

# Social Dynamics of Japanese Immigrants in Aru Islands from Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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## Abstract

From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, Japanese migrants frequently chose the Aru Islands (Maluku) as a destination for “work away from home.” Their appearance was unique compared to other Japanese migrants who arrived at the same time in other parts of Indonesia. The discovery of high-quality pearls in the Aru waters attracted Japanese migrants to the area. This research aims to trace back how they lived and worked in a remote area that is geographically and culturally distinct from Japan. This research, which primarily utilized data from Japan, the Netherlands, and Indonesia, demonstrates a balance of harmony and conflict in the social dynamics of Japanese settlers in the Aru Islands. Both occurred internally within the Japanese immigrant community and in their interactions with other Aru inhabitants. One aspect that plays a significant role in their social interactions is their socioeconomic class and ethnicity, shaped by history.

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## Abstrak

### Dinamika Sosial Imigran Jepang di Kepulauan Aru dari Akhir Abad ke-19 hingga Awal Abad ke-20

Pada akhir abad ke-19 sampai awal abad ke-20 Kepulauan Aru, Maluku merupakan sebuah wilayah yang banyak didatangi oleh imigran Jepang. Keberadaan mereka berbeda dengan keberadaan imigran Jepang di wilayah lain di Indonesia pada masa yang sama. Mutiara yang berkualitas yang menjadi kekayaan perairan Aru memang menjadi daya tarik kedatangan imigran Jepang. Kajian ini menelusuri kedatangan mereka, dan bagaimana mereka menjalani kehidupan di wilayah yang secara geografis dan kultur sangat berbeda dengan Jepang. Dengan menggunakan sumber dari Jepang, Belanda, dan Indonesia, kajian ini menemukan bahwa dalam dinamika kehidupan sosial imigran Jepang di Kepulauan Aru, ada harmoni dan konflik. Keduanya terjadi baik di dalam komunitas imigran Jepang sendiri, maupun dalam relasi mereka dengan komunitas lain di Aru. Salah satu faktor yang cukup berpengaruh dalam relasi sosial mereka adalah kelas sosial dan etnisitas yang dibentuk oleh perjalanan sejarah.

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## Kata Kunci:

dinamika sosial; imigran  
Jepang; Kepulauan Aru

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## 1 Introduction

Japanese activities in Indonesia during the colonial period are themes those remains relevant topic of study to this day. Many scholars have applied economic, social, and political approaches to analyze Japan-Indonesia relations during the colonial period (Post, 1996).

Looking at the various existing studies, Japan's presence in Java and Sumatra, particularly related to economic activities, is a dominating theme. Nonetheless, from further searching the data, a study of Japanese in Indonesia during the colonial period indicated that outside the two regions, the activities of Japanese immigrants were quite prominent.

The presence of Japanese Immigrants outside of Java/Madura and Sumatra, which were considered the Outer Provinces – located in the eastern part of Indonesia – was not too significant. However, they were actively engaged in specific fields that will neither found in Java nor Sumatra, particularly in fisheries, pearl cultivation, and copra (dried coconut kernel for oil) production. The progress of Japanese businesses in the Outer Provinces had even attracted the concern of the Dutch, which eventually drove the Governor-General in 1912 to implement a policy aimed at preventing Japanese investors have a stronger footing in the region (Post, 1996, p. 309). Post also stated that before the First World War, Japanese investments centered in the east, namely copra in Minahasa and Sangir Talaud Islands, pearls, and deep-sea fisheries in the Aru Islands.

The presence of Japanese in the eastern parts of Indonesia had indicated by researchers who had analyzed the spread of Japanese throughout the entire Indonesian region since 1868 (Shiraishi & Shiraishi, 1998). Shiraishi has not examined the presence of the Japanese people in the eastern parts of Indonesia in a specific study; he has at least provided information that east Indonesia is a region that once held an important part of Japan's operations in the southern region (*Nan'you*).

In Taisho 4 (1915), an association of the Japanese community (*Nihonjinkai*) had established in Manado, in Makassar (1918), in Buton (1920), and at Mongondow in 1933. In these associations, they were people who had business in the fisheries (mostly), small-scale economic business, and agribusiness (Matsuda, 2010). A Japanese school was established in Manado (1936) with less than ten students attending. Until 1939, there were 70 Japanese companies and 29 retailers in Sulawesi and Maluku (Post, 1996, p. 309). In Dobo and the surrounding areas, there were quite a substantial amount of Japanese immigrants totaling 155 individuals, while in Halmahera, there were 15 people. In Aru Islands, Japanese immigrants exported pearls, whereas in Makassar, in addition to pearls, they also exported shells (Astuti, 2008, p. 121).

