmy Koto", a former diver employed on a pearling lugger, came to live in Vanatinai (Louisiade Archipelago, Papua New Guinea).³²⁰ Mabe Tamiya, who drew some attention due to having one short arm, was welcomed into a Basilaki Island community, the place that had earlier been ravaged by outsiders following the death of Captain Friar.³²¹ Heijirō Murakami arrived on Thursday Island in 1894, went on to work as a tender on a pearling lugger, and came to live in Naiwara village (Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea) in 1900.³²² He was described as being "heavily tattooed" on "both arms & chest", possibly indicating acceptance into a local Papuan community.³²³ Each and every one of these outsiders developed intimate relationships with locals, parented children, and became part of the regional socio-cultural fabric.³²⁴ What they had in common was that they were part of an extended network of victims of Tropical Cyclone Mahina – a cat's cradle that linked previously disconnected cultural communities. In a process resembling the reproductive dynamics of marine invertebrates to an almost uncanny degree, the storm of 1899 facilitated cross-cultural adoptions and forms of hospitality among human communities. In the following section, I examine how these newly created circuits of hospitality, but also reciprocity and mutual aid were mediated by languages peculiar to the Arafura Zone.

³¹⁹ These practices have come to be known as 'blackbirding', which included kidnapping locals, or destroying their canoes at sea and threatening to leave them to drown unless they join the crew.

³²⁰ Iwamoto, p. 42.

³²¹ Iwamoto, p. 44.

³²² Iwamoto, p. 45.

³²³ The tattoos might also indicate his roots in the commoner culture of early Meiji-era Japan – since there are no pictures it is hard to tell. Australian National Archives, Prisoner of War/Internee; Murakami, Heijirō; Year of birth - 1875; Nationality – Japanese MJ18500.

³²⁴ Several other names, figures, and details appear in Hiromitsu Iwamoto's study of the pre-war Japanese presence in Papua and New Guinea based on extensive oral histories conducted in collaboration with descendants. But it was not just 'Japanese' who came to be increasingly interwoven into socio-cultural fabric of the eastern parts of the Arafura Zone. Not much is known about the incorporation of 'Malays', 'Filipinos', 'Aborigines', and others within this area, other than the fact that they were adopted into local communities and intermarried. See, for example, R. G Crocombe, *Asia in the Pacific Islands: Replacing the West* (Suva, Fiji: IPS Publications, University of the South Pacific, 2007), chap. 3.

IV.3 Linguistic Receptivity

From the very outset, the various actors that met on the waters of the Arafura Zone had no shared verbal language to communicate in. They could not tell each other what the distance was to the next fishing ground or how many days it would take for them to reach land once again. Yet they basked in the same sunlight and weathered the same storms. They drank freshwater from the same sources and ate eggs from the same gannet and turtle nests. Through gestures and other forms of nonverbal communication, people from Wakayama, Masbate, Wari Island, and the Pama Malnkana quickly acquired a shared vocabulary that ensured basic survival.

By the 1890s, the outlines of what seems to be a creole language had emerged. Facing danger in the water, a Rotuman (Fiji) deckhand could shout “komawana”, which to an Illocano (Philippines) diver or a tender from Tanami (Japan) would immediately be understood as “I cannot hold out or protect myself”.³²⁵ On the decks of ships, people who initially did not share a mutually intelligible language could reliably pass on information that was crucial to keeping crewmembers alive as they engaged in the work of foraging marine creatures on the seabed. In the towns, this language was likely used by ‘Cingalese’ to live functioning everyday lives in ‘Japanese’ boarding houses.³²⁶ It was used by ‘South Sea Islanders’ at Fing Luck’s house on Hargrave Street, where they gambled with ‘Danes’, ‘West Indians’, and the likes of adventurous authors such as Colin Simpson.³²⁷ Various others utilized it to make their way into the ‘Kanaka’ opium dens. People who may have never met each other before, could thus rely on a common tongue to call on each other for help, to engage in pastimes, and to generally coexist.

In the wake of Tropical Cyclone Mahina, such linguistic cross-pollinations began multiplying at a rapid pace. It was as if the cyclone blew away any remaining language barriers that stood in the way of cross-cultural collaboration. People freely used words from Meriam Mir and Kala Lagaw Ya (indigenous languages of the Torres Strait), “Sandal-wood English”, Kishū-ben and Iyo-ben (now considered Japanese ‘dialects’ but still largely languages in their own right at the time), Illocano and Cebuano (‘Filipino’ languages), Paman languages (indigenous languages of Cape York), and many more – blending them into a complex *mélange*

³²⁵ Queensland inquests, ITM2733413, p. 7.

³²⁶ Anna Shnukal, “The Sri Lankan Settlers of Thursday Island,” in *Navigating Boundaries: The Asian Diaspora in Torres Strait*, ed. Anna Shnukal, Guy Ramsay, and Yuriko Nagata (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004), 161–201.

³²⁷ Guy Ramsay, “The Chinese Diaspora in Torres Strait Cross-Cultural Connections and Contentions on Thursday Island,” in *Navigating Boundaries: The Asian Diaspora in Torres Strait*, ed. Anna Shnukal, Guy Ramsay, and Yuriko Nagata (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004), 66–67.

that continuously changed depending on the interlocutors at hand and the situations they faced in their daily lives.³²⁸ This indeterminacy and openness in terms of language use paved the way for intensified interactions between non-state actors in the Arafura Zone.

The life of Isokichi Komine gives us an idea of how this process came about. Arriving on Thursday Island, Queensland in 1890, Komine worked in a pearling crew as a pump-hand and quickly acquired the skills and recognition to become a diver. In the subsequent years, he leased his own boat and worked the waters around Cape York Peninsula, occasionally crossing Dutch, German, and British territorial boundaries to fish in the waters around New Guinea. Unlike other hyakushō in the Arafura Sea around the turn of the twentieth century, Komine often engaged with state actors whose interests could be found in the expansion of both formal and informal empire. He worked with Japanese businessmen and settler colonialists, and German and British colonial authorities. This is one of the reasons why we find many more traces of his life in the documentary record, and why the few scholars who have been interested in Komine see him as a “settler” or settler colonialist.³²⁹ There was, however, much more to his life than the act of settling down as a colonial subject of the Japanese empire. In fact, his was a life that was characterized by constant movement across seas and oceans and, rather ironically, continually unsettling. Feeling somewhat at home in the Torres Strait, or enticed by the advantages that come with being a naturalised citizen, Isokichi Komine applied for naturalisation in Queensland in 1898. His application was unsuccessful and he would have had to fall back on a different sense of belonging, which happened to be offered by another community in the making. Like other hyakushō in the Arafura Zone, Komine lived alongside and interacted with a highly heterogeneous group of people, paying little heed to their civilizational status – much to the disapproval of Japanese state actors who saw such horizontal interactions as blemishing Japan’s image on the international stage.³³⁰ These were people whose lives revolved around the ocean, and who were deeply affected by Tropical Cyclone Mahina. If Isokichi Komine had not witnessed Tropical Cyclone Mahina with his own eyes, he would have most certainly heard of its disastrous effects from his colleagues, acquaintances, and friends.

³²⁸ Missionaries such as Archibald Wright Murray saw this fluid and ever-changing language as a simple and broken form of English (“Sandalwood English”), Archibald W. Murray, *Forty Years’ Mission Work in Polynesia and New Guinea, from 1835 to 1875*, London Missionary Society, 1892, p. 450.

³²⁹ See, for example, Hiromitsu Iwamoto, *Nanshin: Japanese Settlers in Papua and New Guinea, 1890-1949*, Canberra: The Journal of Pacific History (1999).

³³⁰ Watanabe, 濠洲探検報告書 [Australia Travel Report], 75.

By the time disaster struck in 1899, Komine was fully immersed in the non-state actor networks of solidarity that first emerged in Arafura Sea (Chapter 3). It was most likely here that he came into contact with Kiapsel and Imbaul from the Tanga Islands (Papua New Guinea), who had been working in the Arafura Sea since the 1880s.³³¹ Shortly after the cyclone, the two Tangans involved Komine in their plans to reform their societies back home, taking him on a long journey across the Coral and Solomon Seas. Witness accounts of Komine's visit to the beach at Amfar, on Boang Island (Tanga Islands), reveal how Tangans "engage[d] Komine in a reciprocal exchange relationship modelled to some extent on their own exchange relationships in which big men buy pigs from supporters with shell valuables and then redistribute the pigs".³³² It was a deeply political act orchestrated by Imbaul and Kiapsel to end internecine violence, which they saw as hurting the Tangans more than helping them. In the words of Tiwas, an elder who attended the peacemaking event as a little boy:

Baul said 'All these men killed that man Murngimfis. Here they are. They ate him.' Baul spoke to Komine 'I want you to speak to us. We must stop fighting, we must be afraid and fear your kind of spears. We are ignorant of them. We must live together as one. Tell us to live together as one. We must rid ourselves of this fighting and of our feuds. We must live together as a group. We will show you.' They shot at some clusters of coconuts, the coconuts at Anifnabie. (Have those coconuts died, or are they still there?) They shot and shot, again and again.

