

# Australia, Japan and the Asia–Pacific Region :

## From the Perspective of Frontier Studies

Tessa Morris–Suzuki  
*Australian National University*

### Abstract

In recent years, issues of migration, “people–smuggling” and border controls have become increasingly salient topics of political debate in many parts of the world, including the Asia–Pacific region. Particularly since the events of 11 September 2001, national governments around the world have introduced policies to strengthen border controls, and in many cases developed policies to cooperate with their regional neighbour in border protection. Against this background, this paper aims to look, not just at these present–day concerns, but also at the nature of the border in history — to examine some forces which have shaped the border controls that exist today, and particularly to examine the impact of these border controls on human lives. By drawing on examples from my recent research on frontier zones in Australia and Japan, and taking an “Anti–Area Studies” approach to these case studies, I hope to show how these apparently disparate examples can highlight common strategies for rethinking history, and debating common dilemmas facing the nations of the region today. Cases to be examined include the history of mobility and frontiers in the Tsushima Straits between Japan and Korea and in the region stretching from Arnhemland in Australia to Sulawesi in Indonesia. Based on discussion of these frontier histories, I suggest the possibility for new sorts of cross–border collaboration between scholars and others concerned with the protection of the rights of migrants and border crossers in the twenty–first century Asia–Pacific region.

### From Area Studies to Anti–Area Studies

Since 1981, when I first migrated to Australia, I have been employed as a researcher and teacher of “area studies”, focusing on Asian — and particularly Japanese — studies. However, for the past six or seven years I have been trying to develop an approach to knowledge which may be termed “Anti–Area Studies”. In this paper, I shall use examples drawn from my current research, which focuses on

the history of frontiers and border controls in Australia and Japan, to illustrate the notion of “anti-area studies”.

“Area Studies” is an approach to knowledge which emerged in the mid-twentieth century, and particularly in the years immediately following the Second World War. In Australia, the events of the War highlighted the lack of Australian knowledge of its immediate region, and stimulated a growing interest in what was then known as “Oriental Affairs”. This led to the establishment of departments specializing in the study of Asia and various parts of the Pacific at a number of universities: among these was my own institution, the Australian National University, which included a “School of Pacific Studies” amongst the original four Research Schools created on its founding in 1947. (Despite the title “Pacific”, a large part of the research in the School focussed on East and Southeast Asia.)

Area studies has played a very important role in helping Australians to develop a deeper knowledge of the cultures and languages of neighbouring countries. In this sense, the legacy of area studies is extremely valuable, and needs to be protected against a current educational environment in which the study of Asia is facing challenges in many universities and schools. Whatever the political future of the Asia-Pacific region, Australian society will increasingly need citizens who possess a good knowledge of neighbouring regions, just as Japan will increasingly need citizens with a good knowledge of the languages and societies of China, Korea and other Asian neighbours (and in this context I would also like to include Australia as one of those “Asian neighbours” in the broad sense of the term).

At the same time, however, I have some sympathy with certain critics who have raised questions about the approach to knowledge implicit in Area Studies, at least in its more traditional forms. One particular focus of such criticism has been the “speaking position” of Area Studies scholars. The traditional model of Area Studies which flourished in Australia and Japan, as well as in other developed countries, was strongly influenced by US and (to a lesser extent) British models, and embodied an image of the area scholar (who was commonly based at an academic institution in one of the richer countries of the world) as an objective observer of “the Other”, applying universalist disciplinary expertise to interpreting the particular empirical realities of distant, often less developed, societies. This approach did little to encourage the Area Studies scholar to reflect on his or her own “speaking position”, or to look critically at the social context which shaped his or her own research and

teaching practices.

An academic engaged in “Japanese Studies” in Australia, for example, is generally expected (according to the traditions of Area Studies) to apply theories drawn from the existing disciplines to the study of phenomena such as (for example) the Japanese political system or the status of women in Japan. The result tends to be scholarship which highlights the unusual or distinctive features of Japanese society as contrasted with a presumed model of “normal” or “universal” modernity. In all of this, however, there is no expectation that the academic will ask questions about the peculiarities of his or her own society — about (for example) the Australian political system or the status of women in Australia. Implicitly, Australia — the society within which the scholar lives and works — comes to be treated as part of the “normal” universalist realm from which the scholar observes the often strange and exotic “Other”.

