George Rocky

Johnson Butcher

Matty Young

Old Lockhart River lugger-hands who had lengthy associations with Japanese boat-masters.
Photographs by Athol Chase

'ALL KIND OF NATION': ABORIGINES AND ASIANS IN CAPE YORK PENINSULA*

Athol Chase

Apart from some interaction with Torres Strait Islanders, the Aborigines of Cape York Peninsula, Queensland, were free from overseas contact until European 'discovery' and subsequent settlement occurred in the nineteenth century. Shortly after Europeans arrived, Asians appeared in the Peninsula and its waters, attracted by news of its mineral and marine resources. Their intention, like that of 'Macassan' visitors to other north Australian shores in earlier days, was only to exploit the rich natural resources for as long as this was profitable. In Cape York the Asians (particularly the Japanese and Chinese) came to work the mineral fields or to supply the fast-growing lugger industries with specialised labour. Despite European anxiety at the time, these Asians were resource raiders rather than colonists intending to settle the north.

There were two main areas of Asian impact in northern Cape York: the rich coastal waters of the Great Barrier Reef where pearlshell and trepang could be found in abundance, and the hills and valleys of the eastern mountain spine where gold and other minerals awaited the fossicker's dish. As a result early contact between Asians and Aborigines was concentrated along the eastern margin of the Peninsula, in particular the coastal strip from Cape York itself to Princess Charlotte Bay. Here the crews of fishing luggers could find well-watered bases in the many bays and river mouths, well out of reach of officialdom. Here, too, transport boats could easily deliver men and supplies to the scattered mining bases which had developed by the 1890s.

The earliest commercial fishing took place among the reefs of the Torres Strait, where Frank Jardine, the first government Resident in the north, had discovered large beds of pearlshell and trepang (*bêche-de-mer*). By the middle of the nineteenth century pearling beds in the traditional fishing grounds of Asia and Ceylon had become over-worked, and the rapidly expanding European market for both pearls and shell created high prices. At the same time Asian markets for trepang were reaching a peak. The first recorded commercial fisherman in Torres Strait waters was a Captain Edwards; with one ship, *Blubell*, he set up a trepang station on Albany Island near Cape York in 1862.¹ He was followed by a Captain Banner, who began pearlshelling on Warrior Reef in Torres Strait in 1868. By 1873 Darnley Island was the centre of a growing trepang industry with a permanent station and curing works. Torres Strait Islanders and Solomon Islanders provided the labour, and 'sandalwood English' was well-established as the *lingua franca* of the boat trade.²

In 1875 the government Residency was transferred from Somerset, on the mainland, to Thursday Island to put authority closer to the expanding fishing industries. By 1884 the value of pearlshell production reached £94,000. It was Queensland's sixth most valuable export.³ Thursday Island, at the centre

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1 Jack 1922:340.

2 Murray 1876:450.

3 Saville-Kent 1893:204; Haddon 1935:14.

of this bustling colonial industry, rapidly developed into a frontier port where Europeans were but one of many ethnic groups. Census figures show that by 1880 the population of Thursday Island included 214 Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, about 200 Asians, and 28 Europeans. By 1890 the European population had increased to 270, and 126 Asians, 38 Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, and 38 South Sea Islanders were enumerated. By 1901 the total population was 1,695: 700 were Europeans, 113 were Aborigines and Islanders, and there were 304 Japanese, 114 Chinese, 83 Filipinos and 55 Malays.⁴

For the coastal Aborigines of the eastern Cape York Peninsula, the commercial collection of pearlshell, trepang, trochus and later sandalwood resulted in intensive contact — indeed, a close association — with Asians. European colonists of the period, establishing cattle stations and mining towns farther inland, openly expressed their fear of invasion by the 'yellow hordes'; the coastal Aborigines, however, seemed to welcome the Asian visitors, having learned from experience that it was the Europeans who wished to dispossess them of their lands. The Japanese, 'Manillamen', Malays and others who came from the sea to set up temporary coastal camps and shore stations were more interested in establishing peaceful relations with local communities in order to obtain cheap labour and access to women. The Asian visitors, far from their homelands and facing a potentially explosive racist hostility simmering along the northern Queensland frontier, seemed aware of the value of local Aboriginal support. Presumably the Asian minority was conscious of the need to avoid the brutal excesses which were becoming a feature of European contact with Aborigines in the Peninsula. Asians, like Aborigines, were classed as 'coloured people' whom Europeans despised. Moreover, they suffered political and economic handicaps as foreign nationals. Although their association was not without friction, Aborigines and Asians cooperated in economic enterprises on this seaboard for more than half a century, in a climate of mutual dependence.