The event could not have taken place without a considerable degree of trust and goodwill between Komine, Imbaul, Kiapsel, and the other Tangans. The dangers involved in living a life at sea, particularly the Arafura Sea, had created a shared sense of vulnerability vis-à-vis nature, and the cyclone of 1899 made this ever more obvious. This was the basis of the trust that created new circuits of reciprocity, hospitality, and mutual aid mediated, in the first instance, by language.

In his dealings with people from all over the Arafura Zone, Isokichi Komine came to acquire the belief that nobody can realistically avoid learning other languages throughout their lifetimes. Komine himself spoke English, German, Spanish, "Pidgin" and "several indigenous

³³¹ Charles A. Price with Elizabeth Baker, 'Origins of Pacific Island Labourers in Queensland, 1863-1904: A Research Note', *Journal of Pacific History*, 11 (1976), 116; and Robert J. Foster, "Komine and Tanga: A Note on the History of German New Guinea," *Journal of Pacific History* 22, no. 1 (January 1987): 59.

³³² Foster, 60-61.

languages”.³³³ He became somewhat of a preacher of language learning, telling people he worked with “if you remembered one word of a foreign language a day, you would be pretty fluent in one language in one year”.³³⁴ Here, ‘fluency’ was not meant as an abstract ideal in order to show cultural sophistication. For Komine and others who had weathered the storms, language was a pragmatic tool to establish goodwill. Its form mattered less than its content. Sometime between 1901 and 1907, Komine’s boat *Zabra* had wrecked on a reef close to Ponam Island (North of Manus Island, Papua New Guinea).³³⁵ Komine and his crew were saved by the *luluai* (chief), who invited them to stay on the island. It was the beginning of an enduring reciprocal relationship, attested to by the *luluai*’s tombstone which carries Komine’s name.³³⁶ Water-bound people such as Isokichi Komine, who were often at the mercy of nature and therefore had to frequently rely on complete strangers, **instinctually** understood language use as a function of reciprocity and mutual aid.

If individual episodes of shipwrecks and rescues could establish life-long reciprocal relationships, disasters of the scale of Tropical Cyclone Mahina created a type of reciprocity between a larger number of people that endured across swathes of time and space. They sparked, across the Arafura Zone, an awareness of what language could be used for, making people receptive towards language change and language learning. Linguistic openness enabled the Mutumui to teach people such as Kanosuke Okamoto and Shōtarō Takimoto how to use the little soaks along the beaches around Cape Melville (Northern Queensland) as sources for drinkable water.³³⁷ Residents of Omanini Point crossed awkward linguistic barriers to show other thirsty visitors how to use the fresh-water springs that could be found below sea-level.³³⁸ ‘Japanese’ referred to food as ‘taka’ (from ‘tucker’)³³⁹, and ‘Filipinos’ would understand that as an overarching term that might include “namas” (from ‘namasu’, raw vegetables and seafood marinated in rice vinegar), thinly-sliced mackerel eaten raw with soy sauce³⁴⁰, – or, on a good day, “rice with all kinds of beans in it, all fancy cooking”.³⁴¹

³³³ Interview with Komine’s nephew’s daughter in Iwamoto, *Nanshin*, 52.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Iwamoto dates the event to 1907, whereas Foster suggests that it might have happened as early as 1902. Cf. Iwamoto, *Nanshin*, 54–55; Foster, “Komine and Tanga: A Note on the History of German New Guinea,” 57.

³³⁶ Iwamoto’s interviews with Ponam Island elders Sohō, Alphonse, and Mohak, Iwamoto, *Nanshin*, 121.

³³⁷ See Ogawa, *Pearls of the Arafura Sea*, 120–21.; e.g. April 7 1925 entry in Matsumoto, *Diary of Takimoto Shōtarō*. As described by Tindale, 1933, p. 69.

³³⁸ Tindale, 1933, p. 69. “Water is found at Omanini Point: the natives tell of a. At high tide they dive down and drink; at other times they lower shell buckets into the sea to obtain supplies.”

³³⁹ Takimoto Shotaro diary, e.g. entry for Feb. 10th 1925.

³⁴⁰ Ganter Interview with Chappy Playo, p. 350.

³⁴¹ Ganter Interview with Richard Ah Mat, p. 3.

As late as the 1970s, the anthropologist Athol Chase found remnants of these developments (particularly from Japanese languages) in the language of the Lockhart River people (see fig. 3). He saw it as a result of the many intercultural interactions they engaged in, particularly with Japanese fishers, in a historical period known locally as ‘luggertime’ (or ‘luggerkuma’, and sometimes ‘Japaneeekuma’), starting in the late nineteenth century.³⁴² These were interactions that came out of trusting relationships:

unlike European captains, the Japanese are remembered for honouring agreements to return crews to their home shores after an agreed period of service [...] Most importantly, the Japanese were not ‘flash’ (that is, proud or pretentious): they ate and slept with Aborigines and respected Aboriginal knowledge of coasts, weather and bushfoods.³⁴³

Based on his ethnographic fieldwork among the Lockhart River people, the anthropologist goes on to describe the outcomes of these trusting relationships as follows:

a new initiation into manhood took place in the hard life aboard the sailing vessels, in the dangerous reef waters, and in the various ports where yet other strangers posed a constant threat through unknown methods of sorcery and physical violence. Out of this new and exciting rite of passage grew a feeling of self-reliance which cut across the more localised dependencies upon kin and totem. From the cross-cultural camaraderie of the boat decks a special creole language emerged, and new songs and dances known today as *thaypu*, or ‘Island style’ rose in popularity to threaten with their vigour and inventiveness the old traditional forms which had hitherto provided the only structures for formal social activity.³⁴⁴

Chase was one of the first to take the perspectives of the Lockhart River people into serious consideration in dealing with the topic of cross-cultural interactions involving indigenous Australians, offering an immensely valuable resource to those whose interest lay in the transnational interactions between the diverse cast of non-state actors who resided in the Arafura Zone. However, by understanding the product of the linguistic exchanges between

³⁴² Chase, “‘All Kind of Nation,’” 11.

³⁴³ Chase, 14.

³⁴⁴ Chase, 13.

‘Japanese’ and ‘Lockhart River people’ as a creole language, Chase inadvertently took on a state and nation-centric view of language that does not account for the fact that *all* languages are continually in flux. Languages associated with states or nations were once the products of creolisation themselves, and they continue to be affected by the same processes if not for attempts to straitjacket them into static forms comprehensible across imagined communities.

What emerged through the interactions of ‘Lockhart River people’ and ‘Japanese,’ ‘Jamaicans’ and ‘Filipinos’, or ‘New Guineans’ and ‘Malays’ were not creole languages, but languages like any other – languages which we might tentatively call Arafures. These were not languages of an imagined national community (such as Australia, the Philippines, or Japan) whose continuity was safeguarded by state power. They were languages of a transnational culture that was fostered by the network of survivors of Tropical Cyclone Mahina.

ABORIGINAL TRANSCRIPTION	MEANING	POSSIBLE FORM	JAPANESE ENGLISH TRANSLATION
<i>ikuramu</i>	we go	<i>iku</i>	go
<i>irati</i>	boat runs	?	
<i>umay</i>	woman	<i>omae?</i>	you (as used by men to women) perhaps also from delicious or good in Japanese
<i>churumpu</i>	black man	<i>kurombō</i>	blackman
<i>churuchuru</i>	child	?	
<i>sagi</i>	any drink	<i>saké</i>	saké (Japanese fermented drink)
<i>kuyima</i>	come back	<i>koi ima</i>	come now
<i>tuning</i>	trochus shell	<i>tōnen</i>	trochus
<i>ma nandu uki nu</i>	big one	<i>ma nanto ōki no</i>	what a large ... (ōki — big, large)
<i>ukuyti</i>	hold course	<i>yukute</i>	course
<i>ma ami nandu ukinu</i>	big rain comes	<i>ma ame nanto ōkino</i>	what a big rain comes (ame — rain)
<i>subu</i>	small boy	?	
<i>misakuru</i>	eat food	<i>meshi kurau</i>	eat food (meshi — rice/food kurau — eat)
<i>atama</i>	head of a person	<i>atama</i>	head
<i>namaku</i>	trepang	<i>namako</i>	trepang
<i>kami</i>	turtle	<i>kame</i>	turtle
<i>namas</i>	specific Japanese cuisine	<i>namasu?</i>	raw and vinegar — Japanese for pickling fish and vegetables in vinegar

Fig. 4: Athol Chase’s language transfer table

IV.4 The Materiality of Trust

Accompanying the proliferation of cross-cultural interactions in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Mahina was the circulation of an increasing amount of stuff. It was not just gestured or spoken

language through which people conveyed a willingness to enter into relational circuits of hospitality, reciprocity, and mutual aid. Material objects often spoke directly of such intentions.

