

## globalising aboriginal reconciliation

*Indigenous Australians and Asian  
(Japanese) Migrants*

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Over the last few years, I have attended several political meetings concerned with the refugee crisis, multiculturalism or Indigenous rights in Australia, meetings at which liberal democratic-minded 'left-wing' people came together to discuss, or agitate for change in, governmental policies. At these meetings, I always found it difficult to accept the slogans on their placards and in their speeches: 'Shame Australia! Reconciliation for a united Australia', 'Wake up Australia! We welcome refugees!' or 'True Australians are tolerant! Let's celebrate multicultural Australia!' My uncomfortable feeling came not only from the fact that I was left out because of my Japanese nationality but also because I had never seen or heard words like 'shame Japan', 'wake up Japan' or 'true Japanese are ...' at Japanese 'left-wing' political gatherings. In Japan, these are words used only by right-wing nationalists. Indeed it is difficult to even imagine liberal-left intellectuals in postwar Japan calling for a 'true Japanese' political response (as if such a response was positive), such is the extent to which the idea of 'good nationalism' is now regarded as an oxymoron. This is my starting point for an essay in which I want to be attentive to the different roles played by national(ism) in the Japanese and Australian political environments.<sup>1</sup>

### — A BRIEF HISTORY OF JAPANESE PEARL-SHELLERS IN AUSTRALIA

The history of Japanese pearl-shellers in northern Australia has been studied by both Australian and Japanese historians since the late 1970s.<sup>2</sup> The collecting and trading of pearl-shells in northern Australia has gone on for as long as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have been in the region.<sup>3</sup> However, the colonial pearl-shell industry began in the 1860s. When

fishing beds of pearl-shells were 'found' near Broome and Thursday Island these places experienced sudden development as fishery ports. One may think it was the 'pearl' as an ornament they were after, but it was the 'shell', a popular material for the button industry in Europe since the 1850s. At first, the colonial fishery industry used Indigenous Australians and Malays as manual labourers to collect pearl-shells, but workers were in serious short supply. During this time, Japan went through the Meiji Restoration and abandoned its national isolation policy. As a result, Japanese labour migrants began to arrive in northern Australia.

In 1876, Kojiro Nonami from Shimane prefecture was recorded as the first Japanese pearl-shell worker to arrive on Thursday Island.<sup>4</sup> From the 1880s, labour migration from Japan to Thursday Island and Broome became constant. With Australia producing, at one point, 80 per cent of pearl-shells in the world, even the introduction of the White Australia Policy in 1901 did not halt the flow of Japanese migrant labourers. According to the statistics, there were about 1200 Japanese in Broome and 600 Japanese on Thursday Island in July 1919.<sup>5</sup>

The pearl-shell industry peaked in the early years of the twentieth century. While the First World War had a negative effect on the pearl-shell market, the most destructive impact was caused by the Second World War. When Japan declared war against the USA in 1941, Australia was allied with the Americans and most Japanese in Australia were detained.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, all fishing boats were either impounded by the navy or destroyed. After the war, Japanese immigration was restricted until 1953 when some thirty Japanese were finally permitted to enter Australia and start work in Broome again. The indenture of 106 Okinawans was permitted in 1958 as well. Okinawa was an American mandated territory at that time, which justified the arrival of Okinawans in Australia.<sup>7</sup> However, even though there was a short recovery, the pearl-shell industry practically came to an end in the 1960s.

The question at the centre of this article is this: are Japanese people responsible for the colonial exploitation of Indigenous Australians, their lands and waters? In a more general sense, what are the 'global implications' of the colonial past and postcolonial present of Australia? Finally I want to consider how these questions are they related to the process of Aboriginal reconciliation.

### — READING THE AUSTRALIAN DECLARATION TOWARDS RECONCILIATION

In 2000, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation presented the *Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation* (hereafter, *Australian Declaration*), consisting of eleven paragraphs and twelve sentences.<sup>8</sup> It begins: 'We, the peoples of Australia, of many origins as we are, make a commitment to go on together in a spirit of reconciliation'. It continues by acknowledging the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the original owners of this country, and that they

were colonised without treaty or consent. After affirming the fact that their traditional customs and beliefs have survived until today, there follows four sentences about historical recognition and the 'nation':

Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves.

Reconciliation must live in the hearts and minds of all Australians. Many steps have been taken, many steps remain as we learn our shared histories.

As we walk the journey of healing, one part of the nation apologises and expresses its sorrow and sincere regret for the injustices of the past, so the other part accepts the apologies and forgives.

The *Australian Declaration* then gestures towards a future in which all Australians enjoy their rights at the same time as Indigenous people hold their right of self-determination, and ends hoping for 'a united Australia': 'Our hope is for a united Australia that respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all'.

Reading the *Australian Declaration*, it seems to me that the purpose of this mode of reconciliation is clearly the *re-integration of participants in the Australian nation-state* through the national ritual of apology and forgiveness, and by learning and acknowledging 'our shared histories'. In other words, the purpose of 'reconciliation' initiated by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation is re-imagining the united nation-state of Australia. I would like to call such a style of reconciliation 'closed reconciliation'. By the word 'closed' I want to emphasise that Indigenous issues are recognised as 'domestic problems' to be solved within the framework of the nation-state, and thus the global implications of Australian colonialism are not considered. Nonetheless, Indigenous peoples' rights are an international concern. For example, since 1982 the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) has promoted global networks among indigenous peoples from different countries. Even though there is a sense of international alliance among different countries' indigenous populations, their political activism has mainly targeted improvement in their social standing and rights *within* the nation-state where each indigenous group has been colonised. Therefore, Aboriginal people's rights and reconciliation have been sought within the framework of the 'Australian problem'. Even though there is international concern about 'indigenous rights' or 'reconciliation', each 'right' and 'reconciliation' has been recognised as a domestic issue of each nation-state.

