

# Writing the on-board: Meiji Japan in transit and transition\*

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## Abstract

*This article uses the history of Japanese emigrants to Hawai'i as a lens through which to examine Japan's engagement with the outside world in the late nineteenth century. Focusing on a single journey from Yokohama to Honolulu in 1885, it reconstructs the transit of two migrant labourers as they entered an 'in-between' state – between regimes of labour, between freedom and coercion, and between local and national identities. These migrant experiences challenge the teleological discourse of Japanese 'progress' that was so popular among political elites across the world in the 1880s, and that was embodied by the very materiality of the ship in which the labourers travelled. But the 'in-between' also speaks to the historiographical need to fill the silences that exist between archives across the Pacific Ocean, and thus to the wider challenges of writing global history.*

**Keywords** civilization, Hawai'i, Japan, migration, silence, steamships

## On board

'On board Steamship "Yamashiro Maru": the first words of a letter from Robert W. Irwin, Hawaiian chargé d'affaires for Japan, to 'His Excellency Walter Murray Gibson, Minister for Foreign Affairs'.<sup>1</sup>

Irwin's letter, written 'Off Honolulu June 25, 1885', spoke to a transitional moment in Japan's engagement with the outside world during the Meiji period (1868–1912). It opened by countering allegations in the Honolulu press that the nearly 1,000 migrant labourers who had travelled to the Kingdom of Hawai'i on board the *Yamashiro-maru* were 'reeking from the slums of a seaport town'. Rather, Irwin stated, they had been carefully recruited from the Japanese countryside and had undergone pre-departure quarantine near Yokohama. After

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1 Hawai'i State Archives (henceforth HSA), FO&EX 31, Immigration Matters (April to June 1885), Robert W. Irwin to Walter M. Gibson, 25 June 1885. In what follows, I hyphenate the suffix *maru*, which is attached to non-military ships in Japan, from the given name of the vessel, except when quoting from primary sources.

more details about the backgrounds of the migrants, he turned to a recent claim made in the *Hawaiian Gazette* newspaper that the arrival of such large numbers of Japanese constituted the ‘Asiaticizing’ of the Hawaiian islands.<sup>2</sup> Instead of rebutting the *Gazette* by quibbling about numbers, however, or by pointing out that the islands’ influential sugar planters had long been calling for new labourers from overseas, he put forward an idea that would have been unthinkable earlier in the nineteenth century: ‘Now, I do not consider Japan an Asiatic nation. The Japanese people have nothing in common with India and China. Japan is progressive and is rapidly becoming a Western Civilized State.’

That Japan was no longer part of ‘Asia’ was an idea that had in fact been articulated a few months earlier by the doyen of ‘civilization’ debates in Meiji Japan, Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901). Fukuzawa was an intellectual who had travelled both to America and to Europe on government embassies before the 1868 Meiji Restoration and who subsequently made his name with books such as *The conditions of the West* (1866–70) and *An outline of a theory of civilization* (1875). In March 1885, three months before Irwin’s letter, Fukuzawa wrote of Japan’s need to ‘cast off Asia’ (‘Datsu-A ron’): ‘Japan is located in the eastern extremities of Asia, but the spirit of her people has already moved away from the old conventions of Asia to Western civilization.’<sup>3</sup> Irwin may not have been aware of Fukuzawa’s ‘Casting off Asia’ when he wrote his letter later in June, given that the latter’s editorial only became widely read in future years. Nevertheless, the fact that the two men sought almost simultaneously to recast Japan’s relationship to ‘Asia’ suggested that, in the mid 1880s, Japanese elites and foreign residents of Japan (such as Irwin) shared a rhetoric of Japanese ‘progress’. To be ‘civilized’ was to be ‘Western’. Nearly two decades after the Restoration, Japan was moving in such a ‘progressive’ direction towards civilization that it could no longer be classified as ‘Asian’. And, with the arrival of Irwin in Honolulu, that message was conveyed to a Pacific audience. On 29 June, the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, a newspaper owned by Walter Gibson, the Hawaiian Minister for Foreign Affairs and the recipient of Irwin’s letter, opined, ‘Japan has cut loose, as far as it is presently safe to do, from its Asiatic methods, and adopted those of the Western world.’<sup>4</sup>

This message of Japanese civilization was not only diffused through human interlocutors. Steamships, too, were central to a narrative of progress. In 1853, the arrival of Commodore Perry’s steamships in Edo Bay had underlined Tokugawa Japan’s isolation from new technologies that were revolutionizing the world.<sup>5</sup> Just thirty years later, by contrast, it was no coincidence that Irwin described Japan’s ‘progress’ while sitting on board what he called ‘a splendid iron steamer’ – a *Japanese* steamship. The *Yamashiro-maru* had, in fact, been constructed in the shipbuilding mecca of Newcastle upon Tyne. But a Japanese company ordering a new fleet of British-built passenger-cargo ships was also an example of Japan’s having ‘adopted [methods] of the Western world’.<sup>6</sup> On its maiden voyage to Japan, the *Yamashiro-maru* was lauded as a ‘high class ship’;

2 *Hawaiian Gazette*, 24 June 1885.

3 Amended translation from David Lu, *Japan: a documentary history*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997, pp. 351–3 (here p. 352). See also Pekka Korhonen, ‘Leaving Asia? The meaning of *Datsu-A* and Japan’s modern history’, *Asia-Pacific Journal*, 12, 9, 3, 2014, <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Pekka-Korhonen/4083> (consulted 14 March 2016).

4 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 29 June 1885.

5 See John W. Dower, ‘Black ships & samurai: Commodore Perry and the opening of Japan (1853–1854)’, [http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/black\\_ships\\_and\\_samurai/bss\\_essay01.html](http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/black_ships_and_samurai/bss_essay01.html) (consulted 1 April 2015).

6 On the early history of the company in question, the Kyōdō Un’yū Kaisha (Union Steamship Company), see William D. Wray, *Mitsubishi and the N. Y. K., 1870–1914*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1984.

it was the ‘best steamer’ of the Union Steamship Company, according to its (British) captain in 1885; and, soon after its arrival in Honolulu in June of that year, the *Yamashiro-maru* was subjected to a long profile in the aforementioned *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, which concluded: ‘The cost of the vessel, without any “extras,” was \$255;000, and any one who visits her will not think that sum too much to pay for such a splendid specimen of marine architecture.’<sup>7</sup> Such praise across the globe channelled the wider discourse of ‘civilization’. The ‘splendid specimen’ became more than just a ship: the *Yamashiro-maru* itself embodied Japan’s ongoing attempts to redesign the traditional architecture of international affairs in the late nineteenth century by becoming a ‘high-class’ nation.<sup>8</sup>

Before getting too carried away, however, we need to note a tension at the heart of this rhetoric. The *Yamashiro-maru* may have stood for one story of what its captain called the ‘New Japan’,<sup>9</sup> but the people on board the ship represented another: migrants who, in the eyes of opposition sections of the Honolulu press, were smallpox-carrying, slum-ridden ‘Asiatics’; men (overwhelmingly) who, owing to economic hardships in their hometowns, had chosen to make new lives and livelihoods halfway across the Pacific Ocean. The journeys that these migrants made to Hawai‘i and their subsequent reception there undermined the very teleology of Japanese ‘progress’ represented by the ship that carried them.

To explore these tensions further, to tease out the differences between what the ship represented and what the people on board represented, this article takes the period of transit during the particular journey of the *Yamashiro-maru* to Hawai‘i in June 1885 as a historical window through which to consider the more general transformation of Japan’s engagements with the wider world in the late nineteenth century. In reconstructing the history of the *Yamashiro-maru* for the first time, I focus on two questions: how did the migrants experience the journey from Yokohama to Honolulu, and what did the period of transit mean for them? My argument is that the shipboard passage constituted a crucial moment of being ‘in between’ for the Japanese labourers: not only between home in Japan and a new life on the sugar plantations of Hawai‘i, but also between contrasting regimes of identification and labour respectively. To frame even a relatively short, two-week passage in these ways then allows us to ask, at a more fundamental level, what it meant to be ‘Japanese’ in the late nineteenth-century world, and to propose the space of the ship and the time of transit as significant – and significantly understudied – arenas in the genesis of national identities.<sup>10</sup>

In these ways, I join with the other contributors to this special issue in problematizing the period of the on-board during the high age of steamships, with a view to highlighting the internal temporal and spatial dynamics of ‘transit’. My starting point, inspired by work on the Atlantic slave trade, is the assumption that close, microhistorical analyses of what it meant for different people to be ‘in transit’ offer historians distinctive ways of constructing global histories of a particular time or place.<sup>11</sup> As Sheila Hones and Yasuo Endo point out in their

7 *Straits Times Weekly Issue* (Singapore), 25 June 1884; John J. Mahlmann, *Reminiscences of an ancient mariner*, Yokohama: ‘Japan Gazette’ Printing & Publishing Co., 1918, p. 180; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1885.

8 For similar, later reactions to the *Yamashiro-maru* in Australia, see *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 21 November 1896; *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Queensland), 14 February 1898.

9 Mahlmann, *Reminiscences*, p. 125.

10 See also Tamson Pietsch, ‘A British sea: making sense of global space in the late nineteenth century’, *Journal of Global History*, 5, 2010, pp. 423–46.