The Japanese presence in Aru Islands is a specific phenomenon that differed from other eastern Indonesian regions. Mullins narrates the history of Aru as a part of maritime history by considering it a 'trade war' arena for various countries, particularly England, the Netherlands, Australia, China, and Japan (Mullins, 1997, pp. 30–39). The trade commodities, which mostly come from maritime activities, were situated at the center of discussion; and Mullins chronologically examined Aru as an inseparable part of activities abroad, namely Torres Strait Islands (North Australia). The approach used by Mullins can see the dynamics in the Arafura sea area as a unified whole; the sea saw as a means that unites economic and social activities in the region. Mullins not only saw the conflict between the Dutch, British, and Australians over the land for pearl hunting in the Aru-Islands, and the trade network between them but also tried to understand the response of the local community and government to this foreign trade invasion. In addition to looking at this issue as a reaction to

commercial competition, Mullins also observed it within the complex political context, wherein authority was often ambiguous and less stringent.

Meanwhile, Hagerdal explained in his study that the dynamics in Aru Islands are not strictly limited to trade issues. There are also social and religious aspects involved (Hagerdal, 2019, pp. 480–482). The non-hierarchical structure of society, which tends to be egalitarian, is the hallmark of Aru compared to other surrounding areas. Hagerdal observed interactions between colonizer groups and indigenous people, not only in colonial policies but also in strategy choices among the communities. Furthermore, Hagerdal also analyzed the economic channels between Aru and the outside world beyond European control; when observed deeper, what is meant by the outside world here, is Australia.

The presence of the Japanese community in the Aru Islands can be considered a relatively new topic of study. In his research, Vickers (2019) explained that in the early 20th century, Aru Islands had extended as international traffic areas. Even Dobo, as the capital city, had developed as a boomtown. Vickers analyzed the presence of Japanese immigrants by using records made by a colonial government official named Van Sluys. The historical record was titled *Dobo Ervaringen* (1916), and it is a source that can mutually complement the Japanese sources as the one presented by Utsumi Aiko (Murai et al., 2016). Utsumi not only describes the conditions in Dobo, but she also looked into Kushimoto (Wakayama Prefecture), the hometown of most Japanese immigrants living in the Aru Islands. This prefecture is an area with residents who have diving skills to look for pearls. They went to Aru to get pearls of better quality. Local governments also benefit from the activities of the pearl divers because remittances from immigrants can be a source of regional income. Therefore, the government provides convenience for its citizens who go to Aru (Murai et al., 2016, p. 121).

Among the numerous studies on Japanese immigrants in Aru, most of what emerges are anthropological studies and trading activities, especially pearls. Based on resources from Japan and the Netherlands was shown that concerning other ethnicities, Japanese immigrants have a certain tendency. There are problems of racial arrogance, class conflict, and other social conflicts that accompany their daily life in Aru. Using an approach to social history, the study of this article will explore the dynamics of the life of Japanese immigrants concerning other ethnic groups in the Aru Islands.

## 2 Methods

This research uses the socio-historical approach, which observes social phenomena and then describes them with social science theories (Kartodirdjo, 1993, pp. 4, 120–125). In the social history approach, it is crucial to look at the dynamics of people's lives. The interactions among Japanese immigrants and interactions with other ethnic groups in Aru are dynamics to be discussed. In addition, the harmony and conflicts that transpired will also explain as part of the dynamics.

The explanation of these various dynamics will see as related to the capital owned by Japanese immigrants. Capital referred to here is not limited only to the economy but also to cultural and social capital (Haryatmoko, 2016). This study uses prominent sources from Japan and the Netherlands, obtained directly at the National Diet Library in Tokyo and through internet access. The sources used included:

The sources used included:

1. *Kaigai Zairyu Honpoujin Shokugyoubetsu Jinko Chousa Ikken* (survey on Japanese citizens living abroad by occupation). This record had issued by the Japanese Foreign Ministry in 1909 and 1912.
2. *Imin Chousa Houkoku: Ranryou Higashi Indo Toubu Shotou* (Survey report of immigrants in the east Dutch East Indies), issued by the Japanese Foreign Ministry in 1914.
3. *Nanyou o Mokuteki ni* (heading towards the region of the southern sea), a record made by a Japanese visiting Eastern Indonesia in 1913.
4. *Nanyou Shotou Junkouki* (Voyage to islands on the southern seas), a record made by an internship staff at the Japanese Embassy during a visit to the Eastern Indonesian regions. This record had issued in 1914.
5. *Dobo Ervaringen* (1916), a note of the experiences of a colonial government official in the Aru Islands, A.G.H van Sluys. This record had released in a journal titled *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* in 1916.

In addition to written sources, oral sources had used for tracing the descendants of Japanese immigrants Dobo, residents of Aru who still have memories of the existence of the Japanese, and several places where traces of Japan still can be seen. Interviews are a crucial method to do because they will be able to reveal facts that are not obtained from written sources.