It was above all a sense of frustration at the structural limitations of such an approach that encouraged me to think about the possibility of “Anti–Area Studies”. By contrast with Area Studies, which focuses on the study of a specific geographical region of the world, and on analysing and understanding the historical, social or cultural peculiarities of that region, “Anti–Area Studies” seeks to examine a specific social, political or historical *problem* from *widely differing* geographical vantage points. In this way, it aims to promote cross-border exchanges of ideas about common problems faced by many countries and regions in our complex and globalized world.<sup>1)</sup> Anti–Area Studies differs, however, in important respects from “Comparative Studies”, which also examines specific themes within the context of a range of different geographical locations. While “Comparative Studies” typically takes the nation state as its unit of analysis, and highlights differences between specific aspects of the institutions or cultures of nation states, “Anti–Area Studies” seeks points of dialogue between disparate geographical spaces which may not necessarily be nation states, but may instead be cities, minority communities, or frontier zones.

For example, one possible topic for “Anti–Area Studies” might be the experiences of indigenous peoples in many different parts of the world — from Aboriginal

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1) See Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “Anti–Area Studies”. *Communal/Plural*. Vol. 8, no. 1, 2000, pp. 9–23.

societies in Australia to Ainu communities in Japan to indigenous groups in Canada or Brazil. Of course, the histories and present circumstances of these communities are very diverse. However, as small societies which have been and remain colonized by larger nation states, they confront common problems which can usefully be investigated by looking at them from geographically dispersed perspectives. A similar "Anti-Area Studies" approach can be applied to the study of many topics: for example, the role of women in the workforce, problems of political participation, the issues of aging and the care of the elderly etc.

### **Frontier Studies as Anti-Area Studies**

The issue of frontiers and border controls seems to me to be an important topic for Anti-Area Studies because questions of border controls have, in the past decade or so, emerged as a central topic of debate in many widely dispersed parts of the world. Over the past quarter of a century, the globalization of the economy has inevitably brought with it an increased impulse to human mobility. Overseas investment encourages the cross border flow of workers and managers; the spread of a global consumer economy increases the lure of the major metropolises, while increasing wealth gaps between different (and sometimes adjacent) nations promote the migration of those seeking a tolerable standard of living for themselves and their families. According to the US Central Intelligence Agency (which takes a close interest in these matters) some 140 million people are now said to be living outside the countries of their birth, and more than 50 nations have populations in which first generation immigrants account for more than 15% of the population. This represents a considerable increase over the past decade or so.<sup>2)</sup> In 1990 the number of people living outside the country of their birth was said to be around 80 million, just over half the present level.

Particularly since the events of 11 September 2001, national governments around the world have introduced policies to strengthen border controls, and in many cases developed policies to cooperate with their regional neighbours in border protection.

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2) Central Intelligence Agency, "Growing Global Migration and its Implications for the United States", National Intelligence Estimate NIE 2001 - 02 D, Washington, 2001.

For example, in the “Japan–Australia Creative Partnership” declaration signed on 1 May 2002, on the occasion of Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to Australia, one of the key issues on the agenda was collaboration between Australia and Japan in strengthening border controls and preventing people smuggling in our region.<sup>3)</sup> The Joint Statement on the prevention of terrorism signed by both leaders in Tokyo on 16 July 2003 also highlights immigration and border controls, including “support for the implementation of Advance Passenger Information (API) systems” as one of the key areas of collaboration between Australia and Japan.<sup>4)</sup>

It is against this background that some colleagues and I have embarked on a research project on borders and border controls in our region, focussing particularly on the borders of four nations: Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia and Japan. In this project we aim, not just to look at present-day concerns, but also to rethink the nature of the border in history — to examine the forces which shaped the border controls that exist today, and to examine the impact of these border controls on human lives. By doing this, we hope in the long term to contribute to a rather different form of cooperation between nations — a cooperation between those who are concerned not so much with increasing the effectiveness of border controls between nations as with protecting the rights of migrants and ensuring that security measures do not excessively restrict freedom of human mobility.

Here I should like to use a couple of examples taken from my work on Australia and Japan to explore some of the ways in which a study of the modern history of borders in different geographical locations (in this case, Australia and Japan) can illuminate common problems which we face in today’s globalized world.

