

Under the Shadow of Apartheid: Maritime Paths of Transnational Communication

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Introduction

Unexpected cross-cultural encounters sometimes took place, even against the backdrop of racial discrimination in Cape Town, South Africa. William Plomer (1903-1973) and Laurens Van der Post (1906-1996) met Captain Mori Katsue (1890-1989) of the Osaka Commercial Line and came to Japan in 1929 by ship, crossing the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. The story of the way they encountered Mori in Durban, despite the barriers of apartheid, and of what they saw and experienced in prewar Japan is rich with relevant anecdotes of cross-cultural mutual understanding between Africa and East Asia. This panel addressed two topics in this story of particular interest in comparative literary studies. One topic is the experience of traveling by ship across the oceans. The other is what followed from their discovery of Japan. William Plomer took an interest in the Noh performing arts and went on to collaborate with Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) in the creation of *Curlew River* (1964). Van der Post learned the Japanese language and his familiarity with the thinking of the Japanese would help him and his team survive their experience as prisoners of war in Java during World War II. Referring to Post's account, *Yet Being Someone Other* (1982) and other records, the study investigates the world of transnational navigation, touching upon the maritime imagination.

Birth in South Africa, then a British dominion, and the experience of visiting Japan

in 1926 were defining elements of Laurens van der Post's eventful life (1906-1996). Yet the voyage crossing the oceans connecting the two was perhaps his most decisive experience. That journey was key in the discovery of another self in him; it was the sea that revealed to him the hidden bonds of human destiny and nature. The fact that it was, moreover, a Japanese ship, and that he was one of only two non-Japanese passengers, together with William Plomer (1903-1973), turned out to provide him with an irreplaceable initiation to Japan, about which he knew nothing at the time. It was, in fact, only in his late 70s that the full meaning of that trip to Japan would finally reveal itself to van der Post. The enigmatic, half-hidden message, "destinies working themselves out behind the storms and calms" (*Listener*¹) takes shape as the fulfillment of revelations an exceptional life allowed him to behold.

I

Japanese captain Mori Katsue 森勝衛 (1890-1989) was 36 and on a mission of opening up a maritime route between South Africa and Japan when he met Laurens van der Post (then 26), and William Plomer (29). They were two young journalists who had just lost their jobs because of their outspoken, anti-apartheid writing. The Japanese captain, taking note of their circumstances, found in them ideal candidates in his search for good journalists or writers capable of reporting on Japan and its inhabitants to the African Continent, which was then dominated by the White settlers. He thus invited them to board his cargo-passenger ship, the *Canada Maru*, traveling from the port of Natal to Japan.

1. The "Lion's Roar": Shipboard Initiation to Japan

The two white passengers' initiation to Japan begins with their astonishment at hearing a roar just as they were taking after-dinner tea in their cabin, next to the Captain's bathroom.

¹ Printed on the back of the paperback edition, Laurens Van der Post, *Yet Being Someone Other*, Penguin Books, 1984. The following quotations are from the same edition, unless otherwise mentioned.

... when a sound almost like a roar of pain from a trapped lion came from the bathroom next door. Plomer looked at me with some consternation and exclaimed: "My God, what's happened? Murder in the first degree, I presume!"

But this outburst of sound then produced a pattern of tone and rhythm which, strange as it was to us, made it clear that Captain Mori was singing in the bath. This singing went on for nearly forty-five minutes. Soon after it ended, Mori, changed into his most formal of uniforms, appeared at our cabin entrance to invite us to have a cocktail with him on deck and watch the sun go down. And, he went on to ask, how had we liked his singing? (*Yet Being Someone Other*, pp. 122-123)

In February 1980, we heard Captain Mori's impressive voice when he welcomed Laurens van der Post at the University of Tokyo Komaba campus on one evening. His strong bass boomed out over all the students gathered there and I noticed immediately that van der Post was well accustomed to Mori's inimitable way of speaking English. The passage quoted above reminds us that Lafcadio Hearn, too, had a very keen ear: upon his arrival at Yokohama, and then at his first awakening in Matsue, he was deeply moved by the strange and unfamiliar sounds (wooden shoes and merchants' voices) in the town. Likewise, Laurens keenly reacts to this strange song by the Captain:

No off-stage accompaniment would have better suited this world of the *Canada Maru* to my mind and, had it been absent, I now feel it would have impoverished the atmosphere of our voyage.

