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The *Lady Rowena* and the *Eamont*: The 19th century¹

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Australian contacts with Japan in the 19th century can be seen to fall into three, fairly distinct, periods. The first was the final years of the *sakoku* period when Japan was still a closed country — Japan before the appearance of Commodore Perry and his black ships and the ensuing negotiation of the *Ansei* treaties with the foreign powers, opening Japan to foreign residents and permitting Japanese subjects to go abroad. The second period — from about 1867 to about 1891 — can be seen as one of unfettered but infrequent and small-scale contact. It was, however, in the latter part of this period that Japan became an important source of labour for the pearling industry on Thursday Island, and at Darwin, Cossack and Broome. And it was in the late 1880s that the Japanese prostitute made her appearance in a string of Japanese brothels extending in the east from Thursday Island to Melbourne, and in the west from Darwin to Bunbury and Coolgardie. The third period from, say, about 1892 to 1901, we may call the period of more numerous emigration sponsored by the large commercial emigration companies. This ended with the enactment of the *Immigration Restriction Act*, which prevented the entry of non-Europeans to Australia.

1 Unpublished paper.

The *sakoku* period (c. 1633–1866)

During this period there were two occasions when the crews of Australian vessels came ashore in Japan. Both were whaling ships — the *Lady Rowena* of Sydney and the *Eamont* of Hobart. In 1819 whales had been discovered in large numbers off the Japanese coast and those waters soon became part of the Pacific whalers' itinerary.

The *Lady Rowena*

The *Lady Rowena* cleared out of Sydney on 2 November 1830 on a whaling voyage that was to last until 25 June 1832. We have a detailed account of the voyage for her captain, Bourn Russell, devoted much time and energy to entering the log, which has survived. Poor catches in the Solomons caused Russell to abandon the south Pacific grounds earlier than he had planned and some months before the seasonal movement of whales to the Japanese grounds. He decided to spend the interim in pursuit of the right whale in Aniva Bay at the southern tip of Sakhalin. He was thither bound when it became necessary for him to beach the vessel in order to repair a leak. Accordingly, on 31 March 1831 they entered Hamanaka Bay on the coast of Hokkaido about 50 kilometres south of Nemuro.

At the village of Kiritappu they found the Ainu inhabitants friendly and happy to exchange curios. The three Japanese whom they encountered, however, regarded them with 'cold indifference'. When they next put ashore two days later, the inhabitants had fled, taking all their food with them. Regarding this as a breach of the duty to assist ships in distress, they began helping themselves to firewood, salt, utensils and 'many little things of little value'. The following day, when collecting more firewood, they neglected to extinguish their cooking fire, which then spread and burnt a house to the ground. The next day when Russell espied a 'hostile party' of four horse-soldiers riding in the direction of Akatoma, the town at the top of the bay, he despatched a boat in that direction. From this he tried, unsuccessfully, to shoot a horse from under the rearmost rider in order 'to take one person on board and prove to them that we were friends and not enemies as they suppose or rather feign to believe'. As they approached Akatoma they observed a dozen men armed with swords and muskets manning a dummy battery consisting of a canvas screen on which was painted the representation of five cannons' mouths. He wrote that they 'could not refrain from trying the effect of a shot on this ludicrous scene and accordingly fired'. After an interval the sound of three musket shots rang out on the hill. Two days later, having replenished their ammunition, Russell put 23 men armed with muskets and bayonets into four boats and, in his own words, 'proceeded to chastise those contemptible [*sic*] Japanese for presuming to fire on a Stranger seeking shelter from a leaky Ship'. According to his account, they advanced in file until the fort was in musket range and then 'kept up a continuous

fire for 10 minutes which made the hill smoke as tho' it was on fire — behind which they had got'. Victory was complete. The defenders were driven off, one prisoner was taken and there appears to have been no casualties on either side.

Six days later, as the *Lady Rowena* weighed anchor, the prisoner was released with some gifts for himself and a letter addressed to the Emperor warning him of the consequences of treating British subjects inhospitably. Finding the Nemuro Strait still frozen over, Russell then made for Hachijojima (in the Izu Archipelago off Shizuoka prefecture) where he landed and, without incident, peacefully secured water and provisions. From there he proceeded to the whaling grounds off Miyagi prefecture. On 29 May he boarded four Japanese junks off Kinka-san and bought from them fish and a compass. On 8 June he was successful in catching three whales. By 22 June four of his crew had scurvy and he was considering making another landing. On 30 June, however, he encountered another Japanese junk and decided to secure the necessary fresh vegetables from it. In mid-August scurvy finally made him abandon the Japanese whaling grounds and make for Guam.

