

## Chasing the Chieftain's Daughter

### Dancing Japan's Pacific Desires

*“Wa-ta-shi no . . . la-bā-san . . . shū-chō no mu-su-me . . .”*

ATO ȪAÑKIO WINKS AS HE BEGINS TO SING a Japanese song. Straightening out his freshly pressed orange shirt as he corrects his posture, the elderly Marshallese historian who spent his childhood on Kwajalein wrinkles his mouth to carefully enunciate and draw out each word of the lyrics as he sings slowly and spiritedly. He slaps his palm on his thigh for rhythm, as if reciting a church hymn, and upon finishing the song he breaks out in an extended chuckle, “*Wor-ror!*—ah, damn,” he says in a low voice. “I can’t pronounce Japanese anymore.”

His eyes suddenly glaze over as he raises his eyebrows and looks through the cracks of the doorway of his home on Ebeye islet at the departing US Army ferry headed back to Kwajalein. It is as if he is seeing beyond the atollscapes that lie before him in 2006 and into another dimension. “Now, wait!” he says over the receding roar of the boat engines, and he switches back into totally fluent Japanese, “*Ima omoidashita!*—That song is coming back to me now!” He draws a deep breath and continues to sing where he left off, with almost perfect Japanese pronunciation:

. . . <i>Iro wa kuroi ga</i>	. . . She’s black but
<i>Nanyō ja</i>	In the South Seas
<i>bijin . . .</i>	She’s a beauty . . .

“That’s all—*emmuij*,” he says, clearing his throat and making an embarrassed smile. Ato explains that he learned this song when he was in “*gakkō*,” the Japanese public elementary school on Kwajalein,

when he was only about six or seven years old. He tells me his teacher used to sing it, and later, when the soldiers came to reinforce the atoll against the Americans and forcefully remove Marshallese from their land, he heard them singing it too.

“Everyone used to sing it, but after the war when the Japanese lost the war and got killed, or when they were sent back to Japan here everyone forgot it,” he explains. “I think I know who the song is about, too. There were plenty of Japanese businessmen who came here like that. Married the daughter of the *irooj*, made children, and then they died in the war. So many families connected to Japan today—I don’t know,” he jokes, “maybe because of this song?”

The prewar popular Japanese song “*Shūchō no Musume*” (The chieftain’s daughter)<sup>1</sup> could almost have been a theme song for Japanese colonialism in the Marshall Islands, if not all of Japan’s mandated territories in the Pacific, for it emerged at the beginning of the Nanyō Guntō administration and encapsulated a whole worldview of Japanese imperial desires: romanticism, assimilation, and possession. Peattie (1988, 216), Yamashita (2000, 449), and Kawamura (1994, 88) have all made mention of the 1930s version of the song, without tracing it back to its origins or paying much attention to the legacy it produced. As Ato suggests, however, it was much more than a song: The *shūchō no musume* herself was, after all, an icon. I explore in the following pages how as a motif she appears not only in song, but also in dance, art, and imagery throughout the Japanese colonial period, not only in the Marshall Islands, but throughout all of Nanyō and many other sites of encounter. She is, I argue, the quintessential embodiment of the Japanese colonial desire toward the islands and a symbol for the myth of available, alluring virgin territories into which Japan could launch its expansionist “mission” of *nanshin*, or southern advance.

Although this mission unfolded long before imperial Japanese military forces began fortifying rural Kwajalein Atoll as a major front-line commanding base in the war years, the chieftain’s daughter narrative of power and privilege foregrounded and legitimated the Japanese military *raison d’être* by expanding the territory of Japan out into the Pacific. Throughout the Marshall Islands, elders like Ato often recall these lyrics within the context of a time of relatively peaceful cooperation and intermingling with Japanese migrants, along with the bittersweet memories of war they also conjure up. And while younger Japanese today have little or no awareness of the song’s existence,

for many Japanese people born before the Asia Pacific War, the mere mention of “Māsharu” produces a grin of nostalgia. Long before my conversations with Ato on Ebeye islet, I remember many puzzling moments in Japan when, upon the mention of my childhood in the Marshall Islands, elderly Japanese men and women would begin dancing, arms in the air, swaying from side to side and singing, “*Shū-chō no musume.*”

Despite this, digging around for a recording of the original song in contemporary Japan proved to be quite difficult at first. While I was able to find a disco remix from the 1970s called “Chieftain’s Daughter ’79,” and a newer version by a female *shamisen* player made in 2005,<sup>2</sup> both of these recordings were hard to come by. My quest to find “The Chieftain’s Daughter” led me to the old record collections of a radio station in southern Japan, where I first listened to at least three different versions of the song; through old record shops in the back alleys of Jinbōchō, Tokyo; to a farming village in the mountains of Kyushu; to the Pacific Arts festival in Palau; to auction websites and YouTube channels; and to a number of archival sources, in which I finally encountered her, face-to-face, on an unseasonably hot day in Kōchi, Japan, in early November 1923.

### Representing Japanese “Tropicalism”: The Daku-Daku Craze

With the intense blue of the sky and the warm breezes blowing off the Pacific Ocean, the weather seems more like the tropics than autumn in Shikoku. On the grounds of the new Kōchi Imperial Secondary School (now Kōchi University), the local community has gathered to celebrate the school’s opening, with an all-day track and field event, an *undōkai* to celebrate the athletic prowess of the school’s inaugural two hundred first-year students, and to enjoy a series of cultural performances (Kisō 1986, 257). The air smells of dry leaves and the overpowering sweet perfume of *kinmokusei* (osmanthus) flowers, and of salty brine and fishing nets off in the distance.

Dressed variously in finely tailored white suits and hats, or in *hakama* with *tabi* socks and *geta* clogs, the well-to-do invited guests and officials sitting on chairs under the red and white tents around the track fan themselves and wipe the perspiration from their brows. Families and other well-wishers from surrounding villages take a break from their farming and fishing to root for these elite students who have come to study from all around Japan. They huddle around *bentō*

boxes stacked high with *onigiri* rice balls, fish, pickled *otsukemono* vegetables, and various local delicacies. In the sweltering heat, many of the men have already gone through several bottles of beer and cold *sake*, and they are already quite red in the face as they await the next performance of the early afternoon. In the morning, there have been relay races and sprints, interspersed with brief choral renditions of school songs or traditional dances, like the well-known humorous *yosakoi* dances of the region. Even in the audience, women and men of all ages were standing, clapping, and moving in step with the boys on the playing field as they danced along with these familiar pieces. But a strange hush falls over the enthusiastic crowd when the next group of students steps forth.

A class of forty boys walks out onto the soil of the playing field, barefoot, wearing nothing but red *fundoshi* loincloths covered with “grass” skirts made of straw, with red *hachimaki* bands of cloth tied around their heads. Their skinny teenage bodies are smeared from head to toe in charcoal, leaving only circles of pale flesh around their eyes exposed. Beads of perspiration run down their backs, rivulets of black ink.

With deadpan seriousness, the boys march forth slowly and deliberately with sharpened bamboo spears in their hands, some holding a giant banner emblazoned with a huge skull on it. They form a circle in front of the audience and begin to rotate, kicking their legs inward as they dance. In unison, they start to chant peculiar lyrics:

<i>Sekidō chokka Māsharu Guntō</i>	Down by the equator in the Marshall Islands
<i>Yashi no hakage de daku-daku odoru</i>	She dances <i>daku-daku</i> shaded by the palm fronds
<i>Odori odotte yoru o akasha</i>	Dancing all night long
<i>Ashita wa banana no shita ni neru</i>	She'll sleep tomorrow under the banana tree.
<i>Kinō yama de mita shūchō no musume</i>	I saw the Chieftain's Daughter on the mountain yesterday,
<i>Kyō wa izuko de daku-daku odoru</i>	Where will she dance <i>daku-daku</i> today?
<i>Odori shiranai hito wa iya</i>	She doesn't like [men] who don't know how to dance.
<i>Dare ga oyome ni yuku mono ka</i>	Who would marry one of them?

