

INTRODUCTION

Sometime around 1915, a dozen Australian women paused for a photograph as they readied for a Japanese-inspired parade at Wallaroo Mines in Kadina on South Australia's remote Yorke Peninsula (see Figure 0.1). The women are dressed in homemade interpretations of kimonos and obis and wear chrysanthemums in their hair. Two of them hold Japanese umbrellas and one a painted fan. A young child clutches a Japanese doll and large paper chrysanthemum as she sits in a sedan chair decorated with flowers. The Japanese war flag, the ensign of the powerful Imperial Navy, flutters somewhat limply near the front of this little procession. Japan, for the time being, was an ally if not quite a friend. Its navy was protecting Australia's coastline and escorting Australian troopships to distant wars for and on behalf of Great Britain. This wartime connection is elsewhere apparent in the photograph. Towards the back of the pictured group, one woman has adorned her Japanese robe with the ribbon of the Australian Red Cross Society, formed in 1914 to provide comforts to serving soldiers overseas such as knitted socks, vests and chocolate bars.

This photographic performance of Australian conceptions of women's wartime duty using elements of Japanese culture speaks powerfully to the connections between Australian perceptions of Japan and photography at that time—connections that were to go through periods of rupture and reconciliation in the decades to come. Photography is an evocative means of crossing time and territory in imaginative and physical senses. The Wallaroo Mines photograph was likely taken as a memento of an Australia Day community pageant in 1915 in which participants demonstrated their imagined allegiance with the Allies by appearing in their national costumes. A group of so-called 'geisha girls' and 'Japanese ladies' received special mention in the local newspaper.¹ Japanese decorative arts and textiles, moreover, were *a la mode* in Australian homes and it was not unusual for Australian women to identify with their Japanese sisters to the far north by posing for photographs in which they

1 'Australia Day. Magnificent Kadina Pageant', *Kadina and Wallaroo Times*, 28 July 1915, 2.



Figure 0.1. Untitled postcard, Wallaroo Mines c. 1915.

Source: National Library of Australia, PIC Album 1197/2 #PIC/15675/262.

interpret and adopt their dress at home.² Such imagined connections are heightened by the physical movement of the photograph across time and space. Not long after it was made, the Wallaroo Mines photograph travelled as a postcard connecting its writer with her brother, who lived 150 km away in Adelaide. Her message wished her brother good health and, in pointing out a special someone among the group, allowed the photograph to bring them emotionally closer to someone far away. After moving from one private collection to the next for almost a century, shifting from personal keepsake to collectable, the postcard acquired new value as an object of public cultural heritage when it entered the National Library of Australia collection in 2013.

This kind of complex, material and imaginative movement makes photography a valuable medium of historical analysis and cross-cultural interpretation. Photographs are highly adaptable objects of material culture that are equally at home in personal and public realms. Evident

2 Melissa Miles and Jessica Neath, 'Staging Japanese Femininity: Cross-Cultural Dressing in Australian Photography', *Fashion Theory* 20, no. 4 (2016): 545–73.

in their multitudes in immigration documents, government archives, the news media, postcards, tourism, advertising, art galleries and family albums, they also readily shift between and across these realms. Unbound by the limitations of written or spoken language, photographs are likewise well suited for moving between cultures. Their longevity means they can be revisited again and again, allowing them to acquire and shed meanings in often unpredictable ways. Yet, while they offer insight into the big questions of history—involving identity, place and conflict—there remains a quiet intimacy in historical photographs. When held in the hand, they offer a powerful material connection to other people, times and places.

Australia's historically ambivalent relationship with Japan—its oldest and arguably most significant regional partner—is fertile ground for analysing the critical nexus of photography, history and cross-cultural interpretation. While the connections between two such different countries should not be overstated, Australia and Japan share a certain geo-cultural commonality that lends itself to the kind of analysis that *Pacific Exposures* undertakes. Both Australia and Japan are uneasily located in the traditional East/West binary. One is ostensibly the most 'Western' country in the Asia-Pacific, and the other is in many ways the most Asian country in the 'West'. Crossing the vast Pacific in literal and figurative senses has represented a major cultural challenge to Australians—one that has been enabled by and reflected in photographs. From the fascination with all things Japanese in the early twentieth century through the bitter enmity of the Pacific War and the tortuous path to reconciliation in the postwar period and beyond, Australians have used photography to express a divided sense of conflict and kinship with Japan.