...

The "world" of the *Canada Maru* was exactly what it was: a microcosm of the macrocosm of Japan, a sort of Bonsai tree of the spirit transplanted into this miniature pot of its culture afloat on a foreign sea. International and contemporary as the ship was, everything in it was totally Japanese. Apart from Plomer and myself, there were no foreign ingredients to subvert an essentially Japanese version of the modern world. Few of the officers and none of the crew spoke even the most elementary English. They were insulated from any distortion of their own national pattern which contact with the wider world might otherwise have caused. (*Yet Being Someone Other*, p. 123)

2. The Sound of the Shakuhachi: Second Initiation

The next phase of the initiation comes with their exposure to a Japanese musical instrument.

[U]nder my feet, a strange music rose fountain-wise into the sky. It soared with singular lucidity and a noble purity as if inviolate and sheer from the same source as this personal sense of release into the freedom of movement of the universe that I had just experienced. It was, in fact, my first experience of Shakuhachi, the bamboo flute which participates even more profoundly in the symbolism that informs the spirit of one of the few peoples left who still lead a symbolic life, than it does in the almost countless practical needs of their existence. Since the bamboo itself rose out of the earth, as the music to which I was listening soared out of the silence, there was total reciprocity between the fashioning of the flute and the fountain of sound that came to me. That sound was spare and devout in its obedience to its own law of expression which commanded that it should convey all that was possible with clarity and simplicity.

I was to discover that the music itself was about some seabirds combing a secluded beach of yellow sand by the Inland Sea which, like a great lagoon locked out of the swing of the storms of the ocean, holds a vision of calm on the far frontier of a volcanic people's tumultuous history. As a result it was charged with nostalgia; a nostalgia just as much mine as it was Japanese. At once I was glad I had come so unprepared to this new experience. Books would have come between my natural reactions and Japan. For the first time I was unconditioned to let what had to happen come to me unimpeded and be received in my own natural way. (*Yet Being Someone Other*, pp. 124-25)

The anecdote recalls the story of the reed flute in the Islamic mystical tradition. Rumi (1207 -1273), in his Book of the *Masanavi* famously talks about the flute made of reed: being cut off from the waterbed, the plant has become a musical instrument; but it sings nothing but a song of separation from its birthplace, nostalgia to the Origin which he aspires. The *shakuhachi* piece that van der Post and Plomer heard must in reality have been the modern work, *Hamachidori*, 浜千鳥 (Plovers on the Shore), composed eight years earlier in 1918 by Kikutake Shôtei 菊武祥庭

(1884-1954). The waka poem upon which the song was based had been recited by the Emperor Meiji, the sovereign who presided over the emergence of modern Japan, who had passed away six years before in 1911.

潮風を 翼にかけて 冬の夜の 長浜伝い 千鳥啼くなり
Shiokaze-wo tsubasa- ni kake-te fuyu-no yo-no Nagahama tsutai chidori na-
kunari
 磯浜の 波間の月の 影落ちて 暁寒く 千鳥啼くなり
Isohama-no namima-no tsuki-no kage ochi-te akatsuki samuku chidori na-
kunari

Incidentally, the song describes the small seabirds (*chidori*) singing (*nakunari*) on a shore reflecting the light of the waning moon (*namima-no tsuki*) shortly before dawn (*akatsuki*). We will come back to this later.

3. The Forest of Chinese Characters: The Third Initiation

The third initiation is Laurens's learning of the language.

On the very next day, as Plomer and Mori started their translation of *Turbott Wolfe*, I began my studies of Japanese with the purser. The first character he taught me was that of a tree, perhaps feeling prompted to establish that what was about to happen between us was to be not an act of will and mind so much as a growth from roots deep in the dark and mysterious earth.

