A Japanese Galen Down Under
Doctor Suzuki, Broome, and the Intricacies of 'White Australia'

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Abstract: In the early twentieth century, Broome attracted nationwide attention when the local Japanese Club exacted the employment of a medical doctor of their own cultural background. This incident was part of a broader discord in the relationship between the remote north-western town and the ultimate principle of a racially homogeneous society. The migration history of Dr Tadashi Suzuki shines a light on the debates surrounding Japanese migration to the pearl-shelling community as well as on the local embodiments of Japanese agency and the complexity of racial and social relations in the context of 'White Australia'.[1]

The Saturday in mid-January 1910 saw some rain but slightly above-average 33°C in the shade ("The Weather"). Accompanying the wind coming from the southwest, the SS Koombana ran into the port of Broome – thus marking the long-awaited albeit heavily disputed arrival of the Japanese doctor. Having been requested by the local Japanese community, he would henceforth offer his medical services in this north-western town, far removed from the rest of the British-occupied continent.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Broome was a hotchpotch of Asian immigrants: during the heyday of pearl-shelling, Europeans were significantly outnumbered by indentured workers coming, inter alia, from Japan, China, Indonesia, and Timor. Their presence, however, diametrically opposed the nation's self-concept as 'White Australia'. In a nation united by 'whiteness' as the constitutive element of 'Australianness', the virtual bifurcation into a 'white south' and a 'multiracial north' – into "two Australias" (Reynolds vii) – had created an area of tension in which strict immigration regulations conflicted with economic deliberations. In this context, the national invasion anxiety corresponded to global warnings against the 'Yellow Peril', whilst labourist antagonism towards the employment of 'coloured workers' called for the preference of British labourers. Concurrently, northern pearl-shell entrepreneurs presaged the demise of their industry should Asian indenture be discontinued. Amidst this tense scenario, the landing of the Japanese doctor – the "newcomer Galen" – caused quite a "howl in political circles" ("Nor' Westward Ho").

"[M]igrants' agency can create social structures, such as social networks" (Castles et al. 37) and impinge on local politics and social relations. This can be observed in the practical implementation of the leverage accumulated through the numerical power and social influence of Broome's Japanese community. Drawing on Bourdieu's capital theory (1986), migration network theory argues that migration is decisively affected

1 I would like to thank Alice Witt for the translations from Japanese and Liesel Hermes for her perceptive comments on the text.

and shaped by "location-specific social capital" (Castles et al. 40). In the case of the first Japanese doctor in Broome, this manifested in two ways: first, in the Japanese network that brought him into the country; second, in his collaboration with the local white doctor and the religious sisters from the nearby monastery. While the funds collected in the Japanese community provided the basis for the doctor's stay, his high-level education enabled a swift integration into Broome's society.

A historico-sociological case study using historical newspapers and governmental records, this chapter retraces the migration history of the medical doctor Tadashi Suzuki. It looks at this particular incident in the pearl-shelling industry of Broome to illuminate the discursive as well as the practical implementation of racism as a social relation in Australia. By looking at the town's specific extent of Japanese migration and agency, the everyday 'performing' of race relations in 'White Australia' can be investigated as under a burning glass.

Japanese Migration to Broome

Most Japanese immigrated on temporary entry permits under indentured work schemes. From a slow start in the late 1870s in Queensland, pearling became a major pull factor as it expanded along the northern shores. One of the first arrivals in 1878 was a former sailor, who became a prolific pearl diver on Thursday Island (Frei 48). Over the next decades until the virtual demise of pearl diving after the Second World War, most of the Japanese involved in the three principal pearl-shelling ports – Thursday Island, Darwin, and Broome – originated from the same region, the Wakayama district (Sissons 522), where families designated individuals to migrate to the Australian pearl-shelling industry. Like other transitional societies, late-nineteenth-century Japan saw an increase in emigration, amongst other things due to "a decline in rural employment" (Castles et al. 47). Wakayama was one of the "fishing and farming communities" that had largely been left to their own devices due to their remoteness and isolation from larger cities (Ganter, "The Wakayama Triangle" 56).

Japanese migration to north-western Australia had commenced in the late 1880s; soon the prolific and resilient Japanese divers became indispensable for the pearl-shelling industry. Towards the end of the century, the numbers of Japanese immigrating to work in the industry peaked (Murakami 47). At the time of Federation, 966 Japanese resided in Broome (Miles and Warren 6); after a steady increase, seven years later, they had become the largest population group (Sissons, "Pearling Industry" 9). In 1911, the year after Suzuki had arrived at Broome, almost three and a half thousand Japanese were registered in Australia. Of the 3,281 Japanese males, more than half were working in the pearl-shelling industries of northern Australia, many of them stayed up to two decades (Sissons, "Japanese" 522). During the heydays of pearl-shelling, before the First World War, well over one thousand Japanese were employed in the industry, outnumbering the Europeans almost five to one (Meaney 90).

