Broken Promises and Transoceanic Fragments:

Japanese Tango Musicians in Manchuria, 1935-1946

Yuiko Asaba (SOAS University of London)

Author ORCID identifier: 0000-0001-8104-2867

Abstract: This article examines the personal experiences and memories of Japanese tango musicians in Manchuria in the years leading up to and immediately after World War II, revealing the tensions between migration and movement on the one hand, and memory and loss on the other. By engaging with the ideas surrounding continents (tairiku) in early to mid-twentieth century Japan, this article moves away from triangulating the transoceanic movements of Japanese tango musicians and musical commodities across Japan, China and Latin America at this time. Instead, it considers such movements as the sonic manifestation of the island/continent dichotomy that framed Japanese maritime thinking in the first half of the twentieth century. Consequently, in offering a Japan-reflexive scholarship for the study and writing of global music histories, this article argues for the need to move beyond a geo-oceanic approach in examining transoceanic circulations.

Keywords: Manchukuo, transoceanic circulation, Argentine tango, Japan, tairiku (continent), memory, island/continent dichotomy

Decentering the Transoceanic Circulations

Fujisawa Ranko (1925-2013), one of the most celebrated Japanese tango singers who became well-known in Argentina after World War II as 'the tango diva', recalled in an interview her time in 1945 Manchuria. It was this very place and moment that initiated Fujisawa's life-long career as a tango singer.[1] She commented:

> I have forgotten the name of the dance hall, but I was told that I would only need to sing between twelve noon and four in the afternoon, so I agreed to undertake the job. I did not own any formal dresses, so I

> quickly undid my mother's kimono and made it into a blouse. But really, I do not even want to remember that era of my life (Tominaga 1986: 330).[2]

Fujisawa Ranko is one of the many Japanese tango performers who worked in the Manchurian dance halls between the 1930s and 1940s and long refused to talk about their experiences of that time. Due to such silences, as will be examined below, there are very few surviving primary materials on the lived experiences of these Japanese performers who worked in 1930s and 1940s Manchuria. Manchuria, from 1932 to 1945, was called Manchukuo, the puppet state of Imperial Japan, encompassing Northeast China and parts of Inner Mongolia. During this time, many Japanese people, including farmers (from then impoverished regions of Japan) and artists, migrated to Manchuria. On the 15th August 1945, Japan lost World War II, and just prior to that experienced the start of its 'exit' from Manchuria amid the Soviet invasion of this region that had begun on the 9th August 1945. Arising from this historical backdrop, Fujisawa Ranko's personal comment above illustrates the central narrative of this article: Japanese tango musicians in Manchuria between 1935 and 1946 in the frame of an oceanic historiography of tango that is entangled with aspects of memory and loss—'I do not even want to remember that era of my life' (Tominaga 1986: 330).

Between 1935 and 1945, many Japanese tango musicians migrated or travelled to work in Manchurian dance halls. The vibrant dance hall worlds of 1930s-1940s Manchuria were filled with musicians and dancers from diverse locations—including Japan, Russia and the Philippines. Many pioneering Japanese architects designed the dance halls in

Shanghai and in the cities of Manchuria, and numerous Japanese dance halls also opened their branches in this region.[3] From Japan's domestic entertainment, food and beverage industries, musicians, dancers, geishas, actors, cabaret performers and café waitresses travelled to Manchuria to find and build new lives. They migrated to Manchuria for diverse reasons: for some, it was an attempt to escape from the realities of their personal lives in Japan, while for others, it was an adventurous migration or travel led by an immense sense of curiosity. It was in Manchuria that many Japanese musicians and Japanese dance aficionados encountered what many of them considered to be real Argentine tango music for the first time.

Many Japanese tango musicians during the 1930s and into the mid-1940s considered China's cosmopolitan cities to be musically 'authentic' places, where musicians could polish skills as dance hall performers through playing on the stage (Atkins 1999). This was seen as a great contrast to Japan where much of the 'foreign' popular musical knowledge was attainable only by imitating recordings (Asaba 2020). Many Japanese musicians, thus, migrated to China to 'learn through working at the dance halls…some of them also brought their families with them. They called these Chinese cities "the places where one could make a fortune at a single stroke" '. (Monna Toshio, interview with the author, Kyoto, 9 April 2014). Furthermore—and in contrast to Shanghai, which generated the image of an urban international city with a huge financial potential—Manchuria also presented, for many Japanese people, romanticized images of vast lands filled with opportunities (Furukubo 2003: 152-65). In Japan, such ideas surrounding Manchuria, distinctive from those of Shanghai as an urban city, had been generated by the Japanese officials for political reasons and circulated through popular

magazines, shaping many Japanese people's imaginations of 'Manchuria at this time as the place of hope and opportunity' (Monna Toshio, interview with the author, Kyoto, 9 April 2014).