From the start, Europeans attempted to retain domination of the lugger industries, but the Asian visitors, in particular the Japanese brought in for the newer, deeper shellbeds, rapidly organised themselves into syndicates and ran their own boats. Despite the introduction of special legislation and the singling out of Japanese boat captains for prosecution under the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, 1897*, the Japanese retained a domination over the pearlshell and trepang industries which was not broken until collapsing markets and the impending war removed them in the late 1930s.⁵ Jack's 1922 volume on Cape York observed, with perhaps a note of contempt for the Asians whose domination was causing such an outcry from the Queensland colonists, that

the foreign skilled labour employed in the fisheries — more and more in demand as deeper diving becomes necessary — has always been furnished by the justly self-respecting natives of Japan and the Malay Peninsula, who are not less expert in the making and the legal enforcement of bargains than in deep-diving, and may be trusted to safeguard their own interests . . .⁶

4 Evans 1972:27.

5 Sissons 1979 provides a detailed account of the Japanese involvement in the Australian pearling industry.

6 Jack 1922:370.

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Northeastern Cape York Peninsula. Luger camps were situated at many coastal locations between the 1880s and the 1920s.

By the 1880s the pearl fishing industry had developed its own work patterns. All licences were issued at Port Kennedy, Thursday Island. The standard lugger of ten tons was found to be the most useful vessel for pearling. With growing competition, and the depletion of the more accessible shallow shell beds, luggers had to work further away along the southern reefs fringing the Peninsula, or else move eastward to more remote Pacific waters. A lugger provisioned for one month at sea and took with it a number of working dinghies or cutters. A typical lugger crew consisted of the deep diver (who commanded the lugger), a tender to operate the lifelines, and four working hands to man the shifts on the airpump. Crews were a mixed bunch:

With few exceptions, the entire crews consist of coloured men of various nationalities. Mainland Aborigines, Southsea Islanders and natives of the Torres Strait furnish the greatest number, while some of the best divers are represented by Manillamen, Chinese, Japanese and Malays.⁷

Trepang fishing, on the other hand, was a less capital intensive enterprise. The sea slugs were found only in shallow sandy waters where no diving apparatus was needed. The work was coastal and the technological demands lay in the treatment of the catch rather than in its procurement. Trepanging was labour intensive, needing many swimmers to collect the slugs, and more again at the shore station to cut wood, stoke the boilers, boil, gut and finally dry the catch. For all these tasks Aborigines were an ideal on-site labour force. Curing stations were set up at the Aborigines' major campsites, with little risk of intervention by officialdom. Cheap labour was bought with alcohol, trade goods, and a continuous supply of flour, sugar, tea and tobacco.

The Aboriginal communities of the Lockhart River area were affected by both the pearling and trepang industries. Luggers sought these Aborigines as crewmen because of their traditional skills with sea-going dugout canoes and their reputation as fine seamen. The Lockhart River mission station was first established in 1924 when the Anglican church began to collect Aboriginal groups which had settled around the old coastal lugger camps north of Princess Charlotte Bay. The Queensland government, which assumed charge of its administration in the 1960s, moved the settlement inland to its present site at Lloyd Bay on the east coast of the Peninsula, approximately opposite the better-known Weipa settlement. During the early 1970s the Lockhart community included some fifteen old men who had worked under Japanese lugger masters. Among them were three very old residents, Alick Naiga, George Rocky and Peter Pascoe, whose experience of the fishing industry dated back to the turn of the century and perhaps earlier.