For instance, in writing “tree” [木], divested of any phonetic obligations, one drew, in fact, a simplified picture of a tree and in the process the imagination was enriched with all the associations it had with trees, in a way that is not possible by just saying the word. The “sky” [空], as something higher than the trees, was represented by another simplified picture of a tree and a line above it; “heaven” [天], as something beyond the sky, was yet another line above the line representing the sky. Tree, sky and heaven, therefore, were joined in a vision of organic unity from the earth wherein it was rooted, to the heaven at which all that grew from it was aimed. The East [東] for which we were bound, was not just a cardinal on a compass but was shown like an outline of one of those ancient stone lanterns that light the way to some shrine in Japan:

as the lamp of the rising sun [日] shining behind a tree [木] from the direction along which light and life were renewed out of darkness and death. And so the process went on and on, to be orchestrated into a great symphony of more and more complex relations of forms as, for instance, in characters like that for “rest” [休] which is a picture of a man [人] underneath a tree [木]; or “anxiety” [思? 心配?], which was an immediate favourite, i.e., a heart [心] at an open window [窓?]. (*Yet Being Someone Other*, pp. 128-29; the Chinese characters in brackets are added.)

The explanation of the Chinese pictograms as the writer understood them, reveals how the young South African approached the forest of letters “orchestrating” “a great symphony” by the combination of their roots. The explanation of the character “window” 窓 certainly contains some confusion; yet the fact that the open hole 穴 composing a window allows communication of the heart 心 is more than suggestive. In particular, the composition of the letter “East” 東, i.e., the Sun 日 seen through a tree 木, not only accounts for the author’s orientation, but also anticipates another anecdote on the Japanese worship of the Sun goddess, *Amaterasu*.

II

4. The Moon and the Primitive Mind

The moon is the opposite of the sun. At their first encounter with the full moon at sea, van der Post notices that the Japanese he was discovering are as sensitive and as easily “haunted” by the moon as the South Africans he knew well.

Fortunately, after many days there came an evening that Plomer was to enjoy as totally and as actively as I did. It came on the night of our first full moon at sea. Although the goddess who ruled the Japanese from the beginning, and is also the source of authority for them, is the sun, yet their love is for the moon which makes light in the darkness that haunts their spirit, day and night, below the horizon of their doing and being. Even as they bowed to the sun that morning, they did so with a slight abruptness in order quickly to be able to turn their minds to the imminence of a full moon. Part of this concept of Li [礼] is that all should be received with courtesy and ceremonial in order to create a

state of grace in the presence of the reality. (*Yet Being Someone Other*, p. 155)

This observation leads him to develop an idea of contrast between the “civilized” Europeans and other “autochthone” people still exonerated from modern “distortion,” or “the divide between them and us” namely between Oriental or “native” African minds and Occidental “civilized” Westerners:

[W]e were born in love with the sunset, they with the moonrise. I was to remain astonished throughout my life by the role of the moon in their lives and temperament. Perhaps it is all best left to the symbols that inform us of meaning which take over on the frontier where articulation fails. And there was one such symbolic statement of which my sensei told me that was to stand me in good stead. Appropriately it is contained in a piece of that noble and ancient order of the theatre of Japan which is called “Noh.” (*Yet Being Someone Other*, p. 156)

And this further invites him to the classical Noh theater.

This particular play is as spare, simple and yet full, as is demanded of all that is best in this spartan discipline of theatre. It was about an anonymous woman, in the grip of tragedy too great to be named, standing at the rim of a deep, dark well. The moon rises behind her as she stares into this black pit until it is high enough for her to see its reflection at the bottom of the pit . . . That is all, not because there is no more that can be bought to it but because it is enough; and enough for a humble spirit, like that of this woman in her anonymous lot, is almost too much. (*Yet Being Someone Other*, p. 156)