The third step is verification of sources, had done by cross-checking the various sources acquired. The validity of sources obtained through online media had to trace through the institution that issued them. In the verification process, dubious sources were not used, despite supporting other existing sources.

### 3 Results and Discussion

Aru Islands is a region on the eastern tip of the Maluku Islands, which in the early 20th century was appropriately dubbed as an international trading area. At the time, Aru, particularly Dobo, had been teeming with trade activities involving various ethnicities from nearby islands and even farther areas. Aru Islands itself is located in the southeastern part of Maluku, which borders Papua (the bird's head of present-day West Papua Province) to the north, the western shores of Central Papua to the east, the Kei islands to the west, and the Arafura Sea to the south. The Aru Islands, which have an area of approximately 8225 km<sup>2</sup>, possess around 180 islands (Spriggs et al., 2006, p. 4) that are distributed in the "Frontshore" area located on the western side and the "Backshore" area located on the eastern side. There are six major islands in the cluster of islands in Aru, namely Kola, Wokam, Kobroor, Koba, Maekor, and Trangan. Indigenous inhabitants and traders refer to these six islands as "tana-busar" (mainland).

The islands distributed throughout the "Frontshore" area include Buar, Wasir, Ujir, Wamar, and Babi islands, while those located in the "Backshore" area are Watulei, Tabar, Penambulai, Baun, Barakan, Tuturjuring, Workai, and Jin islands. Dobo, which was, historically, the center of trade activities – and is the regional capital of Aru Islands Regency today - is located in Wamar Island, which directly faces the island of Wokam. Warilau is the northernmost island, while the southernmost island is the island of Enu. Presently, Aru is, administratively speaking, a regency in the Maluku Province bearing the official name Aru Islands Regency. Figure 1 is the geographical location of the Aru Islands as a part of the Maluku Islands territory, and Figure 2 shows that Aru has become an independent regency since 2003.



Figure 1: Map from Atlas van Nederlandsch: Oost- en West-Indie



Figure 2: Map from Aru Islands.blogspot.com

Looking at its geographical location, the frontshore area is a skipping stone for anyone intending to enter and exit Aru Islands from the west side. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Ujir Island was a significantly lively area, particularly with trade activities. The travel log of a VOC (*Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie* – Dutch East Indies Company) leader called Adriaan Dortsman and priest Jacobus Vertrecht in 1646 states that sailing ships from Malay, Makassar, and Java had already been engaging in trade activities in the island of Ujir. Aside from bringing in commodities from their

respective place of origin, the ships also brought goods from Aru on their return home. The trade activities in Ujir continued to the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Schapper, 2018, pp. 33–35).

The backshore area, otherwise known locally as “*blakang tana*” located on the eastern side had often been contrasted with the frontshore area, which was deemed a cosmopolitan area, while the backshore was considered an inland area (Spyer, 2000, p. 5). The backshore area was not dominated by trade activities but by pearling activities instead, which highly correlated with similar activities occurring in the group of islands around the Torres Strait (the northern part of Australia adjacent to Papua New Guinea), particularly on the island of Thursday (Mullins, 1997, pp. 30–39). Figure 3 shows the location of the Aru Islands in the Arafura Sea and the surrounding areas, including the northern part of Australia.