<i>Yūkari shigeru Indasu-gawa de</i>	By the Indus River where the eucalyptus thrives,
<i>Yashi no hakage ni banana ga minorya</i>	Bananas ripen in the shade of the palm fronds.
<i>Musume odore ya daku daku odore</i>	Girl, dance, do your <i>daku-daku</i> dance
<i>Ashita wa tenki ka yūgata ga akai</i> <sup>3</sup>	Tomorrow might be fair weather, the sunset is so red.

Bobbing their heads back and forth, the boys begin to sway their hips and step from side to side while they sing. As the boys dance and repeat the words, the audience begins to sway with the bizarre rhythm and nod their heads. The line “*daku-daku odoru*,” an unusual expression suggesting a frenzied dance causing profuse sweating or the rhythmic gallop of a horse, is sung in chorus by the audience as they watch and clap, mesmerized by the boys’ synchronized movements, delighted by the silliness of it all.

It is a dance with a fanciful and nonsensical, comical feel to it, typical of the sort of “*eroguro nansensu*” of the day, a popular cultural style of art or performance that is simultaneously *ero* (erotic), *guro* (grotesque), and *nansensu* (nonsensical). The lyrics reference the far-away tropical Marshall Islands, which were only subsumed the previous year in 1922 into Japan’s mandated Nanyō Guntō islands of Micronesia. Suggesting a chiefly virgin bride who is all at once in possession of erotic beauty and a grotesque otherness, the boys’ strange song imagines a backdrop of fanciful islands awash with exotic kitsch, like eucalyptus, banana, and palm trees, or the mystical Indus River. No matter that eucalyptus does not grow in the Marshall Islands or that the Indus runs through what is still in the early 1920s the colonial British territory of India, this is a song and dance with imperial aspirations for all that is out there in the mysterious lands and seas that make up the southern frontier of Nanyō. By the time the black-faced boy minstrels march off the field, the Marshallese chieftain’s daughter has made her debut in the popular cultural imaginary of Taishō-era Japan, the alluring damsel of a South Seas fantasyland. Unwittingly, the boys of Kōchi Imperial Secondary School have started a whole sensation and contributed to Japan’s mission in the Pacific. Little do they realize that their chieftain’s daughter will have a life of her own throughout the twentieth century and will figure prominently throughout Japan’s colonial project in the decades to come.

The “Daku-Daku Odori,” as the dance came to be known as it was performed again and again throughout the region, was originally conceived by twenty-one-year-old Yoden Tsuruhiko (Kisō 1986, 257). Though he had come to study from Kumamoto Prefecture in Kyūshū, Yoden was clearly inspired by the story of Mori Koben, the entrepreneur from Tosa (Kōchi Prefecture), who had migrated in 1896 to the islands of Pohnpei and Chuuk (Peattie 1988, 28) and become a local legend there, even before the formal Japanese administration of the islands began. Having just moved to Kōchi, Yoden and his classmates were seduced by the real-life tales of Mori, who in fact did marry a local woman from a chiefly family and had already begun an entire Japanese-Micronesian dynasty in Chuuk. Mori’s experiences were told and widely celebrated back in Kōchi with much excitement, and the success of his adventures was only further compounded when all the German-held territories of Micronesia were awarded to Japan under a League of Nations Mandate in 1922.

Why Yoden chose the Marshall Islands and not Chuuk as the setting for his song and dance is not entirely clear, except it would be fair to speculate that since the Marshall Islands were the farthest extreme of the Japanese empire in the 1920s, in what was popularly understood as the South Seas, it only makes sense that he would have imagined them to be literally the most “South Pacific” of all those islands (Peattie 1988, 216). Interestingly, even as late as the census of 1937 in the Marshall Islands, there were no Japanese colonists from Kōchi in the Marshall Islands district capital of Jabor (Jebwad), Jaluit, and only eleven residents from the Shikoku region in general (Nanyō Guntō Kyōiku-kai 1938, 11–16). While Japanese migration had begun into Palau, Yap, Chuuk, and Saipan in the western part of Micronesia (Peattie 1988, 186) in Yoden’s time, faraway Jaluit in the Marshall Islands was the least known of all the territories.

As I have already described, the term Nanyō was originally conceived as a counterpart to the terms Tōyō (the East) or Seiyō (the West). Literally translated “South Seas,” it more generally referred to “the South.” It thus follows that, in a typical orientalist pattern, there would be an equivalent sort of dynamic of cultural superiority and simultaneous romanticism taking place from the north (Japan) toward the south, and the further south, the more exotic. Literary critic Kawamura Minato (1994, 88) calls this “tropicalism,” a whole genre of popular culture in Japan from the 1920s all the way through the early 1940s that embraced a fantastic vision of tropical islands.

There was also the influence of an American Hollywood version of the Pacific, of alluring but comical girls dancing hula on archetypal palm-studded beaches, and in the mid-1920s Hawaiian music, with ukeleles and slack-key guitars, was quite popular throughout Japan. Unfamiliar topographies, like coconut palms, coral sand and atolls, or celestial constellations like the Southern Cross all figured in this Japanese imaginary. Most importantly with this, however, was a fantasy of the noble virgin Islander princess, typified by the chieftain's daughter.

Yoden's intriguing composition was performed entirely by young men, in the tradition of a sort of comic song or slapstick comedy. The lyrics of the "Daku-Daku Odori" presume that all these "black" boys are in fact the suitors for the chieftain's daughter, who is ever-present and yet never revealed to the audience. This is not, for instance, the sort of cross-dressing parody of hula performed by American GIs at Pearl Harbor and elsewhere in the Pacific later in the twentieth century with the typical coconut bra, plastic grass skirt, and lei (Jolly 1997, 116). It is rather a caricature of a presumed Marshall Islander manhood, stylized into primate-like blackness and danced for the sake of pure comedy. Like drag, the intrigue of Yoden's performance comes from the imperfection of the artifice, from the absurdity of "culturally superior" Japanese boys at an elite imperial school trying to dance a "primitive" dance.<sup>4</sup>

The dance becomes more and more frenzied and amusing as the boys compete, toppling over each other to wag their hips, bob their heads, and shake their thighs in pursuit of the elusive and invisible chieftain's daughter. It is not surprising that with its competitive comic value, requiring participants to outdo each other with absurd dances, this sort of event became popularized (Kisō 1986, 256) at mostly male rural social drinking gatherings in the Taishō period, not only in Shikoku but in other regions as well. The Daku-Daku Odori may not have been the first, but it sparked a trend, since schoolboys at other schools throughout Japan in the 1920s began doing dances like these at their school festivals as well, in a similar style of camp, painting their faces black, wearing headbands, and dancing in straw skirts, in what broadly became known as *dojin matsuri*,<sup>5</sup> or "Native festivals."

The lyrics indicate the impossibility of winning over the chieftain's daughter without knowing how to dance. This prose suggests by extension that men dance properly in order to seduce and marry her. In one sense, imagining the chieftain's daughter as metonym for the Marshall Islands or all of Micronesia, it is possible to interpret this

as a dance not only about marrying a woman, but also about annexing and possessing an entire territory by going through the colonialist “motions” of imperial expansion. But at the same time, one must dance the right way to earn the island princess’s approval; these lyrics are not just about “possessing” but also about *being accepted* (and “possessed,” in a sense) into a chiefly lineage.<sup>6</sup>

### Imagining Race in the South Seas: The “Black But Beautiful” Lover

<i>Watashi no labā-san, Shūchō no musume Iro wa kuroi ga Nanyō ja bijin</i>	My lover is the chieftain’s daughter She’s black but In the South Seas, she’s a beauty
<i>Sekidō-chokka, Māsharu Guntō Yashi no kokage de teku-teku odoru</i>	Down by the equator in the Marshall Islands, in the shade of the palm trees She dances lazily [ <i>teku-teku</i> ]
<i>Odore, odore, dobuzake nonde Asu wa ureshii kubi no matsuri</i>	Dance, dance! Drink up your spirits! Tomorrow is the happy headhunt- ing feast.
<i>Kinō hama de mita Shūchō no musume Kyō wa banana no kokage de nemuru</i>	Yesterday I saw her on the beach, The chieftain’s daughter, Today she sleeps under the banana trees
<i>Odore, odore, odoranu mono ni Dare ga oyome ni Yaru mono ka?</i> <sup>7</sup>	Dance, dance! Who would marry his daughter to one who won’t dance? <sup>8</sup>

Yoden’s compelling melody and lyrics spread to other schools, and other festivals in western Japan became so popular that when newly established Polydor Records needed a cheerful song to release on its first album in 1930, it commissioned composer Ishida Hitomatsu to rework the “Daku-Daku Odori” song into an upbeat comic tune (above). The recording (Ishida 1930), performed by well-known Osaka singer Tomitaya Kikuji and played with a *shamisen* and flute accompaniment, was simply titled “The Chieftain’s Daughter” (“Shūchō no



Musume”). It is this version that most people nowadays recall and upon which all subsequent versions were based.