5. Moon Shadow or Reflection of the Mind

The piece he heard of from his “teacher” or “sensei” i.e., purser of the ship, must be identified as *Izutsu* (The Well Head) 井筒, a Noh play composed by the fifteenth-century Noh master, Zeami 世阿弥 (1363?-1443). A woman looks into the well, contemplating the moon reflected on the water’s surface. One modern English translation goes: “The pure and clear water in the pail reflects the moon. While looking at the moon in the water, I feel that my heart also becomes pure and

clean.”² The Japanese original is as follows:

Akatsuki goto-no aka-no-mizu (refrain), *tsuki-mo kokoro-ya sumasuran*
 暁ごとの 関伽の水、暁ごとの 関伽の水、月も心や 澄ますらん。³

van der Post associates this with a Zulu saying:

I thought of a Zulu saying “Patience is an egg that hatches great birds: even the sun is such an egg.” Little did the Zulus know, I told myself, that the moon too is another such egg. So while we ate and turned over poems in our minds, the moon rose through the level of its over-flowing *Momiji*-red self, into a more precise yellow self, followed by the lucid silver manifestation which was once enshrined almost to perfection in the quietude and seclusion of the *Gep-parō*, “The-Waves-by-Moonlight” pavilion in Kyoto. Finally it became a calm unwavering illumination of what was left of the night, until it enfolded our ship with a tender feminine authority in a soft shawl of light. It left the sea with swift impressionistic transcriptions of its unhurried climb to the summit of our glowing world, attended only by a single star whose companions had all been lost on the way in moonlight, as other things are lost in darkness. No sooner had it moved into this final phase of its ascent than the poem of the evening appeared. (*Yet Being Someone Other*, p. 159)

The African sun is replaced here by the moon in the Far East as its equivalent, and symbolically enough, this mental association was established at night on the Arabian Sea, sailing between Africa and Japan. The term “pattern” or “self” here is witness to van der Post’s unmistakable affinity with Karl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), with whom he would be acquainted in his later years; the self is reflected in the moon and its color changes dramatically in its progress over the vast ocean. The-Wave-by-Moonlight pavilion refers obviously to one of the wooden huts at Katsura

² See the-noh.com, checked on July 26, 2019.

³ *Yōkyōkushū* [Collected Noh Chants]. Vol. 33 of *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* [Collected Works of Classical Japanese Literature]. Tokyo: Shōgakusan, 1973, p. 273. [『謡曲集』日本古典文学全集、小学館、1973 年、273 頁]。

Imperial Detached Palace, in the outskirts of Kyoto, built by a member of the imperial family in the seventeenth century, so as to meditate the full moon over a pond. The South African author is also invited by the ship's crew at that moment to the ceremony of composing poems in praise of the moon, a kind of ritual for Japanese.

6. Conrad or a Venture to the Interior

Here Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) comes to his mind.

Conrad possessed for my own immature self then, more than any writer of a time dangerously deprived of instinct and intuition, what an inspired French observer of primitive man called a capacity for *participation mystique* in the world around him. (*Yet Being Someone Other*, p. 163)

The primitive capacity for "participation" here is what the French ethnologist, Lévy Bruhl (1857-1939) had developed. For Laurens van der Post, the "mystical participation" is not superstitious; rather, intuition and instinct play decisive roles in every critical phase of his life facing death. Here he evokes King Lear's famous utterance and gives an original interpretation to it:

It referred to that sombre moment in *Lear* when the doomed King at last finds rough comfort like a rock in the sea of deception and the unreality of a world of worldly and self-seeking men, with the conclusion addressed to his soul, his daughter; "We shall take upon ourselves the mystery of things and be God's spies," Conrad, for me, had been such a spy in many a world beyond the established range of the arrogant and narrowly focused European awareness of his own day. He had been such a one even in the heart of darkness of my own native Africa, and forced a whole new world of unknown earth, being and human considerations upon our slanted and inadequate reckoning. But nowhere had this sense of participation in the strange, antagonistic and totally forbidden been more marked for me than in his discovery of this world the *Canada Maru* was now approaching. (*Yet Being Someone Other*, p. 163)

The Heart of Darkness takes here a special shape thanks to the voyage with the

Japanese ship. What does the “spy” mean here? Laurens van der Post explains it as follows:

