

Australian and Japanese Pioneers: early contact between two important partners

日豪交流史におけるパイオニアたち——重要な関係創生期における接触——

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本研究は日豪関係の黎明期について調べることを目的とする。日豪は1865年より貿易関係を築いてきた。日本が欧米列強と修好通商条約を結んで間もない時である。当時オーストラリアは独立国でなく、英国の領地であった。本論文ではこの時期、相手国に住みながらその居住国に様々な貢献を果たした個人に注目する。最初にオーストラリアに日本人が到着したのは1878年である。日本人は真珠ダイバーとしてオーストラリアの真珠産業に貢献した。また、オーストラリアで稲作を商業化することに成功したのも日本人である。一方初期に日本に渡ったオーストラリア人には、落語家になり落語界で活躍した人物も存在する。このような個人に光を当てながら長い貿易関係を持つ両国の関係を見て行く。

Key words: ☐ Immigration ☐ Australia-Japan trade
☐ Australian pearling ☐ Australian rice
☐ Non-Japanese *benshi* ☐ Non-Japanese *rakugoka*

1 Introduction

Although both Australia and Japan currently have deeply entrenched interests in each other, the relationship is historically only a relatively new phenomenon. It is also an unusual one since neither country has any substantial commonality in terms of language, culture, peoples, and nor do they share geographic proximity being some 7,000 kilometers apart.

This paper will examine the history of interaction between the two countries to show how the relationship has been mutually beneficial, almost to the point of interdependence. Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2008) notes that important trade links underpin this connection, although in more recent years there has been an increasing volume of official and unofficial cultural and other more personal exchanges which have cemented a generally positive image of the other culture. Since the end of hostilities in World War II, the two countries have enjoyed a close relationship which has been of great importance and benefit to their respective governments and peoples.

That is typically the official version of the relationship. The reality is that the two countries have had and continue to have totally different priorities which have caused them to clash, and even vehemently oppose each other's policies. Just over a hundred years ago, Japan was deeply and rightly offended by the introduction of the White Australia Policy which it protested against, but to little effect. Despite their very close ties of late, the Australian government and peoples have been some of the harshest critics of Japanese whaling activities, culminating in the launching of a legal case against Japanese whaling in the International Court of Justice (Alford, 2010). The first point of this paper is to highlight that despite all differences, of which there are many, and all of the problems some of which continue to test the relationship, it has been to the advantage of both parties to ensure that Australia and Japan remain bound and interconnected - and they remain strongly bound out of each other's self-serving needs. This paper will also highlight the contributions of some individuals who were pioneers in early migrations to the other country. These individual contributions deserve to be highlighted because they provided local representatives of their culture who, by their presence, could demonstrate and represent the other culture and provide skills otherwise not available locally, and therefore be to the advantage of their adopted home.

2 | History of early contact

From a European perspective, the country of Australia was only discovered in the 17th century, after which it was extensively explored by Britain's Captain James Cook in 1770. Prior to that Australia had of course been settled by aborigines some 40,000 to 60,000 years earlier, however, they lived in small, itinerant bands which did not amount to any serious claim to nationhood in western eyes. Thus, despite being aware of the presence of aborigines living there, Cook claimed the country as a British territory in 1770 when he sailed along most of its eastern coastline.

As Australia was being colonized by the first British settlers and convicts in 1788, Japan was still in the midst of its *Sakoku* or *Kaikin* period of self-imposed isolation which lasted from 1635 until 1853 when Perry arrived. This ensured almost no contact between Japan and most of the world, including the then British colony of Australia. During this time, not only was entry into Japan by foreigners heavily restricted (only the Dutch, Chinese, Korean, Ainu and Ryukus were permitted to trade and then only through designated ports), but Japanese natives were also banned from leaving the country at the risk of capital punishment. When Japan did open up, it soon recognized how much the advanced nations in Europe and the Americas had progressed, and strove diligently to catch up as fast as possible. It set out to systematically develop and modernize based upon western concepts of education, science, industry and commerce. Although it was not apparent at the time with Japan so clearly focused

on Europe and the Americas, Australia was to become an important part of its push to develop into an advanced economy.