It is with Ishida's version that a Marshall Islander first becomes a “*labā-san*,” a humorous Japanization of the English word “lover.” This chieftain's daughter is immediately made intimate, eroticized, appropriated as an object of desire, all the while being ridiculed at the same time and imagined in a primitivist scenario of savage headhunting cannibalism and idle laziness. Adding the Japanese honorific suffix *-san* to “lover” underscores the satirical tension with which this love affair is imagined. In contrast to the minstrel dance that accompanied Yoden's earlier version, Ishida's lyrics no longer imagine the bungling antics of a troupe of “black” Islander men competing for the love of a chiefly woman; the presumably Japanese narrator of the song has already claimed her, like Japan has claimed the Marshall Islands, as his own. She is no longer available for local men; she is a “lover,” already a prized possession for whom Japanese men must dance. The song becomes a comic invitation for other men to “drink up” their *sake* and dance to win over the heart of a local princess.

In the Ishida version of the song, the expression “*daku-daku*” is changed to “*teku-teku*,” an onomatopoeic term that means “trudgingly” or “slow and laboriously.” In a rendering of Islanders as “lazy Natives,” much like nineteenth-century European and American representations, the implication here is no longer one of frenzy or sweaty fervor; it is one of laziness and lackadaisical swaying to and fro. In this version, the chieftain's daughter's life is described as idle and frivolous, even boring.

Ishida's line, “She's black but in the South Seas she's a beauty” (*iro wa kuroi ga, Nanyō ja bijin*), serves a similar purpose as the black-face minstrel performances of Yoden and his classmates a decade earlier. It is a satirical device that emphasizes the perceived inferiority of “blackness” within the Japanese imperial racial hierarchies. Russell writes of contemporary Japanese literary representations:

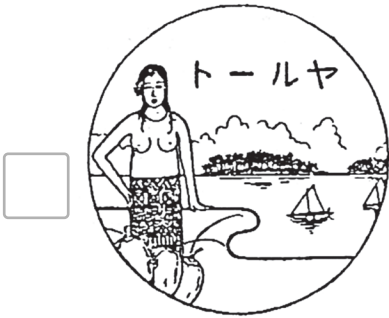
[T]his tendency to dehumanize and belittle blacks disguises [the] tendency . . . to employ the black Other as a reflexive symbol through which Japanese attempt to deal with their own ambiguous racio-cultural status in a Eurocentric world. (Russell 1991, 6)

Indeed, these lyrics carry with them a “black but beautiful” connotation that the chieftain's daughter's appearance would not be

desirable anywhere but in the Nanyō Guntō, creating a sort of orientalized, “tropicalized” exoticism that romanticizes and subjugates Marshall Islanders while positioning the Japanese imperial subject as culturally superior, on par with European imperialists. This image of the eroticized Marshallese “lover-san” stands in stark contrast to the grotesque appearance of forty boys smeared black with charcoal. It references another type of “blackness”: taking the emphasis away from the primitive African stereotypes performed by Yoden’s minstrels and projecting a “dusky maiden” image of the Islander princess as a sexual prize. Still, it is this same marking of blackness itself that makes the chieftain’s daughter exotic while also rendering the song comical for the 1930s Japanese listener, who would likely have perceived a liaison with a non-Japanese (and particularly a “black” person) to be deviant, if not “grotesque.” This is, after all, probably why the song is categorized into the *ero-guro* genre in the first place. Both “erotic” in its tropical fantasy romance and “grotesque” in its eccentricity, it is a double-edged narrative of titillation and humor.

An image in an August 1930 Polydor newsletter advertising the original recording of “Shūchō no Musume” showed how the chieftain’s daughter was transformed into a “black but beautiful lover-san” (Hori 1969). With its photograph of a slender woman in a “grass” skirt with her exposed thigh showing through, with accoutrements like Hawaiian *ti* leaf anklets and a *haku* lei in her hair, the image is less representative of Marshallese femininity and more like a touristic American postcard advertising 1930s Waikiki. It is suggestive in the way that it directly references a European-American primitive fantasy of the tropics, if not Polynesia. An emulation of the trope of the hula girl, her arms are spread back as she gazes out toward a distant horizon. The Polydor image thus fuses the Japanese Nanyō “tropicalistic” optic toward the Marshall Islands in Micronesia with its Western counterpart in Polynesia.<sup>9</sup>

It would not be an exaggeration to say that this image of lazily dancing femininity ultimately becomes a poster girl metonym for the entire Marshall Islands, as she does in this official postal cancellation seal from Jaluit District of the Nanyō Guntō in the 1930s. Whereas similar seals from Palau, Yap, or Chuuk featured traditional buildings, spears, and masks as their motifs, the Marshallese capital of Jaluit was symbolized entirely by a stylized caricature insignia of a bare-breasted chieftain’s daughter, standing along the shoreline with ripe coconuts at her feet under text that reads “Yarūto” (Jaluit), as if to make the



Marshallese woman synonymous with the island itself.

Pacific scholars, writers, and artists have long criticized the so-called “dusky maiden” archetype in European and American representations (Jolly 1997; Desmond 1999; Ferguson and Turnbull 1999; Kihara 2005), and the *shūchō no musume* archetype has some resonance with this hula-girl image.<sup>10</sup>

As Teresia Teaiwa (1999) wrote of Paul Gauguin’s *Noa Noa*, the artist’s depiction of his thirteen-year-old wife Teha’amana (the model in his still-life paintings and the inspiration for the character Tehura in his writing) is similar to that of the image deployed by Hollywood and the tourist industry, a conflation of the contradictory “lazy” and “erotically dancing” description:

Gauguin’s Teha’amana is inscribed as still life, always in repose, and then made to resignify “polymorphous” mobile “Polynesia.” Although an obvious contrast to the image of the “Polynesian” hula dancer, both images are easily absorbed into “Club Med visions,” since Hollywood and naïve anthropologists have helped entrench notions that the lives of “Polynesians” come to not much more than languorous days and erotic nights.” (Teaiwa 1999, 255)

Looking only at the orientalist/tropicalist gaze suggested by the “dusky maiden” and other colonial erotic/exotic representations of “natives,” however, can have the consequence of “presuming too much about the gazer,” as Kelly elucidates (1997, 76). Focusing exclusively on the colonial gaze also tends to privilege a male optic and presume a facile phallic “penetration” of colonized sites without considering “the realities and fantasies of colonial life” (Jolly 1997, 9). The parallels between “virgin women” and “virgin land” notwithstanding, here we must take into consideration McClintock’s (1995) devastating critique of phallic power in imperial conquests. Colonial exploits, not only for Europeans but for Japanese, were not a simple “penetration” of passive and virgin terrain but rather were filled with much more tension, fear, and trouble than is often acknowledged. Indeed, as McClintock writes, the colonial imagination of land as feminine and virgin is:

both a *poetics* of ambivalence and a *politics* of violence. The “discoverers” . . . had stepped far beyond any sanctioned guarantees. Their unsavory rages, their massacres and rapes, their atrocious rituals of militarized masculinity sprang not only from the economic lust for spices, silver and gold, but also from the implacable rage of paranoia. (McClintock 1995, 28)

The chieftain’s daughter narrative, while it engages stereotypes of erotic Native women, stresses kinship and the relation to the chiefly father. It is not only a story about dancing erotically to “get the girl,” it is more importantly a tale about marriage and union. Effectively, the chieftain’s daughter narrative follows in a similar tradition to the hula-girl image, simultaneously denying Islander subjectivity while advancing imperial desires, possession, and colonialism. Yet it plots a different trajectory, one in which Japanese and Islander destinies actually merge. The island princess is not a girl to be taken away as a prize; this is also an alliance between Japanese and Marshallese chiefly genealogies. In Ishida’s version of the song and in many later iterations, the princess’ father (the chief) is the one who makes the final decision of marrying his daughter to an outsider, thus highlighting the alliance between Japanese and Marshallese patriarchal power.