### **Tampa, SIEV-X and the “Crisis of Sovereignty”**

Let us begin by considering the contemporary issue of border controls in Australia. Under the Howard administration, the issue of border controls has become a

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3) See “Joint Statement with Prime Minister Koizumi: Australia–Japan Creative Partnership”, in Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Japan Country Brief, [http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/japan/japan\\_brief\\_bilateral.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/japan/japan_brief_bilateral.html)

4) “Australia–Japan Joint Statement on Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism”, in *ibid.*

central and hotly contested issue in Australian politics, and it is widely regarded as having had a decisive influence on the 2001 Australian election. In this respect, the issue which attracted the greatest international attention was the “*Tampa* affair” of August 2001. On 26 August 2001, a Norwegian cargo vessel, the *Tampa*, picked up over 400 asylum seekers (mostly from Afghanistan) from a sinking boat between Java and Christmas Island. The asylum seekers insisted that they wished the ship to take them to Christmas Island, which is Australian territory, rather than back to Indonesia (from which they had come). When the ship docked off Christmas Island, they requested asylum in Australia. However, the government refused to receive their request, publicly proclaimed that none of the asylum seekers would be allowed to set foot in Australia, and sent troops to board the ship.

After lengthy debate, during which the refugees and the crew of the *Tampa* were left to wait on the high seas, the Howard government announced the so-called “Pacific Solution”, under which boat people, including those on the *Tampa*, would be sent to off-shore “processing centres” on the tiny Pacific Island nation of Nauru (total population, 11,000), and the Papua New Guinean Island of Manus. More than three years later, most of the *Tampa* boatpeople have finally been granted asylum either in New Zealand or in Australia (on “Temporary Protection Visas”), though some have also returned to Afghanistan. However, along the way they had to endure extreme suffering and anxiety, first on the overcrowded cargo vessel and then in inadequately serviced camps on the remote islands where they were held in detention.<sup>5)</sup>

A second, less widely reported but in some ways even more troubling story is that of the boat known as “SIEV-X” (short for “Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel-X”). This overcrowded people-smuggling boat sank between Indonesia and Australia on 19 October 2001, with the loss 353 lives. Since then, some Australian journalists and independent researchers have raised serious questions about the circumstances surrounding this tragedy. In particular, they have highlighted the fact that, al-

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5) David Marr and Marian Wilkinson, *Dark Victory*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 2003; James Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: The Story of Australian Immigration*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp.193–199; also Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “*Tampa* in Japan: East Asian Responses to Australia’s Refugee Policy”, in Alison Broinowski ed., *Double Vision: Asian Accounts of Australia*, Canberra, Pandanus Books, 2004, pp. 105–122.

though the Australian security forces were on extremely high alert against the entry of “people smuggling” boats, they failed to identify the fact the SIEV-X was in trouble or to go to its aid (the only survivors were picked up by Indonesian fishing boats).<sup>6)</sup>

The Howard government has justified its very tough position on asylum seekers and boat people by insisting on the overriding importance of protecting Australia’s national sovereignty. In a very widely-reported speech during the 2001 election, he stated “we shall decide who comes to this country, and the circumstances in which they come”. There can be little doubt that this approach to border controls has widespread public appeal, and has helped win votes for the Howard government (even though there has been very active and vocal criticism of his refugee policies by some human rights groups and other NGOs<sup>7)</sup>). Howard’s emphasis on “national sovereignty” coincides with and reinforces a widespread popular belief that, just as private individuals and families have a perfect right to keep intruders out of their houses, so the nation has a right and duty to prevent “intruders” from violating its national space without permission.<sup>8)</sup>

There are, however, a number of objections to this approach. For example, it could be pointed out that people who flee across borders to escape political persecution are not “illegal immigrants” under international law, since the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees recognises the right of people to cross borders in search of asylum. In many cases, stopping the flow of asylum seekers across frontiers does not actually solve the underlying problems involved, but merely shifts the responsibility for addressing the problems to other (often poorer) countries. Besides, the high profile “tough” approach to border controls taken by the Australian government in fact works very unevenly: it has succeeded in virtually stopping the inflow of boat people from Indonesia for the past three years, but large numbers of visa over-stayers and others remain in Australia, their presence receiving very little

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6) Tony Kevin, *A Certain Maritime Incident: The Sinking of the SIEV-X*, Melbourne, Scribe Publications, 2004.

7) See for example <http://www.refugeeaction.org/>; <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/>; <http://www.ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org/>

8) See Peter Mares, *Borderline: Australia’s Treatment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers*, Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 2001; Jupp op. cit.

media attention.