Influenced by Japanese colonial imaginings of China, Japan's fascination for Manchuria at this time has been discussed not only as an economically and artistically driven admiration, but as a form of Orientalism (Tajima 2009). However, by illuminating the lives of Japanese tango musicians in Manchuria, and by analysing the personal narratives of such musicians and their descendant families, this article examines Japanese preoccupation with Manchuria at this time through much more intricate historical meanings. The key contexts here are Japan's interests in continents (tairiku), namely Latin America and China, and the mass Japanese emigration to Latin America that peaked between 1920 and 1945, promoted by the Japanese government's pro-emigration campaigns as part of Japan's colonial (takushoku) and maritime enterprise. Japanese emigration to Latin America was organised by companies that included the Japanese emigration companies such as the Brazil Emigration Cooperative and the Overseas Associations that were established in many Japanese prefectures and their branches abroad. The Japanese government actively recruited Japanese migrants and funded many of them to emigrate to some of the Latin American countries (Imai 2001; Ōe et al. 1993; Sakaguchi 2010).

In this politically orchestrated migratory dynamic in Japan, the aesthetic and conceptual ideas of continents were created by differentiating island (i.e. Japan) and continents, making the seas the crucial sites of internationalization and longing (Ōe et al. 1993; Sakaguchi 2010). This was also the time when the musical imaginings of 'Latin

America' were beginning to emerge internationally in the context of describing world regions as 'cultural areas' (Palomino 2020). Japan's romanticization of continents and the island/continent dichotomy proliferated against this international backdrop, forming a crucial part of Japan's internationalization outlook. Furthermore, popular presses as well as Japanese official writings became key in shaping many Japanese people's longing for these continents.[4] Images of the continental masculinity surrounding Argentine 'cowboys', the gauchos, roaming across the wilderness of the South American pampas is a great example of the glorified projections of continents that had been superimposed on the romanticized idea of Latin America in Japan at this time (Asaba forthcoming 2025). Glamorised ideas of the tairiku rōnin (continental vagabond), Japanese individuals who roamed across China in the first half of twentieth century, are another key illustration of the idealized continents in early to mid-twentieth century Japan. Furthermore, it is in this historical frame of romanticizing continents—namely China and Latin America—as 'ideal lands', that the memory and loss in the narratives of Japanese tango musicians in 1935-1946 Manchuria must also be understood. Propelled by the promised prospects of financial gains—proposed by the then Japanese government and its associated commercial campaigns—artistic pursuits or simply through curiosity, many Japanese tango musicians migrated and travelled to Manchuria. This article examines these aspects of circulations, memory, loss and histories of Japanese tango musicians in Manchuria under the maritime frame of this time.

Going Beyond the Cross-Currents Approach

Oceans, as the sites of politically orchestrated internationalization and migrations, and as

the carriers of memories, objects and imaginations have received rigorous scholarly attention in the recent years in historical studies (Armitage, Bashford, and Sivasundaram 2018; Haneda and Oka 2019; Matsuda 2012), and in music studies (Byl and Sykes 2023; Fellezs 2019; Irving 2010; Nor and Stepputtat 2019; Solis 2015). The transoceanic circulations of, and imaginations through, music in the Japan-China relations during the 'transwar' era have also received critical reconsiderations (Atkins 1999; Iguchi 2019; Iwano 1999; Hoshino and Nishimura 2020; Kasai 2015; Tajima 2009; Zhang 2020). This article contributes to these rising re-evaluations of the oceanic frames for investigating the cultural circulations. However, what distinguishes my argument from the previous scholarship is that this article takes the transoceanic approach away from the inter-regional, cross-currents, and West-East approaches. While centering the local voices outside the Euro-American West, the previous work on the transoceanic circulations of musics have inevitably involved references to the West due to the historical and colonial entanglements. Furthermore, the writings on the twentieth century musical relations between Japan and China have focused on the bilateral Japan-China axis rather than placing this connection in the wider maritime ideology. By offering the examination of the Japan-China-Argentina musical links between 1935 and 1946, my argument moves away from triangulating this connection: in other words, it goes beyond considering this nexus as ones that only mediated between the three geo-oceanic places. Instead, this

article endeavours to propose a renewed approach of investigating these musical circulations through a maritime thinking—i.e. discourses of the island/continent dichotomy—of this particular historical time outside the West.