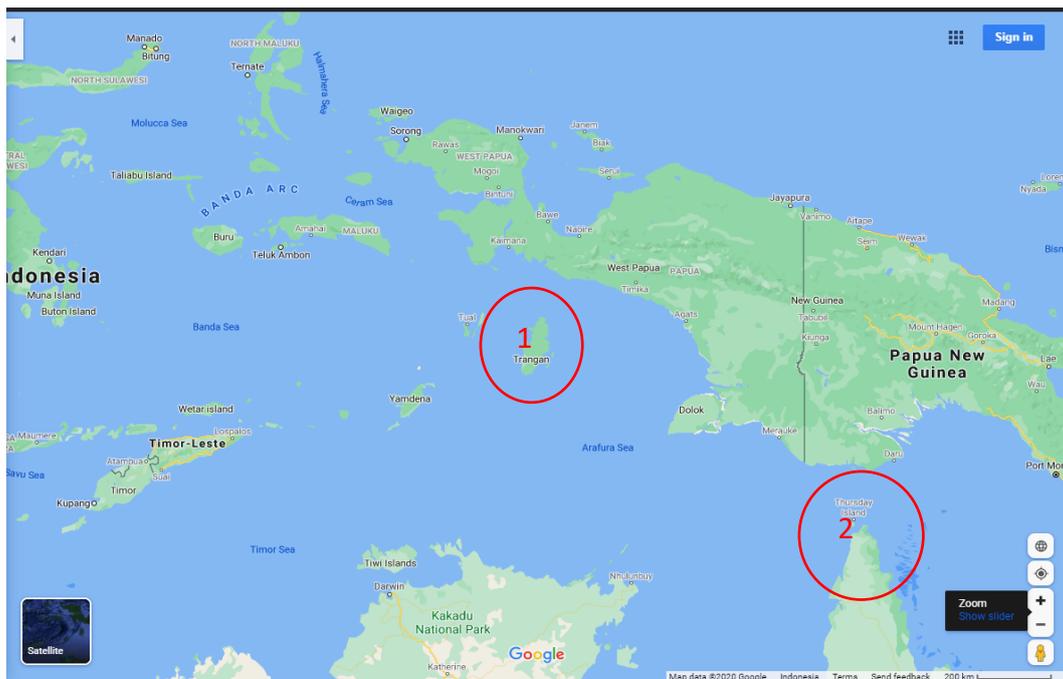


Figure 3: Map of 1) Aru Islands; 2) North Australia  
Source: Google Map

### 3.1 Demographics of Aru Islands

During the colonial period, as recorded in *Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indie* 31 January 1890, number 46, Aru Islands was administered under the Amboina residence (residential) with Dobo (on Wamar island) as its capital. Consequently, Dobo required approval from Ambon for any issues occurring in the region. The colonial administration also assigned a district officer/inspector working as a controller (*controleur*) with an office located in Dobo. One of the officials assigned in Aru was A.G.H van Sluys, who became the governor of Aceh (1918-1925) following his appointment in Aru. In 1916, van Sluys published a report concerning various events during his tenure as *controleur* in Aru Islands. Another official assigned to Aru Islands was A. Balk, who ended his position in 1937.

Aru Islands was a region with a multiethnic population. People referred to as indigenous inhabitants were usually those who were coming from Papua and the *Blakang Tana* (backshore) area. They identify themselves into two groups, the Oersiwa living in the northern part and the Oerlima living in the southern part. In addition to indigenous inhabitants, Aru Islands are also inhabited by newcomers originating from the surrounding areas, particularly Banda, Seram, Kei, Java, and Makassar. These newcomers provide various supplies for the daily needs of Aru communities in the

form of food, clothing, iron, and gold. Aru communities exchanged these daily necessities with sago, coconuts, assorted nuts, lories/lorikeets (Nuri), and birds of paradise (Cendrawasih). In this multiethnic region, sixteen different languages were used, including Malay, the most popular lingua franca.

The multiethnic population mostly resided in the frontshore area. A population census conducted by the Dutch colonial government in 1920 recorded that, at the time, the population of the Aru Islands amounted to 17,644 inhabitants comprising 17,299 natives (inlanders), 75 Europeans, 208 Chinese, 18 Arabians, and the remaining 44 coming from other ethnic backgrounds. A decade later – i.e., 1930 – the colonial government carried out another population survey, and the population of the Aru Islands was recorded at 18,176 inhabitants consisting of 17,309 natives, 171 Europeans, 618 Chinese, and 78 other ethnicities.

Meanwhile, a handover report made by the controller of Aru Islands, A. Balk, who had completed his assignment on 7 July 1937, states that Aru Islands, which various ethnic groups inhabited, had approximately 17,000 population consisting of:

1. Aru natives.
2. Newcomers originating from the surrounding areas, particularly from Timor, Tanimbar, Kei, and Ambon.
3. Foreigners comprised 650 Chinese, 115 Japanese (78 men, while the remaining were women and children), 4 Filipinos, 16 Europeans (from the Netherlands, England, Denmark, Austria, and Australia), and several Arabians. Interracial marriages were not uncommon in Aru. As witnessed by Wallace in Dobo, a Makassar man had an Aru wife, a Javanese man with an Aru wife, and children who were a mix of Malay, Dutch, Chinese, and Papuan ethnicities. In short, it can be stated that according to Wallace, Aru Islands is a region that has long accepted social diversity. Aside from physical attributes, Wallace also argued that numerous syllables are similar to the Portuguese language (Wallace, 2000, p.199).

### 3.2 The Presence of Japanese Immigrants in the Aru Islands

The earliest footstep of Japanese immigrants in the Aru Islands was traced back to 1893 (Meiji 26) when 10 Japanese from Broome (Western Australia) arrived in Dobo (Murai et al., 2016, pp. 127–128). They came using five to six small vessels, and four out of the ten died during the journey. The following year, in 1894, 20 Japanese were recorded to reside in Dobo. Aside from them, there were other 9 Japanese who came to Dobo as part of a schooner owned by a renowned pearl entrepreneur from Australia, James Clark. Ten years later, specifically in 1904 (Meiji 37), a businessman named Nagano Kakuju built a ship in Dobo and employed four workers to collect shells. They subsequently provided information that there were 24 other Japanese doing the same type of work but had quit the following year (Murai et al., 2016, p. 128).

