

# An Ethnographic Study of the J & T Muramats Account Books: Its Trading and Pearling Business in Cossack, Western Australia

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## Abstract

*This paper examines how J & T Muramats operated the two pillars of its business, trading and pearling, in Cossack by analysing its account books, which were recently discovered. The more than 2500 pages of the ledgers written in English uncover that the two businesses were complementary to each other, which contributed towards fostering the company's development. The study also describes the life of Jiro Muramats who was granted naturalisation as a British subject and sought to be a virtuous Australian businessman.*

*Muramats expanded his trading business from a local retail store to an import and export company and also successfully enlarged his pearling business, despite Cossack being in decline. Muramats was suspected of 'dummying' under the white Australia policy. The paper argues that this practice was not only a legitimate business activity but that it also helped the local pearlers. The ledgers also show that his business contributed to the local economy, by aiding and supporting his clients through setting longer debt payment terms and maintaining long-term relationships with them. J & T Muramats continued to base his company in Cossack even after Jiro and his wife, Hatsu, moved to Darwin in 1929.*

## Keywords

Jiro Muramats, ledgers, pearl-shell fishery, Japanese indentured labourers, Pilbara, white Australia policy

## 1. Introduction

J & T Muramats was a trading and pearling<sup>1</sup> company in Cossack, Western Australia. It was established by Jiro Muramats<sup>2</sup> and his older brother Tsunetaro, after succeed-

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1 'Pearling' refers to the pearl-shell fishery, which was the key industry across northern Australia from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Australia became a major supplier of the shells for export to Europe and the United States to be processed as shell buttons. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the major bases of operation for the pearling industry were located at Thursday Island and Broome, and later, Darwin. The industry consisted of pearling masters who owned ships and employed indentured labourers, most of them Asians.

2 Jiro always signed his name 'Muramats' instead of 'Muramatsu', the latter being the usual romanised spelling of this name. Also, the names engraved on the headstone of Hatsu's grave reads 'JIRO MURAMATS' with 'HATSU MURAMATS'. Therefore, it was felt appropriate to retain the spelling of Jiro and Hatsu's family name as 'Muramats'. Jiro's younger brother, Saburo, signed his name 'Muramatsu'.

ing to their father's retail shop at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The company was operated solely by Jiro, and in 1929 its pearling business was extended to the Northern Territory when Jiro moved to Darwin with his wife, Hatsu.

Jiro Muramats was a unique figure because he was the only Japanese pearling master in Australia in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when both the state and federal governments had introduced legislation prohibiting 'Asiatics' to operate a pearling business, and thus he came to compete with other European pearling masters. As a naturalised British subject, Muramats was determined to establish a business in northwest Australia and challenge the restrictions under the white Australia policy. He was, therefore, an Australian businessman and not a merchant of a local Japanese community.

This paper focuses on how Muramats operated the two pillars of his business, trading and pearling, in Cossack by analysing its account books, which were recently discovered.<sup>3</sup> The more than 2,500 pages of the account books written in English are invaluable documents to fully uncover the business practices of J & T Muramats, which the administrative documents held in various Australian archives have partly delineated. They are also important for depicting Muramats' business activities in the context of local economies.

The paper firstly explains the contents of the account books. Nearly 1,200 pages of the ledger, listed as book ① (ledger) in the following table, were the most useful for analysing Muramats' business operations. The study of the books shows that trading

Map: Pilbara in Western Australia



The maps are created by the author based on the data from 'Generalised Regions of Western Australia, Digital Library', Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (<https://library.dpird.wa.gov.au>), and 'Natural Earth' (<https://www.naturalearthdata.com>).

3 KAKENHI (B) Project, 'Dynamism of the Maritime Frontier: Territorialization of Australia's Northern Waters and Subsistence Tactics of the People in the Region' (Principal Investigator: Mayumi Kamada) 17H02241.

and pearling businesses were complementary to fostering J & T Muramats. The account books also show that Muramats had a wide range of clients in terms of their professions, ethnic backgrounds, and residential areas. Furthermore, they illustrate that so-called ‘dummying’ was a legitimate business practice. The paper argues that Muramats contributed to the local economies in the Pilbara region in Western Australia by maintaining long-term relations with his clients. It concludes with an assessment of the potential usefulness of the account books for future studies.

## 2. The J & T Muramats account books

Research focusing on Jiro Muramats has been conducted over the last five years,<sup>4</sup> and a large volume of archival documents in Australia have been examined. On the contrary, there are very few records concerning Muramats in Japan. So, it was very fortunate to be able to locate and interview some of Jiro’s relations and family in Kobe, Fujieda in Shizuoka, and Yokohama. They provided us with photographs, records of the family tree, and the account books.

It is miraculous that the account books of the business operations in Cos-sack from 100 years ago were preserved in Japan. They must have been brought back by Hatsu, Jiro’s wife, when she returned to Japan in 1957 to live with their daughter Marie-Haru in Yokohama. Hatsu passed away in 1959.

Upon receiving the donation of the five volumes of account books by the family of Jiro and Hatsu’s grandson, Mr. S. Imatomi, they were digitised as soon as possible. Because some of them were badly damaged, there was concern that they could deteriorate

Figure1: Account book ① ledger of I & T.Muramats



Figure2: Account books ② ③ ④ ⑤



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4 Mayumi Kamada ed. (2020), *Jiro Muramats (1878-1943): A Japanese Businessman in Australia*, Research Report for the KAKENHI (B) project, 17H02241. The digital version can be downloaded from the website of the Central Information Center, Nagoya University of Commerce and Business.

(<https://www.nucba.ac.jp/en/university/library/discussion-paper/NUCB-K-22101.html>)

further.<sup>5</sup> Examination of the contents revealed that they were the records of Muramats' businesses in Cossack, not Darwin. The five volumes of the account books are as follows.

	Title of the Book	Year	Size (cm)	Number of pages
①	No Binding (Ledger)	1889-1941	33x38	1176
②	Bad & Doubtful Debt Book	1892-1936	22x37	118
③	Cash Book	1919-1924	28x40	574
④	Cash Book	1928-1935	26x37	574
⑤	Ledger	1927-1929	22x33	182

Book ① contains a large volume of material. The front and back covers are preserved but the ledger is currently unbound, therefore the pages are no longer in their original order. It includes various types of accounts,<sup>6</sup> such as the personal accounts of more than 360 individuals who were employees of J & T Muramats as well as residents in the region, accounts pertaining to Muramats' main bank and branches of Union Bank in Port Headland and Perth, trading and pearling expense accounts, property accounts, payroll ledgers, sales ledgers, payment ledgers, and a bill receivable entry book. Entries for most accounts cease at the beginning of December 1941 coinciding with the outbreak of the Pacific War, which led to the arrest and internment of Jiro. However, there are entries in Jiro's hand in some of the accounts for the year 1942, which indicates that the account books were brought to the Tatura Internment Camp.

On the front free endpaper of book ② is written, 'Bad & Doubtful debt Book, copied from old books 1st March 1910, J & T Muramats'. The debt records go back to 1889. Pages 1 to 92 of book ② lists the names of debtors and the amounts owed to Muramats. The total amount of bad debts and doubtful debts from 1891 to 1913 was £1,899/16/8. The debts as of 1 January for every year between 1914 and 1923 are listed on pages 94 to 105, and those as of 30 June for every year between 1927 and 1936, on pages 106 to 116. Jiro seems to have examined the older account books, including those of his father's, and to have reorganised his business accordingly.