The increase in the Japanese population stood in radical contrast to the nationwide guiding principle of 'White Australia', which specified the securing of a racially homogeneous, mainly British, society. The town in the northwest had long been a peculiarity in the eyes of the rest of Australia. In August 1899, a journalist expressed his absolute amazement with Broome's motley social and racial landscape and concluded that, due to the ongoing miscegenation, to "describe some of the children to be seen in the Broome district would utterly puzzle the cleverest ethnologist" ("With a Pearling Fleet").

In the days of 'White Australia', the town's ethnocultural diversity was both a curiosity and a dystopia. Today the wide range of migration backgrounds is echoed in the emphasis on its "multicultural heritage" (Australia's North West 2018). Broome continues to be widely considered a geographic and ideological location where the usual racial discrimination purportedly took a backseat. This configuration is discussed in studies that describe Broome as a "significant exception to the White Australia policy" (Martínez, Vickers 4) and even as the "antithesis to White Australia" (Ganter, *Mixed Relations* 70). Already during the later years of the policy's existence, Broome was seen as an "exciting pocket of humanity in the drab texture of white Australia" (Bartlett 25), which constituted an "exemption" that brought the national ideal of 'White Australia' "in danger of being discredited" (Bach 272).

Christine Choo rightfully claims that the "common-held view of a cosmopolitan Broome, where the 'natives' were friendly and all races lived happily" fails to grasp the full complexity of social and racial relations in Broome and its broader relation to 'White Australia'. Joanna Sassoon, in turn, discussed the town's "rigid social structure based on class, race and gender" that, nonetheless, was compatible with a "fluidity of relationships across [...] social and economic boundaries" (149). This is not a contradiction but asks for further examination of racism as a social relation (Affeldt and Hund 2019). Whilst this judgement indicates the complexity of intercultural interaction at Broome, it is rather telling that, despite being the town with the highest ratio of Japanese inhabitants, Western Australia was the last state to establish a Japanese consulate in Broome in 1910 (Frei 59).

Australia's self-perception as an "isolated outpost of western civilisation" (Markus 178) problematised its geographic location in a world region that was deemed culturally foreign and racially detrimental, whilst the danger of a hostile takeover was enhanced by Australia's still thinly populated northern shores. Consequently, part of the ideology of 'White Australia' was based upon the political endeavour to people the 'empty North' with European settlers as a bulwark against an Asian power grab – be it by violent incursion or clandestine immigration (Walker, *Anxious Nation* 1999). In the context of these deliberations, industries like pearl-shelling or sugarcane were considered catalysts of population growth (Affeldt, *Consuming Whiteness* 334–338). In 1909, the defence minister declared, Australia was the "most vulnerable part of the British empire" (Joseph Cook qtd. in Frei 87) and thus in dire need of protection against invading

Asian 'hordes'. While around the turn of the century, their origins were seen in China, Japan's rise to military power provoked a change of focus (Shimazu 128).

At the time of the Japanese doctor's emigration, the home country of Tadashi Suzuki was a self-confident nation with imperial ambitions. The late Edo and early Meiji period fostered its modernization and the participation in world's fairs further underlined Japan's assertion as a society capable of creating – to European minds – culturally and industrially valuable ideas and products, thus proving that the Japanese were "decidedly in advance of other Eastern people" ("The Japanese Department at Vienna"). In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Japan had been designated the "Britain of the East" (Walker 75); during the Russo-Japanese War, they remained the "British of the East" ("British of the East"); and after the victory over Russia in 1905, they were considered the spearhead of the 'Yellow Peril'. Its territorial expansions regarding China, Taiwan and Korea during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century expressed Japan's claim to being a colonial power. Its far-reaching geopolitical and biopolitical plans concerning Pacific and Asian regions challenged the imperial policies of other imperial powers.

In Broome, the increase of the Japanese population was likewise accompanied by a rise in their social power and agency within the pearl-shelling industry as well as within the town (Martínez, Vickers 106–107). The hierarchical structure of the industry, which saw the Japanese divers at the top of the luggers' crew, was unambiguously arranged based on skills accredited to the respective 'races' (Sickert 67). This contributed to the gradual elevation of their social status above other cultural groups in Broome. Cultural artefacts, like postcards with bilingual captions (Sassoon 150), testified to the significance accredited to the presence of Japanese in the town.