It is surely significant that Neville Meaney's comprehensive history of transformations in Australian–Japanese relations, *Towards a New Vision* (1999), was inspired by a pictorial exhibition, curated by the author, first shown in the New South Wales Parliament House in 1997. It is significant also that Meaney used a visual reference to signify the shifting points of view and perspectives of two countries thrown into an unlikely, enduring relationship.³ Understanding the cultural process of response and reaction that characterises this relationship involves extending the

3 Neville Meaney, *Towards a New Vision: Australia and Japan through 100 Years* (East Roseville: Kangaroo Press, 1999).

interest in historical photographs beyond the events depicted, to also consider what photographs *do*. The photographs examined in *Pacific Exposures* indicate how Australians adopted an array of visual practices—including snapshots, lanternslides, art, news photographs and military public relations—to express their own experiences of international relations and their changing relationship to the past. As facilitators of encounters both real and imagined, as confronting images of battle, and as postwar reflections of rapprochement and anticipations of a fruitful mutual future, photographs have found an intimate place in Australian homes and also figured prominently in the public domain.

Pacific Exposures is, therefore, a story of transnational connection and movement—of people, ideas, labour, commodities and culture. It acknowledges that national histories are the products of relations with foreign countries, rather than merely an internalised vision of national uniqueness. The photographers examined in this book are not simply citizens, residents or public servants of Australia, they are also tourists, consumers, migrants, artists and workers who have forged their own emotional, material, aesthetic, familial and political links with Japan.⁴

In looking at these links, this book contributes to an existing body of research that examines Australia–Japan relations from the grassroots level to complement and extend histories structured around political, military and economic relations.⁵ Further, it develops research on cross-cultural photographic relations. Modes of photographic encounter between Japan, Europe and the United States (US) have been the subject of numerous books and articles. Some historians have interpreted Anglo-European appetites for late nineteenth-century Japanese photographs as a sign of prevailing romantic impressions of Japan as an Oriental fantasia of cherry blossom, teahouses and geisha.⁶ The thriving Yokohama trade in studio photographs has represented a particularly appealing subject

4 See Akira Iriye, 'The Making of the Transnational World', in *Global Interdependence: The World After 1945*, ed. Akira Iriye (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

5 See Paul Jones and Pam Oliver, eds., *Changing Histories: Australia and Japan* (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 2001); Michael Ackland and Pam Oliver, eds., *Unexpected Encounters: Neglected Histories Behind the Australia–Japan Relationship* (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 2007); Noreen Jones, *Number 2 Home: A Story of Japanese Pioneers in Australia* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2002).

6 Lorraine Sterry, 'Constructs of Meiji Japan: The Role of Writing by Victorian Women Travellers', *Japan Studies* 23, no. 2 (2003): 178; Gennifer Weisenfeld, 'Touring "Japan-as-Museum": Nippon and Other Japanese Imperialist Travelogues', *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 8, no. 3 (Winter 2000): 757.

for historians, who have examined the production and consumption of these images in Europe, Britain, Australia and the US.⁷ However, the ways in which Australians have used photography to express their responses to Japan, and more broadly their place in the Asia-Pacific region, has received far less critical attention. The photographs examined here not only provide new insight into the travels and experiences of individual photographers, they also contribute to photography history by revealing many other ways that photography serves as a medium for social and cultural connection.

While structured chronologically, *Pacific Exposures* is not simply an illustrated history of Australian–Japanese relations. It focuses on key moments when the practice of photography played crucial roles in Australian perceptions of and relations with Japan. Building on a body of scholarship on nineteenth-century photographs of Japan and their reception in Australia,⁸ this book begins in a time of major change and ideological ferment in the two countries' histories. The interconnected issues of race, national identity and Australia's tenuous identification with its situation in the Asia-Pacific were hotly debated during the lead-up to Federation in 1901 and through to the interwar years. (Indeed, they have never really disappeared from the public conversation.) This period largely coincided with Japan's Meiji era, in which the formerly feudal society began ostensibly to 'Westernise' its social structures, economy and international relations. Significantly, Japan strenuously objected to the racially exclusionary immigration policy that came to be popularly known as 'White Australia' when it was enacted in 1901, not so much because of its fundamental inequity, but because they saw themselves as entitled to the same status as Europeans.⁹

7 Maki Fukuoka, 'Selling Portrait Photographs: Early Photographic Business in Asakusa, Japan', *History of Photography* 35, no. 4 (2011): 355–73; Luke Gartlan, 'Types or Costumes? Reframing Early Yokohama Photography', *Visual Resources* 22, no. 3 (2006): 239–63; Luke Gartlan, *A Career of Japan: Baron Raimund Von Stillfried and Early Yokohama Photography* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Mio Wakita, *Staging Desires: Japanese Femininity in Kusakabe Kimbei's Nineteenth Century Souvenir Photograph* (Berlin: Reimer, 2013).

8 See for example Luke Gartlan, 'Japan Day by Day? William Henry Metcalf, Edward Sylvester Morse and Early Tourist Photography in Japan', *Early Popular Visual Culture* 8, no. 2 (2010); Gartlan, 'Types or Costumes?', 239–63; Isobel Crombie and Luke Gartlan, *Shashin: Nineteenth-Century Japanese Studio Photography* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2005).