Books ③ and ④ are cash books, dating from 1919 to 1924, and from 1928 to 1935

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5 Due to the historical value of the account books, the original volumes and their digitised images were donated to the Bettye Library of State Library of Western Australia, with the consent of the Imatomi-Nakayama family. These have been catalogued and are accessible online to the general public. (<https://catalogue.slwa.wa.gov.au/record=b1745730~S7>)

6 In bookkeeping and accounting, an 'account' is defined as 'a record of the increases, decreases, and balances in an individual item of asset, liability, owner's equity, income (revenues) or expense'. [Joel J. Lerner and Rajul Y. Gokarn (2009) *Schaum's Outline of Bookkeeping and Accounting*, 4th edition, New York: McGraw Hill, p.49.]

respectively. It is not known whether the cash books between 1925 and 1927 were lost in Australia or in Japan. The pages in books ③ and ④ are double-spread leaves, with deposits recorded on the left page and payments on the right. There are daily entries in cash book ③, and deposits and payments are classified into three categories; bank, cash, and general. The bookkeeping of the entries in book ④ does not appear to have been maintained as regularly as that of book ③. The dates of the entries in book ④ coincides with the period after Jiro and his wife, Hatsu, left Cossack for Darwin.

It is not clear how Jiro did the bookkeeping after he moved to Darwin in November 1929. It is very unlikely that Yoshio Shigeno, who was then the manager of J & T Muramats in Cossack, could perform the bookkeeping duties to maintain the highly sophisticated ledgers of Muramats. Neither does it appear that Jiro did any bookkeeping during his yearly visits to Cossack between September and November.<sup>7</sup> It is most likely that Shigeno sent vouchers regularly to Jiro in Darwin for him to maintain the accounts of the company.

Book ⑤ is a ledger concerned with the two pearling luggers, the *Llyris* and the *La Perouse*. The ledger includes account books of the sales of shells and pearls from 1927 to 1928, payroll of the crew, pearling expenses i.e. the purchase of goods and gear, insurance, oil, as well as costs associated with the importation and departure of crew, shell packing, freight, lighterage, health-related expenses, cable, telegram, and postage costs, and legal expenses. It also contains the personal accounts of the crew. The ledger, however, was not that of J & T Muramats. Neither the *Llyris* or the *La Perouse* were owned by Muramats, nor were their crews employed by him.<sup>8</sup> No records were found in the archives of Western Australia of pearling licenses having been issued to J & T Muramats for the two luggers. Moreover, there was a record in the ledger of commission fees paid to Jiro Muramats according to the yield of pearl shells and pearls in December 1928 and 1929. Therefore, Muramats was either operating the *Llyris* and the *La Perouse* on behalf of a European pearler, a practice called ‘dummying,’ which was considered improper, or he had a mortgage on the luggers. The practice of ‘dummying’ will be examined later in detail, and it will be argued that it was not only a legitimate business practice but that it also helped the local economy.

The names of more than 700 individuals and companies are recorded in the account

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7 The names of the ship’s passengers were printed in the newspapers at the time. Newspaper articles were searchable at the Australian National Library site ‘Trove’. (<https://trove.nla.gov.au>).

8 Kenji Fujita’s records were very useful for information regarding the ships that belonged to Muramats as well as the crew. Hiroyuki Matsumoto *et al.* eds (2021) *Kenji Fujita’s Sketchbook: Memories of Cossack, Western Australia (1925-1938)*, 2nd edition, pp. 118-119. (<https://www.nucba.ac.jp/university/library/discussion-paper/NUCB-K-21102.html>)

books. The account books, therefore, uncover many aspects of the history of Australia in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; the history of the Pilbara region, the pearling industry, local communities and their economies, immigrants and indentured labourers from Japan and other Asian countries, and also business practices at the time, including that of J & T Muramats.

### 3. Jiro Muramats and his trading business in Cossack

#### 3-1. Jiro's foray into business

Jiro's father, Sakutaro, left Japan for Australia in 1888 and arrived in the colony of Western Australia in 1890. He opened a retail store in Cossack in 1891. He had three sons, Tsunetaro, Jiro, and Saburo, and two daughters, Uta, and Yasu, with his wife, Sada.<sup>9</sup>

Sakutaro ran a retail establishment located in 'Chinatown' in Cossack. When he started the business, Cossack was a boomtown with a population of more than 1,000 including approximately 130 Japanese and more than 10 of them were women.<sup>10</sup> Many individuals had their base of operations there as well.<sup>11</sup> There were also brothels in Cossack and Roebourne. Chinese-run stores as well as Sakutaro's were located in the section known either as 'Chinatown' or 'Japtown', while the stores run by European owners were in the township. Sakutaro's clients were most likely Japanese. He must have been involved in recruiting Japanese indentured labourers for the pearling industry. He often travelled back to Japan.<sup>12</sup> The Cossack Japanese Association was founded in 1897, and Sakutaro was elected as its first chief executive and treasurer.<sup>13</sup>

Jiro Muramats was born in 1878 and grew up in Fujieda in Shizuoka, which was Sakutaro's hometown. He left Kobe with his father for Australia at the age of 15 and arrived in Cossack in April 1894 after staying in Broome for five months. In April 1895, Jiro was sent to Saint Francis Xavier College in Melbourne. He was an outstanding student and was awarded prizes in mathematics, writing, music, as well as in bookkeeping. He must have decided on his future direction when he arrived in Australia and thus strove to

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9 For a detailed study about Jiro and his family, see Kamada and Matsumoto (2020) 'Two Homes: Jiro Muramats and his family' in Kamada ed. *op. cit.*, *Jiro Muramats*, pp.104-122.

10 The records of the Cossack Japanese Association list the names of 123 donors who contributed towards the restoration of the Japanese cemetery. (National Library of Australia (NLA): mfm O 2303/5 「在外各地ニ於ケル邦人居留民会、組織ノ会則並其設立ニ関スル法律的關係取調一件 明治四十二年」).

11 TPG+Place Match (2018) 'Draft Cossack - Conservation Management Plan', p.15. (<https://karratha.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/uploads/20180213%20Cossack%20CMP.pdf>)

12 In the 1880s, Sakutaro with Chobe Takeda in Kobe recruited Japanese indentured labourers to Australia. [Kamada and Matsumoto (2020) *op. cit.*, pp.105-106].

13 For a detailed description of the 'Cossack Japanese Association', see Keiko Tamura (2020) 'Jiro Muramats and his Cossack' in Kamada ed. *op. cit.*, *Jiro Muramats*, pp.156-160.



cultivate the qualities of a good businessman and a gentleman while at Xavier College.<sup>14</sup> He built a rapport with students from established families, Japanese diplomats, and businessmen in the southeast region of Australia.

On 4 February 1898, Jiro received word concerning his father's illness and left Melbourne. He learned of his father's death while en route to Cossack. He therefore discontinued his trip and initiated procedures for inheriting his father's estate at the Supreme Court of the colony of Western Australia in Perth. Still only 18 years old, Jiro had not yet reached the legal age of adulthood in Australia, which was 21. Therefore, the Court granted the letters of Administration of Sakutarō's estate to a trustee and executor agency until Sada (Sakutarō's wife) or Tsunetarō could come to Australia, or when any of the other children reached the age of 21.

In July 1899, Jiro was granted naturalisation as a British subject in the colony of Victoria, just before the Federation of Australia. His application was successful due to his excellent scholastic record at Xavier College and the support he received from the Japanese Honorary Consul to Victoria, Alexander Marks. Another application in the colony of Western Australia was rejected in June of 1899, because he was an 'Asiatic alien'.<sup>15</sup> His efforts to obtain naturalisation indicate that he was determined to settle in Australia and was committed to establishing a business there.