The *Eamont*

Nineteen years later, at about 3.15 am on 23 May 1850, the Hobart whaling vessel the *Eamont* (WH Lovitt, Captain), with her crew of 32, was wrecked off Mabiuro, near Akkeshi, about 40 kilometres south of the *Lady Rowena's* Hamanaka Bay. Heading for the whaling grounds in the Sea of Okhotsk, the *Eamont* strayed two degrees off course and struck a bed of rocks about 400 yards from the shore, close to the small island of Kojima, whence the crew made in boats. They then moved to the mainland and established themselves in some deserted huts to which they rafted moveables from the ship. On the third day, they came upon some inhabited huts, whose inhabitants treated them very kindly. Towards evening they were visited by a party of about 20 Japanese, armed with swords, who led them to the local village. Two days later, on 27 May, three small junks arrived and transported them, their livestock and their possessions to Akkeshi about six miles distant. They were marched to their place of confinement at the District Office by a large guard armed with firearms and swords along a route screened from foreign eyes by rolls of cloth and banners bearing the *daimyō* (feudal lord) crest. They were served fish and rice three times a day, varied occasionally with cockles, oysters and cakes. There they were to remain in close custody for nearly four months.

On 12 September they were escorted together with their belongings to two junks, the *Chobo Maru* and the *Antai Maru*, which were to take them to Hakodate and thence to Nagasaki. Once again 'curtains were placed on each side of the road to prevent them seeing anything'. The *Chobo Maru* with 12 of the *Eamont's* crew arrived at Nagasaki on 4 October. The *Antai Maru* with the other 20 did not reach Hakodate. On the second day out it was caught in a gale and driven ashore off

Oshamambe. One of the Japanese managed to swim to the shore with a rope and all were saved except the *Eamont's* cooper, James Higgins, who was swept from the rope and drowned. They travelled the 70 miles to Hakodate on horseback.

At Hakodate they (together with the corpse of Higgins, pickled in brine) were put aboard another junk and arrived at Nagasaki on 6 October. There Higgins was buried among the Dutch graves in the grounds of the Goshinji temple. The convict records at Hobart show that he had been sentenced at Londonderry to seven years transportation in 1840 and that he served his sentence at Port Arthur in the boys' prison at Point Puer (where coopering was one of the trades taught). In so far as he chose to remain in Van Dieman's Land at the expiry of his sentence rather than return to Ulster, I think that we may claim him as a migrant and his grave as the earliest Australian grave in Japan. Unfortunately we cannot mark the spot — it is one of four unidentified graves dating from that period.

It was the practice before handing over foreign seamen to the Dutch for deportation to summon them before the magistrate who would determine whether they had breached the law by wilfully entering the country or by adhering to the prohibited religion, Christianity. They were, accordingly, taken from their place of confinement (the Seikoji temple in Dekidaiku-machi) and transported, each in a closed palanquin, to the court house, where, through interpreters, they were asked: (i) their names, ages, nationalities, and personal particulars; (ii) the date of their departure from Hobart Town; and, (iii) the circumstances surrounding their landing at Akkeshi and Higgins's subsequent death. The religious examination was interrogation and observation of the subject's demeanour when required to undergo the traditional test of *fumie* — trampling on a small religious image about six inches in diameter. The records of such examinations of foreign seamen at Nagasaki show that, from the time of the deportation of the *Lawrence* survivors in 1847, the religious examination was devised in an ingenious manner so that, while the prescribed procedures were carried out to the letter, the subject was carefully shielded from apostasy. It appears that the question asked was something like 'You have no gods do you; but reverence heaven to achieve integrity and enlightenment?'; for this is the substance of the answers recorded against not only the entire crew of the *Eamont* but against the *Lawrence* survivors in August 1847, against the Canadian, Ranald MacDonald, in October 1848 and against the *Trident* deserters in 1850. As for the *fumie* test — they were told, as Lovitt reported, to tread on 'the image of the devil'. MacDonald in his memoirs records that his instructions were in similar terms. By nature curious and observant, however, MacDonald examined the object closely and found it to be an image of the Virgin and Child. For him this presented no problems: 'Told to put my foot on it, being a Protestant, I unhesitatingly did so.'