More broadly, however, from the historian's point of view, an examination of the modern history of the nation's frontier — and even of the frontiers of “island nations” like Australia and Japan — raises important questions about this image of the nation state as a stable, inviolable, sovereign space. To explore these points in more detail, I should like to shift my focus and look at an example drawn from my research on the modern frontiers of Japan.

### “Boat People” and the Borders of Japan

Here I should like to start by quoting from an interview conducted by researcher Sadake Keiko, in which she records the words of a “boat person” who entered Kyushu illegally in the late 1940s. “No sooner had we entered the straits than our boat (a ten-ton powered vessel) began swaying back and forth like a leaf on a tree. This was a dangerous spot known as ‘the devil’s straits’. We lost our course and zigzagged back and forth. In the little cabin, fourteen or fifteen people were crammed together with fear on their faces . . . Next to me was a young woman who was hugging a newborn baby, and was sobbing uncontrollably. She said that she was smuggling herself across the border to show her baby to her husband, who was in Osaka . . . There were many rickety smuggling boats, and you really risked your life when you boarded one.”<sup>9)</sup>

They echo an experience shared by tens of thousands of twentieth and early twenty-first century migrants, including those of the passengers on the *Tampa* and the SIEV-X. As we shall see, many thousands of “boat people” risked their lives to make the illegal crossing of the Japanese border in the decades following the end of the Pacific War. But I have chosen to quote this particular story because it sheds an interesting and slightly unusual light on the problem of Japan's frontiers and border controls. The border in this story — the turbulent stretch of sea known as “the Devil's Straits” lies between the Amami Islands and Kyushu, and the “illegal migrants” who risked their lives to cross the border were Amami Islanders, trying to

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9) Satake Kyoko, *Gunseika Amami no Mikkô, Mitsu Boeki*, Tokyo, Nampô Shinsha, 2003, pp. 190–191.



enter Japan to work, study or be reunited with other members of their family.

The Amami Islands today are part of Japan, as indeed they have been for almost all of the past 130 years. Immediately after Japan's defeat in the Pacific War, however, the so-called "Southwestern Islands" [*Nansei Shoto*] were separated from the rest of Japan by the allied occupation, and were placed under direct US military administration. Between 1946 and 1953, the "Southwestern Islands" included the Amami and Ryukyu Archipelagoes, which were therefore separated from Kyushu by an "international border": a border that could only be crossed by those who had the express permission of the Supreme Command Allied Powers. Since the Amami Islands and Kyushu had very long-standing social and economic ties, however, this arrangement proved to be extremely impractical. In 1953, therefore, the Amami Islands were re-united with Japan, and the border was moved south, to separate the Amami from the Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa).

The story of postwar "illegal migration" between the Amami Islands and Japan illustrates the two key themes of this paper. The first is the artificial nature of Japan's frontiers. We tend to think both of Japan and of Australia (unlike, for example, many Southeast Asian nations) as being "natural nation states" whose borders are determined by geography and not by politics. But in reality, of course, matters are more complex in both cases. Japan is just part of a long chain of islands stretching from Sakhalin and the Kamchatka peninsula at one end towards the islands of the Philippines at the other. The location of the lines that separate this chain of islands into nation states is a matter of history — wars, negotiations, power relationships etc — rather than of geography. In the case of Australia, too, the apparently certain maritime boundaries which separate Australia from its Asian and Pacific neighbours are (as we shall see) less natural and incontestable than they appear.

The second point is that the way border lines are drawn and enforced has an enormous effect on the lives of many people. The types of borders and border controls with which we are familiar are a modern phenomenon. The use of passports to cross frontiers, for example, was not generally enforced until about the time of the First World War, and in some places much more recently. Of course, people in all times and places have a certain sense of belonging to a particular community, and this community is generally identified with a particular place or territory. But at the same time most communities are connected to neighbouring groups by trade,

travel, intermarriage etc. When sharply defined lines are drawn on the map, and people are prohibited from crossing them, this can have drastic effects on the lives of individuals and communities. In the case of the Amami Islands, for example, islanders had for decades traveled to and fro to Kyushu and other parts of Japan for work, to enter school or university, to receive medical treatment, to visit friends and relatives etc. In 1946, when Japan in effect suddenly became a “foreign country” and all such movement became “illegal migration”, their everyday lives suffered massive disruption, and many normally law-abiding people found that they had little option but to become “illegal migrants”.