This area was rich in trepang and pearlshell and by 1908 Lloyd Bay had become one of the major recruiting bases on Cape York.⁸ Japanese captains dominated the recruiting and they apparently worked hard to maintain good relations with the *Kuuku ya'u*, *Umpila* and *Kaandyu* people of the region. Old

7 Saville-Kent 1893:206.

8 Howard 1907-1913.

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lugger men named for me nineteen Japanese skippers under whom Lockhart men had served:

Kusima	Orra	Kunu	Oto
Sasima	Iwata	Singsang	
Sigani	Nujiri	Ipi	
Tayma	Oda	Sakay	
Sakata	Yamatiki	Kuyki	
Winu	Oki	Itu	

From the Aboriginal viewpoint, Japanese luggers and shore stations provided not only the eagerly sought tradegoods and food supplies, but as well, for able-bodied men and youths, the chance to embark on great odysseys to distant places, seeing all manner of strange places and people in a world whose horizons had been considerably expanded. At a time when European authority was making its presence felt and when new sicknesses were ravaging the Aboriginal populations, the hurly-burly of lugger life and sea roving must have been as irresistible as the trade goods which flowed from signing up. For the more cautious and the old, the women and children, the shore camps of the Asians provided material plenty without the need to move from home territories, or from the ambit of relations. Particular captains (almost always Japanese) set up long-term ties with particular family groups. They had favoured status in terms of obtaining crew and labour, and they guaranteed trade supplies to their Aboriginal partners in return.

By the time I began research at Lockhart River in 1971 older Aboriginal people looked back on their early days under Japanese bosses with great nostalgia. They saw themselves as the last of the several generations who had worked closely with the Japanese and the carriers of information about an important period of history for the area and its Aboriginal people. Of all the aliens they had encountered, the Japanese ranked highest in their scale of respect. As one old man put it to me: 'All kind of nation been here before, but them Japanee too smart for the rest'.

Lockhart River people retain a large body of tales concerning their contact with the alien Japanese and Chinese, though stories about the Chinese are fewer and limited to the southern Aboriginal groups who encountered them around the Rocky River goldfields east of Coen. Some of these accounts are now taking on the status of myth in the transmission of local contact history to younger generations. 'Luggertime' or lugger*kuma* refers to an historical period (sometimes called Japanee*kuma*), or a particular part of *kuma*, the period of past history following the mythic creation and for which there are first-hand accounts from either living people or remembered ancestors. Other periods of *kuma* refer to early sailing ships, the first Europeans (though 'Captain Cook' is seen as a mythic creator who left his 'story' sites on the landscape), various mission epochs, and so on.

As part of this conscious tradition of alien contact, Lockhart River people can articulate a system of classification of aliens. This incorporates the various people they have encountered in the past on the basis of perceived characteristics.

Thus:

<i>ku'unkulu</i>	'deep eyes'	Japanese
<i>yanganulnggaya</i>	'long, long hair'	Chinese

<i>makamatyika</i>	'using hand to wipe arse'	Asian Moslems, Malaysians
<i>maa'upinta</i>	'having double skin' [from ringworm]	New Guinea people
<i>thaathimulu</i>	'from the islands'	Torres Strait Islanders
<i>puntu</i>	'sweet talk' [lit. honey]	Greeks, Italians
<i>pupathi</i>	'yankees' [<i>pupathi</i> is a synonym of <i>yaangki</i> , or a species of python]	Americans
<i>parra</i>	'spirit figure'	Europeans

Only *pama*, or Aboriginal person, belonged to the Australian mainland, but together with other alien 'coloured' people they make up a human category distinct from Europeans; they are all *tungkupinta* ('having dark skins'). Of this category, Asians, Islanders and New Guineans are *kungkayti* ('of the north'), or, with reference to their position along with Europeans outside the world of known kin, *watyanu* ('not named'). Each ethnic category is stereotyped in terms of appearance, eating habits and possession of particular skills and knowledge, their cunning or stupidity. I deal here only with the Chinese and the Japanese. Of the two, Japanese play by far the most important part in the oral tradition.

While the heaviest Chinese involvement occurred on the gold and tin fields further south near Cooktown, some Chinese miners worked their way up to the Rocky River gold field, some sixty miles south of the present Lockhart River community, in the 1880s. Here they established diggings and started vegetable gardens to supply the influx of miners to the area and the nearby town of Coen. According to Idriess, the only witness to write about the Rocky River, the 'Chows' rushed the field 'against mining laws, and against all white men's laws'.⁹ Aborigines from the Rocky River area remember the Chinese who lingered on at the short-lived field at the turn of the century. Two Chinese are said to have been killed by one local Aboriginal hero, known as Monkey, who was enraged at the intruders to his territory. He killed them not by spearing, but contemptuously, by dropping stones on them as they dug in a shaft. An old Lockhart River inhabitant, Charlie Omeenyo, recalled a favourite method of getting produce from the Chinese gardeners during his youth:

One Chinaman used to carry all those peanuts, pineapple and other things over to Coen to sell them to the whitefellers. He used to carry them in baskets on the ends of a long pole over his shoulders. I was only a boy then, but we young fellers use to paint up and carry a big bundle of spears and a woomera. We knew which way that Chinaman would come on the track, and when we saw him coming we would wait for him up in the hills behind the Rocky River. When he came round the corner, we would jump out from the rocks calling out and hollering, and waving those spears about. He used to get a big fright and drop those baskets and take off! We used to pick it all up and go off and have a good feed. Those Chinamen weren't wild, they used to have a long pigtail down their backs. That's why we call them *yanganulnggaya*. It means long, long hair.

Lockhart River people see the Japanese in retrospect as having made an abortive attempt to gain a foothold in the Peninsula soon after European discovery and settlement. But, whereas the coming of the Japanese lies within the history

9 Idriess 1980:48.

of present-day humans, the European arrival, through the actions of Captain Cook, lies further back in *antha yi'atyi*, or the 'middle ages' which bridge the creation time and the present-day world. The Japanese are believed to have struggled against the Europeans ever since their arrival, firstly during the lugger time by stealth and cunning, and then in the 1940s by outright warfare. The opinion of George Rocky, an old lugger hand, was that:

Might be they want to live in this place and settle down, but *parra* [Europeans] won't let them, because they come first. They let those Japanee sail about, getting *piira* (pearlshell) but they won't let them settle down anywhere. Those Japanee try properly then, make a war. They want to fight for this country because they know it from before. Nearly, they get it.

There are no stories of conflict with Japanese in the early days of contact. From the start they seemed to have got on well with local populations. A very old Lockhart man, Alick Naiga, provided the following account of his first meeting with the Japanese, possibly in the closing years of the nineteenth century:

I was only a good sized boy, no whiskers yet. My father and I lived with our mob in our country at *patan patan*, Lockhart River, on top, in the hills, really *Kaantyu* language people, not sandbeach. I had never seen a whitefeller before or a Japanee, only blackfellers. My father took me down to Cape Sidmouth where my mother's country is, because he heard a Japanese lugger was there. We went down and we signed up for crew. My father looked after me on the boat and that Japanee skipper taught me about boatwork. The skipper made a camp at Cape Sidmouth, gave people a lot of flour, tobacco and other things. He was like friend to that mob. If another skipper came in to get a crew, he would say: "Go away! This is my mob here, I look after them". That was a long time ago, before that first war. No whitefellers then, only Japanee. Mr Giblet [a European sandalwooder] came after.

While the old ceremonies languished for want of members as a result of recruitment to the luggers, a new initiation into manhood took place in the hard life aboard the sailing vessels, in the dangerous reef waters, and in the various ports where yet other strangers posed a constant threat through unknown methods of sorcery and physical violence. Out of this new and exciting rite of passage grew a feeling of self-reliance which cut across the more localised dependencies upon kin and totem. From the cross-cultural camaraderie of the boat decks a special creole language emerged, and new songs and dances known today as *thaypu*, or 'Island style' rose in popularity to threaten with their vigour and inventiveness the old traditional forms which had hitherto provided the only structures for formal social activity. Cultural as well as geographical horizons had been enlarged.

From their long experience on Japanese boats, these Aborigines built up a perception of their skippers as cunning, resourceful, and able to outwit with ease the government patrol vessels which were constantly pressing them over illegal recruitment. Unlike European captains, the Japanese are remembered for honouring agreements to return crews to their home shores after an agreed period of service. Though they were hard in their demands

for a full day's work ('from sun up to sun down') they were fair in their treatment of crew and scrupulously honest in payment. Pay-off time at the beginning of the monsoons brought money, goods, food, and hard liquor as a bonus for services rendered. Most importantly, the Japanese were not 'flash' (that is, proud or pretentious): they ate and slept with Aborigines and respected Aboriginal knowledge of coasts, weather and bushfoods. Europeans, on the other hand, had a reputation for breaking agreements and cheating Aborigines out of rightfully-earned pay. Moreover, they could be 'cheeky', or dangerous when annoyed. Japanese skills at sailing the luggers were legendary. George Rocky described a voyage he made under a well-known Japanese captain known as Kusima:

We left that mainland from Lockhart and passed that main Barrier Reef. He just kept going *kaaway* [east]. He just watched that sky all day and all night. Every now and again he would tell the helmsman, "little bit port" or "little bit starboard", or "hold him". We were right outside now in deep water and we didn't stop, just kept going. He would alter course a little bit this way, little bit that way. Three days and three nights we kept going like this, never stop. The fourth day came up and that captain said: "Right, I am going to lie down and sleep now. Bye and bye you will see land come up. Wake me when you see it". That afternoon, land came up in front of us, and we dropped anchor so everybody could sleep properly. We were right over in the Solomons. That Japanee captain just had a compass on the boat, no maps, nothing else. You can't beat the Japanee on a boat, they were too smart for that one!

Referring to another trip, George Rocky told of a pursuit by a government vessel, a drama which must have been enacted many times.

This one was before that war, the first one. We were sailing out from Hinchinbrook Island. That government steamer came up and tried to catch us, but that Japanee captain said: "Put on all the sail!" He took over the tiller from one Aboriginal man and took the boat right inside, right up close to the beach in the shallow water, reef everywhere. That steamer couldn't come inside, it just stayed outside and watched us. Night time came and we hid in one bay. Next morning, all clear, so we went outside again, but that steamer was right there waiting for us! Right! We raced him now, we took off and ran for that main Barrier and that steamer was right behind us. But he couldn't catch that lugger, it was famous for speed. By and by we came to the main Barrier, reefs everywhere there. That Japanee started to sail right up next to the reefs and that steamer couldn't come up. We were scared! The steamer was afraid of the reefs, but our captain knew them. He knew all the reefs and channels, and he watched the tide. When it started to drop he ran through a channel into a big lagoon. The steamer couldn't follow. All it could do was sail on the other side of the reef. We went from one lagoon into another lagoon, like that all day, and that steamer just watched us from outside. Next day we went into other lagoons and kept going like that. The steamer couldn't follow. We all had a good laugh and waved it goodbye. I don't know what that government boat was chasing us for. Must be that Japanee captain did something wrong, but he was too smart for those whitefellers on the steamer!

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Japanese men are said to have learned the Aboriginal dialects of the Lockhart area and some of the older Lockhart men professed a knowledge of the Japanese language. By the 1970s this seemed to consist mainly of nouns or their versions of common Japanese phrases used on the boat. The words remembered by the old lugger men are listed below. Their rendering is given first, then the Japanese form and its translation.

ABORIGINAL		JAPANESE	
TRANSCRIPTION	MEANING	POSSIBLE FORM	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
<i>ikuramu</i>	we go	<i>iku</i>	go
<i>irati</i>	boat runs	?	
<i>umay</i>	woman	<i>omae?</i>	you (as used by men to women) perhaps also from delicious or good in Japanese
<i>churumpu</i>	black man	<i>kurombō</i>	blackman
<i>churuchuru</i>	child	?	
<i>sagi</i>	any drink	<i>saké</i>	saké (Japanese fermented drink)
<i>kuyima</i>	come back	<i>koi ima</i>	come now
<i>tuning</i>	trochus shell	<i>tōnen</i>	trochus
<i>ma nandu uki nu</i>	big one	<i>ma nanto ōki no</i>	what a large ... (ōki — big, large)
<i>ukuyti</i>	hold course	<i>yukute</i>	course
<i>ma ami nandu ukinu</i>	big rain comes	<i>ma ame nanto ōkino</i>	what a big rain comes (ame — rain)
<i>subu</i>	small boy	?	
<i>misakuru</i>	eat food	<i>meshi kurau</i>	eat food (meshi — rice/food kurau — eat)
<i>atama</i>	head of a person	<i>atama</i>	head
<i>namaku</i>	trepang	<i>namako</i>	trepang
<i>kami</i>	turtle	<i>kame</i>	turtle
<i>namas</i>	specific Japanese cuisine	<i>namasu?</i>	raw and vinegar — Japanese for pickling fish and vegetables in vinegar

There is one Island style dance performed to Japanese words and phrases which imitates the actions of pulling in the anchor, and putting up the sail. Another Island style song, called the 'Three Languages' song, has words in the local *Kuuku ya'u* dialect (shown unmarked), in Japanese (shown in round brackets), and in 'Torres Strait' language (shown in square brackets):

ngana nyi'i pirra kalnkinmana ngu'ula kani kakalangganu (kura kura
kura tatayana) payina (saka tanama kuwanga ruwa) [nori nori ampa
wirimu sata wirimu nori nori]

The words are translated in English as 'we come from the outside reef, big mob of people sit up there, on the shore'.