11 Models for this approach include Robert Harms, *The Diligent: a voyage through the worlds of the slave trade*, New York: Basic Books, 2000; Marcus Rediker, *The slave ship: a human history*, London: John Murray,

insightful reading of Commodore Matthew Perry's expedition to 'open' Japan in 1853–54, for example, attention to the period of transit – in Perry's case, eight months – leads to a very different narrative framing of the commodore's arrival in Japan. *Pace* numerous popular accounts in both English and Japanese, Perry's ships did not just 'appear' on the Pacific horizon one day: for a start, his expedition came to Japan via the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, not the Pacific, and nor was his arrival a total surprise to the Tokugawa authorities in Edo. To understand the nature of Perry's transit is to acknowledge a much more complex narrative of global geopolitics in the early 1850s than that suggested by the phrase 'the opening of Japan'.<sup>12</sup>

But how can historians historicize the on-board, thus enriching and complicating our understanding of global connections, if we lack transit sources such as the official diary of Perry's expedition?<sup>13</sup> The crossing of the *Yamashiro-maru* to Honolulu in June 1885 was the second of what would become twenty-six crossings of Japanese labourers to Hawai'i. These constituted the so-called 'government-sponsored emigration programme' (*kan'yaku imin*, 1885–94), during which 29,000 Japanese emigrated to work on the sugar plantations in Hawai'i. Significantly, this was the first time since 1868 that Tokyo had authorized a mass overseas migration of Japanese subjects, and, looking forwards, the emigration programme to Hawai'i marked the beginning of hundreds of thousands of Japanese crossing the Pacific to work in Hawai'i, North America, and South America in the decades before the Second World War.

However, although scholars have successfully traced the early migrants' villages of origin, their reasons for seeking new lives overseas, the hardships they endured in their host countries, the significance of their remittances back home, their forging of new identities, and so on, the shipboard passage has been almost entirely written out of the history of the Japanese Pacific diaspora, at least during the early decades of mass migration in the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>14</sup> Such

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2007; Emma Christopher, Cassandra Pybus, and Marcus Rediker, eds., *Many middle passages: forced migration and the making of the modern world*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007. See also Andrew Hassam, *Sailing to Australia: shipboard diaries by nineteenth-century British emigrants*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994 (discussed in Tamson Pietsch, 'Bodies at sea: travelling to Australia in the age of sail', pp. 209–28 in this issue); and Niklas Frykman, Clare Anderson, L. H. van Voss, and Marcus Rediker, 'Mutiny and maritime radicalism in the Age of Revolution: an introduction', *International Review of Social History*, 58, 2013, pp. 1–14.

- 12 Sheila Hones and Yasuo Endo, 'History, distance and text: narratives of the 1853–1854 Perry expedition to Japan', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 32, 2006, pp. 563–78. On the wider relationship – some would say tensions – between the 'local contexts' and 'global contexts' posited by so-called 'global microhistory', see Martin Dusinberre and Roland Wenzlhuemer, 'Editorial', in this issue, n. 30.
- 13 See Roland Wenzlhuemer, 'The ship, the media, and the world: conceptualizing connections in global history', pp. 163–86 in this issue.
- 14 The shipboard passage is almost entirely overlooked by scholars of Japan, even in otherwise excellent analyses of overseas migration during the Meiji period: see Alan T. Moriyama, *Imingaisha: Japanese emigration companies and Hawaii, 1894–1908*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1985; Yukiko Kimura, *The Issei: Japanese immigrants in Hawaii*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992; Doi Yatarō, *Yamaguchi-ken Oshima-gun Hawaii iminshi (A history of emigration to Hawaii from Oshima county, Yamaguchi prefecture)*, Tokyo: Matsuno Shoten, 1980. The key exception is Yamada Michio's study of the *Kasado-maru* (launched 1900), *Fune ni miru Nihonjin iminshi: Kasado-maru kara kurūzu kyakusen e (Japanese emigration history as seen through ships: from the Kasado-maru to passenger cruise liners)*, Tokyo: Chūkō Shinsho, 1998, a work I draw on below. For a slightly later period, see also Yukari Takai, 'Navigating transpacific passages: steamship companies, state regulators and transshipment of Japanese in the early-twentieth-century Pacific Northwest', *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 30, 3, 2011, pp. 7–34. Oral history accounts of the first-generation Japanese to come to Hawai'i are also silent on the shipboard passage: see Center for Oral History, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, *Pioneer Mill Company: a Maui sugar plantation legacy*, Honolulu, HI: Center for Oral History, University of Hawai'i, 2003; Center for Oral History, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, *Kōloa: an oral history of a Kāua'i community*, 3 vols., Honolulu, HI: Center for Oral History, University of Hawai'i, 1988; Franklin Odo, *Voices from the canefields: folksongs from Japanese immigrant workers in Hawai'i*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

silence reflects the paucity of the sources. The most detailed report of shipboard conditions in this period survives from the third government-sponsored crossing of migrants to Honolulu, on the *City of Peking* in February 1886.<sup>15</sup> Irwin's letter, meanwhile, is the only document I have found that was actually written on board the *Yamashiro-maru*, not just in 1885 but throughout the ship's entire career (1884–1910).

To reconstruct a story from silence is, of course, the principle challenge of writing any history, not just global history.<sup>16</sup> But because the silence in this case is to be found in the very act of movement, and therefore in one of the core concerns of global history, the way in which we engage with the period of transit offers insights into the writing of global history more generally. Following Greg Dening's lead in his essay, 'Writing, rewriting the beach', I take silence to be not 'empty soundlessness' but rather a relationship – in this case, a relationship between the archives in Japan and Hawai'i respectively.<sup>17</sup> Through the story of the *Yamashiro-maru* in 1885, I extend the concept of 'transit' to cover not just the shipboard passage but also the wider processes of departure in Japan and arrival in Hawai'i. This allows me to frame the journey with land-based fragments of sources – names, addresses, a grave, a labourer number, a cross-section design drawing – in Tokyo, Hiroshima, Kaua'i, Honolulu, and even Newcastle upon Tyne, and thereby partly to fill a historical silence by bringing these fragments into dialogue with each other. But when that dialogue runs out, or is barely audible in the first place, I leap by necessity into the realm of historical speculation.

To draw attention to this methodology of framing and leaping, and to its limitations, I now turn away from the one 'on-board' source, Robert W. Irwin's letter, to focus instead on two other men: Wakamiya Yaichi, aged thirty-seven in 1885, and Kodama Keijirō, aged twenty-eight. Their stories reveal not only the historical significance of the transit but also one method for writing a global history of silence – for writing the on-board.

## Between departure and landfall

'A landfall', writes Joseph Conrad at the beginning of *The mirror of the sea*, is a particular moment in time, the initial cry of 'Land ho!', which 'you meet at first with a single glance'. It is 'a matter of a quick eye and of a clear atmosphere', after which you begin to fall in with the land. By contrast, a departure is a technical act – the first pencilled cross on a track-chart after the final sight of land – but one that entails a longer process, in which a ship 'may have been at sea, in the fullest sense of the phrase, for days', even though the coast remained in sight.<sup>18</sup> It is this longer process of departure, in terms of pre-migration lives and expectations, that we need to grasp first in order to start reconstructing the significance of 'being in transit' for Wakamiya Yaichi.

I have found Wakamiya's name in two locations. The first is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives in Tokyo, which houses a list of the *Yamashiro-maru* migrants, including their home addresses and their work destinations in Hawai'i.<sup>19</sup> Wakamiya hailed from the coastal village

15 Report to Foreign Minister Aoki Shūzō from Consul Andō Tarō, on board the *City of Peking*, 13 February 1886, in *Hiroshima-ken ijūshi shiryō-ben (A history of emigration from Hiroshima prefecture: historical sources)*, Hiroshima: Hiroshima Prefectural Archives, 1991, pp. 34–6.

16 Alain Corbin, *The life of an unknown: the rediscovered world of a clog maker in nineteenth-century France*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001, pp. vii–xiv.

17 Greg Dening, 'Writing, rewriting the beach: an essay', *Rethinking History*, 2, 2, 1998, p. 146.

18 Joseph Conrad, *The mirror of the sea*, 10th edn, Edinburgh: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1906, pp. 1–2.

19 Diplomatic Records Office, Tokyo (henceforth DRO), 3.8.2.5–14.

of Jigozen, in Saeki county, in south-west Hiroshima prefecture. Hiroshima accounted for the greatest number of migrants on board the *Yamashiro-maru* (390, or nearly 40%); Saeki accounted for the greatest number of migrants within Hiroshima (239); and Jigozen, with 37 male migrants aged between twenty and thirty-eight, formed the single largest sending community within Saeki county.<sup>20</sup> Why, we might wonder, did so many Hawaiian migrants come from one place?

Until the 1870s, Jigozen had been typical of the many coastal communities in the Inland Sea region whose economies boomed in the mid nineteenth century at the expense of bigger, more established market and castle towns.<sup>21</sup> As domestic trade between Osaka and the west and north of Japan increased from the mid eighteenth century onwards, so too did the number of long-distance sailing ships passing through ports such as Jigozen, ships that offered the town's inhabitants the chance to make money in trade and services. By the 1860s, 60% of Jigozen's households could make a living without owning land (an astonishing transformation of the farming : non-farming ratio compared to the 1760s), and the village population was growing to the extent that in 1881 the population of 2,300 was nearly double that of the 1820s.<sup>22</sup> The problem was that many of Jigozen's landless labourers – officially classified as 'farmers' – depended for their livelihoods on the town's vibrant retail sector, which depended on the steady flow of ships coming to port, which in turn depended on economic and political structures that rewarded interregional trade at relatively low speed. These structures were destabilized by Japan's post-1858 participation in international trade, and then torn down completely after the 1868 Meiji Restoration. Starting in the 1870s, goods could be transported to Osaka at higher speeds and in greater bulk – by steamships and eventually by trains – and the merchants of these previously booming Inland Sea ports suddenly found themselves bereft of business.