Jiro travelled to Japan in 1899. He departed Cossack for Melbourne in May, and then left Melbourne for Kobe in July, arriving there in September. Because Sakutarō did not leave a will, the consent of all potential legal heirs was required in order for Jiro to inherit his father's estate. Jiro's mother, Sada, a younger brother, Saburo, and two younger sisters, Uta and Yasu, signed the deed of consent in Kobe, and his older brother, Tsunetarō, travelled to Cossack to finalise the inheritance procedures.<sup>16</sup>

There are scant records related to Tsunetarō. For his first trip to Australia, he left Kobe in May 1893, at the age of 24, and took up residence in Broome for approximately two years. He then moved to Cossack in March 1895. According to documents relating to the inheritance, Tsunetarō was a storekeeper in Broome.<sup>17</sup> During the inheritance process, Jiro and Tsunetarō must have discontinued the business in Broome. The bad debts of the Broome Branch are listed on the first page of the bad debt book ②. Tsunetarō was in Japan when his father passed away, so he travelled to Cossack in November 1898. He left for

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14 *Ibid.*, pp.149-152.

15 State Records Office of Western Australia (SROWA): s675 cons527 1899/0379 'A. F. Abbott - Naturalization Certificate to Jiro Muramats - for'.

16 SROWA: s59 cons3458 1898/044 'Sakutarō Muramats'.

17 *Ibid.*

Japan in 1900,<sup>18</sup> married a Kobe-born woman in 1902 and passed away in 1921.<sup>19</sup>

### 3-2. Expanding the trading business

In contrast to when Sakutarō started his business, Jiro's commitment to go into business coincided with the decline of Cossack. By the turn of the century, the main base of the pearling industry in Western Australia had shifted to Broome, along with the decline of the gold rush. In 1904, a new wharf opened in Point Samson, due to the silting of the river mouth in Cossack, and a tramway had been constructed connecting Roebourne to Point Samson. Cossack lost its status as a municipality in 1910. Jiro, therefore, had to devise strategies to maintain and develop his business.

An advertisement for J & T Muramats can be found as early as 1899 in the local newspaper. It reads, 'J. & T. Muramats, Jap Town, Cossack. Merchants and Importers; Japanese and other Curios always on hand - The best place to purchase pearls and pearl shells'. As Tamura argues, the advertisement was designed to gain clients outside the Japanese community in Cossack and to more widely publicise the business.<sup>20</sup> Jiro's plan was successful, and he established a firm base in Cossack.

Jiro expanded the business from a local retail store to an import and export company, alongside his pearling business. The account books show that J & T Muramats developed into a trading company with a wide regional coverage, and a diverse clientele and suppliers. The company handled a variety of goods, and was involved in various business operations, not only importing but also exporting commodities as well.

He took advantage of the opportunity presented by the declining population of Cossack to acquire properties. According to the property list in the ledger ① dated 1<sup>st</sup> January 1918, he owned the town lots 151, 152, 153, 142, 143, 144, 145, 121, 122, and 123, residential buildings, a shop, some sheds, a stable, a cottage for the crew, etc. The total value of the lots and buildings was £1,650. He also owned 12 vessels including pearling luggers and an auxiliary schooner valued at £5,500. At this time, the total value of Muramats' stock in trade was £2,132 with book debts of £1,703.

The ledger ① includes approximately 360 personal accounts in the 1920s and the 1930s. According to Fujita,<sup>21</sup> there were only 20 European residents in Cossack at that time. Muramats employed at least 100 workers, including Japanese, Koepangers, other 'Asians' and a few 'white people', who worked as pearling crew, drivers, carpenters,

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18 Tsunetarō was a chief executive and treasurer of the Cossack Japanese Association from July 1898 to June 1900 [NLA: mfm O 2303 /5, *op. cit.*].

19 For the detailed study about Jiro's life and his family, see Kamada and Matsumoto (2020), *op. cit.*

20 *Ibid.*, pp.163-164.

21 Matsumoto *et al.* eds (2020) *op. cit.*



handymen and managers. This means that more than 200 clients of the shop were residing outside of Cossack. Studying the accounts uncovers local economic activities, as well as Muramats' business practices.

The names on the personal accounts were those of Europeans, Chinese, Malays, Japanese, and others. Muramats' clients were ethnically diverse, reflecting the population makeup in the region at the time. There were also names of women. Some of the clients who bought goods almost every day must have been residents of Cossack. Some accounts also note the individual's profession. Researchers familiar with the history of the region may be able to identify some of the names.

Moreover, there are personal accounts which note the whereabouts of the clients by place name, such as Roebourne, Karratha, Whim Creek, Mulga Downs, Port Hedland, Onslow, Broome, and Pilbara, or the companies and the stations they worked for. The records indicate that Muramats' business covered a wide region. J & T Muramats advertised regularly in the Northern Times, a newspaper published in Carnarvon and widely read in the Pilbara. The trading expenses in book ① includes 'advertising' as an account item.

Jiro was also keen to invest in equipment and took opportunities to expand his business activities. When he bought a large Republic truck in 1924<sup>22</sup> and later a motor car, he employed at least two drivers, including Yoshio Shigeno who later became the manager of J & T Muramats. The account labelled 'truck and car' or 'motor car' included in the trade expenses account indicates that he ran a transport and car hire business. Carting was a side business he could operate, as he needed to transport pearl shells to the wharf in Point Samson for shipping. He must have taken mail and parcels to the post office in Roebourne since the one in Cossack had closed. Jiro himself drove a car, and residents could hire a car with a driver. Muramats was also trading in vessels. To support his own business operations, he ran agencies for insurance, exporting commodities, and importing Asian indentured labourers.

### 3-3. Cashless transactions recorded in the personal accounts<sup>23</sup>

The most interesting discovery from the ledger was that trading was mostly conducted with credit sales and purchases, which meant cashless transactions. Muramats sold goods on credit, and the personal accounts recorded the date, item, voucher number, and amount of debt and credit. For example, a client sold cabbages and eggs to Muramats on

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22 *Ibid.*, p.164.

23 Personal accounts are the accounts bearing the names of individuals or organisations with whom J & T Muramats had direct transactions. Debits and credits between the individuals and Muramats were recorded in the accounts.

credit and bought goods from the shop on debt. No actual payments were made on each transaction, but credits and debts were recorded on the personal accounts and settled at a later date, in some cases, after several years. The sales ledger from 1930 to 1940 shows that credit sales were three times the amount of cash sales, and that Muramats assumed the risk of the sales on credit. Many of the accounts had the words 'bad debts' written in red ink on them.

Bookkeeping of personal accounts helped to prevent Muramats' Japanese employees from overspending their income, and consequently, decreased the risks associated with carrying bad debt for Muramats himself. Furthermore, Muramats could assure himself that his employees were being treated fairly by making transactions transparent. The ledger ① includes personal accounts of employees and the various payroll accounts which are listed by individual. The employees themselves rarely handled money. Wages, payments for yields, and bonuses were recorded on individual personal accounts as credits. Their purchase of goods, expenses for sending parcels and letters, medically-related charges, license fees, and cash withdrawals were recorded as debts, and the accounts were usually settled on a yearly basis. It is known that some Japanese divers lost their entire income by gambling in other pearling bases in Australia, but this occurred very infrequently among the employees of Muramats. There are records in the accounts about money sent home on request.