Still, as McClintock suggests, these fantasies and realities were also infused with a great deal of anxiety. No doubt the allure of the *shūchō no musume* mythology played in the dreams of many of the Japanese traders and colonists who went to the Marshall Islands and other parts of Micronesia, but Yamaguchi Yōji, who was born on Saipan and grew up in the Nanyō Guntō, explains:

Those men were terrified. They went alone to the islands, sometimes to places where there weren’t many other Japanese. They didn’t know what to eat. They had heard stories about people getting killed in the past. It was a good thing if they could get the protection of the chief, so why get together with a commoner girl if you could find yourself a *shūchō no musume*?<sup>11</sup>

The “Shūchō no Musume” archetype spawned a wide range of images and expectations that could be mapped against the entirety of Oceania, allowing Japanese colonists, soldiers, administrators, and traders to participate in the same sort of imperial project that Europeans had been undertaking in the previous century. The images

produced in the Marshall Islands by Japanese photographers<sup>12</sup> clearly played upon this archetype, singling out the Marshallese woman from other Nanyō Micronesian Islanders as the quintessence of beauty. Typically, like the following image of three Marshallese girls, in post-cards and photo almanacs advertising the Nanyō Guntō as an attractive place for Japanese to travel, work, and migrate, there would be a captivating photo of *Yarūto no fujin*, or “Woman of Jaluit,” in which invariably one or more young and fair Marshallese women would be posed, as if to feature the intrinsic beauty of women from this locale. Often they would be photographed bare-breasted, in a recreation of the Marshalls’ premissionary past. These images were produced both to accommodate the narrative of the alluring Marshallese chieftain’s daughter, just as much as they were taken to deliver the promise of that beauty and desirability back to the Japanese homeland.

Most Islander women, it seems, were already accustomed to wearing European dresses by the time the Japanese colonial period began, but Joachim deBrum, a Marshallese-Portuguese photographer from Likiep Atoll, also took photographs of his own family members in which many of the models (both women and men) posed in “traditional” attire. It is likely the case, however, that in the Marshalls district capital of Jaluit in the 1920s and 1930s, it was no longer commonplace for women to be topless. It could be argued that Japa-



nese photographers made such images of Marshallese women as a means of ethnologically documenting Nanyō culture, in a scientific effort to portray Islanders as natural and innocent. Lutz and Collins suggest in their readings of *National Geographic* photographs that in fact even such “truthful” representations of women ultimately serve to eroticize and titillate; like American images of indigenous people in the pages of *National Geographic*, these early Japanese photographs only “worked” as both scientific and erotic because they were a racial and gendered subordination of black women (Lutz and Collins 1993, 115–116).<sup>13</sup>

How black, however, could one be while still being beautiful? For the most part, aside from the broad racial hierarchy that placed Japanese above all “lesser races,” within the Nanyō Guntō, Islanders were further classified by skin color into two distinct groups: Chamorro (*Chamoro-zoku*) and Kanaka (*Kanaka-zoku*), with most Marshall Islanders of darker complexion categorized in the latter group.<sup>14</sup> According to *Waga Nanyō*, a silent educational film produced mainly by the Japanese navy in 1936, Kanakas were described as “being playfully care-free but of lower cultural level than Chamorros,”<sup>15</sup> while Chamorros were “advanced and of a docile nature with an industrious manner, possessing even pianos and other instruments in some of their wealthier homes” (Nanyō-chō 1936). Chamorro, a term taken completely out of context from the Mariana Islands, where it refers to the indigenous population there, was taken by Japanese to mean “of mixed race” or “of lighter skin.” Chamorros were thought to be more intelligent, sophisticated, and advanced, and they were often admired for their beauty. The 1932 photo on the right, for example, labeled “Chamorro Woman of Jaluit,” reproduces the chieftain’s daughter discourse while drawing attention to her whiteness and mixed-European heritage. The caption under the photo reads, “This photograph depicts the modern style of clothing of Chamorro women today, who do not differ much from European women in



that they can not only play the piano but also do contemporary Western dances.”<sup>16</sup>

*Kanaka-zoku* is a word also heavily laden with a complicated heritage. The word *kanaka* originated from Polynesian languages (*kānaka* in Hawaiian, or *tangata* in Samoan, Tongan, and Maori) and simply means “man” or “person.” This word most likely came into usage for the first time by North Americans in the context of labor when Hawaiians began to settle coastal British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest as pioneer homesteaders who engaged in manual labor (Koppel 1995, 1). *Kānaka* gradually took on the connotation of “native laborer” when used by American and European (particularly German) plantation owners across their colonial territories throughout Oceania, even outside the Polynesian context. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Queensland, Australia, where the practice of “blackbirding”—forcing Pacific Islanders from Melanesian islands into labor—had become so institutionalized, was at one point nicknamed “Kanakaland.” Gerald Horne writes that in Australia and other parts of the South Pacific in the late 1800s, the term “Kanaka” was used as a racist slur, just as “boy” or the n-word was used in the American South around the same time (Horne 2007, 46). According to David Chappell, *canaque*, the French version of the Hawaiian *kānaka*, which had been popularized aboard ships and in plantations, also was a condescending term white settlers to New Caledonia used to refer to local people, although this word was reappropriated positively by nationalists such as Jean-Marie Tjibaou as a term to consolidate indigenous identity in the movement toward self-determination (Chappell 2013, 2). In turn, indigenous people there began to refer to themselves proudly as Kanaks in the 1970s, calling their territory Kanaky.

Although the etymology of the word's use in Japanese is obscure, it most likely came from the German racial classification *kanake*, which was, like in other European colonial plantations, used to refer to the nonwhite “natives” of German Pacific possessions such as the Marshall Islands and Samoa. Probably this racist term was simply adopted through translations of German ethnological studies and administrative precedent into Japanese administrative practice.<sup>17</sup> Thus despite the term's indigenous origins in Polynesia (where it is still used proudly, for instance, to mean “Native Hawaiian,” *Kānaka Māoli*), *kanaka* carried much baggage by the time it was used by Japanese civil administrators, including the assumption that the Native was meant to do indentured menial labor. It was, as in *kanaka dojin*,

often combined with the politically incorrect term *dojin* (“dirt person”) in magazines, on tourist postcards, and in various other popular representations.