If things became bad for the merchants, they were even worse for the 'farmers' who had taken by-employment in the ports – as cooks, maids, porters, couriers, apprentices – and who owned no land upon which they could fall back when those by-employments dried up. Meanwhile, those who *did* own land found themselves taxed at unprecedented levels under the new Meiji government; if they were able to survive without selling up and joining the landless ranks, they did so by raising rents for their tenants, thus exacerbating the growing gap between rich and poor in the community. Finally, those 'farmers' who had depended on the local cotton industry as a secondary (and sometimes primary) source of household income in the mid nineteenth century suddenly found themselves unable to compete with the new mill opened by the Hiroshima Cotton Spinning Company in Saeki county in 1883.<sup>23</sup>

No wonder, then, that such a large group of men sought to escape Jigozen in 1885: these were desperate times. If we are to follow the Tokyo records and believe that Wakamiya really

20 In the concentration of migrants from one particular county, Saeki displays many similarities to Ōshima county in the neighbouring Yamaguchi prefecture: see Doi, *Yamaguchi-ken Ōshima-gun Hawai iminshi*.

21 Thomas C. Smith, *Native sources of Japanese industrialization, 1750–1920*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988, pp. 15–49.

22 Hatsukaichi-chō hen, *Hatsukaichi chōshi (Hatsukaichi town history)*, 7 vols., Hiroshima: Hatsukaichi chō 1988, vol. 7, p. 323; vol. 6, pp. 870–81, 885–8.

23 On falling agricultural yield in Jigozen in the 1880s, see Ishikawa Tomonari, 'Hiroshima wangan Jigozenon keiyaku imin no shakai chirigakuteki kōsatsu (A social and geographic study of contract emigration from Jigozen village, Hiroshima bay)', *Jinbun Chiri*, 19, 1, 1967, p. 88. On the cotton mills, whose numbers nationwide increased from three in 1877 to twenty-three in 1886, see Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: the world of the first generation Japanese immigrants, 1885–1924*, New York: Free Press, 1988, pp. 43–4. On the wider process of port-town change in the 1870s and 1880s, see Martin Dusinberre, *Hard times in the hometown: a history of community survival in modern Japan*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012, pp. 33–6.



was a full-time farmer, he was at best a tenant; equally, he may only have been a part-time tenant farmer who had grown up expecting to support himself and any family mainly through by-employments. Either way, a guaranteed salary of US\$9 a month on a Hawaiian sugar plantation (equivalent to 10.6 yen), plus room and board, was almost three times what he could earn as a day-labourer in Jigozen in 1885.<sup>24</sup> Fuelling these expectations, Wakamiya would have read – or, more likely, would have been read – a message from the prefectural governor on 25 May, the day when the migrants left Hiroshima for transit to Yokohama. Work hard, it said, using an idiom of triumphant homecoming, ‘that you may gain the distinction of one day returning to your hometown dressed in brocade’.<sup>25</sup>

The second mention of Wakamiya Yaichi comes in a ‘Laborer Contract Book’ compiled by the Kingdom of Hawai‘i in July 1885 and kept in the Hawaiian State Archives. The migrants’ names are transliterated into the Roman alphabet, but instead of information on provenance or plantation destination, the *Yamashiro-maru* migrants are listed next to a number, starting at 713: Wakamiya is number 1405. This was the (in)famous ‘bango’, an individual number engraved on a metal disk and worn around the migrant’s neck like a soldier’s dog tag. (Women, absent in the ‘Laborer Contract Book’, went by their husbands’ bangos.<sup>26</sup>) Such labelling made it easier for the employers and government officials to discuss individual cases. Thus, correspondence regarding Takiguchi Junta, who arrived with Wakamiya on the *Yamashiro-maru* in 1885 but died eighteen months later at the age of thirty-six, simply referred to ‘the death of Japanese #863’, as if discussing a farm animal.<sup>27</sup> In subsequent decades, Japanese labourers in Hawai‘i would be photographed with their bangos, in a mug-shot pose that foreshadowed the handling of Japanese internees in the mainland United States during the Second World War.

This shift in official identification suggests a first way for us to frame the period of transit for the *Yamashiro-maru* migrants: on their departure from Yokohama they were individuals with names, but on their arrival in Honolulu they were objects with numbers. ‘The [overseers] never call a man by his name. Always by the bango, 7209 or 6508 in that manner’, the migrants would later recall. ‘And that was the thing I objected to. I wanted my name, not the number.’<sup>28</sup>

A second way of framing the transit is to consider the transformation in the very state of physical ‘being’ from Japan to Hawai‘i. The government-sponsored emigration programme was very popular from its beginnings in 1885, with local officials in western Japan overwhelmed by the queues of prospective migrants lining up outside village offices.<sup>29</sup> Despite the economic hardships that had led thousands of men and women to this point, there was no legal or bureaucratic coercion involved in their decision to leave Japan. Rather, that decision was freely

24 Income figures based on Ishikawa, ‘Hiroshima wangan Jigozenon’, p. 85. The US\$9 salary was on top of a monthly allowance for food (US\$6 for men and US\$4 for women).

25 *Hiroshima-ken ijūshi shiryō-ben*, p. 10. See also Jonathan Dresner, ‘Instructions to emigrant workers, 1885–1894: “Return in triumph” or “Wander on the verge of starvation”’, in Nobuko Adachi, ed., *Japanese diasporas: unsung pasts, conflicting presents and uncertain futures*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2006, pp. 52–68.

26 For examples of how female bangos were used, see Hawai‘i Sugar Planters’ Association Archive, Hamilton Library, University of Hawai‘i (henceforth HSPA), KAU PV vol. 7, *passim*.

27 HSPA, KSC 19-13, letter from the Bureau of Immigration to the manager of Kekaha Sugar Co. (Kaua‘i), 10 January 1887.

28 Ronald Takaki, *Pau Hana: plantation life and labor in Hawaii*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1983, p. 89.

29 Dusinberre, *Hard times*, p. 83.

undertaken by Wakamiya Yaichi and his fellow villagers, and rendered all the more attractive by exhortations for the migrants to return ‘dressed in brocade’. Yet, following the outbreak of illness among a dozen of the labourers during the *Yamashiro-maru*’s passage, an illness that after a spectacular misdiagnosis by the Honolulu port physician turned out to be smallpox, the migrant labourers were bundled off to the isolation of Honolulu’s Sand Island Quarantine Station. There, in what later became known among migrant arrivals as the *semin-go-ya* (‘thousand-person huts’<sup>30</sup>), Wakamiya and his compatriots spent more than a month, surrounded by a high paling and a watchtower, and guarded by as many as ten men during the daytime.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, between departure and landfall, Wakamiya moved from a state of freedom to one of confinement. This was no temporary change for, as the ‘Laborer Contract Book’ demonstrates, the post-quarantine Japanese migrants were bound – almost certainly for the first time in their lives – to a particular work regime by a signed piece of paper. That they and later arrivals came to consider the contract itself as a form of confinement is suggested by the repeated line, ‘When my contract ends’ (*jōyaku kiretara*), in the work songs of the cane fields: theirs was a three-year sentence to endure.<sup>32</sup> During that term, the migrants would have to live on plantation and, if absent from work, forfeit their wages or spend time in jail, or both. Such a system was potentially open to abuse, as was made abundantly clear to Tokyo by Japanese consular officials in Honolulu, who reported on maltreatment of *ex-City of Tokio* workers (the first group of government-sponsored migrants, who arrived in February 1885). These reports, received in the spring of 1885, prompted the dispatch of a special commissioner, Inouye Katsunosuke, to Hawai‘i on the *Yamashiro-maru* to investigate. After a tour of numerous plantations throughout the archipelago, Inouye reported to the Hawaiian foreign minister, Walter Gibson, that he had discovered ‘unwarrantable and frequent acts of violence that have been perpetrated upon Japanese by overseers on many of the Plantations’.<sup>33</sup> Even as the *Yamashiro-maru* lay in Honolulu, *ex-City of Tokio* labourers on Hawai‘i Island were being arrested ‘for continuously shamming sick and refusing to work without cause’ and being forced to defend themselves in trial without understanding English.<sup>34</sup>

Bangos, confinement, violence, kangaroo courts: no wonder that foreign ministry officials in Tokyo preserved a cutting from the Honolulu *Daily Bulletin* which argued that Hawai‘i’s ‘labor contract system ... is but the slavery of the Southern States of America transplanted and revived in a modified form’.<sup>35</sup> No wonder, too, that the Hawaiian Board of Immigration sought to reassure the Meiji government, through Irwin, that complaints of ill treatment were being fully investigated – or that Gibson’s pro-government newspaper, the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, was so keen to stress that ‘our contract system

30 Moriyoama, *Imingaiasha*, p. 112.

31 For the quarantine station, see *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 25 June 1885. I have calculated the number of guards from HSA, v.519 (*Yamashiro-maru*, 1892).

32 Odo, *Voices from the canefields*, pp. 34–6. On the meaning of contracts to Japanese labourers in Hawai‘i, see Martin Dusinberre, ‘Circulations of labor, bodies of work: a Japanese migrant in Meiji Hawai‘i’, *Historische Anthropologie*, 24, 2, 2016 (forthcoming).

33 HSA, 403-16-250, Inouye Katsunosuke to Walter Gibson, 18 July 1885. Inouye [Inoue]’s full report in Japanese, *Hawaiikoku haken Inoue Katsunosuke fukumeisho* (*Report of Inoue Katsunosuke dispatched to the Kingdom of Hawai‘i*), may be found through the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records, www.jacar.go.jp (consulted 14 March 2016).