A Japanese Doctor for Broome

Dissatisfaction with the medical attention provided to them in the local government hospital and the desire to have a knowledgeable medical practitioner speaking their language prompted the Japanese divers, workers, and businesspeople to call for the employment of a fellow countryman. In October 1908, the Japanese Club of Broome raised funds to secure the recruitment and introduction of a Japanese physician and approached the newly appointed Consul General for Japan, Kisaburo Ueno, in Sydney with the request (Home and Territories Department 201). It was not until April 1909 that the secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Atlee Hunt, verbally assured the Consul General that an exemption for a Japanese doctor was feasible (Commonwealth 2684; J. Norman and G. Norman 145).

Against the background of the 'global crisis of whiteness', a national aspiration for racial homogeneity, and an intensified seclusionism expressed by the restriction of non-white immigration, the so-called "Broome incident" raised continent-wide concern as it touched upon broader issues of 'racial integrity' ("The Coolgardie Miner").

A Western Australian newspaper was not the only voice alluding to invasion anxiety by stating that, in view of the "proximity of our north-western shores to … the Far East", the decision on the admission of a Japanese doctor was "not a State matter, but one of national importance" ("The Broome Incident" 2).

Given Japan's imperial interest and potency, political tension arising from opposing interests regarding local economics and national policies determined the ensuing debates. The exemption of a Japanese physician from immigration restriction was considered a 'test case', in particular, because those opposing the doctor's admission presaged that this "grave" or even "dangerous precedent" were to induce other groups to express similar demands as well as the Japanese to press for other crucial positions (Home and Territories Department 229; "Japanese Doctor for Broome: Protest").

Local opposition swiftly picked up the case. The Broome Pearlers' Association claimed that the doctor's admission would negatively affect the relationship between the pearlers and their crews. Both the Association and the Broome Municipal council drew up petitions contesting the admission of the doctor (Commonwealth 2685; Stride, and Louws 157).

David Paton, in his capacity as both the parliamentary representative and the district medical officer, sent a sharp-tongued letter to the mayor, exacting that Broome remained a one-doctor town. The "clientele is composed of Whites, Japanese, [and] Malays", he stated. Following the recruitment of a "Japanese Medical man", the "White Doctor" would be in a "serious position", ruined because half of the yearly admissions were Japanese patients and the Government Hospital would soon run out of revenue (Home and Territories Department 194).

At the same time, the West Australian Pearlers' Association also warned against the ensuing consequences. The Japanese doctor's "presence … can only result in much friction arising between the crews of pearling vessels and their Masters" and will cause "disorganisation" in the industry and invite further demands (Home and Territories Department 192).

Simultaneously, the alleged "grave mistake" ("Japanese Doctor for Broome" [*Kalgoorlie*]) that had been made in respect of the imminent exemption was widely discussed in the Australian press. A letter to the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, authored by a self-claimed insider called 'Pearlshell', proposed an economic reasoning by maintaining that the "protest" against the Japanese Doctor was not "on account of the White Australia Policy," which the European pearlers found "very irksome," but was meant to protect the European doctor in town ("Japanese Doctor for Broome" [*Sydney Morning Herald*] 14). The whole incident was a matter of controversial debate; this was evidenced by numerous articles in favour of conceding to the Japanese residents' demand (nonetheless, they always argued within the ideological framework of 'White Australia', not as a critique of it). The Barrier Miner of Broken Hill, for instance, claimed that "no risk of endangering the integrity of this policy" was taken by

the "permission" and that it was "absurd to urge that this small concession to Japanese sentiment … should endanger in any way … our White Australia"; if anything, the admission would set a "precedent of the reasonable and intelligent and humane and sympathetic application of the policy of Asian exclusion" ("The Japanese Doctor" 2).

Eventually, the "Federal Ministers" of the Deakin government, "declin[ing] to express an opinion" whether the exemption of the Japanese doctor was "right or wrong", put an end to the lengthy controversial debates under the pretext that "the permission was granted before they took office" (Herald 4.8.1909). The Premier of Western Australia decided that the "exemption of three years officially promised to the Japanese Consul General … could not be withheld" (Western Australia 117). By referring to the necessity of upholding diplomatic relations, the officials circumvented an explicit statement regarding the discrepancy between the exemption of the Japanese doctor and the policy of 'White Australia' as the omnipresent principle underlying everything.