It is thus unsettling that the Japanese government continues to use this problematic racial epithet uncritically to describe the “race” of the Marshallese people. At the time of this writing, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on at least one of its profile pages for the Republic of the Marshall Islands within its country-by-country fact database, continues to claim unabashedly that the *minzoku* (ethnicity or race) of “the Marshallese people” is *kanaka-zoku*.<sup>18</sup> This was the only island nation in Oceania whose population Japan still considered as *kanaka-zoku* in the official context. It has since updated its profile on some, but not all, materials to describe Marshallese as *Mikuroneshia-kei*, or “Micronesian,” in keeping with its profiles for the neighboring Federated States of Micronesia (a nation made up of former Nanyō Guntō districts Pohnpei, Kosrae, Chuuk, and Yap States) and Palau, as well as even Kiribati and Nauru to the south. But the lingering categorization of *kanaka-zoku* suggests that Marshall Islanders have been perceived as somehow racially different from other Micronesians when seen from an official Japanese optic that persists in ethnologically classifying the world’s people. The ongoing imposition of such a pan-Pacific plantation-era category (the Polynesian word *kanaka* was never a part of the Marshallese language), moreover, gives an indication of the extent to which Japan still frames Marshallese people in colonialist terms.<sup>19</sup>

Returning to the photographic images of Marshallese, it is important to consider the overall Japanese colonial practice of imaging as well. Morris Low (2003) writes of the way photography was used to support Japanese colonialism in China during the same period. Images were used to produce icons of truth that could convey a scientific “objective” vision of Manchuria as both a site of touristic beauty worthy of “sightseeing” and an unstable, impoverished territory in need of Japanese rehabilitation and military intervention (Low 2003, 110–113):

Through the use of Western science and the camera, the Japanese sought to impose a modernity on the Chinese and the people of Manchuria as part of their own colonialist project. We can conceive the use of photography as part of cross-cultural communication, a spectatorship that provokes thoughts and action. A certain “look”



involves power relations that can subjugate and empower. (Low 2003, 118)

Granted, photography served similar Japanese imperial interests of subjugation and empowerment in Micronesia, but of course we should keep in mind not to attribute too much power to that gaze itself, as colonial encounters were not so simple. Low writes about images taken by the Japanese government in Manchuria, but he does not take into account the ways such images intersected with popular culture and how this trickled down to the public and to the individuals who actually went to Manchuria. Clearly the intertextuality of popular media—not only photographs but also artistic renderings, music, film, and so forth—created a semiotic “mythology” (Barthes 2000) of representation that cannot be ignored.

In the Micronesian context, tropes of the tropics, primitiveness, blackness, and the available chiefly virgin bride were deeply entangled throughout both official and public representations of Nanyō, ranging from Japanese-navy-sponsored propaganda films like *Umi no Seimeisen* (1932) and *Waga Nanyō* (1936) to the glossy ethnological Nanyō photograph albums, to the observations of Hijikata Hisakatsu and Nakajima Atsushi in the 1930s and 1940s, and indeed to popular songs like “Shūchō no Musume.” Settlers, colonial administrators, businessmen, travelers, and soldiers then reproduced these mythologies and assumptions in their own private photographs and memoirs, diaries, poems, songs, and a wide range of other forms about what they observed or wanted to see in the Marshall Islands. This is no different from how Japanese and American tourists today perpetuate their own tropical fantasies on Waikiki Beach in Hawai'i (Feeser and Chan 2006), deliberately framing their snapshots to reproduce the postcard images imprinted in their minds, rather than what they see before their eyes.

### **Dankichi Dancing**

Meanwhile, though Japanese narratives increasingly eroticized and romanticized the Marshall Islander women, they tended to reduce Nanyō Guntō men to comical “black” primitive people who could be enlisted to support the empire.<sup>20</sup> This was particularly evident in the *manga* comic *Bōken Dankichi* (Dankichi the adventurous), created by Shimada Keizō in 1931 and published until 1939 in the popular boys'

magazine *Shōnen Kurabu* (Shimada 1976). Read widely by Japanese boys, the comic was a simple narrative of a wide-eyed boy, Dankichi, who, having set out one fine day on a fishing trip with his trusty mouse friend Karikō, falls asleep and finds himself washed up on a tropical island somewhere in Nanyō Guntō.

Wasting no time upon his arrival on this jungle island, Dankichi strips off his shirt and trousers, dons a grass skirt, and, still wearing his shoes and a wristwatch, sets out to dethrone the chief of the island kingdom. He mingles among the “black” *kuronbō* Natives by covering himself in mud and eating bananas, but his cover is blown when a passing squall washes the color away. The chief is enraged by this infiltrator, whom, interestingly, he calls a “whitey” (*shiranbō*). Fearing that he might be eaten by the Natives (an obvious reference to adventure stories of cannibalism<sup>21</sup>), Dankichi easily outsmarts the chief by setting a trap.

Upon supplanting the chief and securing a promise of peace, Dankichi takes the chief’s crown and places it upon his head, thereby designating himself the new chief of “Dankichi Island.” He immediately and busily befriends the former chief and all the Natives, who happily allow him to paint their chests with numbers, since he cannot remember or pronounce their names. These Natives, who all look exactly the same, are all male, and are drawn as monkey-like black smiley creatures in the tradition of the “black sambo,” gladly follow Dankichi and Karikō wherever they go. The Islanders, the *bankō* (“savages”) are dressed in grass skirts and wear metal rings around their necks, a comic orientalist appropriation of other indigenous, perhaps African, cultures that further gives the characters a particular kind of “blackness.” The boys who danced the “Daku-Daku Odori” no doubt must have been trying to achieve a similar comical primitive parody of blackness when they stepped out onto the playing field smeared in charcoal back in 1923. Accentuating the African motif, Dankichi’s island is inhabited not only by the *bankō* Natives, but it is also home to fanciful exotic creatures like lions, giraffes, and ostriches that one might find in the Serengeti but certainly not on a small Micronesian island.

Russell argues that the genre of the “black other” in Japan, as seen in the chieftain’s daughter archetype or the *Bōken Dankichi* comic, is in part a legacy of American and European “Negro primitivism” that uses many stereotypes of “Africans.” This genre can be dated back to the nineteenth century, when Commodore Matthew Perry entertained

Japanese negotiators in 1854 with an “Ethiopian” minstrel show of white sailors in blackface (Russell 1991, 10). The Dankichi comic was certainly a twentieth-century perpetuation of this genre, yet it could also be said that the “native dances” of the 1920s were also linked to this same minstrel heritage.

Dankichi's glorious adventures in the South Seas continue throughout the comic. He proceeds to wage wars and conquer other islands, all the while tending to the needs of the Natives under his care. Waving small Japanese flags and shouting “*banzai*,” Dankichi leads the men on a march of progress that sees Dankichi in the role of school teacher, chief physician, military general, sports coach, policeman, and various other lead roles. His boyish enthusiasm and innocent playfulness seem to downplay the violence and oppressive coercion he initiates.

Dankichi's is a boy empire, rather like the fledgling imperial project of the Japanese nation itself. It is also a white empire, an articulation of Japanese-ness with European-ness and a narrative of masculine prowess. Essentially Dankichi is the boy hero who, like Barrie's Peter Pan (1928) and Stevenson's Jim Hawkins in *Treasure Island* (1930), is fully entitled to the colonial loot he stumbles upon. Out “fishing” at the beginning of his exploits, like resource-starved Japan in the early twentieth century, Dankichi proudly reaps his rewards as he builds up the economy of his colony. His earnest desire to “civilize” the Natives neatly conforms to the terms of the League of Nations mandate under which the Nanyō Guntō was to be administered. Like economist and educator Yanaihara Tadao, who surveyed the mandated islands and concluded that the Islanders were capable of being educated and nurtured into modernity (Yanaihara 1939; Townsend 2000, 197), Shimada, through his protagonist Dankichi, imagines a paternalistic relationship between “white” Japanese and “black” Islanders, who with proper nurturing can achieve self-determination. Not unlike actual Japanese settler Mori Koben in Micronesia, Dankichi is a colonist who facilitates the expansion of empire but also tends to the needs of locals.<sup>22</sup>

Shimada's narrative represented a shift in popular cultural representations of the Nanyō Guntō away from the dreamy fantasy of a faraway paradise “under the equator” toward a different narrative in which the islands were conquered, controlled, and easily managed by Japanese leadership. Indeed, the Robinson Crusoe-type virtues of rugged survivalism and resourcefulness in the comic suggest a sort of

dutiful imperial Japanese masculine ethic that could easily be translated into the national military agenda that was increasing in fervor at the time. It is important to note that other comics of the 1930s that were also serialized in *Shōnen Kurabu* alongside *Bōken Dankichi*—such as Tagawa Suihō’s *Norakuro*, about a stray dog that leads a life in the imperial army—had distinctly military themes.