34 The case is described in DRO 3.8.2.7; I could find no corresponding records in HSA, however.

35 *Daily Bulletin* (Honolulu), 7 August 1885, as preserved in DRO 3.8.2.7.



should be as free from any imputation of being a species of slavery as it can possibly be made'.<sup>36</sup>

In a third way, therefore, the passage between Yokohama and Honolulu may be framed by the gap between Wakamiya's expectations (as suggested by the Hiroshima governor's exhortations) and the reality of his new life as a contract labourer (as suggested by Inouye's investigations). This was a gap expressed in the songs of the canefields (*holehole bushi*):

Glorious Hawai'i, Hawai'i  
Came and found hell on earth  
The boss is the devil  
His lunas [overseers] are demons.<sup>37</sup>

Such bitterness notwithstanding, however, it is too simplistic to think of the *Yamashiro-maru*'s passage merely in terms of the Japanese migrants moving from 'freedom' to 'slavery'. Instead, the framework developed by Scott Nelson in his study of Irish and Chinese labourers during the US Civil War helps us to understand better the significance of the period of transit for the Japanese migrants in the 1880s. Nelson argues that the Irish and Chinese 'apparently left home of their own free will but did not arrive at work that way. ... Although immigrant workers may not have understood the coercion at the beginning of the process, many sought to protest it at the end.' The significance of the shipboard transit, therefore, was in the creation of 'a special category of labour somewhere *between* slavery and freedom'.<sup>38</sup>

Given the transformations in Wakamiya's identification, in his expectations, and in his state of freedom between departure and landfall, we may now hypothesize that the transpacific passage was a period during which the Japanese migrants were made aware of being *in between*: not only between geographical locations but also between the poles of 'freedom' and 'slavery'.<sup>39</sup>

But how, exactly, would Wakamiya and the other 988 migrants on board the *Yamashiro-maru* have been made aware of this 'in-between' status?<sup>40</sup> The answer may lie in the physical conditions of the shipboard transit – conditions that we can reconstruct using extant ship plans in Newcastle upon Tyne and in the Japanese Defence Agency Archives. The *Yamashiro-maru*, as is clear from multiple newspaper reports and from the *Lloyd's Register of British and Foreign Shipping*, was a three-decked iron steamer, 92 metres long and over 11 metres wide (301 feet by 37½ feet). On the upper deck, forward of the large funnel, was the bridge, while to the aft was a 'fine smoking room' and an area where first-class passengers could promenade, sheltered from less privileged eyes by a large screen that 'cut off the quarter-deck from the rest of the vessel'. Immediately below

36 HSA, 410 Box 3 v.100, Secretary of Board of Immigration to Robert Irwin, 29 May 1885; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 19 June 1885.

37 Odo, *Voices from the canefields*, p. 85.

38 Scott Reynolds Nelson, 'After slavery: forced drafts of Irish and Chinese labor in the American Civil War, or the search for liquid labor', in Christopher, Pybus, and Rediker, *Many middle passages*, pp. 150–1, emphasis added.

39 My thinking here is influenced by David Lambert and Philip Howell, 'John Pope Hennessey and the translation of "slavery" between late nineteenth-century Barbados and Hong Kong', *History Workshop Journal*, 55, 2003, pp. 1–24, esp. p. 3. On how we should interpret 'slavery' in the 1870s and 1880s, see Matthew Pratt Guterl, 'After slavery: Asian labor, the American South, and the Age of Emancipation', *Journal of World History*, 14, 2, 2003, pp. 209–41.

40 For a discussion of passenger perceptions of 'in-between-ness', including the corporeal experience thereof, see Paul Ashmore, 'Slowing down mobilities: passengering on an inter-war ocean liner', *Mobilities*, 8, 4, 2013, p. 596.

the smoking room, to the rear of the middle deck, was the first-class accommodation, where Irwin wrote his letter on 25 June: a ‘handsome’ dining saloon, ‘well lighted with electric lights of various descriptions’; a music room; and around a dozen cabins – ‘large, lofty, and well ventilated’, each containing two berths and a bell to summon the steward.<sup>41</sup> Still on the middle deck, but forward of the engine room, were second-class accommodation and, in the bow, quarters for the crew. Below this, the whole of the lower (orlop) deck was reserved for steerage passengers, probably in two large rooms respectively to the fore and aft of the engine. Finally, below the orlop deck were the *Yamashiro-maru*’s cargo holds, water tanks, coal bunkers, and not least the two-cylinder, four-boiler engine – the boilers, 3.5 metres tall, extending up into the space of the steerage deck.

All of this meant that 940 male labourers, 35 women, and 14 children were packed into at least two rooms, each measuring approximately 30 metres by 11 metres (the engine room taking up the central third of the lower deck). If we allow space for a central gangway, plus for some kind of communal washing and toilet areas, and even space for some kind of small dining area in which the migrants could eat in shifts, then it seems more likely that the total sleeping area of each of the two main steerage rooms was approximately 27 metres by 10 metres. In the style of migrant ships of the late nineteenth century, however, these rooms would have been further divided by large wooden shelves built inwards from the ship’s sides, thus doubling the floor area on which the migrants could sleep. According to Irwin’s letter, the *Yamashiro-maru* was able to carry up to 1,200 migrants; in theory, therefore, each migrant had a sleeping area of 0.9 square metres, or approximately 163 cm. by 55 cm. (5 feet 4 inches by 1 foot 9 inches), most probably with about 80 cm. to sit up or change clothes. Of course, with only 989 migrants, the *Yamashiro-maru*’s crossing to Honolulu in 1885 afforded Wakamiya marginally more room.

To put these figures in context: according to Japan’s first Rules for Ship Facilities (1934), each long-distance passenger was legally entitled to a bed of no less than 180 cm. (length) by 60 cm. (width) by 75 cm.<sup>42</sup> In other words, the sleeping space theoretically afforded to the *Yamashiro-maru* migrants in 1885 was only marginally lacking in generosity according to the Japanese legal standards of half a century later. Similarly, by the standards of European migrant ships in the 1920s, the space allotted to Wakamiya and his compatriots was acceptable.<sup>43</sup> Conditions on board the *Yamashiro-maru* were vastly better than the ‘coffin’-like accommodation endured by victims of the ‘coolie’ trade in the mid nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> And the fact that the ship was nearly brand-new in 1885 marked it out from the vessels typically

41 For the fullest description of the *Yamashiro-maru*, see *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1885. For other elements of my reconstruction, see *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 19 June 1885; *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Queensland), 14 February 1898. On the spatial divisions of British-built steamships during this period, see Douglas Hart, ‘Sociability and “separate spheres” on the North Atlantic: the interior architecture of British Atlantic liners, 1840–1930’, *Journal of Social History*, 44, 1, 2010, pp. 189–212.

42 Rules for Ship Facilities (*Senpaku Kisetsu Kitei*), article 98, available at: [http://law.e-gov.go.jp/cgi-bin/idxrefer.cgi?H\\_FILE=%8f%ba%8b%e3%92%fc%90%4d%8f%c8%82%4f%82%50%82%4f%82%4f%98%5a&REF\\_NAME=%91%44%94%95%90%dd%94%f5%8b%4b%92%f6&ANCHOR\\_F=&ANCHOR\\_T](http://law.e-gov.go.jp/cgi-bin/idxrefer.cgi?H_FILE=%8f%ba%8b%e3%92%fc%90%4d%8f%c8%82%4f%82%50%82%4f%82%4f%82%4f%98%5a&REF_NAME=%91%44%94%95%90%dd%94%f5%8b%4b%92%f6&ANCHOR_F=&ANCHOR_T) (consulted 13 February 2016). For a point of comparison, the *Kaiwo-maru*, a hybrid steam-sail training ship launched in 1930 and of very similar dimensions to the *Yamashiro-maru*, offered beds for its cadets of 180 cm. by 64 cm. For public access to the *Kaiwo-maru*, see <http://www.kaiwomaru.jp/en/> (consulted 25 January 2016).

43 Yamada, *Fune ni miru Nihonjin iminshi*, pp. 97–8.

44 Evelyn Hu-DeHart, ‘La trata amarilla: the “yellow trade” and the middle passage, 1847–1884’, in Christopher, Pybus, and Rediker, *Many middle passages*, p. 173.

used in the contemporary Melanesian forced-labour trade (many of which became human transporters only *after* they were no longer fit for inanimate cargo).<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, my assumed calculation of 163 cm. by 55 cm. by 80 cm. gives us a converted figure of approximately 24 cubic feet per migrant. This was only one-third of the space stipulated in contemporary law for lascars in the British merchant marine.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the comparison with migrant ships in the 1920s and 1930s is misleading because legislation – including that in Japan – talked of *bed* size. By contrast, the *Yamashiro-maru* migrants slept not in beds but head to foot, probably three people deep, either on the deck or on the wooden shelving, with at most some canvas as a mattress and whatever blankets or *futons* they themselves had brought.<sup>47</sup> For those unfortunates who berthed on the floor of the deck, they did so in almost entire darkness: there were no portholes in the lower deck of the *Yamashiro-maru*, and the large wooden shelves would have blocked out any electric light coming from the ceiling. In other words, these were not the conditions of a slave or coolie ship, but nor is it terribly likely that Wakamiya and his friends from Jigozen would have enthused – unlike the Japanese who viewed the *Yamashiro-maru* for the first time in Osaka – about the ship’s ‘lofty ‘tween-decks’.<sup>48</sup>

It was exactly these cramped, uncomfortable conditions that offered migrants a foretaste of the ‘thousand-person huts’ at the Sand Island quarantine station and, later, the minimal accommodation on the sugar plantations, where the wooden bunks of the ‘thousand-person huts’ could be stacked three or four high.<sup>49</sup> Those bunks, indeed, would later be compared by the planters themselves to shipboard accommodation.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, when Irwin decreed, five days out of Yokohama, that the migrants must take three hours of daily exercise on the upper deck of the *Yamashiro-maru* (safely screened off from the fourteen first-class passengers), Wakamiya experienced for the first time the intervention of a white man in his daily routines and bodily regimes.<sup>51</sup> This would be a precedent both for the mass disinfecting showers that the migrants would be forced to take in the quarantine station and for the racial hierarchies of their lives on the plantations. Even the auditory sensations of the ship – such as the bridge bell, sounding every half-hour and then eight times on the fourth hour to mark a change of watch, or the constant rumble and grind of the engine – prepared the migrants for the new time regimes they would experience on the plantations, and for the non-stop clatter of the sugar mill. In these ways, we must speculate, the migrants were made aware of their ‘in-between’ status in terms not just of geography but also of working regimes. The ship was a boot camp for the plantation.