It is reasonable to say, as Benedict Anderson argues, that notions of 'minority', 'ethnicity' and 'indigeneity' are the product of colonial modernity and of a particular nation-state.<sup>9</sup> Because of this, I do not want to underestimate the importance of promoting indigenous

rights within nation-states. In Australia this would include the promotion of Aboriginal self-determination, land rights, rights under Native title and 'National Reconciliation'. These are *important domestic issues* which I hope the Australian government and people sincerely promote as part of the national agenda. However, I could not help asking myself this question: am I, a Japanese citizen living in Australia for over six years, not responsible at all for Aboriginal reconciliation? In more general terms, the question is whether indigenous issues related to 'reconciliation' should be treated *only* as a 'closed' process of re-integration of the nation. Are indigenous issues nothing but a 'national problem'?

In a previous article, 'Anti-Minorities History', I explored the possibilities of globalising Aboriginal historiography by 'unfocusing' the Australian national history and connecting Aboriginal pasts with the histories of Asian migrants to Australia.<sup>10</sup> Using 'Aboriginal reconciliation' and 'fabrication of the national memory' as key concepts, I here want to explore ways of globalising indigenous issues by emancipating them from the notion of a 'national agenda'. For this purpose, what needed is the opposite direction of 'closed reconciliation': I seek for, namely, 'open reconciliation', in which the global responsibilities and implications of Australian colonisation become the primary agenda for an alternative process of Aboriginal reconciliation.

#### — ASIAN MIGRANTS AND ABORIGINAL RECONCILIATION

The components of reconciliation include an apology, social justice in the present, and acknowledgement of the past injustice. Let us start with how to acknowledge past injustice. As we have already seen, in the *Australian Declaration*, 'the peoples of Australia, of many origins' are expected to 'learn our shared histories'. What kind of 'shared histories' are Australians expected to learn? The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has already shown their view of 'our shared histories' in the 1993 document *Sharing History: A Sense for All Australians of a Shared Ownership of Their History*.<sup>11</sup> Reading this, it becomes fairly clear what kind of memories of the past we are expected to share: histories of the invasion of Australia by the British colonialists; histories of several Aboriginal attempts to reconcile with 'whites' in the early stages of colonisation; histories of mainstream Australian society refusing to acknowledge the human rights of Aborigines; or histories of cultural oppression by missionaries and governments moved by the logic of assimilation. After describing these pasts, *Sharing History* concludes by saying 'Reconciliation is about addressing past grievances and about forging a new foundation for future relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians'.<sup>12</sup> However, there is no statement on Australian non-white migrants' responsibility for Aboriginal reconciliation.

Given the fact that 'we, the peoples of Australia, of many origins as we are,' are expected to 'share histories' of the British invasion of Australia, and that it is also expected that 'one

part of the nation apologises and expresses its sorrow and sincere regret for the injustices of the past', the logical conclusion is that non-British migrants, such as Asian migrants in Australia, are responsible for the history of British colonisation of Australia and, thus, have to apologise to the indigenous people of Australia for 'the injustice of the past' done by the British. However, I would argue that the issue is not so much how Asian migrants accept and share (with whites) the past injustice done by the British. Rather, what needs to be explored is how to identify the specific histories of non-Anglo migrants' past (injustice) that need to be shared (with Indigenous Australians). In other words, even though non-Anglo migrants are not responsible for the British invasion of Australia, they may still be responsible for their own injustice in the past, *their own colonisation of Australia*.

Before I explore this point further, I want to suggest three 'historical subjects' of Australian history—mainstream Anglo-Celtic (whites/Europeans), Asian migrants and Indigenous Australians in order to make my argument simpler. However, I will also address the serious problems that are inevitable when categorising the 'historical subject'.

What needs to be questioned here are modes of accessing 'collective memory'. Many people would probably agree that the colonisation of Australia was led by Anglo-Celts, and they were not only colonialists but also racists. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that *both* Asian migrants *and* Aboriginal people were the victims of the white domination of Australia. If so, on what grounds do Asian Australians have to share the 'injustice of the past' in an equal manner with whites and apologise to Indigenous Australians? Since *Sharing History* does not particularly mention the Asian commitment to the Australian invasion and colonisation, it is logical to assume that they (under the category of 'non-Indigenous') are expected to access the 'memory of black-white pasts of injustice'. In other words, every non-Indigenous Australian is meant to be *equally responsible* for the British colonisation of Australia. Here is the problem related to the 'fabrication of national memory'. Ghassan Hage, who himself is a post-war Lebanese migrant, summarised the issue I raise here as follows:

Is there a difference between the migrant saying that 'these events do not concern me' and the established Australian citizen saying the same thing on different grounds? Can a migrant relate affectively to a past that is not his or her own? Can a migrant ever genuinely care for the nation without such an identification with the past? Can he or she ever experience an intense sense of participatory belonging the way people who are assumed to identify more fully with the past experience it?<sup>13</sup>

Hage argues Australian (non-white) migrants are 'in a contradictory colonial location' because migration is clearly a continuing colonial process, but, at the same time, share 'important realities' with Indigenous people in being excluded by white Australians' racist policy.<sup>14</sup>

Hage has no doubt that Asian Australians should support Aboriginal sovereignty but he also summarises this complicated situation by saying 'No neat relation to Australian history here, and too many vacillating *conatus* ... a very postcolonial *colonial* situation'.<sup>15</sup> Now let's listen to his 'subjective' and creative narrative:

*I ought to thank the Aboriginal people for letting me in ... Except they didn't give me a visa either ... I ought to apologise ... to each her therapy ... I might be onto another 'good thing' here: the struggle for the equal right to apologise and recognise injustice! That must go far ... Actually, maybe I can belong here. That guy Noel Pearson said that Australia is made out of indigenous and non-indigenous people. I like that. Finally a category that puts me and John Howard in the same position. Maybe I can belong here ... Who says I don't care ...*<sup>16</sup>

By sharing the 'injustice of the past' with mainstream Anglo-Celtic Australian society, Hage cynically suggests Asian migrants can finally acquire racial equality.