Dr Tadashi Suzuki's journey began on Tuesday, 19 October 1909 in Kobe. From here, he and his wife – so far only known as 'Mrs. Suzuki' – took the Yawata Maru as passengers of the second saloon. With 4,000 tons, it was the smallest ship of the Nippon Yusen Kaisha (NYK) Line, the Imperial Japanese Mail Line; according to the agent's advertisements,2 the ship provided electric fans in each cabin, a cleaning service and a "qualified surgeon" at service for the passengers ("Advertising: NYK"). During the journey in the China Sea, the Yawatu Maru experienced strong monsoons and almost met with a typhoon. Having passed through "high squalls and beam sea", it escaped the adverse weather conditions with only "some slight damage to deck fittings" ("Shipping" 3).

On 9 November 1909, at noon, the Suzukis arrived at Thursday Island, where they were issued their certificates of exemptions. The social distinction between them and the 'common' Japanese immigrant already shows in the route taken. Most of those travelling to Broome to become part of the pearling crews or other workers took the shorter northern route via Koepang or arrived via Singapore (Martínez and Vickers 84). The academically-trained medical doctor and his wife, however, circumvented the continent via the scenic route, aboard more prestigious vessels. The harsh weather accompanied them from Thursday Island past Townsville but the rest of the journey to Sydney saw "very fine weather with light winds and smooth sea" ("Shipping").

While the Yawatu Maru continued on its regular course to Melbourne, the Suzukis disembarked in Sydney on 17 November 1909 (Warner 2010), where they spent about a month. Meanwhile, Mrs Suzuki engaged in a bit of consumerism. When she "appeared in Pitt-street clothed in the garb of Japan", she "created such a sensation owing to her

2 Burns, Philp & Co, business men who were not only heavily involved in the Thursday Island pearling industry but also heavily in the Queensland sugar industry and its 'whitening' by organising and conducting the deportation of the Pacific Islanders (Affeldt, *Consuming Whiteness* 106, 185–89, 287; Bailey 196).

attire – novel to the inhabitants of the New South Wales capital – and her personal beauty that she hurriedly withdrew to assume the orthodox dress of feminine Australia" ("Broome and its People"). This exoticizing assessment may reasonably be doubted. At latest a year prior to the purported 'wardrobe scandal', sales promotion in the very same newspaper had already advertised "Japanese Kimonos" as "useful for this hot weather" ("Advertsing" 12). Furthermore, even during the Russo-Japanese War, David Jones had offered silk and cotton-crepe "Japanese Kimonos" for the "ladies" of New South Wales ("David Jones and Company").

Seemingly without any other sensational contretemps, on Boxing Day at noon, the Suzukis boarded the RMS Otway and – via Melbourne – journeyed to Western Australia ("Mail Steamers"). They greeted the New Year 1910 somewhere en route from Adelaide to the west and reached Fremantle a few days later. After a short stopover of only two days, Suzuki and his wife were taken up the west coast by the SS Koombana. The president of the Japanese Club joined them at Port Hedland for the last leg of the sea voyage, and together they reached Broome around noon on Saturday, 15 January 1910 (Jones 17).

The Japanese Doctor in Broome

Word of the new arrival travelled fast through a continent that took a keen interest in this incident unfolding in the remote north-western town. Notwithstanding, not even half a year into his residence, Dr Tadashi Suzuki's presence in Broome was already considered a success. Part of the benevolent assessment was a comparatively verbose paragraph that addressed the controversy surrounding his admission. While lauding Suzuki's academic prowess, it nonetheless complied with the double-edged conception of 'the Japanese':

> A no inconsiderable personage at Broome is the Jap. doctor, whose introduction to the port caused such a howl in political circles a while back. The newcomer Galen … is admitted by all to possess great professional ability … His extensive degrees and diplomas are casually shown to the visitor happening in. ("Nor' Westward Ho!" 7)

The quoted passage captivates especially because of its internal dissension. On the one hand, it emphasises the importance of the Japanese medical doctor by associating him with Claudius Galenus of Pergamum, the Greek physician, surgeon and philosopher, as versatile, as erudite and also well-renowned for his accomplishments in the medicinal sciences in the Roman Empire; a name that, almost two millennia later, still expresses high esteem with regard to the medical sciences.

This appreciation, on the other hand, is foiled by the fact that the doctor remains nameless. Moreover, even in providing one of the very few verbatim records of Suzuki, the article alludes to the stereotype of Japanese subservient modesty. He shows the reporter around his office and points to a portrait. The "sombre face of vast intellectual power" was for Suzuki "the greatest surgeon in the world. I mean, in Japan". The ad-

dendum was allegedly expressed because he was "apparently not wishing to hurt anybody's feeling". The paragraph then ends with another discriminatory finesse: "In appearance, the doctor is the average Jap., but polished and cultured, speaking English fluently" ("Nor' Westward Ho!" 7).