No wonder then that Isokichi Komine – who played an important role in the peacemaking efforts of the Tangans in the direct aftermath of the 1899 disaster – came to amass a rather sizeable personal collection of artifacts. After the events at Amfar (Boang Island, Tanga Islands, Papua New Guinea), Komine became increasingly interconnected with people of the Massim and the larger Lapita cultural area – drawing them simultaneously into his own networks that spanned across the Arafura Zone: from Celebes in the Dutch East Indies to French New Caledonia.³⁴⁵ By the 1910s, he was known to possess over 3,000 items ranging from artworks to tools for subsistence. In his dealings with local people, Komine attempted to use local languages, and endeavored to abide by local customs – resulting in the creation of bonds of trust through which objects began to travel.

Why was Isokichi Komine holding onto these items? He was certainly well-aware of their value in the eyes of the modern anthropologist and the audiences of industrial metropolises. Figures such as the Tokyo Imperial University Professor Shōgorō Tsuboi (1863-1913) ultimately relied on intermediaries such as Komine to introduce them to the regions they were interested in studying.³⁴⁶ Moreover, the Chicago Field Museum and the Leipzig Museum of Ethnography had expressed interest in purchasing Komine's collection.³⁴⁷ But a lust for profit does not fully explain why he went through the trouble of transporting and keeping a cumbersome bunch of unsorted objects with him for years. For Komine, part of the value of the artifacts might have been rooted in his own curiosity about the cultures of those who utilized them. Items in his possession such as the fishing kite symbolized ways of life in which leisure was not clinically separated from work, and art suffused the everyday instead of being elevated to a higher realm of experience.

Regardless of the rationale that led Komine to acquire his collection, the collection itself was a testament to the many relationships of trust that he had cultivated with local communities. In this light, we might understand why Komine eventually chose to sell his collection to the anthropologist Albert B. Lewis (1867-1940). Although Lewis' boss, the anthropologist George A. Dorsey (1868-1931) had specifically directed him to get a hold on as many materials as

³⁴⁵ Iwaya Bakuai, *ude ippon kara: seikō katsureki*, 東亜堂書房 1916, p. 168.

³⁴⁶ On the links between Isokichi Komine and Shōgorō Tsuboi, via Buddhist figures such as Yoshinobu Tatsue and Yashitarō Uehara, see: Hidetoshi Wada, 大谷探検隊の一側面南洋諸島を調査した龍江義信の事績を中心として, 佛教學研究 70 37-, 2014-03-10.

³⁴⁷ Gerry Barton and Stefan Dietrich, *This Ingenious and Singular Apparatus: Fishing Kites of the Indo-Pacific* (Heidelberg: Völkerkundemuseum vPST, 2009), 142.

possible for the Field Museum³⁴⁸, Lewis underwent a transformation during his fieldwork in the 1910s that steered him toward conducting ethnographical work instead.³⁴⁹ He started realizing that new languages needed to be learned, and that first-hand observations of the day-to-day lives of villagers were just as important as, if not even more important than, capturing whatever material is left of a ‘rapidly vanishing indigene’.³⁵⁰ Roughly a decade after Komine had left Thursday Island, Lewis met him in German New Guinea. He was the one to eventually acquire Komine’s collection³⁵¹, even though it was promised to the director of the Leipzig Museum, who was infuriated upon hearing the news.³⁵² Albert Lewis came to embrace the methods of participant observation, while Komine had done his fair share of observant participation – it is quite likely that the two would have gotten along.

As recipients of treasured artifacts from the larger Lapita cultural area, Lewis and Komine were witnessing first-hand how indigenous practices of material exchange went ‘global’ in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Mahina. These were not forms of material exchange that can be reductively understood as ‘trade’. Rather, they were exchanges based on a desire to establish friendly mutual relations between an ever-growing cast of people – which began to include, since the disaster of 1899, a diverse cast of non-state actors who populated the Arafura Zone.³⁵³

An example can be seen in how a wide range of objects made their way from places such as the Massim, but also the Australian coasts, into the homes of fishing villages in Wakayama. They included conch shells, carved Baobab nuts, coconut sculptures, curios made of the shells of marine invertebrates and tortoises, wooden dowry plates, and ceremonial weapons. To this day, these artifacts accumulate dust on the shelves of an abandoned primary school building in Tanami village – a forlorn exhibition of objects that no longer speak for themselves. They were muted not just by the passage of time, but by the committees that placed these objects in a space they named ‘nanyōkan’ (South Seas Hall).³⁵⁴ While the objects initially

³⁴⁸ Robert L. Welsch, “Historical Ethnology. The Context and Meaning of the A. B. Lewis Collection,” *Anthropos* 94, no. 4/6 (1999): 451.

³⁴⁹ Welsch, 454.

³⁵⁰ On the relationship between the concept of the ‘vanishing indigene’ and racism, see Kim TallBear, “Genomic articulations of indigeneity” *Social Studies of Science* (2013: 43-4), pp. 509-533.

³⁵¹ As part of the A. B. Lewis Collection in Chicago’s Field Museum of Natural History, it constitutes the majority of the Bismarck Archipelago objects. Considering Komine’s vagrant background, however, we may perhaps cast doubt on the origin of some of the Bismarck Archipelago objects.

³⁵² Barton and Dietrich, *This Ingenious and Singular Apparatus*, 142.

³⁵³ For a discussion on possible interpretations of indigenous material exchanges that are not about barter or markets, see David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (London: Allen Lane, 2021), 22–24.

³⁵⁴ According to the staff of the Tanami kōminkan (2019) it was constructed as an annex to the Tanami primary school, presumably sometime in the 1960s, but quickly fell out of use.

showed the transnational nature of the material relations between the fishing villages of Wakayama and the Arafura Zone, they were recontextualized to commemorate the material legacy of empire. In 1992, a new ‘nanyōkan’ committee set up a smaller exhibition space within the Tanami primary school building, and boldly announced that the efforts of the pioneers of Tanami displayed within the cabinets remind us of the tale of Momotarō – in his modern iteration as a champion of imperial expansionism.

But the extraction of objects from the Arafura Zone into the homes of ordinary people was not simply another example in the history of ‘imperial collecting’.³⁵⁵ In my visits to the villages (2019), I discovered that some residents felt no need to heed the calls for donations of family heirlooms, choosing to commemorate the Arafurese connections symbolized by the objects in the privacy of their own home instead. As I examined carved Baobab nuts and an ashtray made of a giant shell in one living room in Taiji village, the descendant to whom these heirlooms belonged began addressing me in Tagalog. Either my face, name, or demeanour apparently gave them the impression that I would understand – and, considering my own relation to North Sulawesi and the Bangka Islands, it was perhaps not unjustified.³⁵⁶ These were not objects that symbolized a relationship between colonizers and colonized. Nor were they exotic objects signifying an unbridgeable cultural gap between the self and the other. In fact, they did the exact opposite: highlighting transnational connections, even after a century had passed since their relocation. Some of these objects were the exact items that emerge in the ethnographic literature as heirlooms exchanged for no other purpose than symbolizing the existence of ongoing or new relations of goodwill. Others were new creations by hyakushō living in the Arafura Zone who wanted to spread their name and gain renown back home – a direct translation of a custom of exchange that was practiced widely in the Massim region in the early twentieth century.

³⁵⁵ See, Maya Jasanoff, “Collectors of empire: Objects, conquests and imperial self-fashioning”, *Past and Present*; and more recently, Maia Wellington Gahtan and Eva-Maria Troelenberg (eds.), *Collecting and Empires An Historical and Global Perspective* (London and Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2019).

³⁵⁶ On the links between the indigenous languages of Sulawesi and Filipino languages see, for example, Noorduyin, J. "The languages of Sulawesi." *Papers in Austronesian Linguistics* No. 1. Pacific Linguistics, 1991, pp. 146-147.