To my knowledge, there are surprisingly few articles discussing Asian commitment to Aboriginal reconciliation. Peter Read is one of the few scholars who explicitly warns that the Reconciliation Council has been too preoccupied with the black-white binary. Read suggests the need for opening up ways of inviting 'The Third Side of the Triangle', Australians who are of neither British nor Aboriginal descent.<sup>17</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty discusses a similar point in a more theoretical manner.<sup>18</sup> Chakrabarty argues that Henry Reynolds's (one of the co-authors of *Sharing History*) model of reconciliation is confined to blacks and whites, based on a 'conquest-paradigm' in which there is no space for immigrants to participate. On the other hand, Chakrabarty argues, Mudrooroo speaks of Aboriginal history from a 'colonisation-paradigm' in which 'Aboriginal knowledges, life-worlds and life-practices were not only invaded but they were colonised as well'.<sup>19</sup> There, Chakrabarty sees the possible conversation between Aboriginal people and immigrants today: 'It is not based necessarily on "shared histories" (as may be claimed between the settler and native) but on the shared predicament of having been colonised (both politically and intellectually)'.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Chakrabarty tries to promote Asian participation in Aboriginal reconciliation by sharing in the 'predicament' with Aboriginal people, rather than (as Hage argues) by sharing in the 'injustice of the past' with white Australians.

I want to place this debate in the wider context of Australian historiography. Since the late 1990s, two relatively independently developed historiographies of Australia—Aboriginal history and Asian Australian history—have begun to communicate with each other.<sup>21</sup> In the context of current Australian politics, Aboriginal human/land rights and multiculturalism began to be discussed in a more connected manner than ever before. Ann Curthoys points

out that the high degree of public support for the One Nation Party, which attacked both Aboriginal people and immigrants, 'forced another kind of rethinking of some of these issues'.<sup>22</sup>

Curthoys has been consciously studying the issues of connection between Aboriginal and Asian histories in Australia since as early as the 1970s. She explored this question in her PhD thesis in 1973,<sup>23</sup> and recently brought the issue to the fore again in several articles.<sup>24</sup> Curthoys points out that, since multicultural discourses became dominant in the 1980s, Aboriginal and Asian migrant experiences under white Australian racism have been discussed analogically. In other words, multiculturalism has tended to locate Indigenous issues within the frame of cultural diversity in Australia. Aboriginal people have consistently objected to this paradigm; stressing their uniqueness, they have refused to be seen as just one of the 'ethnic minorities' of Australia.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, instead of locating Indigenous issues in the context of cultural diversity, Curthoys suggests locating the issues of cultural diversity in the context of Indigenous issues.<sup>26</sup> At first glance, her claim sounds similar to Chakrabarty's call to share in the 'predicament' of Indigenous Australians. But what Curthoys wants to emphasise is the fact that Asian migrants are also colonisers. Her claim is also different from the position taken up by Hage. Instead of putting Asian migrants 'and John Howard in the same position', she argues that in contemporary Australia, colonisation and de-colonisation are happening at the same time:

The continuing presence of colonialism has implications for all immigrants, whether first-generation or sixth. All non-indigenous people, recent immigrants and descendants of immigrants alike, are beneficiaries of a colonial history. We share the situation of living on someone else's land.<sup>27</sup>

Curthoys emphasises that the British invasion of Aboriginal nations is 'the big picture'. At the same time, she calls for studies of the complex cultural interactions of Australia *not* within the framework of cultural diversity *but* as part of the continuing colonial process.<sup>28</sup>

I have examined several different arguments concerned with Asian migrants' positionality in relation to Aboriginal reconciliation and the wider context of 'connecting' Indigenous and Asian histories in Australia. Once one meditates on the issues of Aboriginal reconciliation from the complex positionality of Asian migrants (who were the *victims* of Australian racism as well as *colonisers* of Indigenous nations), it seems to me unrealistic and undesirable to aim for 'a united Australia' through the process of reconciliation. Instead, I think it is more important to realise a 'disunited Australia', in which different positions require different memories, responsibilities and 'implications' in order to commit to Aboriginal reconciliation. These relatively new arguments on Asian migrants and Aboriginal reconciliation are still only

'half-opened'. Compared to the *Australian Declaration*, which naively aims to achieve 'a united Australia' through the national ritual of apologies and forgiveness, the arguments outlined above certainly alert us to different political and historical positions, which, I believe, require critical thinking to take Aboriginal reconciliation beyond the framework of it being a 'domestic problem'.

Ann Curthoys and John Docker recently edited a special section, 'Genocide?: Australian Aboriginal History in International Perspective', in the journal *Aboriginal History*. In their introductory article, Curthoys and Docker suggest the importance of looking at Aboriginal historiography in an international perspective without 'false analogy'.<sup>29</sup> In a broader sense, this article can be identified as one of those international approaches to Aboriginal historiography that is seeking ways of de-nationalising indigenous issues and creating a space for 'open reconciliation' to bring the *global implications* of the colonial past (and present) to light.

#### — INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS AND JAPANESE LABOUR MIGRANTS

Reading the literature on Japanese migration and the pearl-shell industry, it is rare to find studies that explore Aboriginal–Japanese relationships. In what is perhaps the first study of Japanese labour migrants, David Sissons does not mention such relationships at all in his 1979 article. Although Mary A. Bain mentions stories about the 'lubra trade' or 'warlike Aborigines', working relations or the nature of the colonial experiences are not the themes of her book *Full Fathom Five*.<sup>30</sup> The emphasis of Japanese historians is usually on the internationally acclaimed excellence of the Japanese divers and their endurance of Australian racism. For example, Shuuji Kyuhara writes:

[In Australia] Japanese fishery people went through numerous difficulties, fought them out, and with their bravery and efforts, risking their lives, they improved diving technology and found new fishing grounds. With original and exquisite Japanese skills, without peer among peoples of other nations, they have developed the pearl industry.<sup>31</sup>