All of this suggests a modification of Conrad’s observations about departure and landfall. For Wakamiya the departure was inevitably a longer process than simply the last sight of Japan. But so, too, was his arrival in Hawai‘i. The process of his arrival began almost as soon as he left Jigozen: with his shipboard passage to Yokohama, his medical checks in the Nagaura

45 Laurence Brown, “‘A most irregular traffic’: the oceanic passages of the Melanesian labor trade”, in Christopher, Pybus, and Rediker, *Many middle passages*, pp. 191–4.

46 Jonathan Hyslop, ‘Steamship empire: Asian, African and British sailors in the merchant marine, c.1880–1945’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 44, 1, 2009, p. 60.

47 I take these details from Consul Andō Tarō’s description of the *City of Peking*, 13 February 1886, in *Hiroshima-ken ijūshi shiryō-hen*, p. 35.

48 *Hiogo News*, 31 July 1884.

49 Odo, *Voices from the canefields*, p. 51.

50 Planters’ Labor and Supply Company, *Planters’ Monthly*, 6, 9, December 1886, p. 242.

51 HSA, FO&EX 31, Immigration Matters (April to June 1885), Robert W. Irwin to Walter M. Gibson, 25 June 1885.

quarantine station, his adaptation to the cramped and uncomfortable conditions on board the *Yamashiro-maru*, and his auditory experience of the shipboard journey. By the time that he disembarked at Sand Island – carrying his summer bedding, his pots and pans, his bamboo-woven trunk filled with working clothes, a short-sleeved kimono, a pair of tight-fitting trousers, and some summer nightwear – he had already begun to fall in with the regimes of the land.<sup>52</sup>

## Between states of being Japanese

At the beginning of ‘Casting off Asia’, Fukuzawa Yukichi wrote:

Transportation has become so convenient these days that once the wind of Western civilization blows to the East, every blade of grass and every tree in the East follows what the Western wind brings. ... If one observes carefully what is going on in today’s world, one knows the futility of trying to prevent the onslaught of Western civilization. Why not float with [Westerners] in the same ocean of civilization, sail the same waves, and enjoy the fruits and endeavours of civilization?<sup>53</sup>

Steaming across the Pacific Ocean in June 1885, the *Yamashiro-maru* was itself an example of Meiji Japan’s endeavour to float in the ocean of Western civilization, both in the vessel’s British construction and its concomitant ‘splendid’ features, and in the apparently humanitarian on-board conditions of the migrant labourers it carried.

One history of this ‘endeavour’ was partly bound to the foundational year of the Meiji state. In 1868, under the mediation of a Yokohama-based US businessman and in the midst of the chaos that accompanied the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate, 148 Japanese crossed the Pacific to work on sugar plantations in the Kingdom of Hawai‘i. On the occasion of the labourers’ arrival, the *Hawaiian Gazette* newspaper noted that ‘it will require patience to train them to the promptness of civilization’. But some plantation owners had no such patience, and almost immediately problems arose between the Japanese and their employers over pay, sickness, and not least language, with some overseers also accused of abusing their new workers.<sup>54</sup> In Japan, meanwhile, the *Chūgai Shinbun* newspaper criticized the enterprise as ‘identical to the trade in Negro slaves’.<sup>55</sup> From a Meiji government perspective, there was a danger that, under a new policy of engagement with the outside world, Japanese subjects would now become victims of the contemporaneous ‘coolie’ trade in Chinese labourers. For this reason, Tokyo imposed an informal ban on mass overseas labour migration after 1868, a restriction that would remain more or less in place until the new Hawaiian emigration programme began in 1885.

But the Meiji government response to overseas migration was not merely reactive. In 1872, a 370-ton Peruvian barque, the *Maria Luz*, took refuge in Yokohama from a severe storm during its passage from Macao back to Callao. The *Maria Luz* was carrying 231 ‘Chinese passengers’, but according to two escapees the Chinese had been coerced into

52 I take these details from the exhibits on display at the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai‘i, Honolulu.

53 Lu, *Japan*, p. 351. I have made one minor typographical correction.

54 John van Sant, *Pacific pioneers: Japanese journeys to America and Hawaii, 1850–1880*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000, pp. 107–8 (the *Hawaiian Gazette* quotation is on p. 107).

55 Quoted in Daniel Botsman, ‘Freedom without slavery? “Coolies”, prostitutes, and outcasts in Meiji Japan’s “Emancipation Moment”’, *American Historical Review*, 116, 5, 2011, p. 1328.

boarding the ship in Macao and severely maltreated in the five weeks since: they were, in fact, 'coolies'.<sup>56</sup> At this point, after various debates at the highest levels of government, the highest-ranking Japanese official in Yokohama initiated legal proceedings against the ship's Peruvian captain. There were many issues at stake in this intervention, concerning jurisdiction in the treaty ports, the legality of the international coolie trade, Japan's relations with Qing China, and the legal status of prostitution in Japan. But, as Douglas Howland has argued, the thread that connected all such questions was 'Japan's eagerness to attain an international standard of civilization, for that was the measure by which the unequal treaties had been imposed in the 1850s and by which those treaties would be revised. Justice for coolies and prostitutes was secondary to the overall national goal of international parity.'<sup>57</sup>

This longer history of restricted overseas migration from Japan (especially to Hawai'i) and of the Meiji government's intervention in the *Maria Luz* incident is essential to understanding the significance of the 'on-board' for Japan's first transpacific migrant ships in 1885–86. By insisting on a certain level of hygiene and comfort on the *City of Tokio* and the *City of Peking* (both chartered from the Pacific Mail Steamship Company) and especially on the *Yamashiro-maru* (a 'Japanese' ship in ownership if not construction), Tokyo bureaucrats were making a statement about Japan's ability to 'sail the same waves' of civilization as 'the West'. The Japanese migrants were not 'coolies'; they were contract labourers. Their ships were not barques; they were state-of-the-art steamers. Almost two decades after the first group of Japanese migrants to Hawai'i, here were shiploads of men and women who embodied Japanese civilization rather than requiring patience in the training thereof.

As for Fukuzawa in 'Casting off Asia', however, 'civilization' required that Japan not just 'cast our lot with civilized nations of the West' but also 'leave the ranks of Asian nations'. Thus, in a letter to Walter Gibson, carried on board the *Yamashiro-maru* and delivered to Gibson by Inouye Katsunosuke, Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru wrote that the Meiji government

are not inclined to regard with favor the association of Japanese and Chinese. In other places such association has been a fruitful source of embarrassment. The relations between the Japanese and Chinese Governments are of such a nature that His Imperial Majesty's Government are desirous of avoiding the possibility of complications which might easily arise if large numbers of Japanese and Chinese are brought together in Hawaii.<sup>58</sup>

In other words, for Inoue, mass Japanese emigration to Hawai'i would be dependent on the Hawaiian government restricting the flow of Chinese immigrants to the kingdom. Perhaps more than any actual encounters between Chinese and Japanese, Inoue wished to avoid the rhetorical 'association' of the two nationalities. For him, the kinds of articles published by the *Hawaiian Gazette* (on the 'Asiaticizing of the Hawaiian Islands'), or the post-1868 rhetoric of

56 For more on the 'coolie' trade to Latin America, see Hu-DeHart, 'La trata amarilla'; Evelyn Hu-DeHart, 'Chinese coolie labor in Cuba in the nineteenth century: free labor or neoslavery', *Contributions in Black Studies*, 12, 1994, pp. 38–54; Elliott Young, 'Chinese coolies, universal rights and the limits of liberalism in an age of empire', *Past & Present*, 227, 1, 2015, pp. 121–49. Though Young does not discuss the *Maria Luz* incident, he does (p. 137) mention the lesser-known *Cayalti* incident (1868), when a Peruvian ship carrying 'coolies' came to Hokkaido.

57 Douglas Howland, 'The *Maria Luz* incident: personal rights and international justice for Chinese coolies and Japanese prostitutes', in Susan L. Burns and Barbara J. Brooks eds., *Gender and law in the Japanese imperium*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013, p. 39.