A foreign business internship staff at the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture and Trade named Sano Minoru had journeyed through the islands in the southern seas (*Nanyou*) from 1906 to 1909; one of the islands visited was Dobo. He reported that about 700 Japanese in Dobo, most of whom came from the Kishu region (present-day Wakayama Prefecture), stayed in Dobo at that time. In his second visit, which was in 1910, Sano also made a stop in Dobo. Although he did not mention the number of Japanese living there, he did witness that the city of Dobo still had a considerable amount of Japanese population, not unlike what he saw during his initial visit (Sano, 1914, pp. 122–123).

In the subsequent years, the presence of Japanese immigrants attracted the attention of the Batavian Consulate, which opened in 1909. In the survey report on the Japanese nationals living in eastern islands (Kaigai Zairyu Honpoujin Shokugyoubetsu Jinko Chousa Ikken) dated 31 December 1909, the consul, Someya Shigeaki, reported to the assistant of the Minister of Foreign Affairs named Komura Jutaroo, about the presence of Japanese immigrants in various regions throughout Indonesia. Dobo is one of the regions written in the report, and at the time, as many as 155 Japanese immigrants were recorded, consisting of 96 men and 61 women. This number was the largest in the Maluku and Papua regions (i.e., Aru Islands, Ternate, Ambon, Manokwari).

A consul of Batavia named Ukita Satoji, in his report on 19 March 1913, stated that while visiting Dobo, he found there were 350 Japanese working as pearl collectors, 100 Japanese working in the formal sector, and the remaining working as prostitutes or mistresses of foreigners. In the following year's report, Taisho 3 (1914) states that the total Japanese population had increased to 481, wherein 349 of them worked as pearl divers and ship owners, and 11 worked as prostitutes and mistresses. Most Japanese immigrants work for CTC (Celebes Trading Company), a company that has concessions in Aru waters. Japanese divers became widely used workers, as their skills were unmatched. The pearl oyster hunting in the waters of Aru could not have run well without the presence of workers from Japan.

After World War I, the number of Japanese immigrants had decreased; the data from the handover report in 1937 indicates that the number of Japanese nationals in Dobo totaled 115 individuals consisting of 78 men above 16 years old and women and children. After World War I, this decline occurred when the CTC reduced its operations and subsequently discontinued them. They repatriate many of their workers to Japan or withdraw them back to Thursday Island, Australia. (Murai, et.al., 2016, p.130).

As mentioned above, the Dutch colonial government conducted censuses in 1920 and 1930. Nonetheless, both censuses do not specifically mention the number of Japanese immigrants in the Aru Islands. Chinese and Arabians had categorized in their group, but this was not the case for Japanese immigrants. It could be that Japanese immigrants include the category of other Asian residents.

When we observe the population, the presence of Japanese immigrants was quite considerable, particularly in the first decade of the 20th century. There are specific reasons that made these immigrants decide to leave their origin. According to Everett S. Lee, two factors trigger a person to migrate, a push factor finds in their hometown and a pull factor in the destination area (Lee, 2000, p. 236). In terms of migration methods, there were legal and illegal channels. These were also taken place by Japanese immigrants who entered Indonesia during the colonial period.

The main push factor identified in Japan was the issue of poverty since most of the immigrants were coming from dry arid regions struck by disasters. Those who went to the Aru Islands, around 80 percent of them, came from the Wakayama Prefecture, particularly from a coastal region called Kushimoto. This region was an impoverished area, and many people living there had to go abroad to seek livelihood out of necessity. A Kushimoto resident who went to Aru named Hayashi Haruhiko said that the hometown is a "nanimo nai machi" which means a city of nothing. He left for Aru in 1925. At the time, men in Kushimoto went abroad to seek employment was even stated that: "a man could not call a man unless he works abroad" (Murai, et.al., 2016, p.120, 134). Since the Meiji period, the Japanese government actively disseminated propaganda about the Nanshin-ron doctrine, and it was used as a "push factor" for the poor to seek employment abroad. The

government also provides a great latitude to labor recruitment companies to organize the departure of the immigrants in the order they leave the country legally.

Nevertheless, this did not guarantee the absence of human trafficking since regions - especially in Amakusa and Shimabara in Kyushu- numerous women fell victim to these brokers for labor seekers. Women who were victims of human trafficking have employed as prostitutes abroad, and they were called *Karayuki-san* (Pangastoeti, 2009, p. 139). The city of Dobo, in the culmination of Japanese immigrant presence, is inseparable from the existence of the *karayuki-san*. The push factor mentioned would not be able to mobilize individuals to migrate unless supported by a pull factor. For the Japanese immigrants, pearling was a key pull factor that brought them to Aru. Indeed, the Aru Islands have other commodities that sell value, including cassowaries, paradise birds, and tripangs, but these commodities are not very attractive to Japan. The Aru Islands' backshore area, specifically Jedan Island, Karang Island, and Barakai Island, was famous as one of the producers of the best mother of pearl in the world. The pearl grains were compact and durable, and it is such quality that is sought after by the world market, especially in the European and American markets (Egawa, 1913, p. 124; Mullins, 2001, p. 6). The people of Aru themselves initially did not realize that pearls are a high-value commodity.