The conscious explanation was inadequate and in a sense superfluous, because it was all in the story to be known only as through the profound sense of participation which forced Conrad to report on him. He could, in the end, say little more to put his readers on a course which passed the understanding of his day, than that Tuan Jim had come to him “like a cloud” and, when his own truth finally came to his side in the tangled jungle that was its temple, “veiled like an oriental bride,” went on to vanish “inscrutable as a cloud.” (*Yet Being Someone Other*, p. 164)

While “the inscrutable cloud” is the protagonist in the seascape illuminated by the moonlight, it is also a metaphor for the mental state of the observer in constant metamorphosis. Somebody like “Tuan Jim” for Conrad also suddenly appears as if a “visitation” (in biblical term) to Laurens van der Post, at the very moment when the life and death is at stake. This instinctive inner voice announces there the presence of “yet being someone other,” one line from *Little Gidding* by T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), from which the title of this autobiography is taken. At this moment a curious upside-down happens and death marks its triumph, in token of a final victory, as is the case with King Lear facing his tragic end:

Indeed the effect of the scarlet cloud ahead just then was almost a repeat of Conrad’s image of the crimson crack as of doom itself in the final cumulus formation which crowd around the end of his *Victory* leading with classic inevitability, as in *Lear*, to a death that is nonetheless a triumph and vindication of life. Accordingly, this moment in the *Canada Maru* was to live with me through the long, strange, dangerous and random years which were to follow, as one of personal revelation and intimation, no less intense for me than for Tuan Jim. It began with the lesson of learning how pursuit of my own craft and this experience of the sea, with a thrust of my own to the East, was also a search for my own truth. That alone is why I have had to record it at such length. (*Yet Being Someone Other*, p. 164)

7. Anticipation, or the “Future antérieur” in an Autobiography

We all know that this “moment of truth” will constitute the leitmotiv of van der Post’s war novel *The Seed and the Sower* (1964), based on his experience in the prisoners of war camp in Java.⁴ Obviously, the author here is hinting at his future, though the young Laurens on his way to Japan in 1926 could not have the least notion of what destiny secretly awaits him, 13 years later. Only in retrospective reflection at the end of his life, was van der Post convinced that the voyage to Japan had helped him to uncover his own, yet unknown self; and without this revelation (he calls it “eruption”) he could not have survived the Japanese imprisonment in Java. The evocation of Johor in the passage below is not innocent, as it predicts the author’s destiny there under the Pacific War, but its meaning would not yet have been revealed when he passed through the Johor strait at the age of 20:

I dwell on this abbreviation of the intangible that were coming like thunderclouds over the horizon of my mind, as I did in the resumé of the quickening awareness produced in me by Conrad, because this was the real voyage on which the *Canada Maru* was taking me. I realized this, that Johore noon-day, with a start that was a stab of an awakening heart and mind and that made travelling into a new external world in the *Canada Maru* mean so much to me because it was helping me to go thereby into a great undiscovered country of my own imagination, which I could not have entered any other day. For William, I knew the voyage was an interruption and important only as a means of getting from Africa to Japan. Japan would mend the lines of communication for him again, but the journey between it and the severed significance of Africa had no special meaning for him. For me, however, the journey in between was even more important than our point of departure and arrival. The eruption of an immense potential of new meaning in life caused thereby was so great in my mind that I remained silent on our way back to the ship [at their final port of call, Singapore, facing the Johor Strait].

For once William’s keenness of observation and great gift of wit did not really reach me. I hardly heard him or looked further around me because the

⁴ See Inaga Shigemi, “Mediators, Sacrifice and Forgiveness: Laurens van der Post’s Vision of Japan in the P.O.W. Camp,” *Japan Review*, No. 13, 2001, pp. 129-43.

sound of music of gratitude to Mori who had made all this possible filled my senses. (*Yet Being Someone Other*, p. 171)

III

8. Final Challenge: In Front of a Typhoon

The final challenge in the voyage was announced by an approaching typhoon. Van der Post, a trained seaman, meticulously describes the emergency preparations made by the Japanese sailors on board, and with amazement he remarks:

What the officers and crew were carrying out was not merely an appropriate exercise of seamanship but an observance also of *Li* at its most profound level: an observance of good manners in the sense that manners are good when appropriate and that man had to preserve his manners and be on his best behaviour especially against the anger of nature and its storm of wind and water, not just as a matter of survival but the more urgent one of bringing himself, his ship and storm into harmonious relationship again with the law of the universe. The dignity and the rhythm this realization induced for me in the behaviour of all from that moment on was almost like a prayer in action. (*Yet Being Someone Other*, pp. 174-75)

Here the notion of *Li* (Jp. *ri* 理) is understood as the human effort to establish a harmony with nature. In fact *ri* means propensities inherent in Nature, as manifested through the traces which the human being observes by following it, as if making “a prayer in action” by human deeds with insightful reason and wise calculations. *Li* (Jp. *rei* 礼), precisely the same pronunciation in Chinese, means ritual, on which van Der Post also develops his reflection: Through the experience of the Typhoon and the way each Japanese crew member conducted oneself under the captain’s command convinced Post of the meaning of the “observance of ritual” in Asia:

It was clear that the ship, the observance of the rituals demanded of it, its Captain and crew, were vindicated. The realization brought tears to my eyes; not of relief, I am certain, but because it had all been like some sort of transcendent metaphor in action of a meaning to all, however enigmatic and obscure,

even in the utmost of storm. I went below [from the bridge] then like someone leaving a theatre in which an authentic piece of life pitted against anti-life had achieved its catharsis. (*Yet Being Someone Other*, p. 182)

The challenge of the typhoon, natural calamities, and even the menacing threat of death is understood as “the law-abiding necessities” by Orientals. This understanding led him to a “catharsis” about what lay beyond the question of Life or Death. Let us finish with the next and last quote: It is certain that the psalm of “Abide with me” was sounding in his ears at the sight of this mystical ritual of working in harmony with the thunderstorm under the tropical hurricane.

The storm was part of the great law-abiding necessities which demand, for instance, that even the practiced round of seasons cannot serve the change of one into another without storms to aid them. Certainly what was beyond speculation on the second morning after the typhoon first came to examine our credentials for crossing the frontier, was the clarity with which a new ocean and world and time was now open to us. (*Yet Being Someone Other*, p. 182)



Figure 1. *Canada Maru* passing through the Panama Canal, 1911



Figure 2 Captain Mori Katsue in 1926



ては上船員だるか
 (左で船) 氏トスガ、央中兵船長(右で船) 氏トスガ

Figure 3. Lauren van der Post and William Plomer with Captain Mori, on the board of *Canada-maru*, 1926. *Umi* monthly magazine, no. 12, Aug. 1927.



Figure 4. Laurens Van der Post and Captain Mori Katsue, with Mrs. Mori Kimie (middle), in Tokyo in October, 1987.

Crossing “Manchukuo” and Brazil: Migrant Vessels as Contact Zones

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Introduction

This article reports on government-funded research begun in 2017 to investigate migrants' experiences and memories associated with migrant-bearing vessels, especially those that were put into service between Japan and Brazil before the Pacific War (1908-1941).¹ The ocean voyages of these migrant ships were critical experiences for Japanese migrants to Brazil. The ships not only transported people migrating to work overseas, but were the medium through which various types of cargo, including animals and plants, and the accompanying culture, were transported to distant places.

Roughly 33 Japanese migrant vessels carried approximately 190,000 Japanese to



Figure 1. Map of Emigration Routes between Japan and Brazil, 1908-1941

¹ The research was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP17K02043.

Brazil on 322 voyages in the pre-Pacific War era.² The Japanese had taken no longer voyage at any time in their history (cf. Figure 1). On their return voyages to Japan, they brought with them large quantities of Brazilian coffee and also the café culture. Today, Japan is one of the world's leading coffee importers, and the café culture brought to Japan by migrant vessels has taken firm root. These vessels were thus a global medium through which people, goods, and culture came into contact.