To begin to unpack the key argument, this article first clarifies the methodological frames for examining Japan-occupied Manchuria and Japanese tango musicians under the lens of transoceanic circulations and memory. It then moves onto illuminating the Manchurian dance hall worlds, and the circulations of Argentine tango music scores and the bandoneón—tango's 'star' instrument—between Manchuria and Japan during the 1930s. This is followed by examining the personal narratives by and about Japanese tango performers who had lived and worked in Manchuria: Kawasaki Akira, Sakamoto Masaichi, Fujisawa Ranko, and an anonymised interviewee. By utilising oral historical, ethnographic and archival approaches to examine Japanese tango musicians' experiences, this article reveals the musicians' activities in Manchuria under the lens of Japan's maritime framework of this time that is entangled with aspects of memory and loss.

Transoceanic Memory and Broken Promises

While inevitably involving archival investigation, the key part of this research included interviews with descendant families and former co-workers of Japanese tango dance hall musicians who worked in Manchuria between 1935 and 1946. Through ethnographic interviews I sought to create a transoceanic 'memory map' (Tamanoi 2009) of the lived experiences of these Japanese tango musicians. Primary sources on these individuals are limited, a paucity that prompted me to collect personal memories surrounding these

musicians through oral historical research. Oral historical approach has been critical when archival sources on a particular subject are limited, have been lost or have been erased by historical narratives. I thus embarked on field research in Japan in December 2019, and interviewed former colleagues and descendent families of these musicians in the cities of Morioka, Kyoto, Tokyo, Gifu and Nara, where my interviewees resided.[5]

What has struck me the most while conducting interviews and investigating archival materials, however, was the tension of memory in Manchuria between that of musical and financial aspiration on the one hand, and disillusionment and trauma on the other. Some of my interviewees initially avoided the topic of Manchuria, with one of them later writing a personal letter to me, describing how their parents had met working at a Manchurian dance hall in the 1930s. As I endeavoured to restore missing pieces embedded in unspoken memories, it became clear that these personal memories were shaped by the continued presence of loss: I thus turned to the study of memory to begin this research.

There has been significant research undertaken on memory, politics and music in China (Ouyang 2022). In particular, in my research I engage with the historical-anthropological work of Yukiko Koga and Mariko Tamanoi on Japanese and Chinese memories of Manchuria surrounding transoceanic migrations. Contemporary China's capitalised uses of the former Japanese imperial buildings in the region through tourism, also amid the ongoing unearthing of chemical weapons abandoned by the Imperial Japanese Army at the end of World War II, led Yukiko Koga to formulate the notion of 'the inheritance of loss' (Koga 2016: 2-3). She writes:

> the loss of lives, physical and psychological injuries, material loss and damage, and forced displacement and mobilization, all of which have had lasting effects not only on those who were present at the time but on subsequent generations as well. The term also refers to failed empires, to a sense of failure to become modern, to a sense of humiliation and disgrace, and to a loss of faith in modernity's promise. (Koga 2016: 3)

Koga's concept of 'loss' not only points to personal, political and material losses, but also to a sense of disillusionment surrounding 'modernity's promise.' Here, it is also crucial to emphasise that, through the ideas and realities of oceanic circulations that carried the promises of modernity, Japanese tango professionals constructed and honed their skills in performing what they considered to be real Argentine tango performance. To further disentangle this transoceanic authenticity-construction surrounding tango performance intertwined with the memory of loss, I turn to Mariko Tamanoi's notions of 'memory maps'. On the memories of former Japanese agrarian settlers in Manchuria, Chinese people who had lived under Japanese colonial presence, and of Japanese children who were left in China during the Soviet invasion of this region towards the end of World War II, Mariko Tamanoi writes:

> memory maps…serve to organize, in terms of time and space, the narratives of those who remember, and[as] they reveal complex

> interactions between “the present” and “the past”. In other words, these maps are the voices of people. (Tamanoi 2009: 19)

Contributing to Tamanoi’s notion, my argument engages with ‘memory maps’ to illuminate a tango historiography through personal narratives—i.e. ‘the voices of people’ (Tamanoi 2009: 19)—that are interlaced with the fragmented sense of, and the broken promises of, modernity. To appreciate the historical brackets of these transoceanic flows that continue to carry memories, it is vital to explore the dance hall worlds of Manchuria, as well as Japanese musicians and dance aficionado’s encounters with Argentine tango in Manchuria, as told through journal writings and personal recollections dating back to the 1930s. These transcultural encounters are crucial in illuminating the lived experiences and the historical impacts of sonically represented Argentina that was available in this region at this time.