Attempts at the Japanese language never failed to bring great amusement to Lockhart River audiences especially when they were accompanied by exaggerated face and arm movements, said to be a vital part of Japanese instructions. Japanese language is thought to be 'funny', and Aborigines were quick to note Japanese mispronunciation of Aboriginal and English words:

They got a funny talk those Japanee. They can't say those English words properly. Might be they want to say 'Lockhart', like that. Well, they say 'Rockhart', something like that. They can't loosen the tongue, they speak little bit deep, can't lighten him.

Apart from noting such behavioural idiosyncrasies Lockhart River people always comment on the physical appearance of Japanese. They are said to have been recognisable at a great distance by their short muscular bowed legs and thickset torsos. The absence of body hair was invariably noted. The Japanese are credited with great physical strength for their height, comparable with the famed Torres Strait Islanders. The Japanese earned their name *ku'unkulu* ('deep eyes') from the fact that their eyes did not protrude from the facial plane, unlike Aborigines and Europeans. Japanese are believed to possess insatiable sexual appetites, proof of which was to be found in the past through their constant desire for young Aboriginal girls as bed companions and through the presence at Thursday Island of a Japanese brothel which accepted Aboriginal customers. Here, it is said, Japanese women performed astonishing sexual services hitherto unknown to Aboriginal men.¹⁰ Clearly, from the Aboriginal perspective, all Asians, in particular the Japanese, had special knowledge and 'medicines' to attract sexual partners and to extend potency. During my visits I was constantly asked about Japanese or Chinese 'chemists' in southern towns, and whether special elixirs could be obtained from them to increase the flagging potency of male pensioners. Such preparations, said to have been encountered in luggering days, are believed to be far more effective for all kinds of ills than either local 'bush medicines' or European drugs. Even today the considerable beach litter left by passing shipping traffic is carefully examined for containers labelled in Asian scripts. Where contents remain, these are carefully examined by old lugger men who attempt to identify their possible 'use'. Stings from poisonous stonefish and stingrays are still treated in 'Japanee style' by applying a poultice of heated dry rice grains to the affected area: Lockhart people say that this is the only effective way to reduce pain quickly and stop the victim from 'singing out'.

The Japanese influence at Lockhart River is most immediately visible in household cuisine. Rice, now a staple food in the community, is always cooked 'Japanee' way. First it is washed to remove dust and then it is covered with water to the depth, above the grains, of the middle joint of the middle finger. The rice is then boiled until all moisture is evaporated and only the cooked grains remain. Another food item said to have originated from contact with Japanese is a preparation of small hot chillies pickled in vinegar. The chillies, from bushes grown around local houses, are said to have come from seeds obtained from Torres Strait Islanders, who in turn obtained them from Japanese. This fiercely hot preparation is eaten as an accompaniment to rice and meat. The ability of older men to eat large quantities of it without visible emotion is a result of lugger experience. Most favoured of all items from the Japanese cuisine is *namas* (identified as a Japanese word) or pickled raw fish. Thin lateral slices of such predatory fishes as mackerel are placed in a dish of vinegar with slices of onion for some fifteen minutes until the flesh turns opaque. It is then eaten without further preparation. Soy sauce may be added when available.

Green ginger, garlic and soy sauce are still favourite condiments used to flavour turtle and dugong meat. All of these, as distinct from curry powder, are said to be Japanese in origin. Old lugger men retain their dexterity with the

10 See Evans 1972:48-9 for details of 'Yokohama', the Japanese brothel at Thursday Island which catered for 'coloureds'. See also Sissons 1977 for a detailed account of Japanese prostitutes in Australia.

yuku tyu'atyu ('small sticks') or chopsticks said to have been the only eating implement available on the luggers. These old men show considerable pride in demonstrating their skill, and recall that acquisition of this expertise was made harder by the fact that Japanese chopsticks, unlike those of the Chinese, were pointed. The old lugger men also remember that the Japanese relished Aboriginal foods cooked in earth ovens, and took an instant liking to the traditional preparation of cooked balls of stingray meat soaked in the liver oil, a great delicacy for coastal Aboriginal communities on Cape York Peninsula.