This presentation examines the functions and historical meaning of migrant vessels as a form of global media. I shall refer to the 1940 case of two migrant vessels that brought Japanese cherry trees and Manchurian animals to Brazil and Brazilian plants to Japan and Manchuria.

Animal and Plant by Japanese Migrant Ships

An article appeared in *Brasil jihō* (Noticias do Brasil), a Japanese newspaper published in São Paulo, dated January 27, 1940, referring to the donation of animals and plants (No. 2091).

Aromatic "Orchid" Ambassador:

From Manchukuo to Brazil; Badger Plays his Part

We wish to exchange beautiful flowers and rare animals, and so contribute to goodwill between Brazil and Manchukuo.³

Such was the proposal made to the Kobe Japan-Brazil Association (Kobe Nippaku Kyōkai) by Mr. Mitsushi Nakamata, the head of the Zoological and Botanical Gardens in Xinjing (Shinkyō Dōshokubutsuen), capital of the puppet-state of Manchukuo established by the Japanese Guandong Army after its conquest of Manchuria. The Kobe Japan-Brazil Association thought that a people's diplomacy of "flowers and animals" was an interesting idea at a time when Japan and Brazil were in opposition to one another. Association Chairman Hara, familiar to Brazil-resident Japanese, dispatched a communication to the National Zoological and Botanical Gar-

² Yōsuke Tanaka. *Senzen imin kōkai monogatari* [The Story of Prewar Migrant Voyages]. São Paulo: Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, 2010.

³ *Brasil jihō* (Noticias do Brasil), No. 2091, January 27, 1940.

dens of Rio de Janeiro that very day. The first consignment of gifts was entrusted to the 5,425-ton *Brisbane-Marū*, owned by the Osaka Shosen Kaisha shipping company (OSK). The ship set sail from Kobe on November 29, 1939. The animals they sent from Manchukuo were two Amur lions, a pair of Usley eagles, and two horned owls, together with six and a half-month's worth of special feed for each animal. They also sent several species of orchids, the national flower of Manchukuo, by the *Brasil-Marū* (cf. Figure 2), which set sail for Brasil on November 17 (*Brasil jihō*, No. 2091, January 27, 1940).

Construction of the Xinjing Zoo and Botanical Gardens, the largest zoo in Asia, had begun in 1938 in Xinjing Special City, the capital of Manchukuo. The zoo was planned with many innovative features such as an orientation to ecological display that combined a zoo and a botanical garden; the complete adoption of an open farm system for animal exhibitions; the acclimatization of animals to life in the north, leadership in education and research; de-emphasis on entertainment, and industrial applications.⁴ Nakamata, who had proposed the exchange of plants and animals with Brazil as a goodwill gesture, had been assigned to Xinjing from his previous position at the Sendai Zoo. After World War II, he became director of Maruyama Zoo in Sapporo and Asahiyama Zoo in Asahikawa, both in Hokkaido. At that time, Manchukuo, Japan's puppet state, had become the object of international criticism, did not have diplomatic relations with Brazil. An unofficial relationship had been established through the mediation of the Kobe Japan-Brazil Association in cooperation with the Osaka Shosen Kaisha. This was a pioneering project that marked the beginning of the kind of "flora and fauna diplomacy" that continues in the present day with "panda diplomacy."

What is noteworthy about the exchange of plants is the transplanting of cherry trees, which is considered one of the symbols of Japan. At the same time the "ambassadors of animals and plants," cherry trees and "more than 20 garden trees" were donated to Rio de Janeiro, the capital city of Brazil. Consider this:

"The Avenue Between Japan and Brazil: Coming Soon to Rio de Janeiro"

⁴ Yasuhiro Inuzuka, "Shinkyō Dōshokubutsuen kō" [A Study of the Xinjing Zoo and Botanical Gardens], *Chiba Daigaku Jinbun Shakaikagaku Kenkyū*, no. 18, May, 2009 pp. 15-25.