Fig. 5: Shell ashtray in Taiji village home (photograph taken by author, 2019)

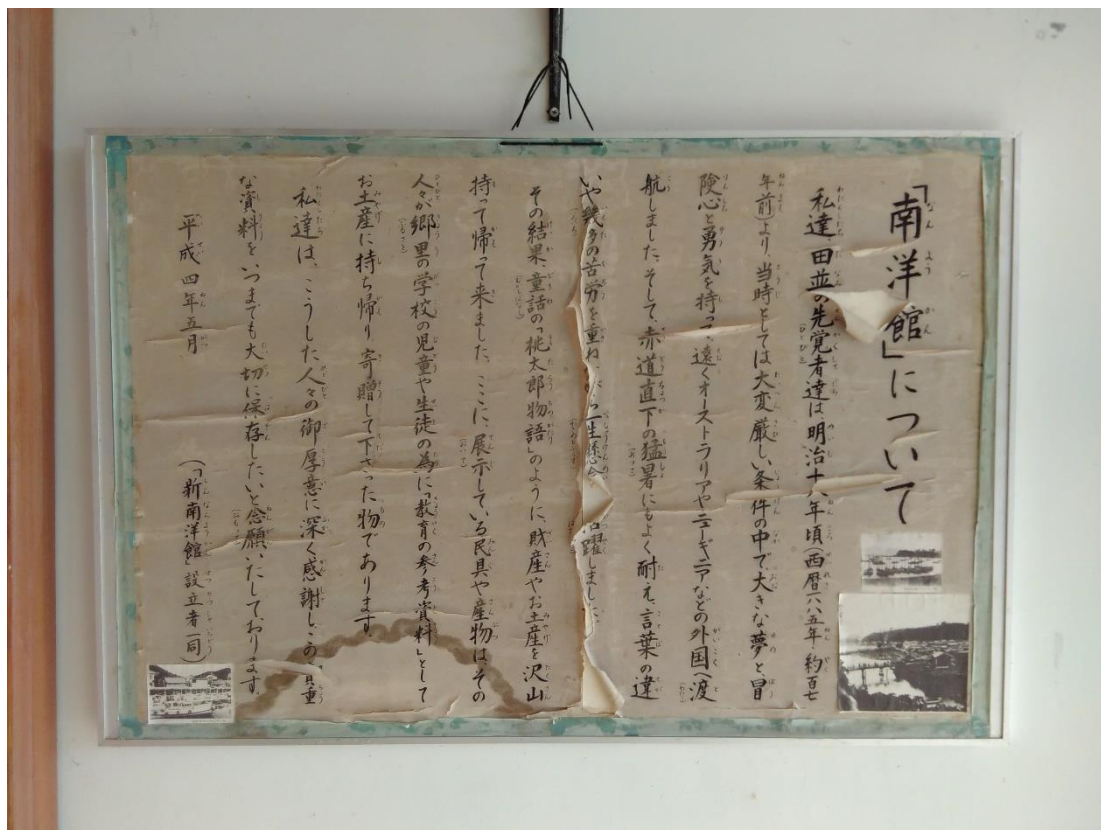


Fig. 6: Display of Arafurese objects in Old Tanami Primary School, Wakayama Prefecture (photographs by author, 2019)

IV.5 Becoming Arafurese

High mountain ranges and vast oceanic expanses tend to be thought of as natural borders between different states, nations, civilizations, and ‘races’. Yet these ‘barriers’ have, throughout history, often constituted bridges between culturally distinct groups of people. The nineteenth-century geographer Lev Mechnikov made this point using a set of examples starting with the Alps, where “the three great ethnic elements – Latins, Gauls, Germans – which divide western and central Europe, appear to us most intimately mixed and mutually penetrating”.³⁵⁷ He goes on:

Although the Pyrenean mountain range, in its middle part, serves as a clear-cut boundary between Languedoc and Aragonese nationalities, it did not prevent the Catalans from extending without interruption from Narbonne to Alicante, nor did it prevent the Vascons, Auskes or Euskes from occupying the area between the Garonne and the upper Ebro valley in the west. The complicated ethnology of the Caucasus and the Himalayas would seem to show that the highest and, apparently, least affordable mountain ranges can be like closed fields where the most varied elements are brought together, or at least juxtaposed. This will sooner or later lead to an agreement of morals or interests resulting in the creation of temporary alliances – such as the league of Caucasian mountain people of various races against the Russian invasion – or permanent federations – such as the Swiss Union – despite the diversity of origins, idioms, and religious beliefs.³⁵⁸

In the same way, the intersectional waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans had seen the birth of innumerable voluntarily organized social units that rested on convergent worldviews. Raised from the waters of the Coral and Solomon Seas, Tropical Cyclone Mahina concretized the outlines of the latest and perhaps most heterogeneous manifestation of this tendency in this part of the world, and at this particular moment in history. Harsh, inhospitable, and unstoppable natural forces did not stand in the way of human cultural development, but rather shaped it.

In the interest of illustrating much larger historical dynamics, Mechnikov could not delve into the details of the process that leads to an agreement of morals or interests which, in turn, results in the creation of self-organized communities. The ‘Japanese’ encounter with Tropical Cyclone Mahina offers a window into this process. While there are no traces of any

³⁵⁷ Mechnikov, *La Civilisation et les Grands Fleuves Historiques*, pp. 65-66

³⁵⁸ Mechnikov, *La Civilisation et les Grands Fleuves Historiques*, p. 66

historical battles fought under a single banner that might allow us to speak of an ‘Arafurese union’, and no charters that can attest to the creation of an ‘Arafurese federation’, evidence of the articulation of an Arafurese subjectivity abound.

What initially distinguished ‘Japanese’ from ‘Malay’, and ‘Aborigine’ from ‘Filipino’ – or, more appropriately Ilocanos from Wakayamans, Cebuanos from Izu Islanders or Ehime-ans, and Rotumans from Bwanabwanans – became increasingly unclear after 1899. As we have seen in the previous sections, circuits of hospitality, reciprocity, and mutual aid began to grow in the wake of the disaster. These circuits began to include more people, cover a greater geographical area, and more importantly, blur the cultural characteristics that distinguished one social group from another. After being adopted by the Ohantaala and living with them for many years, Narcisse Pelletier became Amglo not just in name. His sense of self was transformed to the point that he forgot his mother tongue as well as the practices and beliefs that would have allowed him to identify as a modern Frenchman. Jimmy Koto, Mabe Tamiya, and Heijirō Murakami, who became intimately involved with the local communities of insular Papua New Guinea all experienced a transformation similar to that of Pelletier to some degree around the turn of the century. So did other ‘Japanese’ who were integrated into a relational web of the Arafura, Coral, and Solomon Seas.³⁵⁹ Survival necessitated the creation of relations between people that emphasized their commonalities, and such relations affected both notions of self and society.³⁶⁰

Hyakushō, who were not quite ‘Japanese’ in the first place, became Arafurese as they acquired knowledge of the seasons, the currents, and the behaviors of dingoes, cassowaries, and dugongs. This was partly the result of close observations of the environment, as we might glean from Shōtarō Takimoto’s diary, in which almost every entry is preceded by a note about the weather and the direction of the wind.³⁶¹ But it was also the result of participation in multilateral flows of knowledge exchange and having a shared aesthetic sensitivity towards nature.

Kenji Fujita fondly recalled seeing patches of sea apples ‘breathing’ together synchronously, equating his dives down to the seabed to a stroll through a flowerbed. He recalled seeing islands full of gannets, with eggs neatly laid in square patterns in the sand and

³⁵⁹ See, for example, Yoshiyuki Tsurumi, *アラフラ海航海記—木造船でゆくインドネシア3000キロ* (徳間書店, 1991), 36, 114; Hana Gonomiya, *Watashi No Mokuyōtō* (Self-published, 2006), 12.

³⁶⁰ For the conception of society as “a sum of relations within which individuals (and groups) stand”, see Roy Bhaskar, “Societies” in Margaret Archer et al. (eds.), *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 207.