All of these beliefs and practices suggest that there was considerable intimacy in the association of Japanese and Europeans in this part of Cape York Peninsula. Both groups obviously found rewards in a mutual dependence while their opportunities were circumscribed by the opinions and activities of European colonists. The older people of Lockhart River have preserved a recollection of a wartime incident which seems to acknowledge the qualitative difference in their relations with Japanese and Europeans. They are unaware that European fears of Aboriginal disloyalty during the second World War were widespread, and largely hysterical.¹¹ They simply recount their memories of the days in the early 1940s when Japanese invasion of Cape York seemed certain. European staff at the Lockhart River Mission departed hurriedly, abandoning their charges (presumably on military orders). But, before leaving, the superintendent collected all firearms owned by Aboriginal residents and dumped them out at sea. They were told the reason: to prevent them giving guns to Japanese soldiers who, the Europeans believed, would almost certainly be accompanied by the friendly lugger masters of the pre-war period.

From their long and varied experience of Asians in Northeastern Cape York local Aborigines obtained information on alien lifestyles which were quite different from that of Europeans. The Chinese and Japanese examples mentioned here point up the differences within the general category of Asians. Such experiences served to provide additional yardsticks by which to measure differences between Aboriginal and European existence. Kolig has observed that Aboriginal people, in the press of contact, manage to retain an identity by conceptualising differences between themselves and others. In the Kimberleys of Western Australia they:

come to orient their existence mainly in relation to Western society and they link themselves directly, though not kindly, with it. Partly by their own insight, partly by the import of ideas mainly from southern urbanised Aborigines, Aborigines begin to define themselves now mainly by comparison with Europeans.¹²

In this part of Cape York Peninsula the variety of experience in the process of long-term alien intrusion has meant that models other than European have been available, and indeed partly adopted, in the process of adjustment. For many of the older Lockhart men their experience with the Japanese far outweighed their experience with Europeans, though the Europeans were the controlling agents of settlement. I have suggested elsewhere that the multi-ethnic experience, together with the absence of a single sudden displacement

11 Hall 1980:87-90.

12 Kolig 1977:48.

from territories (as happened in much of the pastoral area of Australia) provided Lockhart River Aborigines with the opportunities to make adjustments to the pressures brought by land and sea contact.¹³ The riches sought by these aliens lay in the short-term extraction of resources, and in temporary seasonal exploitation of Aboriginal labour. The land itself was not a resource to the Asian intruders, but only a base for the soon-gathered minerals and marine products. Asians and Europeans, though both invaders of a sort, were in Aboriginal eyes enemies to each other and, in the case of Japanese, fellow victims of an authoritarian European government. Chinese, though only encountered sporadically, seem to have provided Aborigines with a target against which to measure their superiority in a world which ranked Aborigines close to the bottom of the status hierarchy. Like the Torres Strait Islanders who experienced a similar range of contact, the Lockhart River people were 'worldlywise' in comparison with other Aboriginal groups to the south at that time, where contact experiences were narrower and more geographically contained. Certainly for old Lockhart River men today, life in the modern settlement away from the beach, with its stifling routine of work, drinking and gambling under European administration, seems a good deal greyer and duller than it was in luggering days.

In conclusion, Barth's comments on ethnic distinctiveness have some relevance. For him, ethnic *boundaries* are the central elements in such distinctiveness, not the 'cultural stuff' they enclose.¹⁴ It seems likely that where Aboriginal identity is not under direct attack the multiplication of such ethnic boundaries in the one area at the one time through multi-ethnic experience can help to define and strengthen local Aboriginal identity to resist later attack. The 'cultural stuff' of the Lockhart River community has altered in material and behavioural forms over a century of contact, yet their ethnic boundaries are proudly maintained. In this area Asians have played their part in building up Aboriginal defences against modern assaults, by Europeans, upon a distinctive and localised identity.

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