58 HSA, FO&EX 31, Immigration Matters, April–June 1885, Inoue Kaoru to Walter Gibson, 2 June 1885. Inouye [Inoue] Katsunosuke was the adopted son of Inoue Kaoru.

the Hawaiian Anti-Asiatic Union, which saw Japanese labourers as no different from Chinese ‘coolies’, were the real ‘embarrassments’.<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, Inoue was not only concerned with what the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* labelled the *Gazette*’s ‘bracketing’ of Japanese ‘with Chinese coolies, for the purpose of misleading the public’.<sup>60</sup> More practically, it was clear from reported maltreatment of the ex-*City of Tokio* labourers that a number of plantation overseers also did not perceive the higher ‘civilization’ of their Japanese workers in relation to ‘Chinese coolies’. Hence the importance of Special Commissioner Inouye’s dispatch to Hawai‘i: in contrast to the *Maria Luz* incident, when China was initially dependent on the intervention of outside powers (including Japan) to protect Chinese labourers from foreign maltreatment, Japan was responding with alacrity to reported maltreatment of its own contract labourers in 1885.<sup>61</sup> Later that year, Inoue would similarly intervene in the question of Japanese labour migration to Tasmania. He wrote to Japan’s honorary consul in Hobart that he was concerned about labourers ‘who were made to work virtually like slaves and in consequence incurred serious hardships’.<sup>62</sup> No doubt in Hawai‘i and in the Australian colonies Japanese government officials were motivated partly by human concern for the physical wellbeing of their compatriots. To return to Howland’s argument, however, it seems more likely that such concern was secondary ‘to the overall national goal of [attaining] international parity’. That is, the welfare of Japanese labourers, on shipboard as on the sugar plantations, was a matter of national prestige, one that could improve the standing of Japan in the international community of ‘civilized’ nations. Certainly, when British officials discussed with Queensland sugar agents the possibility of contracting Japanese labour in 1887, they noted ‘the liberal and enlightened spirit in which the Japanese Government have dealt with [emigration] questions’ in Hawai‘i.<sup>63</sup>

The ‘enlightened spirit’ of the Meiji government’s treatment of overseas migrants in the mid 1880s suggests another way of framing the experience of the ‘on-board’ for Wakamiya Yaichi and his compatriots. Almost as soon as the *Yamashiro-maru* left Yokohama, the migrants were transformed from individuals who hailed from different villages, counties, and prefectures into representatives of the Japanese nation in the wider world. Just as the international powers used the treaty port system in Japan to assert the various rights of their citizens, so Japan could use the government-sponsored emigration programme to negotiate what Inoue called ‘the protection of the rights of our subjects and other persons in Hawai‘i’.<sup>64</sup> The performance of that protection, however, aroused the ire of anti-monarchical constituencies in Hawai‘i. In a petition to King Kalākaua in November 1885, a number of influential sugar planters criticized Inouye Katsunosuke for having conducted ‘formal courts of inquiry without apparent legal authority’. The petitioners argued that the king’s government should no longer succumb to ‘pressure from foreign governments’ but rather promote the ‘national welfare’.<sup>65</sup> In these ways, at the moment of their arrival in Honolulu in 1885, the Japanese migrants became props

59 Moon-Kie Jung, *Reworking race: the making of Hawai‘i’s interracial labor movement*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, p. 79.

60 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 16 July 1885.

61 Qing China subsequently sent a high-ranking commission to Cuba to investigate the ‘coolie’ trade. See Rudolph Ng, ‘The Chinese commission to Cuba (1874): reexamining international relations in the nineteenth century from a transcultural perspective’, *Transcultural Studies*, 2, 2014, pp. 39–62.

62 DRO, 3.8.2.8, Inoue Kaoru to Robert Beadon, 28 December 1885.

63 DRO, 3.8.4.8, John Carey Hall (acting British consul in Yokohama) to W. J. S. Shand, 15 November 1887.

64 HSA, 404-15-252, Hawaiian Officials Abroad (Japan), Inoue Kaoru to Robert Irwin, 30 May 1885.

65 HSA, FO&EX 31, Immigration Matters, October–December 1885, Planters’ Labor and Supply Company petition to King Kalākaua, 19 November 1885.



through which various governmental and business interests articulated competing visions of national 'rights' and 'national welfare'.

How might the migrants themselves have perceived this transformation from local subject to national representative across the period of transit? One shift concerned the face of the bureaucratic state. When Wakamiya Yaichi applied for his passage to Hawai'i in late April 1885, he addressed his papers – including a pledge of good behaviour, a request for passage assistance, and a statement from his guarantor (usually an older relative) – to the head of the Jigozen village office, a man called Nakai Jutarō.<sup>66</sup> In a community of 2,000 people, Nakai would have been a familiar face to Jigozen residents – not only personally (as a neighbour and community leader) but also as a figure who mediated Wakamiya's interactions with the Meiji state.<sup>67</sup> Nakai, in turn, would have dealt with officials in the Saeki county office, who would have dealt with officials in the Hiroshima prefectural office, who would finally have dealt with officials in Tokyo. By contrast, once the *City of Tokio* and *Yamashiro-maru* migrants arrived in Honolulu and were dispersed to their individual plantations, this 'local' face of the bureaucratic state no longer existed. Instead, the migrants communicated with a direct representative of Tokyo in the form of the Japanese consul in Hawai'i and his deputies. The Meiji state became at once impersonal and yet, in terms of bureaucratic layers, less distant: Tokyo was figuratively closer to Wakamiya in Hawai'i than it had ever been in Jigozen.

For the ex-*City of Tokio* migrants, arriving in Honolulu in February 1885, the transformation from 'local' to 'national' was particularly abrupt. As they spent their first few days in the immigration depot awaiting transfer to their plantations, they were visited by the German doctor and amateur photographer Eduard Arning (1855–1936). Arning took a set of nine photographs depicting the migrants in a variety of poses: wearing *geta* (platformed sandals) and dark-dyed cotton *yukata* (summer kimonos), squatting with cooking utensils on the dusty ground. The migrants' bamboo-woven trunks are stacked high with blankets folded over them, while futons and drying *yukatas* hang from washing lines in the background. In one posed scene, men dressed only in *fundoshi* loincloths re-enact a sumo bout, the 'referee' holding up a frying pan in lieu of the ceremonial fan. In another, a group stares directly at the camera (see Figure 1). A mother on the front row leaves her *yukata* half-open.

Arning's iconographic framing of 'the Japanese' for a non-Japanese audience was echoed by the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser's* reports of this same scene. 'A bit of Japan' described the migrants' skin colour, their clothes, sandals, cooking, and children's games; another article described the sumo bouts, which were attended by King Kalākaua, government ministers, Irwin, and various other visitors. An extraordinarily long lecture by General Thomas Brodhead Van Buren, the US consul-general to Japan for the previous eleven years, was published over several issues for readers to learn more about the country from which the new plantation workers hailed.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the 1885 migrants were labelled and objectified as 'Japanese' on their arrival in Honolulu in ways that they were not at the time of their departure from Yokohama.

But this formulation is passive. Might there have been any experiences between departure and landfall that led the migrants not only to *be labelled* as Japanese but indeed to *label*

66 I have extrapolated such a relationship from documents in the *Hiroshima-ken ijūshi shiryō-ben*, pp. 7–10.

67 On the multiple bureaucratic and community roles that local elites played in Meiji Japan, see Dusinger, *Hard times*, pp. 53–80.

68 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 10, 12, 19, 20, 21, and 23 February 1885.



**Figure 1.** Ex-City of Tokio migrants in Honolulu, February 1885; photograph taken by Eduard Arning. Source: Museum für Völkerkunde Hamburg.

*themselves* as such – a shift from identification to self-identity?<sup>69</sup> The question is significant because of Naoko Shimazu’s work on how conscript soldiers articulated the beginning of a new national identity through their conscription journeys to the battlefield during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05). Having been conscripted, such soldiers embarked on what Shimazu terms a ‘journey of life’ from their respective hometowns to Ujina (Hiroshima), whence they would ship to the Asian frontline. As they travelled by train, the soldiers were regularly greeted by cheering crowds, whose support helped young men from otherwise diverse backgrounds begin to feel a sense of connection to ‘the nation’. At the same time, the trains passed key national landmarks – the Akashi Straits, Himeji Castle, and especially the ‘floating’ shrine at Itsukushima. Shimazu writes: ‘the internal journey from their home town to Hiroshima played a key role in expanding [the conscripts’] geographical space of what constituted “Japan” and, in the process, effortlessly integrated these soldiers from disparate parts of the country into the common national landscape of the homeland’.<sup>70</sup>

And so to a second hypothesis about the significance of ‘being in transit’. The *Yamashiro-maru*’s passage from Yokohama to Honolulu was a period during which the migrants formed a nascent sense of national identity – a sense of being ‘Japanese’ that would be central to their sojourns in Hawai‘i. It is possible to sketch this nascent identity by imagining the journey of one of the westernmost migrants on board the *Yamashiro-maru*, a man called Kodama Keijirō.

69 I take the distinction between ‘identity’ and ‘identification’ from Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in question: theory, knowledge, history*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005, pp. 71–3.

70 Naoko Shimazu, *Japanese society at war: death, memory, and the Russo-Japanese war*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 76. See also Pietsch, ‘British sea’.

Kodama, according to the Tokyo Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives, was the only Hawaiian emigrant from the small village of Orisaki, north-east of Kumamoto city, on the island of Kyushu. Given this westerly location, Kodama would have been among the first group of migrants to start their journey east to Yokohama on 22 May (according to Irwin's letter). Reporting first to Kumamoto, he would have met with the thirty other migrants from Tamana county, including seven from Orisaki's neighbouring villages. At this point, he would also have realized that he was one of 276 migrants from Kumamoto prefecture. Perhaps this was when the Kumamoto contingent boarded the *Yamashiro-maru* and sailed north to Hakata, to pick up 149 migrants from Fukuoka prefecture, and then to the Inland Sea port of Ujina, to pick up the 390 migrants from Hiroshima prefecture on 25 May. If the full complement of 989 migrants did not join the *Yamashiro-maru* before it arrived at the Yokohama quarantine station at Nagaura on 28 May, they must have done so sometime before the ship's final departure to Honolulu on 4 June. The migrants thus left their respective prefectures with their hometowns in mind: the aforementioned exhortation of the Hiroshima governor was for them to 'gain the distinction of one day returning to your hometown (*sato ni kaeru*)'.