Although no vouchers were kept, it is possible to ascertain the kinds of goods sold by Muramats. The ledger ① includes accounts of the goods returned with some remarks about them. We can also identify store items on the invoices, which were kept with the account books, and in the Muramats Collection of the Karratha City Library.<sup>24</sup> They include grocery items such as flour, sugar, milk, vegetables, biscuits, eggs, cheese, and some Japanese food items such as rice, *somen* (Japanese thin noodles), miso, soya sauce, beans, etc. Other items include fabric for dresses, singlets, socks, raincoats, needles, shaving razors, shoes, and rubber-sole *tabi* (Japanese *jikatabi*); and those for builders and station workers, such as nails, water-carrying bags, fuel, tools and materials for buildings. The store also handled equipment for pearling.

Tamura pointed out that Muramats had expanded his trade through mail and telegraph orders.<sup>25</sup> He sold the goods on credit and accepted the returned goods. We can see that Jiro had built up a good reputation and thus gained the trust of clients and which enabled him to expand his trading business in the Pilbara region, even while assuming the risks associated with bad debts.

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24 Tamura (2020), *op. cit.*, pp.164-165.

25 *Ibid.*, p.164.

The suppliers to J & T Muramats were also diverse. The cash books ③ and ④ show that Muramats purchased goods mainly from Australian companies, such as Streeter & Males Ltd in Broome; Colonial Sugar Refining Company, Burns Philip & Co, John Stewart & Co, Wood Son & Co, Pearse Bros, Mills & Ware, Bunning Bros, Carbarns Co in Fremantle; Nestle Milk Co, McLean Bros & Rigg, Goode Durraut & Co, Harris Scarfe & Co, G & R Wills in Perth; and on occasion, See Sing & Co, Watson & Co, and Yee Pack in Roebourne. Japanese products were supplied through Tonan Shokai and Tokumaru Bros. in Broome, and some items were imported directly from Shimada Jirosaku Shoten in Kyoto, Japan.

### 3-4. Export business of asbestos<sup>26</sup>

Alongside his pearling business, Muramats operated an agency for purchasing and exporting pearl shells and pearls from local pearlery. It is recorded in several personal accounts that gold, turtle shells, and tortoise shells were brought to Muramats for sale. Eighty-eight tons of copper ore valued at £650 was also listed in the property list tabled in 1918.

In 1939, Muramats began exporting asbestos after large asbestos veins were discovered in the 1930s in Yampire Gorge and Wittenoom, approximately 300 km inland from Cossack. He must have taken immediate action regarding its exporting operations because he held some white asbestos samples in Darwin as early as 1935.<sup>27</sup>

Muramats could make use of his knowledge of pearl shell export procedures and his trading networks to export asbestos. By starting the asbestos business, he was making further advances toward diversifying and internationalising his business. So he had taken another initiative to activate the local economy by exporting asbestos.

The ledger ① includes accounts of asbestos trading from 1939 to 1941. Muramats purchased it from small-scale individual miners and exported it through large trading companies. They traded in both white and blue asbestos. The asbestos was generally purchased once a month, and the amount purchased from each miner, varied from approximately £3 to £150, and its export value for Muramats was approximately £250 (between 30 and 40 bags) for each shipment. According to the records of cable communications and freight costs in the accounts, asbestos was shipped to Nissa Shokai in Kobe, Otto Gerdau in New York and London, and Tucks in Melbourne. The Otto Gerdau Company was the main company with which Muramats had been engaged in the trading of pearl shells.

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26 From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, asbestos was commonly used as a heat insulator and fireproofing material for buildings, and as an anti-friction material for machinery. But its toxicity became widely acknowledged in the 1970s, resulting in its use being made illegal in many countries.

27 Tamura (2020), *op. cit.*, p.166.

After taking into account the costs of packing, insurance, and freight, the asbestos business was not very profitable. Muramats' calculations show profits in the accounts, of £86 in 1939 and £467 in 1940. It was at this time that global trade began to shrink, and with the outbreak of WWII in Europe in 1939, the remittance and settlement of accounts also became more difficult. And finally, he had to discontinue his asbestos business in 1941 due to the onset of the Pacific War. So, his lack of success in asbestos trading was due to circumstances beyond his control.

However, the asbestos trading did contribute towards stimulating the local economy. Muramats purchased asbestos from small-scale miners and provided them with exporting services. The miners who sold asbestos to Muramats were also the clients of his store. When they brought asbestos to Cossack, they would have bought packing bags, string, and other equipment, as well as groceries. And perhaps they had a few drinks at the hotel.

#### 4. Pearling Business of J & T Muramats in Cossack

##### 4-1. Pearl-shell fishery<sup>28</sup>

The other pillar of the J & T Muramats' business was pearling. Pearling masters (pearlers) like Muramats, owned ships and employed labourers to work as crew on the ships. Jiro took the opportunity to start his pearling business as the industry was in decline in Cossack.

The boats used for pearling were called pearling luggers, and those used in Western Australia were approximately 15 meters in length with two masts and three sails. Some pearling masters owned a large number of luggers and organised fleets with a store ship. There were 113 pearling masters in Western Australia in 1909, but most were small operations. Only around six pearling masters owned more than eight luggers.<sup>29</sup> Muramats, who owned ten luggers, therefore, was a major pearling master. The pearling masters were required to obtain a pearling license, granted by the state government, for each lugger and to pay annual license fees. Luggers were given registration numbers such as C19 (C for Cossack and B for Broome, etc.), but they were ordinarily referred to by the name of the ship, for example, the *Edhita* for C19 owned by Muramats.

The crew numbered between six to nine men, depending on the size of the ship and

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28 拙稿 (2016) 「アラフラ海の日本人ダイバーたち」 村井吉敬他『海境を越える人びとー真珠とナマコとアラフラ海』 コモンズ、pp.64-96. [Mayumi Kamada (2016) 'Japanese Divers in the Arafura Sea' in Yoshinori Murai *et al. eds*, *Crossing the Seas and National Boundaries: Pearls, Tre pang and the Arafura Sea*, Tokyo: Commons.]

29 Pam Oliver (2006) *Empty North: The Japanese Presence and Australian Reactions 1860s to 1942*, Darwin: Charles Darwin University, p.42.

type of equipment onboard. They worked as divers, tenders, boatswains, cooks, etc. The crews were primarily composed of indentured Malays, Koepangers and Filipinos labourers, but by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the crews were predominantly Japanese. The diver wore a helmet, a diving suit and weighted boots, and collected the shells at the bottom of the sea. The tender sent air from the boat and communicated with the diver via a lifeline. It was very hazardous work because the seafloor was rocky and covered with sand and seaweed, and the airpipe could get severed.

The diver usually worked at depths of between 10 to 30 meters, and occasionally as far down as 70 meters, which could cause a severe case of the bends. Storms and rapid currents endangered the vessel as well as the divers. Knowledge of the location of the pearling grounds and operational skills were acquired on the job. The crew lived on the boat for a few weeks at a time during the pearling season (from April to October in northwest Australia). In Western Australia, the crew was comprised of different ethnic groups, but within each group, they were often from the same hometown.