In discussions of the relationship between the people who cross borders (on the one hand) and the nation-states which control those borders (on the other) there is a common acceptance of the nation-state as the “given condition”, the pre-existing reality which is then influenced, for better or worse, by the intrusion of human movement across frontiers. This view of migration from the perspective of the nation state generates a limited and predictable range of questions. What impact do border-crossers have upon the nation? Has migration contributed to, or hindered, national economic growth? Do migrants enhance the cultural diversity of the nation, or do they imperil social stability and national cohesion?

But what if we begin (as it were) from the opposite side of the story? Human movement across land and sea is, after all, a very much more ancient phenomenon than the nation state. Movement across the areas which were to be divided by the modern borders between Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan and Russia, or across the borders between the countries we now call Australia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, had continued for centuries before the borders themselves were drawn. From this point of view, rather than asking what impact migrants have on the economy and society nation state, it may make more sense to ask the opposite question: what impact do nation states and national borders have on the people who move around?

### **Border-Controls and Boat People on Japan's Western Frontier**

To explore these questions a little further, I should like to consider one specific example from Japan's modern history, the example of the border between Japan and Korea, and particularly the region of the Tsushima Straits.

In a couple of farmhouses near the quiet little port town of Sasuna on the Northwest coast of the island of Tsushima there are, to the present day, documents dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries which highlight some intriguing aspects of the history of this frontier region. They are documents issued to the heads of the families who lived in these houses, confirming their appointment to official positions by the King of Korea. This status was highly treasured, as it gave the holder the special right to travel once a year to the Korean peninsula for trade purposes, since official representatives of the Korean King and the Lord of Tsushima were the only people allowed to participate in the lucrative trade between Japan and Korea in the Edo Period.<sup>10)</sup> Though a number of other merchants did in fact engage in smuggling between the two countries, the penalties for those who were caught were very severe.

Those appointed “officials of the Kingdom of Korea” were of course not the only Tsushima islanders who had direct contact with people from the Korean peninsula. Throughout the Edo period, the island was the key staging post for the huge delegations of envoys from the King of Korea, which travelled through Tsushima to the main islands of Japan, where (accompanied by a retinue of Tsushima Islanders) they made their way to Edo to pay their respects to the Shogun. The domain of Tsushima also maintained a trading post in Pusan which was staffed by a large contingent of islanders — several hundred at any one time.

The documents preserved in these Sasuna farmhouses illustrate the fact that Edo period notions of the state and “sovereignty” were rather different from the notions that prevail today. Nowadays it would surely seem strange for a person who both lives in Japan and is Japanese to be appointed an official of the Korean (or Chinese or US) government, but in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (indeed, until about the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), the sharp dividing lines surrounding the nation state, which we are so familiar with today, did not yet exist. Rather, states like Japan, Korea or China were surrounded by wide “inter-state zones”, which were linked to the centralised state by ties of loyalty or various forms of tribute payment, but which at the same time maintained a considerable degree of autonomy. Good

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10) See Izuhara Chōshi Henshū linkai, *Izuhara Chōshi*, Tokyo, Dai-Ichi Hōki Shuppan, 1997, pp. 647 – 665.

examples of the were the Ryukyu Kingdom, the Ainu territories of what is now called Hokkaido, and the islands of Tsushima and Chedju. Some frontier zones indeed owed allegiance to more than one state, a case in point being the Ryukyu Kingdom, which paid tribute both to China and Japan.

It was only from the Meiji period onward that Japan defined modern border lines around the nation, and even then, the forms of border controls with which we are familiar today took a long time to evolve. In both Japan and Australia (as in many other parts of the world) the use of passports to enter the country did not become a legal necessity until the time of the First World War, and indeed passport-free travel between Japan and China continued until the late 1930s. With colonial expansion, of course, surrounding regions including the Korean Peninsula came to be incorporated into the Japanese empire. This had a major impact on frontier zones such as Tsushima. A substantial number of Tsushima islanders spent periods of time in colonial Korea, particularly in the city of Pusan, which is much nearer to Tsushima than any Japanese city. Since the island had no high school, many Tsushima children went to Pusan to attend the commercial college there. It is even said that, when young Tsushima Islanders wished to watch a movie, they would pool their savings and travel to Pusan to go to the cinema. Conversely, during colonial times a substantial number of Korean people from the villages around to Pusan moved to Tsushima, where they employed particularly in the charcoal industry, just as large numbers of migrants from the island of Chedju, including divers, travelled back and forth to Kyushu and Shikoku in colonial times in search of work.