They only consumed the flesh of the shell on account of its exquisite taste, or they would exchange them with Chinese or Buginese for food products, daily necessities, and *sopi* (a type of liquor). When the Dutch first arrived in Aru, the natives did not sell pearls as they were unaware of the value, but the Dutch had changed pearlings into small businesses. The Dutch subsequently sold the pearls to the European market and gained substantial profit (*Algemeen Handelsblad Voor Nederlandsche-Indie*, 22 June 1933). The natives of the Aru Islands realized that pearls were a highly valued product when many people from Australia started to come looking for pearls and selling them as a trade commodity.

The second wave of Japanese immigrants was observed in Dobo in the 1930s when the Japanese military entered the Southeast Asian regions (*Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 4 August 1936). They came to the Aru Islands driven more by the imperial assignment to carry out their mission of conquering the southern regions as disseminated in the *Nanshin-ron* propaganda. In this period, the presence of civil immigrants had started to decline because the Japanese government began sending their citizens working abroad back home in the aftermath of World War I. Dobo, dominated by trading activities before, became bustling with military activities even in 1943 also involved the United States destroying the Japanese troop headquarters in Dobo.

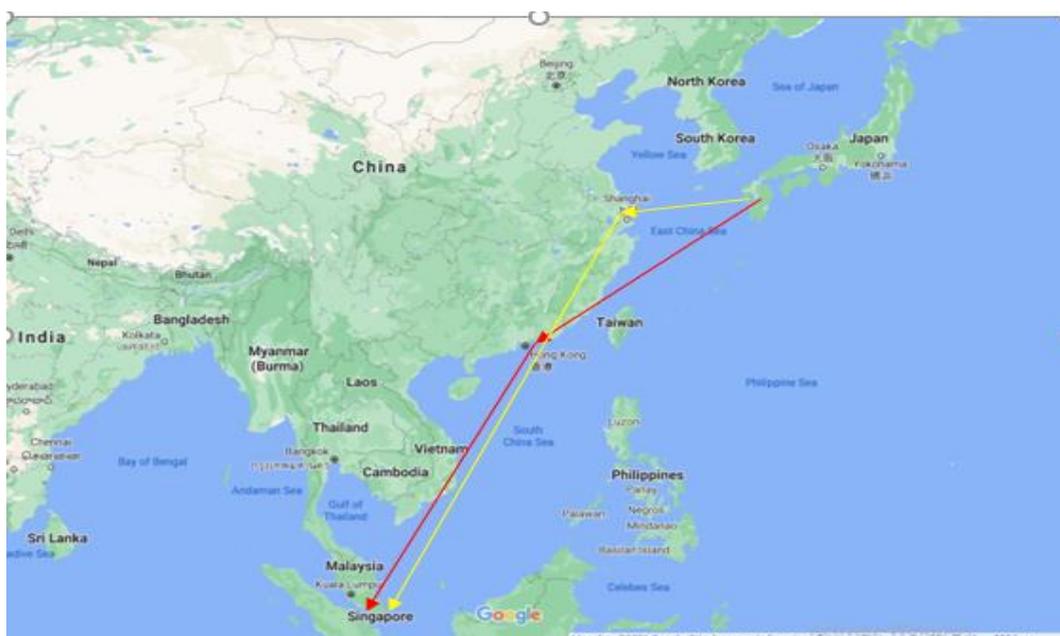
The keyword for the presence of Japanese immigrants in Dobo based on the push and pull factors were national interest (*kokueki*). The underlying doctrine was similar, namely *Nanshin-ron*, but actualization in the field was no longer the same once national interest developed. Aru Islands had an attractive appeal that served as a reason for Japanese nationals to come. Pearling had attracted the first wave of immigrants, while Aru's strategic location had attracted the second wave of immigrants. These two groups of Japanese immigrants had contributed to making the multiethnic social life in Aru even more dynamic.

### 3.3 Travel Routes to Aru Islands

In terms of legality, Japanese immigrants entering Indonesia at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century had separated into two categories, those entering legally and those entering illegally. Those who legally entered Indonesia consisted of workers who knew their

destination, and they had official documents signed by a foreign labor deployment company (*imin gaisha*). Illegal immigrants are victims of human trafficking, and most of them had employed as prostitutes or hard labor.