Satisfied by their answers, the governor commanded them never again to enter Japan and handed them over with their personal possessions to the Dutch for transportation to Batavia aboard the *Delft*, to whose captain who had made over 85 sacks of rice and 300 thaler, requesting that the passengers be treated with the greatest care and kindness.

The second period (1867–91)

Jugglers and acrobats

The first Japanese to set foot in Australia were members of touring troupes of Japanese jugglers and acrobats that arrived in Australia in late 1867.

It was not until 1866 that the Japanese Government, under pressure from the Treaty Powers (United States, Great Britain, France, Russia and The Netherlands), revoked the edict under which for two centuries Japanese subjects were prohibited, on pain of death, from venturing beyond the realm. Contrary to expectation, the first to avail themselves of the new dispensation were not merchants or students, but jugglers and acrobats recruited by foreign impresarios through the good offices of foreign trading firms in the Treaty Ports. Japan's first passports were issued on 23 November 1866 — 14 to the Matsui troupe engaged by a Britisher, W Grant, and 18 to the Hamaikari troupe engaged by the American acrobat, Richard Risley. They embarked for London and San Francisco on 2 December and 5 December. Another 12, the Kanawari troupe, had already embarked for San Francisco on 29 October without passports.

In May 1866, at the end of Thomas Lenton's troupe's two-year tour of the Australian colonies, Lenton had entered into a partnership with the Melbourne circus manager, John W Smith, for the Lenton troupe to tour South-East Asia and China, with Smith accompanying them as manager. After performing in Hong Kong, the Philippines, Java, Singapore, Penang and Calcutta, the troupe arrived in Melbourne aboard the P&O mail steamer *Avoca* from Ceylon on 16 December 1867. They toured Australia and New Zealand until February 1869, performing under the name of Lenton & Smith's Great Dragon Company in each capital except Perth and Brisbane, and in Ballarat, Geelong, Bendigo, Castlemaine and Launceston. When the length of their season called for a change of program, the troupe added drama to their repertoire and performed an adaptation of one of the famous sword-fighting scenes from a *kabuki* drama, the 'Death of Kokingo' scene from *Yoshitsune Senbonzakura*.

At the end of 1867, Japanese troupes of this nature were a common sight on the world scene. Four were performing in the United States and another two had already moved on from there to Europe, where the Matsui troupe had been performing since February. Such competition extended to the antipodes.

The Lenton & Smith troupe had disembarked in Melbourne in December 1867 only to find a rival group, the Tycoon Japanese Troupe, performing in Geelong. Recruited and led by a Deshima Eurasian, Tanaka Bushichiro (born of a Japanese mother and Dutch father), it had arrived on the previous month's steamer from Ceylon. It was a smaller group, consisting of three men, whose repertoire included top-spinning, juggling, tumbling and slack-rope walking, and three women, who sang and danced and provided accompaniment on the shamisen. It toured Australia and New Zealand until the following October (1868), performing in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide and their suburbs, the Hunter Valley, the cities and towns of western Victoria as far as Avoca, and at Gawler and Kapunda in South Australia.

These were followed two years after by a group of eight led by Matsunosuke, which, under various names, performed in Victoria, New South Wales, Adelaide, Brisbane and New Zealand from February 1871 to January 1873.

A group of 13 members led by the juggler Awata Katsunoshin arrived in July 1873 and toured Australia and New Zealand for two years. When their contracts expired at Hobart in September 1875 the group split and its members secured engagements with various Australian circuses. Five were to settle here and become our first Japanese immigrants. The shoulder-balancer, Rikinosuke, who had married an Australian in 1875, performed with her and their daughter in Queensland towns until his death in 1884. The partner in his act in the Awata troupe, the boy Iwakichi married an Australian acrobat in 1892 and with her, their children and some performing animals, operated an itinerant family show out of Quilpie (Queensland) until 1917, when he took up farming. He died in Brisbane in 1938. Cooma Kitchie (Kumakichi) the tumbler and rope-walker was a working partner in Wirth's Circus at its inception in 1882 and was joined there by Bungaro (Bunjiro) the tub-balancer and his juvenile partner Itchi (Ichitaro) the following year. Bungaro and Itchi continued to perform together in vaudeville programs and country shows until shortly before Bungaro's death at Grantham (Queensland) in 1903. Itchi died in Brisbane in 1917, survived by his widow and their five children. While Cooma Kitchie was with Perry's Circus, an Australian Aboriginal woman at St George (Queensland) bore him a son, Henry Coome Kitchie, whom the Perrys later adopted. Henry grew up to be a clown with Eronis' and later Soles' circus. In the 1940s he was employed by Perry's on the road as their advance agent. He died at Wentworth Falls (New South Wales) in 1969 and was survived by his two daughters.