Another historian, Taira Ogawa, takes a similar view in his *Arafura Kai no Shinju* (Pearls in the Arafura Sea), but, in addition, he introduces the perspectives of former Japanese divers on Indigenous Australians in a small section called 'primitive race bushman'. Both Ogawa's narrative and the oral histories of Japanese ex-pearl divers present nothing other than racist discourses.<sup>32</sup> For example, Ogawa introduces stories of Japanese divers being attacked and eaten by 'bushmen', and reports that Japanese ex-divers also told him that Aboriginal women had 'the rut'.<sup>33</sup> According to Ogawa, 'settled bushmen' who worked for the pearl or trepang industry were employed because they did not demand money and were satisfied with clothes

and tobacco. At one point he suggests that the ability of Aborigines to hunt fish, birds and kangaroo was very useful in the industry, and adds: 'their sense of smell and sight demonstrate extraordinary superhuman-like talent, which is almost akin to animals'.<sup>34</sup>

What becomes clear in these narratives is the existence of a kind of 'dual racism' in the pearling towns where Japanese migrants were themselves victims of white racism and perpetrators of racism directed towards Indigenous Australians. Such a hierarchical racial social stratum seems typical of rural Australian towns and is well described by both Bain and Fujio Nakan, the latter in his account of a Japanese diver and his Aboriginal wife.<sup>35</sup> In a peculiar way this narrative—of Japanese migrants who suffered in a foreign country but who, against the odds, developed a new industry—is in fact quite similar to that of many white Australian historical narratives before the 1960s. The difference is that those who suffered and sacrificed for the future were not white Australians but Japanese migrants.

The literature examined so far does not consider the Indigenous side of Aboriginal–Japanese relations in the history of the pearl-shell industry, and it's to this issue that I will now turn. Athol Chase's anthropological research discusses Aboriginal–Asian working relations in Cape York.<sup>36</sup> According to Chase, Aboriginal people welcomed the Asian 'visitors' because they did not try to dispossess their lands as Europeans did:

The Japanese, 'Manillamen', Malays and others who came from the sea to set up temporary coastal camps and shore stations were more interested in establishing peaceful relations with local communities in order to obtain cheap labour and access to women.<sup>37</sup>

He also compares Japanese attitudes towards Aboriginal people with those of Europeans:

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 bush-foods. Europeans, on the other hand, had a reputation for breaking agreements and cheating Aborigines out of rightfully-earned pay. Moreover, they could be 'cheeky', or dangerous when annoyed.<sup>38</sup>

In short, Chase's emphasis is on the close and friendly relationship between Aboriginal and Japanese labourers under the oppressive colonial regime.

Regina Ganter's historical research has resulted in intensive studies on race-relations in the pearl-shell industry of northern Australia. In *The Pearl-Shellers of Torres Strait*, Ganter's tale is similar to Chase's and focuses on the close and friendly relationships between Aborigines and Japanese. However, while Chase came to this conclusion based on his interviews with Aboriginal people of the region, Ganter's sources are principally Japanese ex-pearl divers.<sup>39</sup> Despite relying on very similar sources to Ogawa, Ganter's version sharply contradicts Ogawa's racist narrative.<sup>40</sup>

In the historiography of Aboriginal–Japanese relations in northern Australia, historians have not yet paid much attention to the simple fact that Asian migrants were both victims of white colonial racism and deeply involved in the colonisation of the Aboriginal lands. I have no intention of suggesting that the involvement of Asian migrants in the processes of colonisation was the same as that of the British. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume, as Chase and Ganter indicate, that Indigenous Australians saw Asian migrants as less oppressive and more friendly than the white colonial authorities who dominated the industry. Therefore, I want to repeat—here there was not a single racism at work but a hierarchy of racisms. Nevertheless, what has not yet been explored is the history of *Asian migrants as colonial agents*. A detailed study of this proposition is beyond the scope of this article but I want to briefly look at two issues that would be central to any such account: Japanese exploitation of Aboriginal land and sea resources, and Japanese exploitation of Aboriginal women.

#### — JAPANESE EXPLOITATION OF ABORIGINAL LANDS AND SEAS

According to Kyuhara, Japanese workers as a group earned a total of £25,860 a year on Thursday Island in 1894. If you add the value of their property (their houses and ships), it is over £50,000.<sup>41</sup> Kyuhara writes, 'With courage and patience of not being afraid of any circumstances, by overcoming many difficulties, they made an enormous fortune'.<sup>42</sup> Such narratives that emphasise the success of Japanese migrants in Australia may be welcomed by contemporary historiography as a contribution to the multicultural dimensions of the Australian past. But, this type of narrative lacks the historical imagination necessary to regard such 'enormous fortunes' as having been built by exploiting Indigenous people's land and sea. While earlier studies often emphasise the ways in which mainstream white-racist Australian authorities and entrepreneurs used cheap labour to compete with and resist the Japanese involvement in the industry, few studies have tried to point out that such 'competition' between whites and Japanese was carried out without the consent of the original owners of these natural resources.<sup>43</sup>

Indigenous sea rights have been discussed as a 'logical extension of land rights'.<sup>44</sup> Although Indigenous 'rights' over the waters emerged relatively recently in legal debate, there is a long history of Indigenous Australians claiming coastal waters as part of their country. Bain quotes from Tataro Maeda, an ex-pearl diver in the early 1950s:

From the beginning there was trouble with natives of nearby islands when we worked in shallow seas, as they had the right to fish there. The Japanese had then to go out to much deeper sea.<sup>45</sup>

It is reasonable to assume such understandings were common among the settlers, or at least among Japanese pearl-shell workers. It is unlikely that Japanese and Indigenous people of the

area shared the same concept of '(sea) rights' at that time. However, when Bain and Ogawa write of 'bushmen' or 'warlike Aborigines' attacking Japanese workers, the story of friendly relations has clearly become a situation in which Indigenous people were resisting the settler invasion of their country and/or the abrogation of their rights.