According to the records from the Diplomatic Record Office (*Diplomatic Report Office*, 1906), dated 13 June 1906, there were two routes that Japanese immigrants would typically take, which were Moji (Kita Kyuushu) or Kuchinotsu (Minami Shimabara) → Hongkong → to Singapore (see map, red line). Another route was Kobe (Hyogo) → Shanghai → Singapore (see map, yellow line). From Singapore, the immigrants were gone to Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi, to employ in various cities. Those who went to Aru Islands made a transit in Makassar as their final port before entering Dobo. Figure 4 is a map of the routes they would take. Figure 4 is a map of the routes they would take.



**Figure 4: Routes of Japanese immigrants to Indonesia at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century**

Aside from the routes above, Japanese immigrants who entered Dobo after previously living in Australia pursued the route opened up by Nippon Yusen in 1896. This route, called the Australian route, connected Yokohama and Kobe to Manila, Thursday Island, and Melbourne. Those entering Dobo from the Frontshore or western side were assumed to have gone through the Indonesia-Japan Route operated by Java China Japan Lijn twice a month.

In addition, there was also a regular monthly shipping route opened up by Nanyo Yusen Gumi in October 1912, connecting Kobe and Surabaya (Murai, et. al.,2016, p. 121).

### **3.4 Social Life Dynamics of Japanese Immigrants in the Aru Islands**

As mentioned above, pearls were the main attraction for the Japanese to come to Aru Islands. Most Japanese immigrants in Aru Islands engaged in activities relating to the pearl business. The pearl business was not only correlated with the buying and selling of pearls but also with efforts to obtain pearls. Japanese immigrants were involved in such pearling efforts, which included roles like ship owners, ship crews, and divers. When they initially came to Dobo in 1893, there was already a

pearl business managed by a local trader of Arabian descent named Said Baadilla. He collaborated with a businessman from Australia, James Clark. They worked together to get pearls in the waters of the Aru Islands since the consortium they established was able to secure a concession license from the Dutch East Indies government.

Many Japanese immigrants had employed in this activity; most of them were divers, tender operators (rescue rope restraints for divers working in the sea), and oxygen delivery machine operators for divers in the water (*kuruma mawashi*) (Murai et al. 2016, p. 128). In 1910, there were 500 Japanese working at the Celebes Trading Company (CTC), but this figure declined to 100 during the First World War as the consortium's activities decreased. Another source states that out of the 500 Japanese working at CTC, not all of them worked in Aru Islands. Some of them were employed as divers in a company owned by Said Baadilla in Buton, while 334 people worked in Dobo. Out of the 334 Japanese, 110 divers (*sensui otto*) and net casters (*amimochi*) each, and the rest were *kuruma mawashi*.

In addition to the pearl business, Japanese immigrants also owned many entertainment establishments, inns, restaurants and drinks, grocery stores, barbershops, and the woodworking industry (Hosaka, 1916). Resources from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also mentioned that Japanese immigrants grow vegetables. These businesses have carried out not only for their own needs but also for the needs of the local inhabitants and business interests.

The various activities carried out by Japanese immigrants led to social life in Aru- Particularly the Dobo - being dynamic. The dynamics had gained greater prominence when Japanese immigrants interacted with other ethnic groups. On the one hand, the characteristic of the Japanese as a reclusive nation made it difficult for them to interact with other community groups. When Japan underwent its political isolation policy (*Sakoku*) for over two hundred years, there was minimal contact with foreigners. The end of the isolation in 1854 did not necessarily make it easier for the Japanese to interact with foreigners. On the other hand, the multiethnic society in Aru compelled them to interact with people from various nations. The strengthening of Japan's position as a nation following its victory in the Sino-Japanese War (*Nisshin Sensou* of 1894-1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (*Nichirou Sensou* of 1904-1905), had also been crucial factors that influenced social relations among Japanese immigrants and other communities in Aru Islands.

The Japanese immigrants hailed from differing social class backgrounds. They were victims of human trafficking and were typically from the lower social class. Their lack of education and poor economic conditions had resulted in their easily conned by brokers promising employment (Morisaki, 1976, p.35). The presence in Aru significantly correlated with the ploys set up by the brokers. These immigrants groups are women employed as prostitutes in several brothels in Dobo (Sano, 1914, p. 307-315); they, who came to Aru through official procedures, worked in the pearl business and grocery stores (Murai, et.al., 2019, p. 128). Despite coming from a different social class, the Japanese had known to have difficulty mingling with other ethnicities. They stayed in groups in the eastern part of Dobo city. An immigrant named Hayashi Haruhiko, who returned to Japan, stated based on his recollection that the Japanese in Dobo did indeed live in residential compounds that were close to one another. They lived around the area of CTC, the tax office, and the police officer. They opened up various businesses in the compounds where they lived, including laundry businesses, grocery stores, coffee shops, and photography services (Murai, et al., 2016, p. 146).