In order to operate a pearling business, the ability to recruit labourers and to obtain permits for them was crucial for pearling masters. Permits were issued by the federal government as part of a policy to control Asian immigrants. The pearling masters needed to apply for new permits or for permission to transfer them according to any changes regarding the pearling boats, such as the acquisition of new vessels, changing operating areas and the purpose of the vessels, and updating vessels by installing new equipment. Open permits were those that were held by pearlers but not currently in use. Muramats could not operate more than ten pearling luggers due to restrictions on the issuing of licenses and permits imposed by both the state and federal governments. For

Figure3: Pearling lugger drawn by Kenji Fujita



Figure4: Fully equipped diver drawn by Kenji Fujita



Figure5: Diver in the water drawn by Kenji Fujita



Muramats, managing the permits was vital to operating his fleet.

Air pumps were manually operated until the 1930s when mechanical pumps were introduced. Air compressors allowed the boats to have two divers. And by the 1930s luggers were also motorised. Pearling masters needed to update the equipment on their luggers in order to increase their yields to remain competitive. Equipping the vessels with advanced equipment also increased their value.

Furthermore, the crew was restricted to the performance of their duties only while on the boat. For example, they could clean the shells on board, but not after landing. Therefore, different workers had to be employed for preparing shells for shipping. The crew could clean the boats and equipment during the off-season but were not allowed to do carpentry work. The account books recorded that Muramats employed indentured labourers and a Japanese shipwright for work that needed to be done onshore.

As mentioned above, starting up a pearling business required navigating a complex bureaucratic process. It also involved dealing with exporting and trading, as well as looking after the vessels, the crew, and other workers. The recruitment of indentured labourers required undergoing burdensome immigration procedures, e.g. dealing with immigration companies, preparing documents for their entry into Australia, paying bonds and taxes to the government, and organising insurance policies. Pearlery had to provide labourers with food and accommodations according to the contracts. It was also the pearlery's responsibility to maintain the vessels and the equipment on board.

Before shipping, the shells needed to be cleaned, sorted, packed and stored. Exporting shells also required lengthy procedures, such as arranging for transport to and storage at the ports at both the exporting and importing ends, paying taxes, and insuring the shells. Sometimes export permission from the government was required. The price of the shells had to be negotiated with the buyers who put them up for auction at the London or New York markets, and proceeds from the sales had to be remitted.

It was, therefore, much more efficient to have a large fleet with managers. A sole lugger owner had to rely on an export agency. Muramats found a business opportunity in providing services to small-scale pearlery. He also acquired vessels from pearlery whose business had failed.

#### **4-2. Pearling in Cossack**

Cossack was established in 1863 as the first port in northwest Australia. During the 1860s, the Butcher Inlet became a base for pearling fleets operated by European pearling masters, who employed local Aboriginal labourers. By the late 1870s, there were a considerable number of South-East Asians working in the industry, and there developed a



'Chinatown'. By 1875 there were 989 Malays and 493 Aborigines employed on 57 vessels licensed in Cossack, and in 1886 a fleet of 44 vessels operated out of Cossack. In 1887 the municipalities of Cossack and Roebourne were proclaimed, and there were five Chinese stores in the two towns.<sup>30</sup>

In the 1880s Broome came to be the centre of pearling in Western Australia as the pearling grounds in the southern waters of the colony became depleted. A devastating cyclone hit Cossack in 1881 severely damaging the town, and twelve pearling vessels were lost. After the town of Broome was officially established in 1883, pearling fleets started moving their headquarters there.<sup>31</sup>

Cossack was still a boomtown in the 1890s due to the discovery of gold in the Pilbara region, and its importance as the main port in the region, but pearling had ceased to play a vital role in the local economy. In 1894 the population of Cossack was comprised of 126 Europeans and 266 Asians, and in 1901 the official population decreased to less than 200, comprised of 69 Australians, 19 Europeans, 68 Asians, the majority of them Japanese, and some others.<sup>32</sup>

By the time Jiro took over his late father's business, pearling was no longer a key industry in Cossack. It was a good time to purchase pearling vessels at low prices and to take part in the industry. So, Jiro acquired vessels, launched his pearling business, as well as established a base for trading despite the decline of Cossack.

According to records held in the State Records Office of Western Australia (SROWA), Muramats owned one vessel in 1906, eight in 1911, and ten in 1912 just before the 'Pearling Act 1912' was enacted, which prohibited 'Asiatics' from operating a pearling business. At the time, Muramats also had a pearl dealer license. The ten luggers he owned in 1914 were: the *Edhita*, *Fly*, *Ruby*, *Pearl* (later renamed *Dulcy*), *Bee*, *Ant*, *Emu*, *Bat*, *Lilly*, and *Gracie*.<sup>33</sup> Knowing the names of the vessels was helpful to track the changes of ownership, and how Muramats administered the fleet. His pearling business was very successful and expanded further over the next ten years.

### 4-3. Enlarging the pearling business under the 'white Australia policy'

The focus of this section is how Muramats made his pearling business successful by the time he planned to move to Darwin, despite the downturn of the industry in Cossack. Since 1912, Muramats had not owned more than ten pearling luggers, but he continually

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30 TPG+Place Match (2018) *op. cit.*, pp.12-16.

31 Val Burton (2000), *General History of Broome*, Broome: Broome Historical Society, p.6.

32 TPG+Place Match (2018) *op. cit.*, pp.33-34.

33 SROWA: s946 cons477, 1920/0039 'J. Muramats- Roebourne - Ships License for'.

upgraded the fleet by trading vessels and equipping them with engines and air compressors. The monetary value of his vessels reflected the efforts that Muramats made to upgrade his fleet. In practical terms, he was managing a larger number of pearling vessels than he should have been, including those of other local pearlers. The ledger ⑤ contained accounts for pearling vessels owned by local pearlers other than Muramats.

By the end of the 1920s, Muramats had built up his pearling business and became one of the main pearlers in Western Australia. To further enlarge his pearling business, he decided to move to Darwin in the late 1920s. He acquired two vessels and contracted to purchase seven more at the time of his move to Darwin. But the federal government interfered with his plans by refusing to grant permits for them, so Muramats was prevented from owning more than ten vessels, including those already operating in Western Australia.<sup>34</sup> The federal government was concerned that Muramats, an ‘Asiatic’, was becoming influential in the pearling industry.

With information gleaned from Muramats’ property account from 17<sup>th</sup> April 1918 to 13<sup>th</sup> July 1926 and several personal accounts included in the ledger ①, as well as the files kept in the National Archives of Australia (NAA) and the SROWA, it is possible to track the ownership of the pearling vessels in Cossack and to review Muramats’ involvement. Details of the transactions regarding the vessels, which are recorded in the account books reveal the ways in which Muramats fostered his pearling business.

The vessels for which Muramats were granted licenses in 1916 were: the *Edhita*, *Fly*, *Ruby*, *Dulcy*, *Gracie*, *Mavie*, *Cleave*, and *Empress*.<sup>35</sup> According to Muramats’ property list tabled on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1918, the vessels he owned and their values were: *Nellie* (auxiliary schooner, £750), *Edhita* (£500), *Fly* (£500), *Ruby* (£500), *Dulcy* (including the engine, £800), *Gracie* (£500), *Mavie* (without the engine, £600), and *Cleave* (£500). He also owned the *Ant* (£150), *Emu* (£250), *Bat* (£200), and *Empress* (£300), which were not equipped with either air hoses or dresses, in other words, they were not ready for immediate operation. It should be noted that the vessels for which Muramats applied for pearling licenses sometimes changed, and the vessels he owned were not necessarily operated under his name. According to the property account, the *Ant* was sold in December 1919 for £275, and the *Emu* in March 1920 for £200.