Sudō Naoto points out that the American animation *Betty Boop* also played a role in influencing both the chieftain’s daughter trope and the *Bōken Dankichi* narrative. *Betty Boop’s Bamboo Isle*, a 1932 animated piece in which a dark-skinned Betty Boop dances a Samoan dance while clad in a grass skirt, was given the title *Shūchō no Musume* (The chieftain’s daughter) when it was shown in Japan, thus aligning racialized and sexualized fantasies for Japan in the the Marshall Islands with those of the United States in Samoa (Sudō 2010, 35). Sudō also argues that *Bōken Dankichi* cartoonist Shimada borrowed heavily from Boop’s island and the African jungle setting from another of her cartoons, plus a scene where one character smears himself with mud to pass as a native (2010, 37). This intertwining of American and Japanese ambitions for the Pacific Islands is representative of the conflict and subsequent collaboration that would play out in the decades that followed.

A 1934 propaganda animated short by Komatsuzawa Hajime also fuses American and Japanese popular cultural images in support of imperialism and militarization. It opens with an eclectic bunch of toy-like characters living on a small tropical island somewhere in the Pacific, all of whom are blissfully doing a Nanyō dance in step with the “Shūchō no Musume” melody. Out of the blue, they are attacked by a squadron of grotesque Mickey Mouse look-alikes swooping down from the sky aboard bats that attempt to invade their peaceful haven. The islanders call for help and are rescued by a group of Japanese story-book historical heroes led by Urashima Taro and Momotaro (another inspiration for the Dankichi character), who defeat the Mickey Mouse leader and restore order to the island. Sakura flowers blossom on the trees of the jungle, and the characters all begin to dance to a more Japanese-sounding tune in a traditional Bon Odori style. This cartoon, titled “Picture Book 1936,”<sup>23</sup> was likely meant to stir up motivation for Japan to expand its military in the wake of its withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933, and a warning of impending war with the United States in 1936 (possibly because of the expiration of a naval treaty in that year). Here, the chieftain’s daughter song thus becomes

a soundtrack for the Japanese empire itself, an empire that must be defended staunchly by nationalist nostalgia for the home islands.

By 1941, the “chieftain’s daughter” style of “Nanyō dancing” had become a trademark for southern expansion (*nanshin*) in general, as could be seen in a photograph printed in the *Mainichi Shimbun* newspaper in 1941, in which Japanese soldiers on the Burmese front were seen dancing a variation of a “Native dance” titled the “East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere South Seas Dance,” *Tōa Kyōei-ken Nanyō Odori* (Hosokawa 1992, 146). As Robertson (1995) argued about this dance, the “theatricality of the colonialist project” is enacted in the cross-dressing and caricature of “South Sea Islanders” (974). Yet what is most fascinating for me is how this parody of Pacific Islanders was being performed even on the fringes of the Japanese empire, beyond the Pacific.

These soldiers depicted in the newspaper photo were not only wearing grass skirts, they were also wearing paper crowns, each of them acting out the part of the fictional island king, Bōken Dankichi. The soldiers enacted Dankichi’s colonial *nanshin* progression farther south into Southeast Asia, fusing the pursuit of the chieftain’s daughter with the comic book hero’s colonial exploits. Yet in essence, the myth of the boy king who possesses an island is essentially the same narrative as that of an intrepid Japanese man who dances his way into the heart of a Marshallese princess, marrying into chieftdom as a result. Undoubtedly by the time of the Pacific War, this dancing had become enough of a genre unto itself that Hayashi Kōichi, former Kwajalein Imperial Japanese Army chief of staff until 1943, was compelled to write in his memoirs, “It seems that the main pastime of the Marshallese people was the kind of ‘South Seas dancing’ made famous by the song ‘Shūcho no Musume.’” (Hayashi 1964, 4). But moreover, it was the soldiers stationed throughout the Nanyō Guntō and throughout the empire, often in blackface, who were the ones performing this dance, parodying local people right in front of their faces.

### Encountering the Chieftain’s Daughter

The mythologies of the chieftain’s daughter and *Bōken Dankichi* were so pervasive that they primed Japanese steeped in this popular culture to encounter Islanders in the Marshalls and throughout Nanyō with a certain degree of expectation and ensuing disappointment. For instance, a sailor who worked aboard a naval mail ship that traveled

between Japan and a number of ports in the Nanyō Guntō and parts of Asia made a direct reference to the “Shūchō no Musume” song upon seeing actual Islanders in a time when Ishida Hitomatsu’s popular song was still a major hit played throughout Japan.

In a photo scrapbook a bereaved elder named Yoshie entrusted to me, I discovered a photo her father had taken in 1932, probably of a dance troupe, with an ironic caption painted beside it in white ink: “Is this what they mean by ‘In the South Seas, she’s a beauty?’ ” he asks sarcastically, citing Ishida’s exact lines “*Nanyō ja bijin.*” His diary and his various descriptions of Micronesian ports of call make the implication quite clear: the realities of the islands and Islanders who inhabited them were different from their romantic preconception.

In fact, there were many men who, like the legendary Mori Koben, became involved with local women (chiefly and otherwise), effectively married, and had children, thus fusing Japanese and Micronesian genealogies. This was compounded by the fact that most of the Japanese men who were sent to the Marshall Islands (even more than other parts of Micronesia) were either unaccompanied or young and single. Kobayashi Izumi researched how many *nikkeijin* (people of Japanese descent) there were in the Marshall Islands and discovered that about 30 percent of the population is part Japanese, most of whom are from chiefly families (Kobayashi 2007, 88). Writer Nakajima Atsushi, a fan of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* who traveled around the Nanyō Guntō in 1941 and wrote a travelogue of his journey,<sup>24</sup> described in his memoirs his encounter with “Young Paramount Chieftain Kabua” upon arrival in Jaluit Atoll in September of that year. He wrote:

The [Kabua] home is a bungalow that looks like a small trader’s shop. At the entrance is a sign with Japanese characters on it that read “Yashima Kabua . . .”<sup>25</sup>

Explaining that the master of the house is not home, two young women greet me. At first glance, I know by their faces that they are of mixed Japanese blood, but even judging them by Japanese standards, they are certainly beauties [*bijin*]. I can tell immediately that they are sisters. The older one tells me she is Kabua’s wife.

Soon her husband is called home. He is black but is a young rather intelligent-looking fellow of about thirty years old who looks rather hesitant, as if he is perpetually on guard. Apparently he speaks enough Japanese to understand me, but he says nothing

but quiet words to express his comprehension of what I am saying. For a moment, I cannot believe that this is a Paramount Chieftain with an annual income of at least 50,000 to 70,000 [yen] . . .<sup>26</sup>

On my way back, I learn from one of the civil servants working there that the young Kabua had recently fathered a child with the younger sister of his wife (whom I had just met), and it was causing quite an uproar in the village. (Nakajima 2001, 200–201)

Nakajima's description of his brief exchange with an actual "Chieftain," Iroojlaplap Kabua Kabua, and two beautiful women is another episode that says much about how Japanese perceptions of Marshall Islanders were shaped by an ongoing, intertextual narrative of race and exoticism. Nakajima, who was only in his early thirties himself, was not much different in age from Kabua Kabua, and yet he paternalistically describes the chief in his writing as "Young Kabua" (*Kabua Seinen*). The women he encounters are "of mixed blood" but they are "beauties" (*bijin*) by Japanese standards. Again, this statement is like a rehearsal of the "Shūchō no Musume" narrative of "black" (or in this case mixed-blood) but beautiful in the South Seas, "even by Japanese standards." Likewise, Kabua is "black" but intelligent. Unpacking these statements, "black *but* beautiful" and "black *but* intelligent" of course reveals the author's underlying racist equation of blackness with unattractive simplemindedness. Finally, his anecdote about Kabua Kabua's involvement with his wife's sister and the birth of a child, incidentally yet another "chieftain's daughter," ridicules the chief as a promiscuous—even incestuous—savage.