Among later groups to perform in Australia were the Tetsuwari/Tachibana troupe, which formed part of 'The Japanese Village' (an exhibition of Japanese traditional craftsmen at work, engaged by the Australian actor and impresario Pemberton Willard) that toured Australia from April 1886 to July 1887. The Goday family troupe came in 1891 and performed in vaudeville and with Wirth's Circus and Fitzgeralds' Circus until Goday's death in Melbourne in 1900. Two of his daughters settled in Melbourne and spent their lives there.

The pearling industry

In 1866 the Treaty Powers secured the right for their merchant vessels to sign on Japanese crew at any of the Japanese Treaty Ports. British captains made extensive use of this right. Sometimes they did so unscrupulously and took advantage of Japanese recruits' ignorance of the English language to bind them to very unfavourable conditions. It was after several cases had come before the Melbourne police courts in which Japanese seamen, engaged as a result of such subterfuges, instituted criminal proceedings against their captains for various acts of ill treatment that the Japanese Government on 4 November 1879 appointed Alexander Marks honorary consul in that city. This was one of the earliest Japanese consulates in the British Empire, preceded only by Hong Kong (1873), London (1876), and Singapore (April 1879).

Nonami Kojiro of Hirose in Shimane prefecture joined a British merchantman at Yokohama in this fashion and, after a couple of years on the world's sea lanes, took his discharge at Sydney. There in 1876, aged about 25, he signed on as a pumper on a Torres Strait pearling lugger. He was hardworking and ambitious. He learnt to dive from a Malay diver and soon achieved a high reputation as a diver. During the next few years, several other Japanese sailors arrived in similar circumstances and some of these became divers. The men performed so well — either as crew or divers — that the pearlery began to recruit Japanese overseas. In 1883 there were about 15 or 16 Japanese recruited in Hong Kong to work as pumpers on the Thursday Island luggers on 18-month contracts. Later in that year the Torres Strait pearlery began to recruit in Japan itself; at Yokohama on 10 October Captain JA Miller engaged 37 Japanese (six divers, six tenders, 24 pumpers and an interpreter — all on two-year contracts). The performance of these men was such that the Australian pearlery continued to seek labour in Japan. The following year another 69 were recruited for them by Fearon, Low and Co., a British firm in Kobe. Of these, about 45 went to Thursday Island and 15 to Darwin. In June 1885 Streeter and Co., the largest of the Western Australian pearlery, recruited at Yokohama six divers and an interpreter on terms similar to those of the Miller contracts.

Commerce

In February 1890 Kanematsu Fusajirō, a businessman from Kobe, arrived in Sydney to set up the Sydney office of his trading firm. With him was his manager designate, Kitamura Toranosuke, aged 24. In 1918, when the patent firm in Japan became a public company, Kitamura was the principal shareholder, holding 18 per cent of its capital. In 1922 when the Sydney office became a separate company, F Kanematsu (Aust) Ltd, he was its managing director. He died in harness in 1930 and was survived by one son and three daughters in Australia. In the previous year the firm had endowed the Kanematsu Memorial Institute of Pathology and Biochemistry at Sydney Hospital. During his 40-year reign in

Sydney, the number of bales of wool shipped by the firm from Australia had risen from 200 in 1890–91 to 100,000 in 1930 (in which year Japan supplanted France as the number two market for Australian wool).