³⁶¹ Matsumoto, *Diary of Takimoto Shōtarō*.

thousands of newly hatched chicks filling up the beaches. Fujita reminisced in the same way about the migrations of Hawksbill turtles, who came to lay their eggs on the beach at night. Foraging turtle eggs in the night time was not without its risks. Dingoes could become fierce competitors, and indigenous peoples taught Fujita how to scare them away with fire. Having livelihoods that depended on the ocean, Arafurese of various denominations often appreciated nature up close. For example, the 'aboriginal' informants of Regina Ganter, such as Henry G. Dan recalled:

When you were underwater you were looking at different fish, different coral life. It is a strange world, a different world altogether. I used to appreciate seeing different things. Not like when you're on land. When you're out at sea and underwater you see a very different life altogether.³⁶²

And Jeremiah Babia:

It is something like you don't want to come up, you want to stay down there all the time. (Laughs) Nice, big trees, big farm. There are all sorts of things when you look down there - fish. It is just like a garden. You can see shell underneath the big sea trees. You can see sharks and turtles. You can see from here to that trailer there - the water is so clear at Darnley, not like here or Badu Island.³⁶³

The appreciation of nature went hand-in-hand with observations of its dangers:

[...] trochus shell it's in the little crevices and the holes in the sides of what we call bomboras, just coral cliffs. You might see one hole there and it might have a dozen trochus in it and he said 'when we first started you could put your hand in but you put your bloody hand and there's a moray eel. And once they close their jaw they don't let go. The only way to get your hand back is you rip it out of their mouth and of course you've got a great rip in your skin. And this is why the scar.'³⁶⁴

³⁶² Ganter Interviews, p. 119, see also, p. 328.

³⁶³ Ganter interviews with Jeremiah Babia, p. 17.

³⁶⁴ Ganter interviews with Vic Ellem, p. 145.

These, in turn, were part and parcel of practices of knowledge exchange aimed at mitigating environmental hazards and saving lives:

'Now' he said, 'the first thing you do now', he taught me and I tell you what it's probably saved me because I saw a few moray eels, 'you carry a little net bag to put your trochus shell in and before you ever put your hand in a hole or a crevice you wave the net bag over in front of it and wait there for two or three seconds and if nothing comes out you're right you can put your hand in and take them out.'³⁶⁵

These flows of knowledge were multilateral – local knowledges from elsewhere came to be known among the Arafurese population. Many of Ganter's 'aboriginal' informants, such as "Hopevale", remembered 'Japanese' treatments for the sting of a crown-of-thorns starfish (*Acanthaster planci*):

When you are stung you have a milk coming out of it, a poison. You boil rice with hot water and burn the rice. Then you put your leg or hand in and that's it - finished. That is Japanese medicine. You burn the rice and then when it is burnt you throw water onto it so it hisses and then you put your leg or arm in. It is not very hot you know, just rice.³⁶⁶

Information about nature, its dangers, and its beauty circulated freely between 'Torres Strait Islanders', 'Filipino', 'Japanese', and 'Aboriginal' people. To be Arafurese was to partake in these informal networks of knowledge exchange.

In the years and decades following the 1899 disaster, we see how 'Japanese' not-quite-national subjects and their local knowledge were assimilated into the Arafura Zone. They, in turn, came to adopt an Arafurese sense of self and society that revolved around nature. This emergent subjectivity in which nature played a central role was diametrically opposed to the understanding of nature as part of state and nation that began to emerge in early twentieth century Japan. The historian Julia A. Thomas discussed how such a conceptualization of nature, developed in language and the arts from the 1890s paved the way for the 'ultranational' ideology of wartime Japan in the 1930s.³⁶⁷ Thomas argued that earlier understandings of nature

³⁶⁵ Ganter Interviews P. 145.

³⁶⁶ Ganter interviews, p. 215.

³⁶⁷ Julia Adeney Thomas, *Reconfiguring Modernity: Concepts of Nature in Japanese Political Ideology* (Berkeley,

were effaced in favor of chauvinistic ones with the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. If turn-of-the-century Japanese state actors began to chip away at earlier Tokugawa and Meiji notions of nature that were much more universalistic, 'Japanese' non-state actors carried such notions with them into the Arafura Zone – allowing them to become Arafurese in the process.

The disaster of 1899 emphasized the shared plight of people inhabiting the same time and space. It punctuated the day-to-day encounters with nature that characterized life for the Arafurese and gave rise to forms of social organization without hierarchical subdivisions based on race and culture. Life at sea was equally dangerous for all, its charms and attractions equally alluring. The Arafurese awe of nature did not arise from a desire to return to a time when things were 'simpler' – it should not be seen as a cultural protest against modern industrial civilization, but rather a way of living that did not pay much heed to it.

IV.6 Conclusion: Tropical Cyclone Mahina as a Historical Vortex

Tropical Cyclone Mahina struck the Arafura Zone just as new bonds between a highly diverse cast of actors were in the process of being formed. It sped up and intensified these processes which revolved around mutual aid, and thereby became an important moment in the formation of an 'Arafurese' subjectivity. How these bonds manifested in interpersonal relations, but also linguistic and material ones, between 'Filipinos' and 'Malays', 'Chinese' and 'Sinhalese', and other non-state actors is, as of yet, largely unknown. However, from what we can tell of the effects of the cyclone on the creation of new links between so-called 'Japanese' figures and the people that they encountered, they all present opportunities to see the history of global interconnection differently. The history of Tropical Cyclone Mahina offers a glimpse into a major event that brings together a group of people who do not yet exist as a collective entity in the historiography. It allows us to recognize meaningful differences that have long remained invisible under the lenses provided by international or global approaches, yet simultaneously offers a point of human historical convergence.

Despite its significance for the history of a group of Japanese commoners, Tropical Cyclone Mahina has never been part of the chronology of modern Japanese history. In fact, it does not form a significant part of any established historiographical tradition. The event is both temporally and spatially situated between recognized and unrecognized turning points in various national historiographies: the 1881 death of the sultan of Sulu, the Australian Maritime

Calif: University of California Press, 2001).

Strike of 1890, the respective outbreaks of the First Sino-Japanese War and the Boxer Rebellion in 1895 and 1899, the Spanish-American War of 1898, the 1901 Federation of Australia and adoption of the 'Ethical Policy' in the Dutch East Indies, and the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. Yet, even though Mahina intersects with all these events, it does so awkwardly. Unlike a turning point that serves to pivot linear historical narratives into opposite directions, Mahina whirls unpredictably around a moving axis. It is a highly complex historical event that uproots actors, processes, and phenomena, and forces us to examine their intersections in a new light. Not only does the cyclone tell us about forgotten death and suffering that were experienced collectively across national divides, it also illuminates unsung feats of overcoming such challenges to life. Mahina was neither just a cyclone nor a turning point – it was a historical vortex.

This vortex is a historical phenomenon in which actors, processes, and events that are usually accorded little historical significance in existing historiographical traditions combine to tell a larger narrative. Like the miniscule droplets of water that evaporate into the atmosphere and proceed to form a storm, these micro-historical components converge and potentially become energized. And in accordance with the fleeting nature of a storm, they leave few traces in the historiography after dissipating, even if they heavily impacted people's lives. The historical vortex serves as a methodological metaphor for 'doing' transnational history as well as environmental history in a transnational inflection.

Historical vortices do not necessarily revolve around one-off catastrophic natural disasters. They may just as well refer to more pervasive and/or subtle environmental phenomena, such as pollution, disease, and animal migration. Environmental historians have long shown that studies of the intersections between human society and ecology require a disregard for national borders and a predilection to global historical patterns.³⁶⁸ The vortex takes this imperative one step further by challenging the centrality of the state in the analysis of historical connections. It can function as a convergence of turning points in the historical trajectories of non-state actors and encourages us to look beyond state-centric units and frames of analysis. It has the capacity to blow apart the known pivots of national historiography, destabilize the narratological constructs that they helped to establish, and point to something even newer under the sun.³⁶⁹ With its heavy focus on the non-state, the historical vortex cannot

³⁶⁸ See, for example, Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*; but the tradition can be traced back to Fernand Braudel's, *La Méditerranée* (1949).