In addition to the aforementioned “Flower Animal Mission,” 20 kinds of garden trees were sent by the Japanese government to the Brazilian government on the *Brasil-Maru*. The Brazilian government planted the trees on the Tijuca main street in Rio de Janeiro as a sign of long-lasting friendship with Japan.⁵

In return for the donation of the cherry tree saplings, Rio de Janeiro City donates “310 saplings of 20 species of Brazilian trees” to Tokyo Prefecture and Osaka City, respectively, along with a letter of appreciation from Mayor Henrique Dodsworth to Shōzō Murata, president of the Osaka Shōsen Kaisha and a member of Japan’s House of Peers.⁶

This is one example of the occasional exchange of animals and plants facilitated by Japanese migrant ships during the pre-Pacific War period. The exchange of animals and plants between Japan, Manchukuo, and Brazil is thought to have played a significant role in Japan’s “animal and plant diplomacy.” At that time, Japan and Manchukuo, which had become increasingly isolated in the international community, hoped to expand their connections in South America through the development of triangular trade interests for mutual benefit. It is probable that this effort took place against the backdrop of restrictions Brazil placed on Japanese immigrant numbers under the “New Immigration Act” of 1934. The act was linked to the Japanese invasion of China and the establishment of the puppet state of Manchukuo.

Related Considerations

It seems likely that three motivations lay behind the exchange of animals and plants between Japan/Manchukuo and Brazil which were facilitated by the migrant vessels:

- 1) Japan and the Kobe Japan-Brazil Associação: The pioneering of new projects prompted by the reduction in numbers of migrants to Brazil and the expansion of Japan and the association’s presence in Brazil through the exchange of plants and animals;

⁵ *Brasil jihō* (Noticias do Brasil), No. 2091, January 27, 1940.

⁶ *Umi*, vol. 106, Osaka Shōsen kaisha, July, 1940, p. 36.

- 2) Manchukuo and the Xinjing Zoo and Botanical Gardens: The enrichment of the botanical gardens through the receipt of animals and plants from Brazil, and recognition and friendship between countries that did not have official diplomatic relations;
- 3) Brazil and the Rio de Janeiro Zoo and Botanical Gardens: The enrichment of botanical gardens through the receipt of rare animals and plants from East Asia and the promotion of friendship with countries that did not have official diplomatic relations such as Manchukuo.⁷

One can presume that behind this exchange of animals and plants between Japan, Manchukuo, and Brazil was the agenda of the Japanese and Manchukuo authorities seeking to expand trade between Brazil and Manchukuo in order to secure resources, even as the embargo imposed by the United States and the Allied powers was expanded. It is noteworthy that migrant vessels were engaged in this exchange of people, goods, and culture between East Asia and South America in the midst of a tense political climate with migrant vessels prioritizing economic effects.

We historians of migration should pay more attention to the process of migration and its functions not only at its destination but also on board the migrant-carrying vessels.

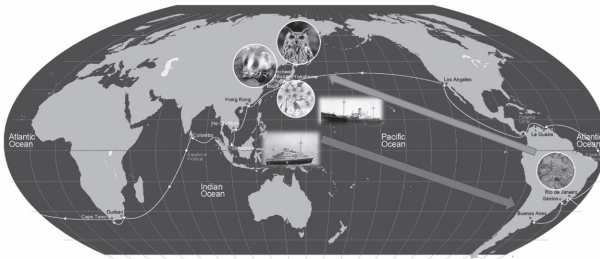


Figure 2. "Fauna and Flora Diplomacy" between Japan, Manchuria and Brazil in 1940

⁷ Sachio Negawa, "Kyokutō to Nambei no sesshoku kaimen: Iminsen ni yoru dō-shokubutsu no 'utsushi'" [Worlds of Contact between the Far East and South America: The "Movement" of Animals and Plants by Migrant Ships via Migrant Ships]. In Inaga Shigemi, eds. *Utsushi to utsuroi: Bunka denpa no utsuwa to shokuhēn no jissō* [Metempsychosis and Passage: Recipients of Transcultural Migration and Haptic Transfigurations]. Tokyo: Kachōsha, 2019, p. 513.

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