#### — JAPANESE EXPLOITATION OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN

I also want to discuss the very sensitive matter of sexual relationships between Indigenous women and settler men. Sexual relations between Aboriginal women and Asian migrants in northern Australia were seen by colonial authorities as a serious problem. Missions and government administrators repeatedly reported on Aboriginal women's 'immoral traffic with the lugger crews', and while these activities were legally banned, they were not well controlled. According to these reports, Aboriginal elders sent young women to the lugger ships for a night and received flour, tobacco, sugar or grog in return.<sup>46</sup>

It would be simplistic to claim Japanese 'exploitation' of Aboriginal women from these accounts. This is an extremely complex matter involving gender, cultural diversity and colonialism. Sarah Yu argues that such exchanges of goods and women were well accepted among Aboriginal societies on the Kimberley coast as long as the 'payment' was agreeable. Yu quotes from Edna Hopiga, an Aboriginal woman whose grandfather was a Malay man:

That's a good idea for people. Help one another. Blackfella never worry about it. There used to be whiskey too if they want'em. But mainly tucker.

That's not the blackfella or Malay fault. They did it for themselves. Wasn't wrong.<sup>47</sup>

Yu points out that it was a European perception that such activities were 'scandalous' or 'intolerable'. She argues instead that 'the presence of the luggers with their Asian crews provided another opportunity for the Karajarri living in the bush to secure necessary rations without having to associate with the white authorities'.<sup>48</sup> Here again, the framework Yu applies is 'friendly relations between Aboriginal and Asian migrants under oppressive white authorities', in other words, Indigenous issues in the context of cultural diversity.

There has been a similar debate over settler-Aboriginal sexual relationships in the pastoral industry of Australia. For example, Ann McGrath disagrees with the stereotyped notion that 'Aboriginal women were exploited by brutal white stockmen' and claims Aboriginal women enjoyed receiving 'gifts' from white men in these exchanges.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, Deborah B. Rose warns us of the existence of undocumented sexual abuse and not to underestimate the traumatic experiences of Aboriginal women.<sup>50</sup> In this article, I just want to say we need an extremely careful approach to understand these issues. I agree with Yu that one should not accuse anyone without inquiring into the cultural, social and economic backgrounds of

Aboriginal (and Japanese) societies. But, given that Japanese ex-divers tell stories such as 'Aboriginal women had the rut', one cannot ignore the racism and sexism among Japanese men.<sup>51</sup>

#### — GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS OF AUSTRALIAN COLONIALISM

It was not only Anglo-Celtic Australians who came to this continent and made an 'enormous fortune' by exploiting Aboriginal people, their lands and seas. It was also the Japanese—and Chinese, Malays, Filipinos and many other people from overseas—who came to Australia without the consent of Indigenous people, and often took their fortunes back to their home countries.<sup>52</sup> This is not just a story of the past, or just a story of the pearl-shell industry. For example, many Japanese eat 'Aussie Beef', one of the most important Australian export products and one which derives from an industry established and developed by using cheap or unpaid Aboriginal labourers.<sup>53</sup> The highly politicised Indigenous activism related to Jabiruka uranium mine relates not only to Australia but also to Japan, because Japanese electric companies plan to buy uranium from this mine.<sup>54</sup> To sum up, it is not just Anglo-Celtic Australians, nor all Australians including Asian Australians, who are responsible for the colonial (and postcolonial) exploitation of Indigenous people and their lands. Australian colonisation has 'global implications'—historical and contemporary—for which both Australians and non-Australian are responsible. In this very context, Aboriginal reconciliation must cross national boundaries.

Here we face complex problems related to the 'responsibility' of the 'historical subject'. For example, who should take responsibility for the colonial exploitation by Japanese labour migrants in the nineteenth century? Are 'all Japanese' responsible for this, or only those and their families who migrated to Australia? What about Japanese Australians who migrated here last year? And how are they expected to take 'responsibility' for it?

These questions bring us to an arena similar to (the so-called) '*Rekishu Shutai Ronso*' ('Historical Subject' debate), which has been a matter of controversy among liberal democratic-minded scholars in Japan. The debate's central focus is postwar responsibility of Japan(ese). This paper does not intend to introduce the debate in full, or to intervene in this controversy.<sup>55</sup> But, in order to criticise the ways in which Aboriginal reconciliation is used to unite Australia(ns), and in a search for 'open reconciliation', I believe this debate is highly suggestive. After briefly sketching the debate, I would like to introduce Tessa Morris-Suzuki's notion of *renrui* (implication) and Toshio Nakano's argument on *shutai no bunretsu to kousou* (the fissured subject and its conflict) and develop a theoretical perspective on possible 'open reconciliation' which de-nationalises (or globalises) Aboriginal reconciliation.

In 1995, Norihiro Kato, a cultural and literary critic, published an article titled '*Haisengo ron*' ('Japan After Defeat'). Kato argued that both left-wing liberal intellectuals and right-wing

nationalists failed to face the 'warp' of the postwar Japanese psyche. On the one hand, left-wing intellectuals cannot acknowledge the historical fact that the famous Article Nine of the Constitution declaring the renunciation of war was imposed by the US occupation forces. On the other hand, right-wing nationalists do not face the obvious fact of the Japanese emperor's war responsibility. Because of this 'warp', the Japanese have failed to establish a collective subject of 'we the Japanese' that can be responsible for war crimes against Asian nations during the Second World War. Therefore, Kato urges the establishment of a 'collective national us' *in order to* sincerely apologise to the Asian nations.<sup>56</sup>

Many liberal intellectuals in Japan found it difficult to accept Kato's arguments because of his highly controversial (neo)nationalistic discourse. In particular, those working on deconstructing 'the Japanese national subject' argued that the Japanese could take responsibility for the previous war crimes only when they *unmake* their Japaneseness as the national subject. However, these deconstructionists have also been criticised as 'irresponsible' on the ground that one cannot deconstruct Japanese identity when Asian war victims *name* 'the Japanese' as the accused.<sup>57</sup>

How can these debates affect reflections on Aboriginal reconciliation in Australia? As I remarked in the early part of this article, it is important to recognise and emphasise the historical responsibility of Australia as a colonial nation-state. There should be no doubt about the need for 'national reconciliation' in decolonising Australia through the promotion of Indigenous legal rights and overcoming the numerous disadvantages that many Aboriginal people still suffer. But, if the final and only destination of Aboriginal reconciliation is the re-establishment of a 'united Australia' or the 'collective national subject', then the process of reconciliation will become a closed national ritual. Such a 'closed reconciliation' tends to standardise different historical positionalities (for instance, between Anglo-Celtic whites and postwar Asian migrants) and fabricate the national memory.