9 See Neville Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1976), 111.

Chapter 1, “‘The Child of the World’s Old Age’: Photographing Japan in the Early Twentieth Century’, focuses on the significance attributed to photographs of children at this pivotal time. Although they are less well known than photographs of ‘exotic’ geishas, images of Japanese children were prevalent in women’s magazines, newspapers, travel books, studio photographs and amateur photographic performances.¹⁰ This chapter argues that the recurrence of this symbolic imagery reveals much about Australian perceptions of Japanese cultural traditions, its growing military strength, industrialisation and Australia’s status as a British colony on the fringes of the Asia-Pacific. Popularly described in Australia, Britain and the US as ‘the child of the world’s old age’, Japan was often personified as infantile—sometimes as an unpredictable, unmanageable *enfant terrible*. The international trade in commercially produced photographs of children, as well as postcards and tourist photographs, allowed these and other ideas about Japan to circulate widely in public culture and Australian homes. As photographs of children helped to reinforce conflicting conceptions of Japan as a children’s paradise and a budding (and threatening) military and industrial powerhouse, they also offer new insight into Australian attitudes towards modernity and what it meant for the two nations.

Extending this discussion of how the Australia–Japan relationship was represented symbolically in photographs, Chapter 2, “‘White Australia’ in the Darkroom’, addresses how aspects of this relationship were negotiated through direct, interpersonal relations between Australian and Japanese photographers in the 1910s through to the 1930s. The chapter looks at the contributions to Australian visual culture made by two Japanese photographers living and working in Sydney during the ‘White Australia’ era—Ichiro Kagiya and Kiichiro Ishida. Japan’s status as an enemy during World War II (WWII) has meant that much of the original photographic work examined in this chapter has been hitherto inaccessible and absent from historical analysis. Kagiya’s intriguing photographs of Sydney, its Japanese community and Japanese-inspired public spectacles have only recently been rediscovered—having spent

10 See Alison Broinowski, ‘The Butterfly Phenomenon’, *The Journal of the Asian Arts Society of Australia* 1, no. 3 (1992); Ofra Goldstein-Gidon, ‘Kimono and the Construction of Gendered and Cultural Identities’, *Ethnology* 38, no. 4 (Autumn 1999); Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Mikiko Ashikari, ‘The Memory of Women’s White Faces: Japaneseness and the Ideal Image of Women’, *Japan Forum* 15, no. 1 (2003); Miya Elise Mizuta, “‘Fair Japan’: On Art and War at the Saint Louis World’s Fair, 1904”, *Discourse* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2006); Wakita, *Staging Desires*.

70 years in obscurity following the photographer's return to Japan amid escalating tensions in the lead-up to the Pacific War.¹¹ Additionally, many Japanese-inspired photographs produced by Australians in the first decades of the twentieth century are now known only in reproductions in magazines; the originals were lost, perhaps deliberately, at a time when to express sympathy with Japan was enough to be placed under official suspicion. As well as forming a compelling counterpoint to governmental and military attitudes towards Japan during this period, this chapter highlights how past political and military relations can shape historians' access to photographs and how the more secure bilateral relationship today affords a deeper investigation of these once neglected images of the interwar period.

Chapter 3, 'Shooting Japanese', discusses the Australian photography of the Pacific War from 1941 to 1945, which came to dominate and even define Australian relations with Japan long after the military conflict itself had ended. A large corps of official Australian photographers—working for both government and civilian agencies—expressed the racial ideology of a war fought against an opponent who was increasingly loathed as hostilities intensified. Their battlefield pictures of the Australian encounter with the Japanese, including graphic and often deliberately demeaning pictures of the dead or captured enemy, reflected the compulsions of wartime propaganda. At the same time, they also expanded on a body of visual and textual cultural references derived from decades of concern about the threat of invasion and revealed the national obsession with the battlefield as the ultimate arena for a contest of rival national masculinities. Australian photographers, including George Silk and others less well known, produced some remarkable pictures of the vicious conflict with the Japanese in the jungles and on the beaches of the Pacific islands. However, the enormous photographic archive has been largely ignored, except as a source of emotive illustrative material to popular and tendentiously patriotic histories of the campaign. This chapter delves deep into that archive to provide insights into national, cultural, military and geopolitical insecurities, as Australians sought to identify and produce purportedly definitive images of the Japanese bogeyman.