Yet flipping this encounter around and listening to a Marshall Islander perspective on the same moment tells a very different story. Possibly unbeknownst to Nakajima, the two Japanese-looking sisters he writes about were in fact the daughters of Noda Tetsuzō, a Japanese businessman who had been dispatched to the Marshall Islands in the 1930s by Nanyō Bōeki Kaisha. Noda, who fathered three children in Kosrae with a woman named Srue,<sup>27</sup> was then transferred to Jaluit Atoll, where he subsequently partnered with a woman of chiefly descent named Eline, from Mejit Island. Like Mori Koben in Chuuk, Noda thus literally had a Marshallese "lover-san," a real "chieftain's daughter."

Noda and Eline had three daughters in the Marshall Islands: Yamato, Kimie, and Tamai. It is the elder two daughters that Nakajima meets in his narrative. Kabua married Yamato and the two lived

together, but in keeping with the Marshallese *irooj* custom of being free to have more than one partner, Eline allowed Kabua to cohabit with their daughter Kimie as well; hence the birth of the child that Nakajima describes. As this sort of practice was quite common in the Marshall Islands among chiefs, it is worth questioning whether this “uproar” (*ōsawagi*) happened in the overall Marshallese community or in the Japanese expatriate community that was shocked by this custom.

According to Kimie’s granddaughter Fumiko, the *real* “uproar” for the *Marshallese* community of Jaluit at the time had ensued many years earlier, when Kabua’s father-in-law Noda went back to Japan, entered into an arranged marriage with a Japanese woman, and returned matter-of-factly with his new bride, who moved into the family home and lived together alongside Eline and the rest of the family, much to Eline’s dismay.<sup>28</sup> While the Japanese wife generally kept to herself and helped out with the household, most family members ignored her and did not speak to her, to the extent that her name is not even remembered by Marshallese descendants, who only knew her as *okusan* (“the wife”).

Kaname Yamamura also reflected upon this sort of mixing in his childhood at Wotje Atoll. His father, Hiroshi, another Japanese businessman with Nanyō Bōeki Kaisha, like Noda Tetsuzō, also had a Japanese wife, whom Kaname affectionately referred to as his “Japanese mother” (in Japanese, he called her his “*Nihon no okāsan*”). Granted, the idea of fathers having more than one partner is perhaps less stigmatized in the Marshalls, where there are expressions like *mamaan maj* (“men [are like] sea worms”)<sup>29</sup> and *jined ilo kōbo, jemād im jemā ro jet* (“our mother is ours forever; our father also the father of others”).<sup>30</sup> Pollock (1970) also shows how dynamic the Marshallese extended family structure is in accommodating children from different unions. Yet, as in the case of the cold reception of Noda’s Japanese wife by his Marshallese family back in Jaluit, clearly such marital arrangements were not taken lightly if they crossed racial borders in certain ways.

The stigma of such unions with local women was even more pronounced back in Japan, where presumably most businessmen or officials on assignment in the Marshall Islands often chose to keep quiet about their Islander lovers or children and perpetuate family obligations by marrying other Japanese, even if it resulted in complex arrangements in their Nanyō lives. Former Nanyō administrator Yasutake Seitarō reflects that:



Concerning marriage between Japanese and islanders, it was said that marriage with foreigners would make our blood polluted or make our family record dirty because the Japanese were a so-called "Pure" race. Furthermore, the Japanese prewar family system was very restricted. In case of a union between a Japanese and an islander, if the Japanese father acknowledged a child of this union as his own, then the child was given a Japanese name, which was registered in the government's record as an adoption. (Higuchi 1987, 62)

Many Japanese fathers refused to register the children they produced with Islander women, resulting in those children being seen as *otoshidane*, "fallen seeds" (illegitimate) by Japanese authorities. At the same time, from a Japanese standpoint, common-law marriages to Islanders were not legally recognized, so it was likely that the family obligations of Yamamura or Noda back in Japan required them to engage in an arranged marriage (*omiai kekkon*) with a Japanese woman, regardless of circumstances. In the case of Marshallese-Japanese Kaname, who was recognized by his father and traveled with him on various errands to Japan, the extent of his father's local relationship was accepted and understood.<sup>31</sup> Here Kaname poses (second from left in back row) with his relatives at a family gathering in Nagasaki.



Kobayashi Izumi has argued that from an Islander perspective of matrilineal land tenure and power, intermingling with the Japanese colonizer was acceptable, if not desirable. In a matrilineal society like the Marshall Islands, he explains, where women have traditionally been in control of the assets and all children born become a part of the mother's family, the identity or background of the father is not very important. This, added to the need for small island communities to avoid consanguine relations and ally with colonial power, compelled many chiefs to marry their daughters to the single Japanese men that were posted in their islands, which explains why so many chiefly families throughout Micronesia possess some degree of Japanese heritage (Kobayashi 2007, 89).<sup>32</sup>

Izumi's argument highlights the agency of Islander communities in relation to Japanese settlers, who were in the minority, compared to places like Palau or Saipan. But it is also important here to note the agency of women in the Marshall Islands, first and foremost, in the sense that a chiefly daughter would be a very powerful chief in her own right, a *lerooj* (female chief), not simply the property of her father to be brokered and traded. Her position afforded tremendous power in that *she* could negotiate on behalf of her matriline. From a Marshallese perspective, it was not the whim of Japanese or Marshallese men nor the chauvinism of a patriarchal Japanese colonial system, but rather the wisdom and authority of chiefly women who were able to influence the colonial power structure and turn the odds in their favor. From this Marshallese perspective, the *Shūchō no Musume* song takes on a much more nuanced meaning, not one in which a destitute Islander Cinderella awaits her prince, but one in which an empowered *lerooj* princess sweeps the powerless Japanese businessman off his feet and gives him access to her land in exchange for higher status in the empire.

Thus, despite the comedic, bizarre, and romantic narrative of Ishida Hitomatsu's song, the reality of mingling with a real-life woman of chiefly status was in fact a complex and problematic endeavor. I wish to draw attention to the broader, complicated contexts that superficial narratives like the "Daku-Daku Odori" and the "Chieftain's Daughter" betray. Like the coral reef, these are messy histories with multiple trajectories. Traders like Noda were much like coral polyps riding the currents, following along with the trends of colonialist culture but deliberately settling the reefs of the Marshall Islands and leaving their traces in the atolls they traversed.

Yet Noda did establish himself as the father-in-law of a major

*iroojlaplap* of the Marshall Islands (indeed, a major leader with land claims at Kwajalein). His children and grandchildren went on to become significant local leaders, including his grandson Kimilang (Phillip), a diplomat who served as the Marshallese ambassador to Japan. Like many other Japanese men who settled and started families, Noda and Kaname's father are remembered positively by their many descendants and larger communities. Although the popular narratives of prewar Japanese colonialism were about incorporating and possessing Nanyō, nowadays, when Japan has all but forgotten its erstwhile tropical Other, it could be said that Marshall Islanders of Japanese descent still “possess” Japan proudly through their own genealogical heritage.

### Dancing Back the Memories: The Mission Continues

Driving up from the city of Kobayashi in Miyazaki Prefecture, Japan, I am struck by the sight of a Micronesian building off to the side of the road approaching the Ikōma Highlands. Standing next to several rows of greenhouses and surrounded by bales of hay is a traditional Palauan meeting house, a *bai*.<sup>33</sup> I pull over to the side of the road and notice a plywood sign in the shape of an Islander woman: “Welcome, Free Entry.”



The *bai* has been erected, I soon learn, by the local residents, a small community of farmers who all relocated from Palau at the end of the war, when they were forced to repatriate to Japan. The youngest of the village's residents, Kubo Matsuo, takes a break from his farming, bowing and wiping sweat from his forehead as he approaches me with soil on his hands. Looking at me cautiously he explains, "We don't get many visitors here. Most people don't care about the past anymore, but for our families it was bad enough just to have to come back to Japan at the end of the war. . . . That place in Palau was our home, our place. It was part of Japan. We needed to remember it somehow, so before all of us die we decided to go back to Palau and find someone who could build us one of these."