What about claiming that the Japanese migrants are responsible for the Australian colonisation as *Japanese migrants*? For example, in 1998 the Japan Club of Australia published *Osutoraria no Nihonjin: Isseiki wo Koeru Nihonjin no Kiseki* (Japanese in Australia: Japanese Footprints over a Century) which narrates a history of the Japanese in Australia from the nineteenth century to the present.<sup>58</sup> In the introduction, the editor wishes for Japan–Australia friendship by 'passing on the precious records of Japanese (in Australia) over a century to the next generation'.<sup>59</sup> If, as the Japan Club seems to want, one wishes to establish the 'Japanese in Australia' as a historical subject, then Japanese Australians today must as a collective historical subject—Japanese migrants—be responsible for what pre-war Japanese pearl-divers did in northern Australia.<sup>60</sup> But, this extension of responsibility is nothing other than what Anderson calls 'long distance nationalism'.<sup>61</sup> If one aims to regard *both* the

pre-war Japanese pearl-divers *and* the contemporary Japanese migrants, who may have just arrived in Australia last year, as the unitary historical subject then, yet again, we witness the fabrication of the national memory.

I believe that the limitations of setting up the three historical subjects of 'Anglo-Celtic (whites)', 'Asian migrants' and 'Indigenous Australians' have become clear by now. As I have demonstrated in this article, we need to constantly re-categorise historical subjects such as 'British', 'Anglo-Celtic (Anglos and Celts are not the same!)', 'whites', 'postwar migrants', 'Asian', 'Japanese', 'Malays', 'non-Indigenous', 'non-British' and so on, according to the context of what it is we want to address. As Curthoys correctly points out, 'our conceptual frameworks remain inadequate to our attempts at historical understanding'.<sup>62</sup> It is precisely at this point that I want to introduce Toshio Nakano's idea of *Shutai no Bunretsu* (the fission of the subject) in his engagement with the 'Historical Subject' debate in Japan:

'Responsibility', especially war responsibility and postwar responsibility *can only be* fulfilled *not* by the establishment of the 'subject', but rather in the direct opposite, by the *fission* of the subject, or more precisely speaking, by *bringing conflict within the 'subject' and making it politicised*.<sup>63</sup>

What does Nakano mean by 'fulfilling war-responsibility by fission of the "subject"'? Citing Chantal Mouffe and Judith Butler, he sees a fundamental problem with the very notion of 'the unitary subject'.<sup>64</sup> According to Nakano, fulfilling war responsibility means 'to put an identity on this "I" which has been maintained without any doubt of innocence in danger'.<sup>65</sup> To my mind, what makes his argument different from previous deconstructionists is that, instead of naively praising the plural/relational subjectivity which tends to make the 'responsibility *to respond to the other*' ambiguous, Nakano calls for fissuring the subject *in the process of political conflicts*.<sup>66</sup> Nakano's argument has its roots in the notion of 'implication' explored by Tessa Morris-Suzuki:

'Implication' means the existence of a conscious connection to the past, but also the reality of being (in a legal sense) 'an accessory after the fact'. It is the status of those who have not stolen land from others, but who live on stolen land; the status of those who have not participated in massacres, but have participated in the process by which the memory of those massacres has been obliterated; the status of those who have not injured others, but allow the consequences of past injury to go unaddressed. Implication means that the prejudices which sustained past acts of aggression live on into the present, and will lodge themselves in the minds of the present generation unless we make the effort to remove them. We who live in the present did not create the violence and hatred of the past. But the violence and hatred

of the past, to some degree, created us. It formed the material world and the ideas with which we live, and will continue to do so unless we take active steps to unmake their consequences.<sup>67</sup>

This notion of 'implication' makes it possible to shift our focus from 'the past colonial injustice' to 'the present postcolonial everyday facts' that are deeply rooted in our historical understanding of the past. Referring to Morris-Suzuki, Nakano argues it is precisely the moment of being accused of 'Japanese (war) responsibility' that a 'Japanese' realises the implication of the past injustice in 'her/his' everyday facts. When I hear the voice of the injustice of the past directed to myself, 'I' fissures itself between 'I' that exists as a 'Japanese' and 'I' who holds a critical gaze to the fact that 'I exist as a Japanese'. Without this fission, 'I' cannot recognise the 'implication' of the past that 'I am responsible for today. Therefore, 'fission of the subject' means political commitment to unmaking the consequences of past violence in response to the war victims' accusation today.<sup>68</sup> In other words, colonial injustice is not only an 'unfinished business' from the past, but is also quite literally 'alive' in our everyday lives of the present.

#### — FOR OPEN AND GLOBAL RECONCILIATION

In calling for 'open reconciliation' with the Indigenous people of Australia, I believe it is necessary to promote the 'fission of the (historical) subject' in order that 'responsibility' and 'implication' come together in ways that make past injustices visible and unmake continuing injustice. This will be a multi-layered process. First, in order to commit to 'open reconciliation' as Australians, the 'Australian subject' needs to be fissured. And then, if one is questioned about the implication of past injustices under categories such as 'Japanese' or 'post-war migrants', the historical subject of 'Japanese' or 'postwar migrants' needs to be fissured by acknowledging the past and by politicising it in the present. Each of us has a unique multi-layered subject position in which we live with a particular condition of 'implication of the past' in our everyday lives. Whether one is an Australian, Japanese or Indigenous person, a student, business person, young woman or old man, each of us may need to realise the implication of the past in our everyday life and make our subjectivity fissured and politicised in order to set up 'open and global reconciliation' along with 'closed and national reconciliation'.