These cross-border links, of course, were deeply embedded in imperial power hierarchies. Nonetheless, they illustrate a certain form of cross-border social and economic integration which came to link communities on both sides of the national boundary during the colonial era.

### **Cold War Legacies**

In some senses, then, the modern border lines around the nation of Japan with which we are familiar today are actually a product of the immediate postwar period. Japan's border control system — including the Migration Control Law still in force to the present day — was thus deeply influenced by the legacy of the Cold War. The original version of this law (the 1951 Migration Control Ordinance) was in fact

based on a draft drawn up by a retired US immigration officer, Nicholas Collaer — who designed the ordinance specifically to keep out the wave of “Communist subversives” who, he anticipated, would seek to enter Japan from other parts of Asia at the end of the US occupation.

The emergence of this new Cold War order is vividly reflected in the history of the Tsushima border zone. In the first half of the 1950s, very sensationalized reports about the island began to appear in some of Japan’s national media. For example, on 13 October 1952 the Tokyo *Yomiuri* newspaper carried a large article entitled “Tsushima: East Asia’s Dark Sea — The Island of 20,000 Stowaways”.<sup>11)</sup> The article’s author, who signed himself only with the initial “F”, described Tsushima as being “even today, virtually a foreign country”. The island, he went on, was filled with gangs of smugglers and people smugglers who used its fishing fleets and charcoal burners’ huts to escape detection by the authorities. The article claimed (on what basis is unclear) that only 20% of these illegal activities were ever detected by the police, and labelled Tsushima an island full of the “Korean stowaways” who were a “cancer” to Japan’s alien registration system.

Not surprisingly, such reports evoked considerable anger amongst Tsushima islanders themselves. The local *Tsushima Shimbun* struck back, attacking the *Yomiuri* for publishing propaganda which “conveyed to the people of Tokyo the image of Tsushima as an ‘Island of Fear’”.<sup>12)</sup> Indeed, the *Yomiuri* article was both wildly factually inaccurate and full of discriminatory language. Nevertheless, there was one factual core to the newspaper’s story. It was indeed true that relatively large numbers of undocumented migrants — then generally referred to as “stowaways” [*mikkôsha*] were entering Tsushima from the Korean peninsula. The problem is that the media entirely failed to examine the reasons *why* many people, among them families including small children, were entrusting themselves to “people smugglers” and making the risky crossing from the southern tip of Korea to Tsushima and on to other parts of Japan (including Osaka — the ultimate destination for many of the “stowaways”).

The reasons, however, are not very mysterious. At the end of the Pacific War,

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11) *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 13 October 1952.

12) *Tsushima Shimbun*, 30 October 1952.

there were over 2 million Korean and Taiwanese colonial subjects living in Japan. Some had been brought over as forced labourers, others had migrated to escape rural poverty, or for other social or personal reasons. The majority returned to their homelands in the months immediately following Japan's defeat; but not all went back. Some people had lived in Japan for decades; others found that they had no homes, family or jobs to return to. The chaotic situation on the Korean peninsula made return particularly difficult. Besides, returnees were allowed to take only 1,000 yen with them — a sum of money which would barely support a family for a month. Thus, in the early part of 1946, some of those who had returned to Korea attempted to cross back into Japan. This alarmed the allied occupation authorities (GHQ/SCAP), who were afraid of the consequences of uncontrolled movement back and forth across the border. In the first part of 1946, therefore, they suddenly closed the border between Japan and the continent, making it illegal for anyone to enter Japan without the express personal permission of the occupation authorities, despite the fact that ex-colonial subjects living in Japan still possessed Japanese nationality under internal law until the signing of the Treaty of San Francisco in 1952.

The Migration Control Ordinance of 1951 maintained a strict approach to the control of exit and entry. Moreover, immediately after the signing of the Peace Treaty, the Japanese government unilaterally revoked the Japanese nationality of ex-colonial subjects. This left Koreans in Japan in a sort of legal limbo, without clearly defined re-entry rights (if they travelled outside Japan) and without any right to bring family members — even spouses and children who had been left behind in Korea — into the country to live with them. It was only after the normalization of relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea that the status of Koreans in Japan (at least those who identified themselves with South Korea) began to be made more secure.