³⁶⁹ Examining the lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, and biosphere instead of individual nation states, John R. McNeill's paradigmatic study of the history of human interactions with their environments nevertheless focuses on the ecological consequences of the agendas of state actors (John R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun*:

be studied using the methods that environmental historians usually employ to examine ecological phenomena and their relationship with human social transformations. Instead, it requires us to employ approaches that not only focus on cross-border and cross-cultural interactions, but also substitute state-centric terminologies and categories for non-state ones. The vortex can thus be used to re-center excluded, obscured, and marginalized subjectivities through which we might understand something like the Anthropocene as merely one of many outcomes of the imagined futures of the past.³⁷⁰

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, Tropical Cyclone Mahina contains a multiplicity of narratives that whirl across the historical intersections of a modernizing Japan, a federating Australia, a crumbling Dutch empire, and a revolutionary Philippines. It involves stories of how Paman-speaking peoples were dispossessed but nevertheless endangered themselves to save others who may have been complicit in the disassembly of Indigenous livelihoods.³⁷¹ It touches on longer histories involving local transformations of Philippine villages and towns such as Naga, Iloilo, or Zamboanga that resulted in the creation of transnational links to the Arafura Sea.³⁷² We might also consider it as one tragic episode in the adventurous practices known as *kune* that brought Bwanabwana people to the Coral Sea.³⁷³ Each of these unexplored narratives constitute anatomical elements of the historical vortex that deserve to be the focus of their own studies. Historical vortices allow us to shed light on overlapping historical phenomena but simultaneously point to more than the intersectionality of ultimately divergent paths. It is rather through the vorticity of historical phenomena (their tendency to rotate

An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World). These and other studies within the remit of Anthropocene historiography tend to gloss over ‘the human’ with little regard for the divergent temporalities and spatialities that we might associate with it. ‘The human’ is seen as a singular and homogenous historical agent that has attained the technological capacity to undo the very foundations upon which their own survival rest. Yet, this agent is far more representative of a state actor, say a white male bureaucrat initiating large-scale agricultural reforms, rather than a non-state actors such as a farmer who is supposed to till the soil but instead drags their feet. For a parallel discussion, see: Zoe Todd, “An Indigenous Feminist’s Take on the Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ is Just another Word for Colonialism”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 29, no. 1 (March 2016).

³⁷⁰ It is therefore a concept that is not necessarily bound to the sub-discipline of environmental history. Wars, concerts, communes, and even the lives of romantic couples or ‘Quaker dwarves’ might be considered historical vortices, as long as they help us study the transnational history of non-state actors. The events and actors discussed in the following works might, for example, be considered part of a historical vortex: Peter Linebaugh, *Red Round Globe Hot Burning: A Tale at the Crossroads of Commons and Closure, of Love and Terror, of Race and Class, and of Kate and Ned Despard*; and Marcus Rediker, *The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist*.

³⁷¹ On the exclusion of these narratives from Australian historiography, see Russel McDougall, “Emergent Tropicality: Cyclone Mahina, Bathurst Bay 1899”, *Australasian Journal of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, vol. 5 (2015/2016). For an account of how “aboriginals from a camp near Cape Melville” attempt to assist victims of the 1899 cyclone and drowned trying, see Outridge Booklet, p. 35.

³⁷² See Aguilar Jr, “Manilamen and Seafaring: Engaging the Maritime World beyond the Spanish Realm.”

³⁷³ For more on the practice of *kune*, see Carl E. Thune, “Kune on Tubetube and in the Bwanabwana region of the southern Massim”, in Jerry W. Leach and Edmund R. Leach (eds.), *The Kula: new perspectives on Massim exchange*. Cambridge University Press, 1983.

interdependently), that we might see previously unconnected narratives as part of a larger whole. This chapter focused on Japan's encounter with Mahina as an example of one such narrative that is capable of bringing together actors, processes, spaces, and times which hold little significance in state-centric histories but can nevertheless form central components of a shared transnational history.

Conclusion

In shifting our attention from the land to the ocean, bureaucrat to fisher, and ‘Japanese’ to ‘Arafurese’, this dissertation offers a new narrative for the transnational history of modern Japan. It does so by identifying a group of actors whose historical trajectories were deeply linked to the currents of the ocean, the winds that drove them, and the marine creatures that lived within them (Chapter 1). Banking on their local knowledge of the sea, these *hyakushō* began to utilize and repurpose new technologies to reshape their lives in the face of changing social and ecological conditions. They created new livelihoods for themselves and their communities, but came into conflict with state actors in the process of doing so. Forced to relate to the environment in state-approved ways, *hyakushō* left their hometowns in the late nineteenth century and made their way into the Arafura Sea.

Historians of global history often attribute such movements to economic push and pull factors, but there is more to be said in the case of *hyakushō* leaving for the Arafura Sea (Chapter 2). Their decisions were deeply tied to their understanding of how humans ought to relate to nature – as a commons rather than the territorial property of any nation state. Arriving at the intersection of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, *hyakushō* began to shape the contours of a non-state space within the interstices of European empires. Here, in the Arafura Zone, nature deeply shaped the rhythms and patterns of everyday life, giving rise to a sense of time that did not align with that of industrial civilization and Western modernity. This was not an endlessly looping cyclical time with no notion of progress, but rather one in which progress was defined outside the conceptual universe of Western civilizational discourse.

As could be seen on the decks of ships, in the courthouses, and coastal towns of the Arafura Zone, *hyakushō* sought to improve their lives by engaging in practices of mutual aid (Chapter 3). They did so because a combination of social structural forces and environmental hazards created a condition of everyday death. Realizing how state conceptualizations of violence in nature justified social structures that sustained such hazardous conditions, *hyakushō* began to take matters into their own hands. They created a communal seascape with its own set of practices of care and compassion. These practices crossed the racial and cultural boundaries held in place by state actors of various empires and challenged forms of involuntary social organization maintained by a higher authority. As a result, we see the beginnings of a sense of self and society that was deeply non-state and transnational in character: a subjectivity that was not just ‘Japanese’ but ‘Arafurese’ too.

Following the decades in which hardships posed by nature provided the opportunity for *hyakushō* in the Arafura Zone to realize caring relationships between themselves and others with whom they collaborated, the region was struck by Tropical Cyclone Mahina in 1899 (Chapter 4). With its unmatched capacity for death and destruction, the cyclone was an important moment for the community of *hyakushō*. Since 1899, the unifying structures of care that they had created began to expand beyond the decks of the ships and the courtrooms in which they were initially developed. Called into being to deal with a broad definition of terrifying nature, these structures reveal a seemingly contradictory subjectivity that was at once ‘modern’ (in the sense that it was concerned with future improvement) and ‘traditional’ (in the sense that it paid close attention to the structures and patterns of the natural world). We know that such forms of subjectivity were prevalent in Japan from the early twentieth century onwards, particularly in the realm of culture – albeit a distinctively state-centric form of culture. However, in the case of thousands of ordinary ‘Japanese’ who found themselves in the Arafura Zone, this subjectivity had little to do with the ethnocentric worldviews concocted by state-endorsed thinkers. Instead, this was a transnational subjectivity that emerged from the everyday encounters between *hyakushō* and others in the Arafura Zone, as well as their shared experiences of the climate.

The story of *hyakushō* in the making of the Arafura Zone might thus be understood not just as transnational history but as environmental and oceanic history too. By asking how nature shaped the course of history, this dissertation offers new historical interpretations that center actors who are often considered marginal, and events and processes that are usually thought of as peripheral in the major narratives of modern Japanese history. I provide a new explanation of technological change in nineteenth century Japan that takes into account ordinary people’s historicity (as seafolk) and active involvement in the creation of new ways of living in dialogue with the sea. Moreover, by placing the Arafura Zone onto the map, I identified a nature-centric spatial and temporal unit outside the realms of the historiography of Japan that played an important but overlooked part in the lives of ‘Japanese’ seafolk. The first part of the dissertation (Chapters 1-2) thereby shows how *hyakushō*’s historical relationship with the environment can help us arrive at a new interpretation of the meaning of the Opening of Japan. The second part (Chapters 3-4) focuses on the experiences of *hyakushō* on the waters of the Arafura Zone as a window into the creation of transnational and ocean-spanning networks of mutual aid – first on the decks of ships and then through the connections woven together by a catastrophic tropical cyclone in 1899. It asks how nature functioned as a historical force capable of unifying an immensely heterogeneous group of people. On the whole, this dissertation recounts a

narrative that is as far removed from the classical preoccupations of historians as can be. From the perspective of *hyakushō* rather than those who saw the sea as part of the land, Japan's relationship with the ocean does not shed light on war and revolution so much as indiscriminate cooperation in the face of nature's many hardships.

Utilizing a body of sources that have never before been examined collectively due to linguistic and methodological barriers, this dissertation offers an entirely new view on Japan's relationship with the wider world. *Hyakushō*'s encounters with the Arafura Zone shed light on processes, actors, events, connections, and conceptual universes that have never before made it into mainstream histories of modern Japan. They do not merely supplement what we already know about modern Japan, that it adopted new technologies in pursuit of modernization according to Western models; that it began to expand the reach of its archipelago by creating a formal and informal empire; or that it came to be forcefully incorporated into a global economic system led by an international community of 'civilized' nation states. In addition, they change how we might understand modern Japanese history by attributing historical significance to everyday technological innovations, the decisions and intentions of ordinary people, and the ways in which they navigated environmental hazards. The story of *hyakushō* in the Arafura Zone shows us how focusing on nature's role in shaping people's lives can result in an entirely different understanding of what history might look like.