The colonisation of Australia, which violently exploited Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and their lands, holds *global implications* of the past (and present) injustice. For example, as a person who eats Aussie beef, whose ethnicity and citizenship are the same as Japanese ex-divers in Australia, as a sojourner who lives in Australia and who as a historian produces discourses related to Aboriginal historiography, I am responsible for *unmaking* the past (and present) injustice of Australian colonisation. This is because the 'global implications

of Australian colonisation' have clearly shaped my everyday life. Therefore, what a historian can do for 'open reconciliation' is, I believe, to make such implications of the past visible. Studying the histories of Aboriginal–Asian relations in Australia is just one of many possible approaches to promote this alternative mode of Aboriginal reconciliation. To participate in this, it is irrelevant whether or not one is a 'true Australian'.

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1. The comparative studies on the particular natures of Australian and Japanese nationalisms involve many interesting points to explore carefully in a more scholarly context. I would like to reserve these issues for another paper in future.
2. The following summary is based on the literature below: David D.C.S. Sissons, 'The Japanese in the Australian Pearling Industry', *Queensland Heritage*, vol. 3, no. 10, 1979, pp. 9–27; Mary Albertus Bain, *Full Fathom Five*, Artlook Books, Perth, 1982; Regina Ganter, *The Pearl-Shellers of Torres Strait: Resource Use, Development and Decline 1860s–1960s*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1994; Imin Kenkyu-kai (ed.), *Nihon no Imin Kenkyu: Doukou to Mokuroku* (Studies of Japanese Migrants: Trend and References), Nichigai Asosie-tu, 1994; Shuuji Kyuhara, 'Shinjusaishuu to Dekasegi Imin (Pearl Divers and Migrant Workers)', *Rekishu Kouron*, vol. 5, 1978, pp. 136–43; Shuuji Kyuhara, 'Wakayama-ken no Osutoraria Dekasegi Imin (Migrant Workers from Wakayama Prefecture to Australia)', *21 Seiki Wakayama*, vol. 7, 1986, pp. 107–26.
3. Bain, pp. 13–14.
4. However, many Japanese migrant labourers came from Wakayama or Ehime prefectures.
5. Imin Kenkyu-kai, p. 128.
6. Yuriko Nagata, *Unwanted Aliens: Japanese Internment in Australia*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1996.
7. Ganter, p. 126.
8. Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, *Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation*, 2000, <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car/2000/12/pg3.htm>>.
9. Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*, Verso, London, 1998.
10. Minoru Hokari, 'Anti-Minorities History: Perspectives on Aboriginal–Asian Relations', in Penny Edwards and Shen Yuanfang (eds), *Lost in Whitewash: From Federation to Reconciliation*, Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, forthcoming.
11. Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, *Sharing History: A Sense for All Australians of a Shared*