Against this background, it is not surprising that Tsushima, as a Japanese island much nearer to Korea than to the major cities of Japan, became a focus for the efforts of desperate people to cross the border in small boats. Nor is it surprising the individual histories of such border-crossers include many sad stories. For example, in the archives of GHQ/SCAP you can find the following letter, written to General Douglas MacArthur in July 1950 by a junior high school student :

“Your Highness,

Please use your power as a General to send Father home. I pray to God that he

will come home any day now. My mother and big brother can't sleep at night for worrying about Father. If Father is forced to return to Korea, I won't be able to go to school any more. Do send him back to us quickly. It's lonely at home without Father. Please."

The father of the girl who wrote this letter was at that time serving a two-year prison sentence. The "crime" he had committed was this: about a year earlier he had heard that his elderly mother was dying, and he had gone back to his home village to be with her. After her death, he had returned to the house he shared with his wife and five children in a small Japanese city. Why was this very normal human act a "crime"? The reason was that the schoolgirl's father, although he had lived in Japan for over twenty years, originally came from Korea, where his relatives still lived. In order to visit his dying mother and return to his home and work, he had therefore had to cross the border on a "people smuggling" boat via Tsushima.<sup>13)</sup> He was, in other words, one of the 20,000 menacing "stowaways" depicted in the *Yomiuri Shimbun* article.

Another quite typical "stowaway" story is presented in an article which appeared in the pages of the *Tsushima Shimbun* in August 1950. This story concerns a fourteen-year-old boy who was arrested on a tiny islet just off the coast of Tsushima on 26 June 1951. With a small group of other people, he had left the Korean port of Pusan in a small fishing craft on 13 June, and had been hiding on the islet for several days.

According to the local newspaper, which obtained its account from the police, the boy had been born in Osaka and lived there until the age of six. During the Pacific War, however (perhaps to escape from bombing raids on Osaka) he and his mother had returned to Korea, leaving a much older brother behind in Osaka. He had completed his primary education and entered Middle School in Seoul, but according to the Japanese newspaper account, "he left Middle School after two years, and the following year he fled the wartime destruction of Seoul for Pusan". Once in Pusan, he started work in a cotton-spinning factory but, keen to complete his education, also attended night school after work. Soon after, however, his mother died,

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13) See documents of GHQ/SCAP Civil Affairs Section C, "Petitions for Release", Microfiche CAS (C) - 01670 - 01671, held in the National Diet Library Tokyo. I have revised the translations provided by the GHQ/SCAP translators.

of causes which the newspaper article does not explain.

With war still continuing in Korea, the young boy turned to an uncle for help, and the uncle advised him to go and live with his older brother in Osaka, where it was hoped that he might be able to re-enter school full time. The uncle lent him 120,000 won, of which 80,000 won was paid to a “people smuggler” for a place on the boat to Tsushima.<sup>14)</sup> At this point the story ends. I know nothing else about the boy’s fate, but it seems most likely that (like almost all others in his situation), after being arrested and questioned he was sent to the newly established Ômura migrant detention center near Nagasaki, detained there and later deported back to Korea. If he is still alive today (as he may well be) he would be in his late sixties; and — as with all such unfinished stories — I wonder about the life he lived and the person he became.

The story, however, highlights several points about the postwar wave of “boat-people”. Many were in fact people who had close relatives in Japan, and who were refugees fleeing the Korean war. However, there was no system at that time which allowed them to cross the border legally. Ironically the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, which was being drawn up at the very time the Korean War was raging, at that stage applied only to Europe, and no provision was made to deal with displaced people who tried to flee from Korea to other countries because of the war or of the various forms of political persecution which accompanied it.

Although no reliable figures exist, one can estimate that as many as 100,000 or more people may have crossed the border between Korea and Japan without official documentation in the two decades following the end of the Pacific War. However, the peculiarities of the law and the alarming media images of “stowaways” made it necessary for those who had made these clandestine journeys to hide the fact, for fear of being branded as “criminals” and expelled from Japan. For this reason, their history has been largely ignored or forgotten, and many people still subscribe to the mistaken belief that there was virtually no migration into Japan between the end of the Pacific War and the 1980s. In my current research project I am trying to re-explore this sensitive history, partly because of its own intrinsic importance, and partly because of the light it can shed on the experiences of more recent waves of

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14 ) *Tsushima Shimbum*, 30 June 1951.



“boat-people” including those who seek to cross borders today.