2.1 Australia-Japan Trade

The first recorded business between the two countries (Australia was still a British colony at the time) goes back as far as 1865 when coal was exported to Japan, 1888 when wool was exported, and 1900 when wheat exports began (Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade, 2008). At the time of achieving independence from Great Britain in 1901, Japan was Australia's thirteenth largest trading partner (*ibid*). To facilitate this flourishing trade and migration, the first Japanese consulate was established in Townsville in 1896, however, it was withdrawn in 1908 after restrictive immigration policies associated with the White Australia policy were introduced starting from 1902. The Japanese government was greatly offended that despite its western-influenced industrial development and increasingly high standards of living, education, etc., it was being lumped together with all non-white cultures as “backward” in Australia's strict binary classification system. Despite this deeply divisive problem, trading steadily increased and by 1930, Japan had become Australia's third largest trading partner.

Trade continued to expand until 1936 when Japanese imports were limited as part of western sanctions against Japanese naval aggression. Iron ore exports to Japan were later halted in 1938. The start of the Pacific War in 1941 put an end to all other trade until 1947 when restrictions started to lift and limited trade began again. The signing of the Agreement on Commerce between the Commonwealth of Australia and Japan in July 1957, led the way to increased trade which had still been limited since the end of the war. From 1957, exports to Japan grew steadily and in 1966–1967, Japan overtook the UK as Australia's major trading partner. The 1973 abolition of the White Australia policy manifested Australia's acknowledgement of its strong and increasingly important ties to Asia and the growing movement away from its long-held, assumptive identity as an appendage of the old British empire. After holding the position of being Australia's biggest trading partner for most years since the sixties, Japan was eclipsed by China in 2007 (*ibid*), which only further ensures the continuing place of Asia as Australia's primary trade focus. This can be readily understood by viewing a list of the top 10 two-way trading partners for Australia. Currently 6 are Asian with the UK being placed at number 5. Compare this with 1900 when all major trading partners were either European or fellow British Empire countries with the UK and US as the top trade partners, respectively. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001.)

Overall, Japan has been Australia's primary trading partner for most of the past four decades, with only the USA sporadically, and more recently China taking the top spot and then for only relatively short periods. In 2007–2008, Japan remained the second most important export market for Australia, taking 12.3% of total exports, behind China's 13.2% but ahead of

the USA with 10.3% (Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade, 2012). Japan is also an important contributor to the industrial development of Australia. For example, Japanese car companies manufacture cars and associated parts in Australia producing many thousands of jobs and providing export income for Australia. For Japan, Australia remains a stable source of the raw materials needed to sustain its many industries and considerable energy needs. In particular, Australia has supplied and continues to export huge quantities of coal, iron ore, and uranium, in addition to many agricultural products such as sugar, beef, fruit, wool, seafood, etc. For both countries, the stable, long-term trade relationship has been vital for their economies. A good case can be made that without the other, neither country would have enjoyed quite the same high level of economic development and living standards as they currently do.

3 | Japanese in Australia

Until Japan opened up and international travel was finally permissible during the Meiji era, it was not possible for Japanese to visit or live in Australia. In 1871 an acrobat with the name *Rikinosuke* became the first Japanese national to settle in Australia. He lived in Queensland and like many other countrymen who arrived later, worked in the fledgling Australian pearling industry. When Australia officially was declared an independent nation in 1901, there were estimated to be around 4,000 Japanese immigrants who were mainly based in northern Queensland working in sugar cane or maritime-related industries.

3.1 Japanese pearlers in Australia

The image of Japanese living in Australia is certainly closely associated with the pearling industry based in Broome, Western Australia. In the early 1900s the industry thrived and Broome became the most important pearling center in the world. Diving for pearls in Australia was initially done by aborigines and later by Chinese, but by 1910, the majority of divers were Japanese. They worked as indentured labor, usually for no pay, in order to work off the debt of their transport to Australia. Because of the dangerous conditions of the work, poor equipment, regular cyclones, plentiful sharks and a poor understanding of the relationship between diving time and decompression sickness (or the bends), diving had a high mortality rate and few were actually ever able to pay off their debt. The local cemetery at Broome is full of the graves of Japanese divers who never made it home. Although great fortunes were made in pearls, the actual people who took the risks, the divers, apparently received little benefit.