Living in groups and operating various businesses are indeed Japanese-specific characteristics. A Dutch official in Dobo admitted to this. He said that although the Japanese were dangerous to the

Dutch and its colonies, it has confessed that they worked hard and diligently to survive wherever they lived (*De Indische Courant*, 1933). A well-known Japanese proverb states *kinrou wa bitoku* (hard work is a virtue), indicating the Japanese character relating to hard work. Nature, which does not necessarily provide them with abundant wealth, forces them to develop and utilize their self-potential to survive. Their travel to the Aru Islands is also an effort to develop their ability to explore natural resources in other countries.

While living life as immigrants in Aru, the Japanese have different social relations with other ethnicities. Within the Japanese community itself, social relations had influenced by hometown origin and social class. They tended to interact easily with those from the same village. There are at least three residential houses where they gather according to their hometown. In 1906, Japanese immigrants established *Doujinkai* (a kind of club), also commonly known as *Nihonjinkai* (The Japanese Association), i.e., an association that accommodates all Japanese immigrants regardless of social status. *Nihonjinkai* had established to improve the conditions of Japanese immigrants who were ill and help families of immigrants who died. In 1908, *Nihonjinkai* had expanded into an organization with offices and staff. Among the many *Nihonjinkai* found in Eastern Indonesia during the colonial period, the *Nihonjinkai* in Aru Islands was the first one founded in the region. (Murai et al, 2019, p. 128-129).

In the relationships with other ethnicities, Japanese immigrants had the closest with the Chinese. Indeed, when traced back to its historical roots, Japanese culture-including its culinary dishes-is much influenced by Chinese culture. The Japanese and Chinese work together in Aru of selling daily necessities, especially foodstuffs; *sembei* was one of the food products made by Japanese immigrants in Aru favored by the Chinese. On the other hand, the Chinese also provided Japanese immigrants with hard liquor. As we know, the Japanese are attached to their habit of drinking sake and the like. The alcoholic beverages circulating in Aru at the time were local and imported products. A diplomatic record issued in 1913 states that the colonial government had tightened the circulation of alcoholic beverages in Dobo's taverns as the habit of drinking often resulted in fights, even murder. The regulation made it difficult for Japanese nationals to get their hands on sake, beer, and other kinds of liquor. This condition had exploited by the Chinese to secretly sold those beverages to the Japanese (Hosaka, 1916, p. 894). The Chinese in Aru also provided food products that Japanese immigrants required, such as rice, oil, *udon*, salt, and flour. These food materials have been brought from Makassar, and the Japanese would trade them for sea cucumbers and other marine products obtained in the waters of Aru.

The social relationship of the Japanese immigrant in Aru is related to victory in the Sino-Japanese War (*Nisshin Sensou*, 1894-1895). Four years after that victory, specifically in 1899, Japan gained equal status with Caucasians. Japan achieved another success in the Russo-Japanese War (1894-1895). This series of events had instilled confidence among Japanese immigrants in Aru. They have risen in social status among nations in Asia. Their sense of self-confidence will be excessive when they feel disturbed or bothered. There was a particular incident where a Japanese immigrant with modest clothes opposed a Dutch colonial official in Dobo. The records issued by the Japanese Foreign Ministry in 1913 state that the Japanese are less likable because they often act arrogant, considering themselves first-class citizens. The position as a leading country in Asia was frequently disseminated as propaganda to immigrants throughout the entire region by embassies or consulates. Japanese missions abroad often conveyed to the immigrants that their presence abroad is for the sake of the emperor's glory and national interest. Accordingly, they should obey the central

government in Tokyo. Their presence abroad is temporary. Whether Tokyo beckons them home, they should comply. Such propaganda was duly complied with by the immigrants. Two days before the announcement of the Pacific War, most of the immigrants were summoned back home to Japan.



**Figure 5: Doka port in Trangan Island, one of the regions in the Aru Islands.**

**On the right-hand side, two women are seen wearing a kimono.**

**Source: Tropenmuseum (Collectie Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen)**

#### 4 Conclusion

High-quality pearl was one of the attractions of the Aru Islands during the colonial period. From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, Japanese immigrants came to this region to explore the water by pearling and other fisheries explorations. They have to deal with a multiethnic society under very different cultural and geographical conditions. Social relation was one of the major factors that enabled the immigrants to survive. Harmony, conflicts, and competition were conditions they faced in the Aru Islands. These dynamics relation occurred when they fostered relations among Japanese and while engaged in relations with other ethnicities in Aru.

Developing social capital is one of the strives for survival in Aru. They weave networks with other ethnicities through daily life while introducing Japanese culture. There were similarities between Japan and Aru that could be a bridge for living in harmony.

The up and down position of the Japanese among various nations in Asia could not release from entanglement in wars. Victory in the wars strengthened the Japanese immigrants to develop confidence and faith in the state. This condition has affected the control of the Japanese government over its citizens abroad and relations with other ethnicities in Aru.

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