This brings us to the question of the contribution of this study beyond the historiography of Japan. I would like to begin by considering the term 'Arafura', a term with a long and complex history. Closely related to names such as 'Alfourou', 'Alfoeren', 'Alfur', 'Alfuro', and 'Harafora', it is part of a set of ambiguous terms which were used interchangeably to refer to a presumably distinctive group of people up until the early twentieth century. These people with supposedly shared customs and physiological characteristics populated a vast geographical expanse that encapsulated eastern Indonesia and northern Australia.³⁷⁴ In some cases, the term was used to denote 'the savage', unaffected by 'civilizing' processes of Indianization, Islamization, Sinicization, and Westernization that had touched the rest of the archipelago. The Alfoer, it was said, did not utilize roads and instead followed the riverbed, and they performed labor "wholly voluntarily".³⁷⁵ In other cases, the terms simply refer to

³⁷⁴ Bronwen Douglas, "Foreign Bodies in Oceania," in *Foreign Bodies: Oceania and the Science of Race 1750-1940*, ed. Bronwen Douglas and Chris Ballard (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2008), 7-9; Chris Ballard, "'Oceanic Negroes': British Anthropology of Papuans, 1820-1869," in *Foreign Bodies: Oceania and the Science of Race 1750-1940*, ed. Bronwen Douglas and Chris Ballard (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2008), 198.

³⁷⁵ E.W.A. Ludeking, *Schets van de Residentie Amboina (Outline of the Amboina Residency)* ('S Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1868), 118.

‘heathens’ who had not yet converted to either Christianity or Islam. Loosely defined and continually contested, the terms quickly came to refer to those who were not easily colonized and who became so radicalized as to withdraw to the jungles in order to beleaguer people from there. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the supposedly defining cultural characteristic of ‘Alfours’ or ‘Haraforas’ came to be ritualistic decapitation or ‘head hunting’.³⁷⁶ Outside of referring to a body of water in between the Coral, Timor, and Banda Seas on the border of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the term Arafura (and its variations) fell into complete disuse as understandings of culture and biology changed from the late nineteenth throughout the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, one of its forgotten meanings may be worthy of a revival. Translated as ‘the Free’, the term Arafura deeply resonates with the autonomy of non-state actors inhabiting the Arafura Sea.

The Arafura Zone was a large-scale social experiment in which diverse forms of human relationality were created, disassembled, and reshaped beyond frameworks of capitalism and nation states. Its inhabitants seemed to possess a conception of freedom that was remarkably close to the notion that David Graeber and David Wengrow recently traced back to an ‘indigenous critique’ of Enlightenment Europe: “(1) the freedom to move away or relocate from one’s surroundings; (2) the freedom to ignore or disobey commands issued by others; and (3) the freedom to shape entirely new social realities, or shift back and forth between different ones.”³⁷⁷ Graeber and Wengrow reject Eurocentric conceptions of freedom to suggest not only that most forms of human social organization throughout deep history can be characterized as ‘modern’ (and that we have, in effect, never been modern), but that such competing relationalities can help us re-envision what historical progress might mean. As I have attempted to show throughout the dissertation, the Arafura Zone became the locus of one such notion of historical progress that attracted not just wayward ‘Japanese’ but many others as well.

This notion of progress is one that was never made explicit, but that should not stop us from thinking about what it might have been like. If it were to stop us, we would never be able to do justice to those whose pasts are not legible through established methods of historical research. The ways in which *hyakushō* related to each other and others with whom they coexisted reveal a plethora of social configurations built on the possibility of free movement and experimental forms of assembly – sometimes hierarchical, sometimes horizontal, but always voluntary, self-organized, and flexible. Instead of passively letting global political and

³⁷⁶ See, for example, the descriptions of the ways of the ‘berg-Alfoeren’ in Maria Dermoût, *De Tienduizend Dingen* [The Ten Thousand Things] (Amsterdam: Querido, 1955).

³⁷⁷ Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, 503.

economic forces shape their lives, hyakushō exercised their agency and consciously chose to be part of these social forms. They did so in order to fulfil their basic needs in ways that they found agreeable, leading them to learn to work with the currents, winds, and marine creatures of the Arafura Zone. The transnational subjectivity of ‘Arafurese’ thus emerged in dialogue with nature, but not in the sense of a return to a timeless world of endlessly repeating cycles in harmony with the elements. Arafurese attentiveness and sensitivity to natural processes was part and parcel of a conscious attempt to work towards a better future.

The making of the Arafura Zone tells us how people engaged in transnational forms of mutual aid that could ensure survival in the face of challenges posed by nature. Within their interactions and movements, lay an implicit notion of progress that scholars rarely take seriously, let alone try to articulate. In his book on the transnational intellectual relations between Russia and Japan, Sho Konishi discussed the nineteenth century geographer Lev Mechnikov’s vision of historical progress centering on ordinary people’s engagement with the natural world.³⁷⁸ Mechnikov was deeply inspired by the Meiji Ishin and understood the relinquishing of social privileges by samurai as part of a revolution made possible by the social and cultural achievements of the archipelago. For Mechnikov, these achievements were to be found in forms of cooperative organization that could ensure survival in nature – an idea that led, in subsequent years, to the formulation of the concept of mutual aid.³⁷⁹ If the intellectual foundation of the concept of mutual aid was being formulated in the encounter with ordinary people of the Japanese archipelago (as one example of a place in which harsh environmental conditions brought forth highly cooperative social forms), those who were leaving the archipelago for the Arafura Zone were putting it into practice through their transnational relations.

³⁷⁸ Sho Konishi, *Anarchist Modernity*, pp. 59-73

³⁷⁹ Konishi, pp. 63-64, 72-73.

Appendix 1 – The Pearl Diver (by Banjo Paterson, 1902)

Kanzo Makame, the diver, sturdy and small Japanee,
Seeker of pearls and of pearl-shell down in the depths of the sea,
Trudged o'er the bed of the ocean, searching industriously.

Over the pearl-grounds, the lugger drifted — a little white speck:
Joe Nagasaki, the 'tender', holding the life-line on deck,
Talked through the rope to the diver, knew when to drift or to check.

Kanzo was king of his lugger, master and diver in one,
Diving wherever it pleased him, taking instructions from none;
Hither and thither he wandered, steering by stars and by sun.

Fearless he was beyond credence, looking at death eye to eye:
This was his formula always, 'All man go dead by-and-bye —
S'posing time come no can help it — s'pose time no come, then no die.'

Dived in the depths of the Darnleys, down twenty fathom and five;
Down where by law and by reason, men are forbidden to dive;
Down in a pressure so awful that only the strongest survive:

Sweated four men at the air pumps, fast as the handles could go,
Forcing the air down that reached him heated, and tainted, and slow —
Kanzo Makame the diver stayed seven minutes below;

Came up on deck like a dead man, paralysed body and brain;
Suffered, while blood was returning, infinite tortures of pain:
Sailed once again to the Darnleys — laughed and descended again!

.

Scarce grew the shell in the shallows, rarely a patch could they touch;
Always the take was so little, always the labour so much;
Always they thought of the Islands held by the lumbering Dutch,

Islands where shell was in plenty lying in passage and bay,
Islands where divers could gather hundreds of shell in a day:
But the lumbering Dutch, with their gunboats, hunted the divers away.

Joe Nagasaki, the 'tender', finding the profits grow small,
Said, 'Let us go to the Islands, try for a number one haul!
If we get caught, go to prison — let them take lugger and all!'

Kanzo Makame, the diver — knowing full well what it meant —
Fatalist, gambler, and stoic, smiled a broad smile of content,
Flattened in mainsail and foresail, and off to the Islands they went.

Close to the headlands they drifted, picking up shell by the ton,
Piled up on deck were the oysters, opening wide in the sun,
When, from the lee of the headland, boomed the report of a gun.

Once that the diver was sighted pearl-shell and lugger must go.
Joe Nagasaki decided — quick was the word and the blow —
Cut both the pipe and the life-line, leaving the diver below!

Kanzo Makame, the diver, failing to quite understand,
Pulled the 'haul up' on the life-line, found it was slack in his hand;

Then, like a little brown stoic, lay down and died on the sand.

Joe Nagasaki, the 'tender', smiling a sanctified smile,
Headed her straight for the gunboat — throwing out shells all the while —
Then went aboard and reported, 'No makee dive in three mile!

'Dress no have got and no helmet — diver go shore on the spree;
Plenty wind come and break rudder — lugger get blown out to sea:
Take me to Japanee Consul, he help a poor Japanee!'

.

So the Dutch let him go, and they watched him, as off from the Islands he ran,
Doubting him much, but what would you? You have to be sure of your man
Ere you wake up that nest-full of hornets — the little brown men of Japan.