- Ownership of Their History*, <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car/1993/4/index.html>>.
12. Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, *Sharing History*.
  13. Ghassan Hage, 'Polluting Memories: Migration and Colonial Responsibility in Australia', *Traces*, vol. 2, 2001, p. 339.
  14. Hage, p. 352.
  15. Hage, p. 359.
  16. Hage, p. 358.
  17. Peter Read, 'Pain, Yes, Racism, No: The Response of Non-British Australians to Indigenous Land Rights', in Geoffrey Gray and Christine Winter (eds), *The Resurgence of Racism: Hanson, Howard and the Race Debate*, Department of History, Monash University, Clayton, 1997, pp. 87–95.
  18. Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Reconciliation and Its Historiography: Some Preliminary Thoughts', *The UTS Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2001, pp. 6–16.
  19. Chakrabarty, p. 15.
  20. Chakrabarty, p. 15.
  21. *Aboriginal History*, vol. 5, 1981, is a special issue on Aboriginal–Asian contact, but this topic was not explored until, in 2001, Penny Edwards and Shen Yuanfang called for a conference on the Aboriginal–Chinese relationship in Australian history. See Edwards and Yuanfang.
  22. Ann Curthoys, 'An Uneasy Conversation: The Multicultural and the Indigenous', in John Docker and Gerhard Fischer (eds), *Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2000, p. 31.
  23. Ann Curthoys, 'Race and Ethnicity: A Study of the Response of the British Colonists to Aborigines, Chinese and Non-British Europeans in New South Wales, 1856–1881', PhD thesis, Macquarie University, 1973.
  24. Curthoys, 'Race and Ethnicity'; 'An Uneasy Conversation'; and 'Immigration and Colonisation: New Histories', *The UTS Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2001, pp. 170–9.
  25. Curthoys, 'An Uneasy Conversation', p. 30.
  26. Curthoys, 'Immigration and Colonisation', p. 170.
  27. Curthoys, 'An Uneasy Conversation', p. 32. To be fair, Hage also expresses similar point (but again cynically) in his 'subjective' narrative: 'What are you going on about anyway, if the Anglos didn't do the killing you wouldn't have been able to immigrate here. You owe'em mate. They cleared the land ... ESPECIALLY FOR YOU! (imitating a TV product promotion)', in Hage, p. 356.
  28. Curthoys, 'Immigration and Colonisation', p. 171.
  29. Ann Curthoys and John Docker, 'Genocide: Definitions, Questions, Settler-Colonies', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 25, p. 2.
  30. Bain, pp. 211–14, pp. 109–10, 154–5.
  31. Kyuhara, 'Shinjugaisaishu to Dekasegi Imin', p. 136. See also 'Wakayama-ken no Osutoraria Dekasegi Imin', p. 108.
  32. I discuss this extensively in Hokari, 'Anti-Minorities History'.
  33. A period of heightened sexual excitement, which usually applies only to animals.
  34. Taira Ogawa, *Arafura-kai no Shinju* (Pearls in the Arafura Sea), Ayumi Shuppan, Tokyo, 1976, p. 193.
  35. Bain, pp. 223–64; Fujio Nakano, *Mari-to Masatora: Nihonjin Daiba-to Aborijini no Tsumo* (Mary and Masatora: Japanese Diver and His Aboriginal Wife), Bungei Shunju-sha, 1986.
  36. Athol Chase, "'All Kind of Nation": Aborigines and Asians in Cape York Peninsula', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 5, 1981, pp. 7–19.
  37. Chase, p. 8.
  38. Chase, p. 14.
  39. Ganter, p. 55. See also her report to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, *The Japanese Experience of North Queensland's Mother of Pearl Industry*, Institute of Applied Environmental Research, Griffith University, Brisbane, 1988. A similar storyline of friendly race relations between Japanese and Aborigines under the colonial supremacy of the whites can be found in Fujio Nakano.
  40. This contradiction is discussed in my 'Anti-Minorities History'.
  41. Kyuhara, 'Shinjugaisaishu to Dekasegi Imin', p. 141.
  42. Kyuhara, 'Shinjugaisaishu to Dekasegi Imin', p. 141.
  43. See, for example, Ganter, pp. 129–59; and Kyuhara 'Shinjugaisaishu to Dekasegi Imin', pp. 141–2.
  44. See, for example, the AISTSIS site on sea rights: <[http://www.atsic.gov.au/issues/Land/sea\\_rights/Default.asp](http://www.atsic.gov.au/issues/Land/sea_rights/Default.asp)>.
  45. Bain, p. 351.
  46. Goulburn Island Mission, *Aboriginals Statement RE King River Base*, 1938, National Archives of Australia, A659/1 39/1/864. See also Bain, pp. 211–14.
  47. Sarah Yu, 'Broome Creole: Aboriginal and Asian Partnerships along the Kimberley Coast', *Queensland Review*, vol. 6, 1999, p. 63.
  48. Yu, p. 65.
  49. Ann McGrath, *Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in Cattle Country*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987, pp. 68–94.
  50. Deborah Bird Rose, *Hidden Histories: Black Stories from Victoria River Downs, Humbert River and Wave Hill Stations*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1991, pp. 179–88.
  51. In terms of the gender history of Japanese pearl-shellers in Australia, *Karayuki-san* or Japanese prostitutes overseas is an important issue. See, Yuriko Nagata, 'Gendering Japan–Australia Relations: Japanese Prostitutes in Australia 1883–1946', *Ritsumeikan Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies*, 2002; D. Sissons, 'Karayuki san: Japanese Prostitutes in Australia, 1887–1916', Parts 1 & 2, *Historical Studies*, vol. 17, 1976–77, pp. 323–41, 474–88.
  52. It is true that there was longstanding non-exploitative trepang trading between Macassans and Indigenous Australians since the late 17th century. However, I must argue that most Asian migrants under Australian colonial regimes did not seek permission from Indigenous Australians to enter and work in Australia.
  53. Frank Stevens, *Aborigines in the Northern Territory Cattle Industry*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1974: Dawn May, *Aboriginal Labour and the Cattle Industry: Queensland from White Settlement to the Present*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1994.
  54. Takashi Ito and Komei Hosokawa, *Nihon ga Hakaisuru Sekaizan: Nihon no Genpatsu to Osutoraria Uran Saikutsu* (World Heritage that Japan Destroys: Japanese Nuclear Power Station and Australian Uranium Mine), Fubai-sha, 2000.
  55. There are few substantial English references on this debate, but Yumiko Iida does introduce some of these debates. Yumiko Iida, *Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan: Nationalism as Aesthetics*, Routledge, London & New York, 2001, pp. 248–52.
  56. Norihiro Kato, 'Haisengo Ron', *Gunzo*, Jan. 1995, pp. 252–94.
  57. There are numerous articles and books on these debates. The references I used for this summary are: Tetsuya Kato, 'Ojoku no Kioku wo Megutte (On the Memory of Disgrace)', *Gunzo*, Mar. 1995, pp. 176–82; Chizuko Ueno, *Nashonarizumu to Jenda-* (Nationalism and Gender), Seido-sha, 1998; Youichi Komori and Tetsuya Takahashi (eds), *Nashonaru Hisutori- wo Koete* (Beyond the National History), Tokyou Daigaku Shuppan-sha, 1998; Kazue Yasuhiko and others (eds), *Senso Sekinin to 'Wareware': Reikishi Shutai Ronso wo Megutte* (War Responsibility and 'Us': On the 'History Subject' Debate), Nakanishia Shuppan, 1999; Suh Kyungsik and Testuya Takahashi, *Danzetu no Sekiki, Shougen no Jidai* (Century of Discontinuity, Era of Testimony), Iwanami Shoten, 2000.
  58. Japan Club of Australia (ed.), *Osutoraria no Nihonjin: Isseiki wo Koeru Nihonjin no Kiseki* (Japanese in Australia: Japanese Footprints over a Century), Zengo Nihon Kurabu, Asquith, 1998.
  59. Japan Club of Australia, p. 13.
  60. In *Osutoraria no Nihonjin*, articles on pearl-divers mention 'friendly relationship' between Japanese and Indigenous Australians, pp. 18–28. But not surprisingly, they do not discuss their responsibility for the decolonisation of Australia.
  61. Benedict Anderson, 'The World Disorder', *New Left Review*, no. 193, 1992, pp. 3–13.
  62. Curthoys, 'Immigration and Colonisation', p. 177.
  63. Toshio Nakano, *Otsuka Hisao to Maruyama Masao: Douin, Shutai, Senso Sekinin* (Otsuka Hisao and Maruyama Masao: Mobilisation, Subject, War Responsibility), Seido-sha, 2001, pp. 290–1.
  64. Toshio Nakano, p. 289. His citations are: Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, Verso, London, 1993; and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York, 1990.
  65. Toshio Nakano, p. 297.
  66. Toshio Nakano, p. 295.
  67. Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Hihanteki Souzouryoku no Tameni: Guro-baruka Jidai no Nippon* (For Critical Imaginations: Japan in the Era of Globalisation), Heibon-sha, 2002, pp. 57–8. The English version of the manuscript is unpublished. I acknowledge Morris-Suzuki who kindly showed me her English manuscript and allowed me to quote here.
  68. Toshio Nakano, p. 298.