The introduction of the White Australia Policy which restricted non-Caucasian immigration, was a major setback for the local pearling industry which tried a number of alternatives before successfully circumventing the rules to have Japanese pearl divers

exempted (Frost, 2003; Australian Government, 2007). Japanese divers continued pearling in Broome until the outbreak of both world wars during which they were interned en masse, out of unfounded fears that they would act as spies. In the small but economically vibrant town of Broome where the Japanese community was by then well-established, the locals were in fact interned their long-known friends and colleagues. As such, these Australians apparently treated their “Japanese” well and made their life as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. It was noted in local newspapers after the war how this internment included many persons who spent nearly all or all their life in Australia, and even included younger Japanese who could only speak English (Northern Times, 1946).

After the war ended, many of the pearlers headed back to Broome to resume work. Because of the second world war and the very bitter experiences of Australians who were captured by the Japanese forces in Asia, however, there was enormous anti-Japanese sentiment and many Australians opposed any Japanese staying on. Many were subsequently “repatriated” back to Japan immediately following the war, including Australia-born Japanese. Even in Broome where the Japanese had once been well integrated, the return of the pearlers caused a lot of controversy between locals who either supported their return, and others who called for a ban on all Japanese. Interestingly, a large proportion of the Japanese divers came from the village of *Taiji* which is now widely vilified for its regular dolphin slaughter. Due to this long relationship, Broome and *Taiji* became sister cities in 1981. The controversy surrounded by the release and media attention generated by the Academy Award-winning documentary, *The Cove* (Psihoyos, 2009), however, compelled the Broome side to suspend the relationship in 2009, although it was later resumed that same year (Guest, 2009).

3.2 The Australian rice industry pioneer

A Japanese pioneer who proved to be invaluable to Australia was Mr Isaburo “Jo” Takasuka, who is widely credited with introducing successful commercial rice-growing in the southern states of Victoria and New South Wales. Mr Takasuka was born into a privileged samurai family in Matsuyama in 1865. He was selected to study abroad and received a Bachelor of Arts in the US, after which he returned to Japan and was elected as a parliamentarian (1898–1902). In 1905 he left for Melbourne and in 1906 he was allotted 80 hectares of land on which he first introduced the Japonica rice strain to Australia. Previous attempts to grow rice in this and many other areas of Australia had not succeeded because of the failure to appreciate the relationship between weather and rice growing needs. Like most Australian regions, the area had low and inconsistent rainfall, which was therefore unsuited to rice growing purposes. The sole success for Australian rice had been in Queensland where the heavy tropical rainfalls could support rice growing. After a modest start and much experimenting funded by state government support, it was discovered in 1922 that rice would

grow well on land irrigated by the construction of large dams. Farmers continued to experiment to improve yields and by 1930 this area could produce enough to satisfy all domestic demand and after which Australia began to export rice. Since that time Australia has been a net exporter of rice. In 2010–2011 Australia exported around 65,000 tonnes of rice, providing income of \$61 million per year. These figures are well down from those a decade or so before when the long drought of 2003–2010 had not heavily affected production.

In 1939 Jo Takasuka returned to Japan with the intention of re-establishing a trading business with Australia, but died in 1940 of heart-related problems. His wife accompanied him back to Japan but his three children remained in Australia where they have established themselves in their local communities. Jo is widely regarded as the father of the Australian rice industry, particularly since the previously successful Queensland industry was later abandoned in favor of more profitable sugar cane.

4 | Australians in Japan

Few Australians made an impact in early Japan, such was the focus of most Australians on “mother England” and Europe. This attitude continued until at least World War II after which Australia slowly came to realize that its future was more clearly tied to the US and Asia, rather than Britain which was aligning itself as being a part of the European community. A young Australian man, however, became quite famous for his place as a pioneer in traditional Japanese culture from 1891.