#### 4-4. Reconsidering ‘Dummying’

‘Dummying’ referred to such practices as applying for a pearling boat license owned by a ‘coloured’ person in the name of a white pearler, or having a white pearler working

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34 National Archives of Australia (NAA): A433 1941/2/2244 ‘Muramats, J T - Pearling applications Cossack, WA and Darwin NT’.

35 SROWA: s946 cons477, 1920/0039, *op. cit.*

under the direction of a ‘coloured’ person, according to Murakami. Using indentured labourers for work other than that described in their working permits was also considered ‘dummying’.<sup>36</sup>

With Cossack in decline and the recession of the pearling industry due to WWI, Muramats offered assistance to pearlers in financial difficulty by accepting their vessels as collateral. Some of the vessels owned by pearlers in the region were acquired by Muramats in lieu of their debts: for example, the *Mavie*, the *Cleave*, and the *Empress* were acquired from E. G. Hudson, the *Nellie* from Mrs. M. I. Shaw, and the *Gracie*, originally owned by Mrs. Shaw, from E. Teesdal.<sup>37</sup>

Legitimate business activities were questioned as to their propriety under the white Australia policy, because Muramats was an ‘Asiatic’, although he was a naturalised British subject. The account books show that Muramats managed the mortgaged vessels in order to have the debts paid with interest. He also set longer debt payment terms, which were favourable to the debtors.

This section looks into the transactions of Muramats-owned vessels in detail and reconsiders the ‘dummying’ practices.

#### 4-4-1. Acquiring E. G. Hudson’s vessels and the transferring of permits

E. G. Hudson was listed in the debt book ② as owing £2,890/14/11 as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 1917. It seems he failed in the pearling business.<sup>38</sup> His personal account from July 1921 to September 1930 which is included in book ① shows that his debt had been reduced to £113/6/1 in July 1921. Although the earlier accounts of E. G. Hudson are missing, the accounts in the 1920s indicate that his vessels were sold to Muramats to pay back his debts.

As was explained in the section above, to make the pearling luggers operational, it was crucial to obtain permits according to the number of the crew. Muramats made sedulous efforts to obtain and transfer permits.<sup>39</sup> When Muramats submitted applications for pearling licenses for the *Mavie*, the *Cleave*, and the *Empress* in April 1916, the crews for these vessels were to be transferred from Muramats’ other vessels, the *Ant*, the *Bee*, and the *Bat*.<sup>40</sup> In August 1919 Muramats applied to transfer seven permits of the *Bat*, which

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36 Murakami (2020) *op. cit.*, p.189.

37 SROWA: s946 cons477, 1920/0039, *op. cit.*; also see Yuichi Murakami (2020) ‘Jiro Muramats and the Pearling Industry’, in Kamada ed, *op. cit.*, *Jiro Muramats*.

38 Fujita wrote in his memoir ‘Hudson often visited Cossack. He had boats but failed in business, and Muramats came to own his boats’. [Matsumoto *et al.* eds (2021) *op. cit.*, p.117.

39 NAA: A659 1943/1/7347 ‘Shaw, Taylor and Muramats - Pearling - Complication, Cossack’.

40 SROWA: s946 cons477, 1920/0039, *op. cit.*

had been wrecked, to a new vessel.<sup>41</sup>

The *Ant* was sold to Hudson & Truslove in December 1919 after Muramats acquired it in 1916 from E. G. Hudson. There are many Hudsons recorded in the ledger, and it is not known whether H. Hudson of 'Hudson & Truslove' was related to E. G. Hudson. In December 1919, Muramats applied to have the permits transferred to the *Ant*.<sup>42</sup> The account of Hudson & Truslove from December 1919 to April 1922 recorded the payments to the Japanese crew, cost of goods and meat supply to the *Ant*, and packing and freight costs to London as debits, and the sales value of shells as credits. This indicates that the *Ant* was operating under the name of Hudson & Truslove but was being managed by Muramats.

The later whereabouts of the *Bee* is not known. The *Bee* was owned by E. McKay, the manager of J & T Muramats. McKay played a role as a partner of the company because Muramats' fleet was comprised of a number of his vessels. In 1912, the *Bee* was one of them. When Muramats purchased the *Lucy Boy* in 1920, the vessel including the permits, was transferred to McKay,<sup>43</sup> because Muramats was only allowed to obtain pearling licenses for up to ten vessels. Later, McKay acquired more vessels, and his account from December 1927 to November 1931 in the ledger ① shows that they continued to be under the management of J & T Muramats.<sup>44</sup>

#### 4-4-2. Transactions of the *Empress*: A Fisher's debt payment

Another interesting story concerns the *Empress*. Muramats acquired it from E. G. Hudson, but he applied for the license only once in 1916. Transaction records of the *Empress* were found in the Muramats' property account, his property list tabled on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1918, the personal account of A. Fisher from December 1918 to September 1930, and in the cash book ③. The trading between Muramats and Fisher demonstrates Muramats' long-term commitment to business relations with his clients.

In April 1918 Muramats sold the *Empress* to Fisher for £300 and then bought it back from him in November 1919 for £450 including the permits.<sup>45</sup> The sale from Fisher to Muramats was to pay back Fisher's debt. Fisher's personal account indicates that his debt, including interest, decreased by £80 with the proceeds of the sale of the yield in 1919, but nevertheless, Fisher discontinued pearling with the *Empress*. The difference in

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41 NAA: A433 1941/2/2244, *op. cit.*

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Ibid.*

44 When Muramats moved to Darwin, McKay also moved his vessels and kept the partnership with Muramats. It seems McKay took the initiative to extend their pearling business to Dutch East Indies. [NAA: A7359 9 'J & T Muramats Pearlers'.]

45 NAA: A433 1941/2/2244, *op. cit.*

the *Empress*' trading value of £150 within nineteen months may be due to the value of the equipment Fisher ordered from Muramats and had installed on the vessel. Furthermore, the *Empress* was bought back along with seven permits, which increased the value of the vessel.<sup>46</sup>

Muramats continued trading with Fisher after the transaction involving the *Empress*. Fisher purchased goods regularly from Muramats and paid the freight costs. Muramats purchased gold and a small volume of shells from him. A few pages of his account indicate Fisher resided outside of Cossack and ran some other businesses, including pearling and mining. By May 1931 Fisher owed more than £600 to Muramats, but Muramats did not regard this as excessive. The final disposition of the *Empress* is unknown. Its sale was not recorded in the property account. Its seven permits, which were transferred back to Muramats, might have been transferred to the *Ant* in December 1919 when the vessel was sold to Hudson & Truslove.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4-4-3. Debts of Mrs. Shaw: Sale of the *Success* and the *Nellie* under mortgage

Mrs. Shaw, too, was in debt to Muramats and entrusted the bookkeeping of her accounts to him. Around 1912, her husband, H. F. Shaw, went bankrupt in Broome and transferred ownership of the *Success* and the *Nellie* to his wife in Cossack. The two vessels became mortgaged to J & T Muramats. Muramats partnered with Mrs. Shaw in running a small store, 'Cash & Co', but withdrew from the partnership in 1915. The *Gracie* was also a Shaw-owned vessel but was eventually sold to E. Teesdale, and was later acquired by Muramats.<sup>48</sup>

The ledger ① includes five pages of accounts with the name of Mrs. Shaw labelled as 'Lugger Account' and 'No3 Account'. It seems there were more accounts such as those labelled No1, No2, No4 and a 'House Account', but they have been lost. The 'No3 account' dated from January 1915 to August 1924 recorded a large debt owed by Mrs. Shaw to Muramats. The account had a negative balance of £1,017/5/7 in January 1915, which grew to £6,653/1/5 by February 1921.