### **Australia’s “Asian Frontier”**

Just as Japan’s history looks different when viewed from the vantage point of Tsushima, so Australian history looks different when seen from the perspective of Australia’s maritime borders. A glance at the map quickly reveals why Christmas Island has become such a strategic point in the border controls debate, and raises questions about the reasons why the border lines of the nation are drawn in one place rather than another.

Australia’s modern self-image is of an “island continent”, culturally and historically very distinct from its Asian neighbours. If we go back to the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, however, we find, naturally enough, that transport and communications between the northernmost Australian communities and the societies of the neighbouring Asian islands were much easier than transport and communications between (say) far northern Australia and the regions we now know as South Australia or Tasmania. The Yolngu and other peoples of Arnhemland in particular had close trading links with Macassan traders, from the area around the Indonesian town now known as Ujung Pandang.<sup>15)</sup>

The Macassans arrived in early summer every year to collect trepang, which was sold to markets in China. They set up camps on the shores of Arnhemland and the off-shore islands, where they processed trepang, and their presence brought a variety of cultural and economic influences to the lives of the Aboriginal communities of the area. The traders, who continued to visit Arnhemland until at least the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, brought with them tobacco and alcohol, as well as the tamarind tree, which still grows in many parts of coastal Arnhemland today. Some Macassan words entered into local languages, and Yolngu legends include the figure of a mighty spirit named Ulla [Allah], evidence of their contact with Muslim traders from the north. Sea-born contacts also existed for centuries (and still exist) between the peoples of the Torres Strait Islands and those of the neighbouring regions

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15) See Campbell Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege: Macassan Trepangers in Northern Australia*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1976; John Cawte, *Healers of Arnhemland*, Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 1996, pp. 68–79.

of Papua New Guinea.

The drawing of clear and rigorously protected frontiers through this realm of maritime contact is a relatively recent phenomenon, encouraged particularly by the desire of the Australian and other governments to exert their control over maritime resources. For example, in 1979, Australia extended its territorial waters by 200 nautical miles in the area between the Northern Australian coast and West Timor and the islands to the southeast of Sulawesi. This seriously cut into traditional fishing grounds which had been fished for centuries by people from West Timor, Sulawesi and the nearby islands, particularly from the little island of Roti. In 1982, Australia's control of this area was strengthened by a Memorandum of Understanding with the Indonesian government, under which fishermen from the Indonesian side of the border would be allowed to fish only in a tightly restricted zone known as "the Box", and would only be allowed to use so called "traditional" fishing methods. The result has been a sharp fall in the income which they can derive from fishing, encouraging them to turn instead to "people smuggling" as a means of survival.<sup>16)</sup>

### **A Common Agenda for Frontier Studies**

The examples of frontier histories which I have briefly outlined here point to some possibilities for future approaches to frontier studies as a form of "Anti-Area Studies" which might be pursued by researchers in Australia, Japan and other parts of our region.

These examples, I think, highlight two important points. First, both Japan and Australia long histories of contacts with neighbouring regions—histories which have sometimes been neglected because of our tendency to view history from the perspective of the "metropolis" [Tokyo, Ôsaka, Sydney, Melbourne etc] rather than from the frontier zone. Of course, these long histories of cross-border contact were not always peaceful and harmonious: they included conflict and violence as well as the exchange of goods and ideas. Nonetheless, rediscovering these histories is, I think, important in laying the foundations for future interactions with the region in

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16) See the documentary film *Troubled Waters*, dir. Ruth Balint, Australian Film Commission, 2001.

the contemporary global order.

Second, a view of past and present from the vantage-point of the frontier is important because it helps to make the “faces” of “stowaways”, “boatpeople” and even “people-smugglers” visible. From the vantage point of the centre or the metropolis, such people often appear simply as a menacing “other” who threaten “our” social order and national security. This encourages support for simplistic “solutions” which emphasise the need for ever more sophisticated and militarised border controls. But, as I have tried to suggest in this paper, such an approach both fails to address many of the underlying problems, and often creates human suffering and even death.

In the twenty-first century, as the governments of the region seek new “creative partnerships” to strengthen security, it is important, I believe, for scholars, NGO members and others to develop a somewhat different form of creative collaboration, in order to find humane ways to respond to the global and regional flows of refugees, stowaways and boat people which are sure to increase, rather than decline, as economy of the Asia-Pacific region and of the world becomes more closely integrated than ever.