The third period (1892–1902)

In 1891 the number of Japanese on Thursday Island was about 100. In that year 12 arrived; in 1892, 100; in 1893, 264; and, in the first quarter of 1894, 152. The government resident reported that this influx had caused wages to fall to half their previous level and had produced widespread unemployment — half the 222 Japanese ashore were unemployed. He expressed fear that the pearling industry might pass into Japanese hands: ‘Two years ago there were not 20 boats owned and manned by Japanese. Now there are upwards of 70, and of these 38 are owned by Japanese. This is a matter that merits the serious attention of Parliament.’ The following appear to have been among the factors contributing to this flow of immigrants.

There was the impact of the wealth of the immigrants returning to their villages on the expiry of their contracts. On Thursday Island it was rare for a man to send home less than ¥100 a year (even in his first year). At home he would have earned about ¥40 a year and out of this have had to buy food. Some brought home very much more. In November 1890, it was a syndicate of 10 Japanese on Thursday Island that drew Carbine in Tattersall’s Melbourne Cup sweepstake. They returned to Japan the following month with their winnings — £22,500. Three of them are still remembered in their villages in Wakayama prefecture: Hiramatsu Gorobei and Urita Jinemon from Shionomisaki, and Ebina Torakichi from Tanami. Hiramatsu invested his winnings in mountain land and became known as ‘the forest king of the Kinan district’. Urita put his money into a boat for deep-sea tuna fishing. He also rebuilt his home and put around it a fine stone wall (which is still standing). Ebina bought from his employer the beautiful Fukuhara *geisha*, whom he married. He also donated half the cost of rebuilding the belfry at the local temple. In his lengthy report on Australia and its potential as a field for Japanese emigration, Watanabe Kanjuro in 1894 wrote that because of the savings that people (including the Carbine syndicate) were bringing home, villagers from Wakayama prefecture were swarming to Australia.

Another factor may have been the adoption by the Japanese Government of a more positive attitude to emigration on the appointment of Enomoto Takeaki as foreign minister in May 1891 and the establishment soon after by private enterprise of large companies to finance and broker emigration. The first of these, the Yoshisa Emigration Co. was founded in December 1891 by Yoshikawa, vice-president of the Nihon Yusen Kaisha (NYK) — Japan’s largest shipping company. Hitherto

the Foreign Ministry had been fairly circumspect in issuing passports to contract labourers, but now the vice-minister took the view that if labourers were able to make proper arrangements, the government would assist them as best they could.

It was under the auspices of the emigration companies that in the years 1892–1902 a total of about 2,600 Japanese contract labourers were brought to the Queensland canefields; the first group, 50 strong, landing in November 1892. By December 1896, 1,126 had arrived; but by then the attitude of the Queensland Government, initially favourable to Japanese immigration had, under the pressure of public opinion, begun to change. At a conference of premiers in Sydney in March 1896 it was with Queensland's support that resolutions were unanimously passed that each colony 'should extend without delay the provisions of the Chinese Restriction Acts to all coloured labourers'. In the months that followed, however, the Queensland Government adopted an alternative course of action and in March 1897, by means of a special protocol in which the right of either party to regulate the immigration of labourers and artisans was expressly recognised, entered the 1894 Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation.

In April 1897, probably as a result of the establishment of a monthly Australian service by the NYK line with steerage accommodation at half the prevailing price, the tempo of Japanese arrivals at Thursday Island again began to increase, once more in a situation of unemployment. In prompt response to cables from the consul, the Japanese Government in June prohibited the emigration to all parts of Queensland of all labourers or artisans except where a contract with an employer in Australia could be negotiated before embarkation. There were notorious cases in which these restrictions were circumvented by the emigration companies — for example, on 16 June, 59 uncontracted immigrants landed at Thursday Island bearing passports made out for the Northern Territory.

A proposal by the Queensland Government for complete cessation of Japanese immigration was rejected, but after prolonged negotiations a settlement was reached in October 1900 in which the Japanese population of Queensland at 31 October 1898 of 3,247 was accepted as a ceiling not to be exceeded. In the months that followed, however, the Japanese made no special exertions to restore their numbers to 3,247. Their total in Queensland at the 1901 census was only 2,269.

In February 1902, the federal *Immigration Restriction Act* completely closed Australia to further settlement by Japanese. At that date the Japanese population was 3,593, of whom 90 per cent were in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Thereafter, the only Japanese to enter Australia were a handful of merchants, tourists and students on temporary visas, and contract labourers for the pearling industry.

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