To borrow Shimazu's formulation, however, the ship now 'played a key role in expanding [the migrants'] geographical space of what constituted "Japan"'. For the women on board, and for those men who had avoided compulsory conscription (of whom there were many in the early 1880s), the shipboard passage may have been the first opportunity in their lives to meet Japanese from other prefectures: in addition to migrants from Hiroshima (390), Kumamoto (276), and Fukuoka (149), there were people from Kanagawa (12), Niigata (37), Chiba (8), Shiga (74), Gunma (10), and Wakayama (33) on board the *Yamashiro-maru*. Even if they continued to be divided by prefecture for administrative purposes (such as during their pre-departure transfer from the Nagaura quarantine station back onto the *Yamashiro-maru*), and even if they tended to sleep and socialize in their prefectural groups during the passage to Honolulu, the cramped conditions on board the *Yamashiro-maru* must have facilitated inter-prefectural communication.<sup>71</sup> As Michael Ondaatje's shipboard novel, *The cat's table* (2011), suggests, children were probably central to this communication.<sup>72</sup> The antics of Nakano Tatsuzō, Nakamura Keitarō, Katō Yohei, and Shiina Tatsuzō, all boys aged three, may have provided a common point of conversation for their parents, who respectively came from Fukuoka, Kanagawa, and Chiba prefectures. The mothers Matsuda Tsui (Hiroshima) and Kobatake Kita (Wakayama), both aged twenty-three, perhaps bonded over their baby daughters, aged seven months and twelve months respectively. More generally, the three hours of daily deck exercise that Irwin ordered midway through the passage would have provided other opportunities for cross-prefectural communication, as would cards and *shogi* (Japanese chess) games in the dark lower deck. Perhaps there were even bouts of shipboard sumo when the ocean was calm.

The cross-prefectural space of the ship may not have been alone in triggering a sense of 'Japaneseness' among the migrants, but it was surely one factor in the genesis of national identity – just as the Atlantic slave ships were a site of 'ethnogenesis' for an 'African' slave community, as Marcus Rediker argues. For bonded people on the slave ships, 'broader

71 Consul Andō's report from the *City of Peking*, 13 February 1886, in *Hiroshima-ken ijūshi shiryō-ben*, p. 34. Moriyama, *Imingaisha*, p. 161, quotes a migrant who described spending time with his fellow prefectural passengers during his passage to Hawai'i in 1888.

72 Michael Ondaatje, *The cat's table*, London: Jonathan Cape, 2011.

similarities suddenly began to outweigh local differences', such that cultural and linguistic commonalities became 'crucial to cooperation and community'.<sup>73</sup> In a similar way, although 'local differences' remained central to the Japanese migrants' daily lives on the Hawaiian plantations – as expressed in dialect and diet – the experience of transit served as a precedent for the grouping and labelling of labourers as 'Japanese' by their overseers. Nation was a key element of the migrants' new lives. They 'became Japanese' through forced competition with plantation labourers of other nationalities and through their shared loathing of the *Poriki* or *Porigi* (Portuguese overseers).<sup>74</sup> They performed national rituals by breaking the terms of their contracts to celebrate the Emperor Meiji's birthday on 3 November (for which they were labelled 'patriotic Japs').<sup>75</sup> They appropriated – perhaps tongue in cheek – popular Meiji slogans in their songs:

Sturdy soldiers of a wealthy nation (*fukoku no kyōbei*)  
A hoe on the shoulder;  
Cane knife at the belt.<sup>76</sup>

The ship was the first space after departure from Yokohama in which this sense of a national community could be formed. Later migrants would indeed remember the *Yamashiro-maru*'s sister steamer, the *Omi-maru* (also built in Newcastle in 1884) as a 'Japanese ship'.<sup>77</sup> We cannot know whether Wakamiya Yaichi met Kodama Keijirō during daily exercise on the *Yamashiro-maru*'s upper deck in June 1885. But in being exposed to compatriots from other prefectures while on board, both men surely experienced what Conrad called the 'process' of departure partly as a transition from Jigozen and Orisaki respectively to 'Japan' – that is, from hometown to homeland.

## Between the archives

After a six-week sojourn in Hawai'i – time enough for the smallpox quarantine to be completed, for Inouye to finish his investigations, and for Mrs Inouye to recover from a bout of measles – the *Yamashiro-maru* departed from Honolulu at noon on 30 July 1885. In its cargo, the ship carried a gift from King Kalākaua to Emperor Meiji: an oil painting, some 150 cm. by 75 cm., by Joseph D. Strong, depicting Japanese labourers at the Spreckelsville plantation in Maui (Figure 2). 'The strength of this picture lies in the figures', stated the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 'which are painted in the full glow of sunlight.' These figures included a 'fine looking Japanese man, ... gazing good-naturedly out of the picture', two women caring for a baby, a group of Japanese labourers cutting sugar cane, and an overseer on horseback. 'The picture is a fine representation of a sunny, thriving, hard-working plantation scene, that ... will accomplish its object in Japan of giving the Mikado a correct and pleasant idea of the new home and employment of his countrymen.'<sup>78</sup>

73 Rediker, *Slave ship*, p. 118.

74 Odo, *Songs from the canefields*, pp. 114–15. On the ways that plantation managers encouraged competition between workers along national lines, see Takaki, *Pau Hana*, pp. 68–71. On marginal groups becoming 'Japanese' through overseas emigration, see Noah McCormack, 'Buraku emigration in the Meiji era: other ways to become "Japanese"', *East Asian History*, 23, 2002, pp. 87–108.

75 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 4 November 1891.

76 Odo, *Songs from the canefields*, p. 26.

77 Doi, *Yamaguchi-ken Ōshima-gun Hawai iminshi*, p. 114, referring to an 1889 emigrant's later recollections.

78 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 8 July 1885.



Figure 2. *Japanese Laborers on Spreckelsville*, by J. D. Strong, 1885. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

I have my reservations about this ‘sunny’ scene. It so happens that the Spreckelsville plantation in Maui was Kodama Keijirō’s new place of work. He was #1146 and, like the other Japanese field labourers in Hawai‘i, he was contracted to work a ten-hour day and a twenty-six-day working month. Spreckelsville had been established by the German-born sugar magnate Claus Spreckels in the late 1870s. In 1881, it had been the first plantation in the kingdom to electrify.<sup>79</sup> By the early 1890s it was the biggest sugar plantation in the world and Spreckels was the dominant and divisive figure within the elite sugar planters’ community.<sup>80</sup> But Spreckelsville employed no Japanese labourers until Kodama and his compatriots from Kumamoto, all 276 of them, including only one woman, went to work there on 21–22 July 1885.<sup>81</sup> In other words, Strong’s painting, which was first publicly displayed in Honolulu two weeks earlier, is a fiction. If Strong ever went to Spreckelsville to sketch the landscape of the painting, he saw no Japanese. Instead, as one of the visitors to the immigration depot in February 1885, he took some ‘instantaneous negatives’.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, given the similarity of the figures in one of Arning’s photos to those in Strong’s painting (see Figure 3), it seems likely that the two men visited on the same day and photographed the same posed groups.<sup>83</sup> Strong then simply transplanted these Japanese ‘models’ to the Spreckelsville background.

The real workers did not ‘transplant’ so easily. Only a few months later, in November 1885, the Board of Immigration received reports of ‘trouble arising between Japanese Immigrant laborers on the Spreckels Plantation and their employers’. As with previous

79 Odo, *Voices from the canefields*, p. 55.

80 *Paradise of the Pacific*, September 1893, pp. 133–4; Jacob Adler, *Claus Spreckels: the sugar king in Hawaii*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1966, pp. 69–79. Spreckels was also active in transpacific shipping: see Frances Steel, ‘Anglo-worlds in transpacific crossings, c.1870–1914’, pp. 251–70 in this issue.

81 DRO, 3.8.2.5–14.

82 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 12 February 1885.

83 I am very grateful to Christina Thurman-Wild for pointing these similarities out.





Figure 3. Details from Figures 1 and 2 respectively.

reports received by the Japanese government, the main complaint was of labourers being ‘sent to work while sick’. Such allegations were rejected by the Board of Immigration’s Secretary, Mr Cleghorn, who instead wrote of labourers remaining ‘up at night gambling, long after the regulation hour of nine o’clock, at which time lights are ordered put out’. Through his interpreter and interlocutor, an inspector called Ito, Cleghorn recorded that ‘the Japanese laborers on Spreckelsville come from a district in Japan where there was a good deal of trouble in 1877’. This was a reference to the Satsuma Rebellion, which had indeed occurred partly in Kumamoto. Cleghorn continued, ‘some of these men belong to a class, who make their living by gambling’.<sup>84</sup> In December, when he returned to Spreckelsville to investigate more complaints, he reported that the plantation manager ‘would like to have from 25 to 50 of the Japanese removed, many of whom are inveterate gamblers’. The issue of ‘gambling’ notwithstanding, there clearly were some problems with the health of the Japanese labourers, for Cleghorn reported eighteen Japanese on Spreckelsville’s sick list in November 1885.<sup>85</sup>

84 HSA, 517 v.2, Inspector of Immigrants Letter Book, 1883–86, 28 November 1885. ‘Ito’ was almost certainly ‘Chojiro Ito’, who was still working as an inspector to Japanese immigrants in 1888: HSA, Interior Department Immigration-Japanese, R. W. Irwin correspondence, 25 January 1888.