Down in the ooze and the coral, down where earth's wonders are spread,
Helmeted, ghastly, and swollen, Kanzo Makame lies dead:
Joe Nagasaki, his 'tender', is owner and diver instead.

Wearer of pearls in your necklace, comfort yourself if you can,
These are the risks of the pearling — these are the ways of Japan,
'Plenty more Japanee diver, plenty more little brown man!'

Appendix 2 – ‘Japanese’ deaths in the QSA

Inquest records involving ‘Japanese’ (or likely Japanese) deaths in the Queensland State Archives:

	last name	first name	date	Item ID
1	CHUSAN	Japanese Seaman per Jemima	1884	348707
2	NISHI ISO KILBI	Japanese Seman	1885	348723
3	CHENYABOM	Akemoto Seaman per Gamecock	1887	348740
4	JAPAN	George	1887	348742
5	MARYAMA	Seaman per Gamecock	1887	348740
6	MODY	Male - Japanese	1890	348781
7	FRANK	Omassee - Female - Japanese	1892	348798
8	YASHALLA	Male - Japanese	1892	348802
9	MORI	Okutaro	1893	348814
10	TAINYAMA	Male - Japanese	1893	348815
11	TOYOKICHIE	Nakajawa - diver per Emerald	1893	348817
12	TOYOKITCHI	Nanba	1893	348811
13	YUSHIOKA	Male - Japanese - diver per Nana	1893	348815
14	HASEGAWA	Tomasaki	1894	348824
15	SHIOZAKI	Matsunosuki - seaman per Ino	1894	348825
16	YAMASTOO	Diver per Ivy	1894	348822
17	YAMOAKA	Japanese - diver per Stork	1894	348826
18	CHOBAI MODATE	Diver per Victoria	1895	348833
19	FUGITA	Tatsu	1895	348836
20	FUKUMOTO	Ritaro - Japanese	1895	348841
21	FUKUSHIMA	Inosuke - Japanese - diver per Nonia	1895	348836
22	HAMAJUCHI	Japanese - diver per Water Lily	1895	348836
23	KOJIMA	Japanese seaman per Swan	1895	348832
24	KOTA ONOYE	Male - Japanese	1895	348835
25	SHINA	Nakagawa	1895	348836
26	TOOSUKE	Yosuke	1895	348836
27	HASSAGUCHI	Male - Japanese - diver per Grace Darling	1896	348839
28	KI KUMATSU ITO	Male - Japanese - diver	1896	348841
29	KOJIMA	Male - Japanese - diver	1896	348839
30	KOSUKE ONO	Male - Japanese - diver	1896	348841
31	MATSUNAGA	T - Male - Japanese	1896	348845
32	OHKA	Sulematsu - diver - Japanese	1896	348840
33	OHSHIGE	Sanjin - diver per Corea	1896	348844
34	OHTANI	Yoshematsu - diver per Chris	1896	348839
35	OTA	Gentano - diver per Diamond	1896	348839
36	OTOMATSU	or OTTO - pearl diver	1896	348844
37	SANTARO	Oda - diver per Nautilus	1896	348844
38	TMASO	Tavadaw - Male - Japanese - diver	1896	348842
39	TONUGUCHI	Otamku - Japanese - diver	1896	348839
40	WATTANAHIE	Male - diver - Japanese	1896	348840

41	HIGASHI	Male - Japanese - diver	1897	348847
42	IMOTO	Nizo - male - diver - Japanese	1897	348852
43	INOUE	Otto - Japanese - diver	1897	348847
44	KATSUYAMA	Tatsweeosuki - Japanese - diver	1897	348849
45	KONDO	Buntaro - Male - Japanese - diver	1897	348854
46	KUMOKICHI	Nishioka - Male - Japanese - Diver	1897	348852
47	MIYAJI	Male - Japanese - diver	1897	348854
48	NAKATA	Male - Japanese - diver	1897	348847
49	NISHIMURA	Otamatsu - Japanese - diver	1897	348850
50	NISHIMURA	Male - Japanese - diver per Edith	1897	348856
51	OKAGI	Koshichi - Japanese - pearl diver	1897	348856
52	OKO MURA	Male - Japanese - Diver	1897	348850
53	ORUI	Male - Japanese	1897	348847
54	SAKAMOTO SANNOSUKE	Japanese - diver	1897	348847
55	AIKAWA	Male - Japanese	1897	348847
56	SANO	Mitoro - Japanese - diver	1897	348850
57	SUGIMOTO	Japanese - carpenter	1897	348847
58	TA KAHASHI	Male - Japanese - diver	1897	348853
59	TAGUCHI	Takuzo - Male - Japanese - diver - per Ariel	1897	348854
60	TORAKICHI	Kasashinia - Male - Japanese - diver	1897	348853
61	TSUNETAIRO	Minuari - Japanese - pearl diver	1897	348856
62	YAMAMOTO	Mantaro - Japanese - diver	1897	348849
63	ASARI	Kimiojo - Male - Japanese - diver	1898	348863
64	HARU	Kawaoko - Japanese - diver per Kilach	1898	348858
65	HIGASHI	Youosuki - Diver	1898	348862
66	INOSUKI	Katsuyama - diver per Mona	1898	348860
67	INOWE	Japanese - seaman	1898	348865
68	KATOOKA	Maitaro - Japanese - diver	1898	348865
69	KUMACHICHI	Isadani - diver per Mary Cusens	1898	348864
70	OTOMATSI	Minamiji - Japanese - diver	1898	348866
71	OTOWAKIE	Hori - male Japanese - diver	1898	348868
72	SENKACHI	Yano - diver per Petrel	1898	348864
73	IWANAGE	Tetsutaro - male - Japanese - diver	1899	348875
74	JEROKICHI	Hori - male Japanese - diver	1899	348876
75	JITSU	Kamji - Male - Japanese - diver per Hiroshima	1899	348872
76	SHIMIZU	Sugimatsu - Male - Japanese - diver	1899	348872
77	TAGIMA	Yusutaro - Japanese - diver per Nippon	1899	348878
78	FUKIJURO	Nishida - diver - Japanese	1900	348889
79	HAMANO	YOZU - Japanese - diver per President	1900	348880
80	HONDA	Kiyoshi Menaguichi - male - Japanese - diver at Murray Island	1900	348887
81	KAMA		1900	348886
82	MIKAMI	Kanzo	1900	348880
83	MINAMI	male infant of Shimpachi MINAMI	1900	348890

84	MYOSHI	male - Japanese at Walkerston	1900	348889
85	NISHUJAMA	Ichimatsu - Japanese - Diver per Rita	1900	348880
86	OHASHI	Seihachi - diver per Nautalis	1900	348882
87	OTTO MAYISHIBA	Mayishiba - Japanese - diver per Stork	1900	348883
88	SASAKI	Hatsutaro - Japanese - Diver per Ignacio	1900	348881
89	SEKIMURA	Nenosaku - male - Japanese	1900	348885
90	USHITARO	Oto - Japanese - diver per Kobi	1900	348880
91	WADA	Tamisuke - Japanese - diver per Kishu	1900	348880
92	YAMASAKI	Toyosaku - Japanese - diver per Tillie	1900	348881
93	YOKOTAMA	male - aboriginal on Friday Island	1900	348886
94	BA TARA MAKI	male - Japanese	1901	348894
95	ISOHAMA	Riosaku - male Japanese	1901	348895
96	KAGI	Yasutaro - diver	1901	348896
97	NUINOSAKE	Saito - diver per North	1901	348891
98	SAKAMOTO	Kikataro - Japanese - diver	1901	348898
99	TOMIJIRO	Okamoto - male - Japanese - diver per Yoskeno	1901	348891
100	HAMAGUCHI	Aoera - diver per Ivy	1902	348903
101	HASHIMOTO	Sadajiro - seaman per Alice May	1902	348904
102	HATA	Harukichi	1902	348901
103	KITAMURA	Komatsu - diver per Ivy	1902	348907
104	OGATA	Chiozabura - Japanese - diver	1902	348903
105	TAKAI	Senkichi - diver per Torres	1902	348903
106	UNKNOWN MALE	Japanese - at Oakhurst Maryborough	1902	348908
107	URONO	Heitaro - seaman per Olive	1902	349979

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Susami-chō Rekishi Minzoku Shiryōkan, Wakayama

The Archives of Hokkaido

Wakayama Prefectural Library

The Netherlands

Dutch National Archives

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Shinkeiji temple, Katsuura, Chiba

Shiokaze no Kyūkeijo, Shionomisaki

Susami community center (*kōminkan*)

Taiji community center (*kōminkan*)

Taiji village

Tanami community center (*kōminkan*)

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