4.1 *Black Ishii*

Henry James Black was both the first non-Japanese *kabuki* actor and a *rakugo* performer in Japan who used the stage names *Black Ishii* and *Black Kairakutei*. He was born in Adelaide in 1858 but when he was 3 years old his family moved to Japan where his father published newspapers. The family had stopped in Japan on their way to Europe, and the father became enamored of Japan and the people’s desire for knowledge. Being here with his family from that young age, Black became a fluent speaker of both English and Japanese. He found success as a professional *rakugo* storyteller after earlier trying his hand at English teaching. He was adopted by a wealthy merchant, married his daughter and obtained Japanese citizenship. Despite having a large build, he also was a successful *onnagata* (female role) actor in *kabuki*. His chosen career, however, was against the wishes of his western family members who once even protested during a performance in 1895, forcing Black to quit performing until 1902. Black’s once-flourishing career, however, began to decline which one writer blamed on the envy of younger Japanese *rakugoka* who resented a foreigner being successful in their world (Dym, 2000).

Black owed a lot of his appeal to his Japanese fluency as well as his appearance as a westerner, since Caucasians were still regarded as novelties in Japan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His story telling was popular as he could also talk about western culture and values which were still not widely understood at the time, although ironically after living in Japan from such a young age, Black had little direct experience to draw upon. After not being able to work in *rakugo*, Black found occasional work as a *benshi*. This work consisted of translating English and explaining to Japanese audiences the meaning of western movies. Not many people were able to do this work as very few Japanese had been overseas and did not have either the English ability or the cultural knowledge required. Other non-Japanese were similarly handicapped by their lack of fluency in Japanese, and bilinguals such as Black were very rare at the time. He died in 1923 in Japan. Although there were earlier famous Caucasians such as William Adams who was the first Englishman to visit Japan in 1600 and eventually became an advisor to *Tokugawa Ieyasu*, Black was the first to become a successful entertainer, widely known by ordinary Japanese and a spokesman for western culture through his *kabuki*, *rakugo* and *benshi* performances.

5 | Conclusion

As was seen from the discussion of trading ties, Australia needs Japan as a vital market for its resources and Japan needs Australia as a reliable source of the materials it requires to sustain its industrial strength. On a more individual level, the 2006 Census revealed that almost 41,000 residents in Australia were of Japanese ancestry (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). This figure includes both Australian nationals as well as Japanese citizens who are more recently arrived workers, students, long-term visitors and others residing in Australia. In 2011, over 332,000 Japanese tourists visited Australia, however, this is less than half of the 1997 total of 841,000. Many factors have been blamed for this including racism, poor standards of service, cheaper alternatives for Japanese tourists, and ineffective marketing (Howden and Norrie, 2010). There are thought to be over 9,000 Australians currently residing in Japan (Australian Embassy). Despite its relatively small population, Australia makes up an important source of foreign tourism to Japan with an established inflow of skiers during winter, as well as regular tourists visiting Tokyo, Kyoto and other famous locales throughout the year.

And although less well known, the roles of individuals such as Jo Takasuka in Australia and Henry Black in Japan, were important for their adopted countries. Despite their professional successes, they were important as they were pioneers who could represent their countries at a time when international travel was difficult and expensive. Their value lay in their ability to embody their culture in another country where the people knew little about

them and were certain to have little, if any previous contact with people from the other culture at all. Recently, longer term stays such as student exchanges or other foreign study programs, working holiday programs, international marriages, foreign postings or regular dealings with expatriate workers at home can provide in-depth knowledge of another culture and its people, and are more likely to lead to an appreciation of its strengths and a decrease in the almost “natural” prejudice humans have seem to have towards anything or anybody unfamiliar. Despite my own familiarity with both cultures, having now lived almost half my life in either country, I was not aware of the stories and successes of these early pioneers in either country. I am confident that students will be similarly unaware of them and intrigued to learn of their exploits and positive contributions.

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