85 HSA, 517 v.2, Inspector of Immigrants Letter Book, 1883–86, 19 December 1885. Cleghorn returned to Spreckelsville in March 1886 with a Japanese delegation, whose report appears in *Hiroshima-ken ijūshi shiryō-hen*, pp. 39–42.



Strong's painting, therefore, is anything but a 'correct' depiction of 'thriving' Japanese labourers on the Spreckelsville plantation. But, together with Cleghorn's reports, it highlights the power of the archives to frame our knowledge of Kodama and his compatriots. The painting represented a confluence of powerful sugar interests in 1885 Hawai'i: the king, widely recognized to have been in debt to Spreckels; Spreckels himself, with his enormous plantation; the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, scornfully referred to by rivals as the 'Spreckels Government organ'; and the paper's owner, Walter Gibson (also widely acknowledged to have been 'bought off' by Spreckels).<sup>86</sup> For obvious reasons, these men had a vested interest in promoting the 'thriving, hard-working plantation scene'. And when that image momentarily failed, punctured by the nameless voices of labourer discontent, then the problems were reframed by a Hawaiian government bureaucrat, diligently supported by the social and regional prejudices of a Japanese inspector who was almost certainly a former samurai and who earned ten times the salary of the non-samurai labourers.<sup>87</sup> In short, either the plantation was 'sunny' or its problems were caused by the labourers themselves.

Historians are, of course, indebted to these archives. Just as the exhaustive passenger lists of Seville's Casa de la Contratación 'produced' sixteenth-century migrants to the New World 'with great bureaucratic effort', thus making them 'legible people' for future historians,<sup>88</sup> so the labourer lists in Tokyo and Honolulu enable us to read something into the one-line lives of men such as Wakamiya or Kodama. But, as Bill Mihalopoulos has perceptively noted in his discussion of Japanese female sex workers to Southeast Asia in the same period, these people were also 'made up' by the bureaucratic dictates of the archive: sex workers began to be noticed by Japanese officials and then categorized as 'unsightly women' in the mid 1870s, whereas previously they had been overlooked.<sup>89</sup> To read the 'legible people' in spite of these bureaucratic agendas, historians can look to the spaces between the archives – spaces which, in turn, help us to problematize the 'trans' in the transplantation of labourers from Japan to Hawaiian plantations.

The 'transit' thus stands for more than just a journey: it is also a metaphor for the imaginary space that exists between the places where the migrants' names are recorded – a space that scholars of global history must populate. And when we are exceptionally lucky, objects cross our paths that help us read the *Yamashiro-maru* migrants to Hawai'i in marginally more complex ways. On Kaua'i island, I stumbled across this gravestone:

KEIJIRO, KODAMA

ARRIVED

HAWAII, NEI

86 *Hawaiian Gazette*, 22 July 1885; Adler, *Claus Spreckels*, p. 183.

87 On the samurai status of the Japanese officials in Hawai'i, see Kimura, *Issei*, pp. 132–4; on the salaries of the inspectors/interpreters, see Moriyama, *I mingaisha*, p. 27.

88 Bernhard Siegert, 'Fictitious [sic] identities: on the interrogatorios and *registros de pasajeros a Indias* in the Archivo General de Indias (Seville) (16th century)', in Wolfram Nitsch, Matei Chihaiia, and Alejandra Torres, eds., *Ficciones de los medios en la periferia: técnicas de comunicación en la literatura hispanoamericana moderna*, Cologne: Universitäts- und Stadtbibliothek Köln, 2008, p. 20. The phrase 'legible people' comes from James Scott, *Seeing like a state: how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998. I am grateful to Jan-Friedrich Missfelder for pointing me towards Siegert's work.

89 Bill Mihalopoulos, *Sex in Japan's globalization, 1870–1930*, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011, esp. pp. 1–13; see also Ian Hacking, 'Making people up', *London Review of Books*, 17 August 2006, pp. 23–6.

JUNE 18, 1885

DIED

KAPAA, KAUAI

MEIJI XXIX

JULY 9 1896

The discovery sent me scuttling back to the archives. In Tokyo there survives a list of births, deaths, and returnees among the Japanese diaspora community in late nineteenth-century Hawai'i.<sup>90</sup> It is a rich list: it tells us that Wakamiya Yaichi returned to Japan in November 1892, again on board the *Yamashiro-maru*. He went back to Jigozen, a town that, in the seven years since his departure, had sent another 247 migrants to Hawai'i, and that, by the early twentieth century, would become known as 'America village' for its high rate of overseas workers.<sup>91</sup> But the entries for July 1896 do not mention Kodama or his cause of death: there is nothing to explain what Joseph Conrad calls 'that final journey from which no man returns [when] Landfall and Departure are instantaneous, merging together into one moment of supreme and final attention'.<sup>92</sup>

In my rush to cross-reference the archives, however, I had failed to read the significance of what the gravestone makes legible. Kodama Keijirō arrived in Hawai'i Nei ('beloved Hawai'i') on 'June 18, 1885', it says. That is not true. According to all official records, Kodama actually arrived on 17 June, early in the morning. What we have here, therefore, is an example of an individual gently resisting the time regimes of nineteenth-century globalization: the international framework, agreed in Washington, DC, in 1884, for the world to anchor its time to the Greenwich Meridian and to bifurcate the Pacific Ocean with an international date line – such that 18 June in Japan was 17 June in Hawai'i.<sup>93</sup> In post-war Hawai'i, that time difference would be noted in Japanese songs:

Although it is tomorrow  
When we depart Haneda Airport  
We arrive in Honolulu  
Today!<sup>94</sup>

While this is a playful recognition of the ease of transpacific travel in a global age, the 'mistaken' date on Kodama's 1896 gravestone perhaps indicates something deeper: that, up to his death, Kodama himself (or, alternatively, the unknown donor of his gravestone) maintained a sense of temporal affinity with his homeland. This affinity is also suggested by the precedence given to the Japanese imperial calendar over the Gregorian calendar. Perhaps it is too much to argue that, until his death, Kodama retained a sense of core 'Japanese' time, even as he learned new temporal regimes on board the *Yamashiro-maru* and during his working routine in

90 DRO, 3.8.2 5–13 (vol. 1). According to the Hawaiian Board of Immigration's *Report of the inspector in chief of Japanese immigrants* (1890), only one-third (375) of the 1885 group of *Yamashiro-maru* migrants had returned to Japan by 31 March 1890.

91 Ishikawa, 'Hiroshima wangan Jigozenson', pp. 78–9.

92 Conrad, *Mirror of the sea*, p. 13.

93 Jürgen Osterhammel, *The transformation of the world: a global history of the nineteenth century*, trans. Patrick Camiller, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 69–71.

94 Odo, *Voices from the canefields*, p. 110.

Spreckelsville. At the very least, however, the gravestone suggests an ambiguity of identity, a suspension between Japan and the Hawai'i Nei, between Meiji and Gregorian, between an old life and a new life, between moments of landfall.

## Conclusion

The voices and brushstrokes of the strong inevitably shape my rendition of the *Yamashiro-maru*'s transit. I am reliant on the words of Robert W. Irwin, the chargé d'affaires who did so much to establish the Tokyo-sponsored emigration programme; on Irwin's good friend, the Japanese foreign minister Inoue Kaoru; on Inoue's adopted son and special commissioner in 1885, Inoue Katsunosuke; on the Hawaiian foreign minister, Walter Gibson, and his newspaper, the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*; and on assorted bureaucrats, inspectors, magistrates, managers, and not least plantation owners.

By contrast, the labourers themselves are mostly silent. There is a song some sang from Spreckelsville:

A heartfelt decision  
To leave our family farm in Japan  
Now, here on the Island of Maui,  
I suffer so.<sup>95</sup>

But otherwise, our starting points for their histories are merely the line of an address in Japan or a gravestone in Hawai'i. The migrants are acted upon in this story; they are written in the passive. Yet by framing the sea-based transit with land-based sources, we can do something different: we can rethink 'departures' and 'arrivals', compare expectations of 'brocade' with the reality of plantation 'trouble', reconstruct the spatial configuration of the ship so as to imagine the kinds of interactions that may have occurred on board, and consider transit not only as a physical journey but also as a metaphor for Meiji Japan sailing on the ocean of civilization. Thus, historians can begin to write the migrants' stories in the active. In doing all these things, I have tried to use the transit as a lens for understanding the wider transformations that occurred in the ways that both the Meiji government and ordinary Japanese people engaged with the world in the late nineteenth century. By considering questions of slavery, confinement, and resistance through the frame of the transit, I have offered a less teleological view of Meiji-period history than one implied by a simplistic, Fukuzawa-inspired framework of Japanese 'progress'. By positing the ship as a site for the genesis of national identity formation, I have tried to undermine the polarities of national 'land' history and international 'sea' history.

Along with the other contributions to this special issue, this article has argued that the period of transit started on land, encompassed the sea passage, and then continued once again on land. With this idea in mind, I want finally to return to Scott Nelson's formulation of coercion and protest during the 'middle passage' of Irish and Chinese labourers in Civil War America. If Kodama and his fellow migrants from Kumamoto similarly left home of their own free will in 1885 but then realized, on arrival in Spreckelsville, that they were no longer free, then perhaps we should read their alleged 'gambling' not as a sign of moral indolence from a

95 Odo, *Voices from the canefields*, p. 86.

lower class of Japanese but rather as a statement of protest, of 'objection' to bangos, revulsion with the overseers, frustration at the very idea of a contract. This was a behaviour that can perhaps be explained by a longer conceptual continuum, encompassing both Kumamoto and Maui and the *Yamashiro-maru* in between: Meiji Japan in transit and in transition.

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