Kubo tells me he is already in his seventies and was born in Palau, the former capital of the Nanyō Guntō, in a time when Japanese outnumbered Palauans and other Micronesians. His parents were among many from large families who took advantage of the Japanese government's out-migration and settlement (*kaitaku*) scheme in the mandated territories as a way of starting a new life and making more income. He was still a young boy when the Pacific War ended, but he had gone to school together with Palauans and other Micronesians, and he even knew some Marshall Islanders who had been sent to study there. When American forces finally reached Koror, the capital, many civilians, including Kubo's family, survived by surrendering and sailing back to Japan on US naval vessels.

"Returning" to Japan for Kubo and many other youth, however, was like settling in a strange country. All the people from his village in Palau had to apply to the government under yet another agricultural development and settlement scheme, buying cheap land in Miyazaki Prefecture, where the population was sparse. Southern Japan, with its subtropical climate, seemed ideal to these families. Yet the city of Kobayashi, a rugged town at the base of the Kirishima mountain range founded on the logging industry, is a long drive from the coast. In the winter, the icy breezes from Mount Takachiho-no-Mine come sweeping down the plateau.

"So, we had to make it feel like home," Kubo says, smugly pointing to a framed photograph on the wall of the *bai*. "We had to dance!" I am surprised to find an image of a younger Kubo, together with three other men from the village, two of them shirtless, in plastic green grass skirts. They are thrusting their right legs forward and raising their arms in synchronization. They look a little red in the face, and Kubo laughs as he explains that they had been drinking.

He tells me that whole village has been doing this Palau-inspired dance ever since they returned to Japan in the 1940s, and they often perform it in small, intimate drinking circles and social gatherings like weddings. In the beginning, they used to paint their faces black with charcoal, he says, but that was “too much trouble,” so these days they just use the grass skirts and that suffices. “*Chotto odoru dake de omoi-dasu wa*—Just a little dancing and the memories all come back,” he says, lovingly hugging one of the beams in the meeting house.

While I have not found a similar example of a whole community of postwar returnees to Japan from the Marshall Islands, the elderly dancers of Kobayashi are not alone in their Nanyō nostalgia. Another group in the Ogasawara Islands has popularized their “Nanyō Odori” as cultural heritage (Tomita 2005). It was at the Festival of Pacific Arts in Palau in July 2004 that I first observed them as they made their first public appearance in Micronesia, dancing on stage in front of large crowds of Islanders from all over Oceania.

Beginning their dance with the incantation in English of “left, right, left, right . . .,” the dancers moved their bodies in a peculiarly stiff fashion. Their movements were awkward, childlike, and deliberately exaggerated, a bit like toy soldiers. The music sung by a woman in the background was also unusual, a hybrid of Chamorro and Palauan words mixed in with Japanese, yet jumbled together and impossible to comprehend. The “nonsense” lyrics and the marching, childlike movements, I would argue, were probably not all that different from the “Daku-Daku Odori” of the 1920s. The military-like marching, moreover, seemed like a reference to the regimented marching exercises first introduced by Germans and later enforced by Japanese authorities throughout Micronesia, even echoed in cartoon form when Bōken Dankichi marches the Natives off to war.<sup>34</sup>

There was a solemnity on the dancers' faces, however, a noticeable austerity with which they performed their well-rehearsed steps. Undoubtedly this was not mere entertainment for the dancers; it was part of their own heritage. There was a bittersweetness and nostalgia that underscored the spectacle, and the audience seemed to notice this as well, for many people nodded in empathy and seemed strangely to connect with these visitors from Japan. While the mockery of the dance was potentially offensive, it was more than made up for by the earnestness of the dancers, many of them young and genuinely passionate about their art.

I traveled twenty-five hours south of Tokyo by ferry to Chichijima, Ogasawara, in the summer of 2009 to meet with these dancers

and hear their stories. Our ship was greeted by their dancing as it came into the harbor. Their Nanyō Odori, they told me, had been taught by members of their community who had returned from Saipan before the war, and the elders of their community had proudly passed it on to younger generations. Their dance was preserved as part of Tokyo's cultural heritage, yet when I asked about its deeper origins, they spoke about it in romantic terms, saying that all they knew was that it was a "traditional" dance taught to their ancestors by Nanyō islanders. Many of the people of Chichijima and Hahajima are themselves mixed-race ancestors of whalers from the United States and Hawai'i who were the first settlers of their islands. For them, the dance gave them a sense of belonging to an island heritage, much like other members of their community earnestly danced hula. Still, they referred to the leader of their dance group by using the outdated and orientalist term *shūchō*, a clear reference to "The Chieftain's Daughter." One of the dancers invited me to her home and showed me photographs of other Nanyō dancers on Hahajima, dancing with their bodies covered in soot. "They still do it the old way," she remarked with a giggle and a hint of nostalgia.<sup>35</sup>

Once again, it is as if the chieftain's daughter makes her appearance in the postwar Japanese imaginary, yet she has transformed many times over. She originated in the 1920s as a faraway colonial exotic dream, metamorphosed into a seductive "lover" and bride, and eventually symbolized entwined Japanese-Micronesian genealogies. Yet in the postwar period she has become an object of forlorn longing rather than fanciful desire. Like the islands lost when Japan was defeated during the war, the chieftain's daughter is a lost "lover-san," never to return. Whereas the prewar "South Seas" dances and narratives triumphantly and romantically celebrated Japan's expansion into the Pacific, the postwar Nanyō dances like those in Miyazaki and Ogasawara, or the song sung by the leader of the dance troupe, mourn the loss of a tropical homeland.

For Islander elders, the song and dance has a different meaning, of course. Kurata Yōji, who spent his early adulthood in Palau before and during the war, confirmed my suspicions that the original Nanyō Odori was not a traditional dance by any means, but song and dance that was often done to entertain men while drinking, whether it be comical or erotic.<sup>36</sup> When I asked Humiko Kingzio, an elderly Palauan woman whose father was an Okinawan settler, if she knew about this dance, she immediately answered by explaining that it was the dance

that accompanied “The Chieftain’s Daughter” song, generously—if hesitantly—agreeing to dance it for me that evening. Explaining to me that it was the dance that she used to dance for the soldiers during the war, she locked the front door, let down her long hair and began to sway her hips and sing as she slowly glided around the room.<sup>37</sup> Back in the Marshall Islands, Emlain Kabua, widow of first president Amata Kabua and a *lerooj* female chief herself, explained to me that as a child growing up on Jaluit, children were disciplined if they sang the song, explaining to me that “It was a culture for grown-up men, not for us children to know about.”<sup>38</sup>

In Japan, despite the nearly universal memory today of “Shūchō no Musume” among the elderly, few of the younger generation, including the Japanese tourists who flock to resort hotels, have any awareness of the link between Japan and Micronesia. They do not see how prewar Japanese colonialism is related to tuna fisheries, to development aid and construction, to elections, or to postwar nuclear testing (Kawamura 1994, 7). They are often not even aware of the war between the United States and Japan and how it shaped the future of all Micronesian islands, let alone the Japan-US Security Alliance that still allows for American bases on Japanese soil. Kwajalein or the Marshall Islands, let alone the Pacific Islands in general, do not enter into the awareness of most people in Japan today.

But while Japan lost its South Sea islands, America gained power over the Pacific and the Japanese home islands as well. Though Japan had long eroticized its colonial other in the form of the chieftain’s daughter, now it was Japanese who became the object of America’s imperial desire.<sup>39</sup> As Dower writes, after the war, “the eroticization of defeated Japan in the eyes of the conquerors took place almost immediately, creating a complex interplay of assumed masculine and feminine roles that has colored US-Japan relations ever since” (1999, 137). Similarly, in the Pacific Islands, American popular culture narratives also began to emerge. The US military presence throughout Micronesia added a new layer of “concrete” to the atollscapes of Kwajalein and other “Martial Islands,” and soon American representations of both Islanders and Japanese began to take center stage.

In these new currents of empire that spread out across the ocean, the chieftain’s daughter gradually disappeared from view, but her history was sedimented deep into the coral reef. Gone but not forgotten, her song can still be recited by the declining numbers of elderly people in Japan and in the islands, who watch her dance across their memories.