During the first three years of his sojourn, Suzuki was crucially involved in the medical business of Broome. He successfully collaborated with the acting European doctors, rescuing people of all cultural denominations and fighting leprosy ("Leprosy at Broome"). Moreover, he established the Japanese hospital, which, upon its purchase by the Beagle Bay Mission, was described as having been "one of the finest buildings in Broome" ("Caring for the Natives"). Suzuki cooperated with the local Sisters of St John's of God, who provided their services as (European) nurses (Stride and Louws 161) and in retrospect called him "the kindest friend" (qtd. in Norman and Norman 149).

Furthermore, in a twist of the traditional anthropological power relations, it was Suzuki who performed the highly charged autopsy of pearl diver William Webb. The latter was one of the twelve navy-trained diving experts who had relocated from England in the 1911 "white experiment" – a failed attempt to evidence European aptitude for pearl-shell diving (Bailey 2004; Affeldt, "'The White Experiment'"). Suzuki's selfless effort in saving the life of a white woman in La Grange earned him not only respect but also further support in the case of his retention – for which one hundred Europeans in Broome signed a petition (Home and Territories 113–114).

This community action was necessary because, despite his professional proficiency, the renewal of Suzuki's exemption was placed on the local agenda in 1912. It was, again, the eminent master pearlers who spoke out against the (continued) employment of the Japanese doctor. They were joined by some notable locals – the mayor of Broome and the white doctor, Graham Blick, who, in a letter to the local member of parliament in May 1912, emphatically protested against the presence of the foreign medical practitioner by drawing on the racial tension of the time.

> I feel it a great grievance that I, a white man, … should have an alien thrust into the place who not only takes all this work and pay from me … but attends to 'white' men … These people – who are unworthy of the designation of 'white' – have fallen so low as to allow their women kind to be attended by this Japanese doctor.

Not only challenging the 'whiteness' of some of his fellow Europeans due to their 'racial treason', he also asserted that the continued employment of the Japanese doctor "has a most disastrous effect on the minds of the colored people" and "lowers the prestige of the white race altogether" because it implied an equalization of 'races'. "Black can never equal white and should not be allowed to try", the white doctor concluded in a dichotomizing theoretical short-circuit (Home and Territories Department 105–108).

Despite this fierce yet short-lived opposition, the renewal of the exemption was no matter of much further debate. Suzuki continued his practice for two more years; until he left of free choice to pursue his career in China and Japan. In May 1914, the local

newspaper saw him off with an approving notification on "Dr Tadashi Suzuki, who during his several years' residence in Broome has built up a remunerative business, not only among his compatriots but also among the whites" ("Japanese Doctor" 3).

After Suzuki, four more doctors successively practised medicine and attended to the patients in the Japanese hospital until it closed in the late 1920s. After his return to Japan, Suzuki deepened his knowledge of child health and worked in a hospital in Japan-ruled Dairen (Norman and Norman 154). In November 1925, he became a professor of paediatrics at the University of Kyoto, and, already six years later, had to leave his position due to an illness (Kyoto University 853). Dr Tadashi Suzuki passed away in April 1933, shortly before his 50th birthday (Miyata).

Conclusion

The history of Dr Tadashi Suzuki's sojourn in Australia exemplifies the practical implementation of 'location-specific social capital' in the case of Japanese migration to north-western Australia. Even more, this case study contributes to an understanding of the complexity of race relations in the lived reality of 'White Australia'. Far from being passive subordinates, the successful assertiveness of the local Japanese community gives an account of the effective agency by those whose lives were otherwise framed by an overtly racist attitude and policy. Origins of the Japanese's particular social standing can be found in their importance for the pearl-shelling industry as well as in their own self-conception as an imperial nation with corresponding entitlements.

The debates preceding the landing of a Japanese doctor in the north-western town were an expression of the negotiation at the time that oscillated between the nationwide primacy of whiteness and racial homogeneity and the local discourse that emphasised the indispensability of Japanese workers even in the face of an alleged 'Yellow Peril' but nonetheless drew on traditional racist stereotypes and arguments. Yet, more than an acknowledgement of his actual professional skills, Suzuki's successful residence is a curious episode in Australian history that evidences how the ideology underpinning Australian racism revealed its limitations when the complexity of race relations was put to the test in everyday practice.

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