The 'Lugger Account', which must have been designated for vessels mortgaged to Muramats, most likely the *Success*, is dated from October 1920 to February 1921. The account recorded the payments to the crew, supply of meat, freights costs to London and other expenses as debits, and shell sales as credits. The 'Lugger Account' showed a deficit of £1,156/11/9 in February 1921.

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46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.*

48 Murakami (2020) *op. cit.*, pp.192-193. There is a photo of the *Gracie* (C28) taken with Saburo Muramatsu and the crew in Cossack, taken in 1913. [Kamada ed. (2020) *op. cit.*, p.iii.]

The sale of the *Nellie* and the *Success* were recorded both in Mrs. Shaw's 'No3 Account' and in Muramats' property account. The compressor and engine of the *Nellie* were sold for £150 in April 1918. The vessel itself was sold in July 1920 to G. Rogers for £200. In 1921, Mrs. Shaw was on the verge of bankruptcy and left Cossack, at which point the 'Lugger Account' was closed. The *Nellie* and the *Success* were valued at £500 which partially covered Mrs. Shaw's debt payments. In the Muramats' property account, the payments in May 1921 for Shaw's bedstead, tub, teapot, carpet, and cupboard were also recorded.

Since many of the accounts are missing, it is not possible to estimate how much of Mrs. Shaw's debt Muramats was able to recover or to have an idea of the operating status of the *Nellie* and the *Success* following the departure of Mrs. Shaw. But it appears that Mrs. Shaw was unable to repay her debts, so Muramats continued to manage the vessels. In July 1921, Muramats paid £20 to Rogers to commission the *Nellie*. He also paid a carpenter to work on the *Success* from the 'Success account'.

#### 4-4-4. Muramats' commitments to the local economy

In short, most of the pearling vessels which Muramats acquired were mortgaged to him. He managed the vessels on behalf of the creditors, or sometimes leased or sold the vessels in order to borrow their name. The operations can be considered 'dummying', but he resorted to it because as an 'Asiatic', the number of licenses he could obtain could not exceed the number he had been granted before 1912. He was restricted by state regulations from owning more than ten pearling vessels. Also, the federal government attempted to restrict Muramats' pearling business by controlling the issuance of permits for indentured labourers. However, as Murakami pointed out,<sup>49</sup> the governments tended to tolerate Muramats' 'dummying' operations in order to encourage white pearlers to stay in the business and support the local economy. The sub-collector of customs in Cossack at the time reported that Muramats was suspected of engaging in 'dummying', yet no action was taken to stop it.

From Muramats' point of view, operating the mortgaged vessels was risky and perhaps not very profitable. But without Muramats' commitment to the pearling industry in Cossack, its local economy would not have been sustained. A collapse of the economy would result in the deterioration of his business. Running a pearling business, on the other hand, increased the sales of his store, widened the business opportunities for recruiting labourers from Japan and South-East Asia, and increased exports of pearl shells and pearls.

Furthermore, the author believes that Muramats had a personal attachment to the

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49 *Ibid.*, pp.194-195.



business in Cossack, and felt, perhaps, a responsibility to support the local community as an upstanding businessman. He maintained long-term relationships with his clients despite the risk of not fully recovering all of the debts owed to him.

## 5. Cossack and J & T Muramats

### 5-1. Pearling business in Cossack in the 1930s

J & T Muramats continued to be based in Cossack even after Jiro and Hatsu moved to Darwin in November 1929. There were two reasons for the move.

First, the existing pearling grounds in Western Australia were becoming depleted. Even at Broome, yields had decreased by more than half in the last ten years. The major pearlers in Broome, such as V. J. Clark and V. R. Kepert were also transferring their fleets to Darwin.<sup>50</sup> Muramats transferred six vessels including McKay's; the *Cleave*, the *Mavie*, the *Northam*, the *Mars*, the *Dulcy*, and the *Alpha*.<sup>51</sup> Muramats was 51 years of age with extensive experience and would be active for at least another ten more years. J & T Muramats became a well-known name in the pearling industry in Darwin.<sup>52</sup>

Second, their daughter Haru, who had left Cossack for Japan at the age of 6, was finishing high school in Fujieda, Sakutaro and Jiro's hometown. Jiro and Hatsu must have wanted to bring her back to Australia, in which case residing in Cossack would not have been an option.

Muramats did not, however, move his headquarters to Darwin. He travelled back to Cossack every year and stayed there between September and November. It seems he tried to start a trading business as well in Darwin but was unable to get it off the ground. Unfortunately, the ledgers for the business in Darwin were not found. They may have been destroyed after their arrest at the outbreak of the Pacific War or during the Darwin Air Raid by the Japanese forces in 1942.

The sales figures for pearl shells and pearls in Cossack from December 1931 to June 1941 are found in the ledger ①. The pearl shell sales of Muramats in the 1931 fiscal year were £5,220, £4,494 in 1932, £5,631 in 1933, £3,444 in 1934, £7,032 in 1935, £6,954 in 1936, £5,166 in 1937, £4,661 in 1938, £4,090 in 1939 and £4,065 in 1940. But as discussed earlier, the running costs of a pearling business were high.

For example, in 1937, expenses were as follows: £1,100 for provisions for the crew,

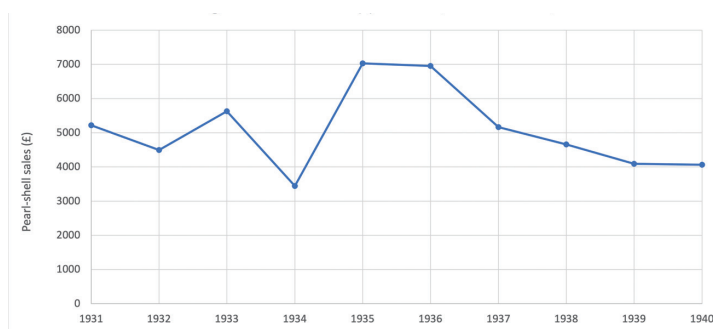
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50 鎌田 (2016) *op. cit.*, pp.75-80.

51 NAA: A433 1941/2/2244, *op. cit.*

52 Kamada and Matsumoto (2020) *op. cit.*, pp.117-120.

Figure6: Pearl-shell sales (£) 1931-1940 J & T Muramats, Cossack



£1,500 for wages and £1,250 for lay and bonus. Combined with other expenses, the net profit would have been less than £1,000. As Fujita wrote, wage payments to the crew were delayed in the late 1930s.<sup>53</sup>

The average annual sale of pearls was approximately £200 to £400. Divers who found pearls were given bonuses according to their value. The volume of pearl shells and pearls that Muramats purchased from other pearlers was not substantial. For instance, the total value of the purchased shells and pearls was £260 in 1932 and £22 in 1936.

## 5-2. To be a virtuous businessman

Why, then did Muramats not close the businesses in Cossack? Profits from trading were not that large either. For example, in 1937, total sales were £6,000 (£1,300 in cash and £4,700 in credit), and the amount of stock purchased was £11,000. Of course, it cannot be concluded that the trading business was running a deficit because it is necessary to take into consideration the value of the stock at the store and the equipment for his pearling business.