11 Melissa Miles, 'Ichiro Kagiya in Early Twentieth Century Sydney', *Japanese Studies* 37, no. 1 (2017): 89–116.

Australia's enthusiastic participation in the US-led postwar military occupation of a defeated and temporarily demoralised Japan was a pivotal historical moment in its postwar relations with Japan, and with the Asia-Pacific region generally. Chapter 4, 'Japan for the Taking', examines how photography was the principal medium by which the Occupation of Japan was both officially recorded and circulated to the Australian people back home, a public that remained hostile to and deeply suspicious of its recent, bitter adversary. Phillip Hobson, Alan Queale and their colleagues formed a large cohort of official photographers charged with capturing the activities of the Australian military community in Japan—a force based largely in Hiroshima Prefecture, quite literally in the shadow of the atom-bombed city. Their images expressed the ambivalence of a force torn between the punitive control of a Japan still hated for the barbarities committed by its military against Allied prisoners of war and the well-intentioned governmental commitment to its positive reconstruction. The photography of the Occupation is analysed as a collective example of neo-colonialist visual representation. The images strategically produced to provide positive public relations for the occupying force betray a fundamental if illuminating contradiction. The postwar Japan they portrayed was dependent on the received imagery of the traditional, essentially rural Japan; the country was voided of ugly reminders of the war and pictured as timelessly 'picturesque', paradoxically so given that one of the major rationales for the Occupation was to revamp Japan into a forward-thinking, advanced nation. That the official photographers were so resistant to signs of the emerging Japan reflects a broader postwar Australian anxiety about the powerful modern nation it was in the process of becoming.

Chapter 5, 'Through Non-Military Eyes', looks at photography as a register of revisionary images of Japan in the late 1940s through to the epochal signing of the Basic Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in Tokyo in 1976, when Australia sought to finalise conclusive links with Japan, economically, politically and culturally. Photography was a crucial tool of rapprochement in the rebuilding of the bilateral relationship in this period. For all their indulgence in the privileges of the conqueror, the men and women of the large Australian military community in Occupied Japan were the trailblazers of a new era of engagement with the Asia-Pacific region, later signified by the reoriented itineraries of Australian travellers and the belated embrace of Eastern cultures. Many of the private pictures taken in Occupied Japan identified a nation

to which the official picture was blind—a country that was rapidly modernising and responding to outside influences while remaining true to its cultural roots. Post-Occupation, the photographic record of the Australians in Japan from the 1950s to the 1970s suggests a visual narrative of reinterpretation, in which the recently despised ‘enemy’ was humanised and revisioned as a potential ‘friend’ and ally. Beyond the pragmatic forging of diplomatic and trade links, photography was the most productive means by which Australians sought not merely to reconcile themselves to Japan but also to identify with it. An essentialised ‘traditional’ Japan was reframed into a dynamic society whose bright promise could bring benefit to Australia. Sources include both press and governmental images of interaction in fields such as trade, sport and forms of popular culture. These images of both momentous and mundane examples of cultural and political diplomacy are sometimes so contrived that they inadvertently suggest the tensions that continued to simmer beneath the smiling surface of bilateralism.

‘Cross-Cultural (Mis)Understandings’, the sixth and final chapter, considers how several Australian photographic artists since the 1980s have rejected the clichés of yesteryear and emphasised ambiguity, contradiction and even deliberate misapprehension in their interpretations of Japan. Seemingly in conflict with bland contemporary discourses of ‘mutual understanding’, these independent photographers have eschewed the official representational niceties of closer Australian–Japanese relations dominated by discussions of trade and security. Christopher Köller, Matthew Sleeth, Kristian Häggblom and Meg Hewitt use their cameras to ask more difficult questions at a time characterised by a more mutually confident bilateral relationship. In doing so, they have developed complex responses to Japan and Japanese people that speak to new possibilities of cross-cultural photographic interpretation. Their work suggests that Australia has arrived at a point in its responses to Japan when it is now no longer necessary to say—and photograph—the ‘right thing’. Their images of today’s Japan provoke us to re-examine the past and think critically about how we come to know it. Japan is no more seen reduced to ‘the child of the world’s old age’, but a photographic subject both captivating and confounding, a place to build personal friendships and professional networks, and one open to multiple opportunities while at the same time frustratingly—but nonetheless fruitfully—uncapturable.

Pacific Exposures argues that photographs and photographic practices tell a compelling story of cultural production and response. Making, distributing and interpreting photographs are fundamentally cultural and political practices that show how people relate to one another and how they see themselves in the world. Whether made in times of peace or conflict, photographs both produce and are the products of relations. Therefore, the following chapters reveal not only how Australians have framed Japan over the decades, but also how they have defined their own place in the Asia-Pacific—through periods of heated social debate and political turbulence, vicious armed conflict, and social and economic changes that have been both dramatic and incremental—to arrive at today's era of bilateral cooperation and exchange. In seeking to represent and relate to Japan, Australians have revealed much about themselves.

This text is taken from *Pacific Exposures: Photography and the Australia–Japan Relationship*, by Melissa Miles and Robin Gerster, published 2018 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.