A close study of the account books of J & T Muramats shows that its business activities in pearling and trading were complementary. But it was very difficult for Muramats to start a trading business in Darwin. Darwin had been the main port for connections to Singapore at the time, and Chinese merchants as well as Australians with European backgrounds had established their businesses there. Furthermore, there would have been greater opportunities in Cossack with the potential for trading in commodities from the Pilbara region.

It is only possible to mention briefly about Muramats' commitment to the hotel business in Cossack. There were two hotels in town at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Weld Hotel and the White Horse Hotel. The hotels were consolidated in the 1910s, around the

<sup>53</sup> Matsumoto *et al.* eds (2021) *op. cit.*, p.113.

time Mr. Shaw acquired the Weld Hotel. Muramats may have participated in the management of the hotel, although he was not granted a liquor license. The debts owed to Muramats by Mrs. Shaw may be related to the hotel business. To reveal his involvement, further examination of the account books is required.

Jiro and Hatsu considered Cossack their hometown. Jiro was 15 when he arrived in Cossack, and Hatsu was 13.<sup>54</sup> They married in 1905, and they had a daughter, Marie-Haru. Saburo, Jiro's younger brother, came to help with the business in 1913, and he brought his wife, Aya, in 1917. Their daughter Sumiko was also born in Cossack.<sup>55</sup> Most importantly, their father, Sakutaro, died and was buried there. The graves of relatives, parents in particular, were very important for Japanese families.

Most of all, Cossack offered more opportunities to Muramats. Jiro must have been proud of being a British subject, and his Xavier College education. He desired to be regarded as a gentleman, and to establish himself as a respected businessman in Australia. While there was a larger Japanese community in Broome, Jiro made the decision to close the branch of his store there at the turn of the century. If he had kept the business in Broome, he would have been expected to make a greater commitment to the community as a Japanese businessman, and at the same time, the competition would be more intense amongst the other Japanese merchants.<sup>56</sup>

His commitment to the Cossack economy is evident not only by the efforts he expended to expand his businesses but also by his active role in supporting the local community. Even though there were risks, he extended the time period for debt payments, and maintained long-term trading relations with clients. He must have valued trust as the basis for maintaining his business.

Muramats was highly appreciated by the locals. According to Murakami, Jiro was one of 34 people who donated to the 'Sandbag Fund' campaign, which was launched in 1916 in Cossack to support Australian soldiers serving in WWI. While most of the donors gave less than 10 shillings, only Jiro donated £1.<sup>57</sup> He also received sympathetic support from local officials, contrary to the skeptical attitude of the bureaucrats in the central offices of the federal and state governments.

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54 According to the family records held in Japan, Hatsu was born on 8 March 1882. She arrived in at Cossack in 1895. [NAA: K1331 'Muramats Hatsu - Nationality: Japanese - arrived Cossack per unknown 1895'.]

55 Kamada and Matsumoto (2020) *op. cit.*, pp.114-117.

56 Current research is focusing on Japanese merchants in Broome, including Kametaro Yamamoto, Toyosaburo Mise, Eijiro Yamazaki, and Tokumaru brothers.

57 Murakami (2020) *op. cit.*, p.195.

When Jiro wanted to bring store assistants from Japan in 1912, the sub-collector of customs in Cossack sent a supportive letter describing Muramats as ‘a good citizen, of sound financial standing’. But the request was denied anyway by the Department of External Affairs in Melbourne. However, the following year, Jiro was successful in bringing over his younger brother, Saburo, to assist in running his business. In 1921, eleven residents of Cossack and Roebourne sent a petition to the Minister for Home and Territories in Melbourne asking that Saburo and his wife, Aya, be allowed to remain in Australia without restrictions under the Immigration Act, although the request was ultimately denied.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, in 1923 when Jiro appealed the rejection by the State Electoral Registrar to placing his name on the electoral rolls of the State of Western Australia, the resident Magistrate at Roebourne was supportive of him.<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately, the appeal was rejected.

Kenji Fujita wrote in his memoir, ‘Mr. Muramats had credibility with the white people and was a person of virtue’.<sup>60</sup> He also wrote ‘he was respected by white people. It was because he had money and assets. He had credit with people at the port hundreds of miles away, and if we mentioned Muramats’ name, everyone lent us anything’.<sup>61</sup>

## 6. Concluding remarks: Suggestions for the further research

The large volume of material in the account books are invaluable historical documents that need to be studied further from many aspects.

First, these are rare materials that document business activities in northwest Australia from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The account books are unique records elucidating the business operations of master pearlers as well as merchants. The records reveal business practices and methods of bookkeeping at the time. It is only through these documents that we are able to gain Muramats’ personal insights into the pearling and trading industries from the perspective of a non-European businessman, as very few personal correspondences of his have survived or been preserved. His business practices offer a different picture of Japanese merchants on the west coast of Australia from that portrayed in existing studies.

Second, the account books offer a realistic view of local economic activities and social relations. The diversity and dynamics of the region need further exploration. The account books are a valuable resource, especially for students interested in the history of the region. They record Muramats’ long-term business relations with his clients, for example,

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58 NAA: A1 1924/24078 ‘Saburo Muramatsu - Exemption certificates.

59 SROWA: s3668 cons1650 1922/0534 ‘Resident Magistrate’ s decision in Roe - Claim for enrolment of Jiro Muramats’.

60 Matsumoto *et al.* eds (2021) *op. cit.*, p.104.

61 *Ibid.*, p.117.

his acceptance of longer terms for debt repayments, sometimes for up to 30 years. The books help to unveil the social and economic contributions of small and medium-sized Asian-owned businesses to the local communities in the Pilbara.

Finally, for students of Australia-Japan relations, in particular the immigration history between the two countries, the account books exhibit the real lives of Japanese workers, their activities in the community, social relations among themselves, and their relations with Japan. In most studies of immigration, immigrants are often treated as one undifferentiated mass, except for those few who were successful. And there is yet no study that examines the actual lives of indentured labourers in the pearling industry.

In the Muramats' account books, individual names were listed, and their economic activities were recorded in detail. For example, with regard to the crew, it records on which vessel he was on, his duties, how much he was paid and how often, how he spent his earnings and sometimes what he purchased, who borrowed money from whom, and how often and how much money he sent back to Japan. The records also reveal Muramats' concern for his employees. He always gave them gifts on Christmas and the King's Birthday, and provided special meals and drinks on New Year's Day and the Japanese Emperor's Birthday. Melbourne Cup tickets were available for the workers. When payments were delayed, Muramats calculated unpaid wages with interest, even when he was detained in the internment camp. Used in conjunction with Fujita Kenji's sketchbook and memoir, and the diaries of other Japanese crew,<sup>62</sup> the account books can help elucidate the lives of indentured workers in the Australian pearl-shell fishery industry. The author will take up this topic in a separate paper.

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62 In carrying out the research project, we reprinted a few of the diaries of Japanese who worked in Australia before the Pacific War. The diary of Shotaro Takimoto, who worked as a cook and engineer on the lugger based on Thursday Island, was also a valuable record that provides a look into the lives of the Japanese crew on pearling luggers. The diary contains almost daily entries from 1924 to 1931 and describes the work and life on board, haul, and the whereabouts of the pearling grounds, as well as information regarding the weather, wind direction and sea conditions. [松本博之 (2016) 『木曜島真珠貝漁業の記録—瀧本庄太郎日記—大正十四年・大正十五年・昭和三年・昭和四年・昭和五年』

(Hiroyuki Matsumoto (2016) *Records of pearl-shell fisheries in Thursday Island - Diary of Shotaro Takimoto, 1924-1931*, Monograph.

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