Manchuria: Tango and tairiku (continents)

In its heyday, the Manchurian dance halls during the 1930s through to the mid-1940s not only played live social dance music repertoires but also Argentine tango music. In the cities of Manchuria, it was possible to perform tango music that had been composed in Buenos Aires due to the availability of tango scores brought from Argentina. The ubiquity of tango music was made possible, in part, by the relatively relaxed import taxation systems in 1930s Dalian (Satoh 1957). As was the case in many dance halls in other countries at this time, including dance halls in Argentina, the dance halls in China—many

of which owned by investors including from Japan, the former Soviet Union, North America, Britain, and France—had separate jazz and tango orchestras, dedicated to performing the finest jazz and tango repertoires.[6] In this international dance hall dynamic, in which the presence of specialised jazz and tango orchestras were expected as the social norm for the high-society dance halls, the level of jazz and tango orchestras determined the prestige of each dance hall. This sense of prestige in turn instigated competitive attitudes between dance halls and musicians in Manchuria surrounding which orchestras sounded more authentic. The accounts by a Japanese dance aficionado below provides a glimpse into these thriving dance hall worlds.

In the 1930s, a wealthy Japanese dance aficionado, Tamaki Shinkichi (1885-1970), sojourned in Manchuria and experienced the dance hall cultures of this region. Articles and notes that he wrote during this time are some of the little surviving documents on the dance hall cultures in 1930s Manchuria. According to Tamaki, there were no dance halls in Lüshun at the time of the article's publication in 1935. Dancing at the Yamato Hotels—managed by the Mantetsu (the Japanese Manchurian Railway)—however, the main hotel building on 1 Shinshigai[7] and its annex on 1 Koganedai, was permitted by the police. Due to the lack of professional dancers in Lüshun at this time, many District residents who were eager to dance got together to organise ball parties at these two, extravagant hotels (*Dance and Music* 1935: 12). It is critical to note, however, that the Yamato Hotels had catered people of the upper echelons of the society, and this was arguably the primary motive behind the police allowing people to dance at the two hotels. Indeed, Tamaki

Shinkichi was a wealthy dance aficionado, who had previously organised a ball party at the Yamato Hotel on 1 Koganedai himself (*Dance and Music* 1935: 13).

While the act of dancing was allowed at Lüshun's Yamato Hotels, the number of balls was limited, thus many dance enthusiasts at this time travelled to Dalian (located next to Lüshun), by using the regular buses operated by the Manchurian Rail. In Dalian, its nine dance venues included the four large publicly open dance halls that had served clients of higher social classes, one dance venue at a hotel, and four dance halls in the so-called flower towns (Japanese geisha district) that were intended for working-class clients. The names of the more expensive dance venues were the Dalian Kaikan, To-a Kaikan, Perroquet, Dalian Hall, and what many Japanese male dance aficionados called 'The Seventh Heaven of Liaodong', situated on the seventh floor of the Liaodong Hotel. Dance halls in the 'flower towns' were the Kairaku, Seiken, Seikai, as well as the Kinsei, and they were owned by geisha houses and kenban (geisha call-offices). These dance venues were used for geishas to 'wait in between their geisha banquet work', and to dance with the dance venue clients. The geishas were paid hourly by the clients for dancing with them, and Tamaki Shinkichi noted that 'these geishas were indeed fine dancers.' (*Dance and Music* 1935: 12-3).

While the five, more expensive dance venues had employed dozens of dancers and two live music bands performing each night, the 'flower town' dance halls had gramophones to which their clients danced along. Ticket prices of these venues ensured that the lower-earning clients could not enter the dance halls outside the 'flower towns': although from Tamaki's accounts, it appears that wealthier clients moved between the high-society dance halls and the 'flower town' venues. While the ticket prices at the

Dalian Kaikan, Perroque, To-a Kaikan, and Dalian Hall cost between 20 sen 4 ri (equivalent to c.£25 today) and 25 (c. £31 today), entrance to the 'flower town' dance venues cost around 10 sen (c.£15 today) (*Dance and Music* 1935: 12-3).

Strikingly, Tamaki notes that in Harbin there were four publicly open dance halls that employed dance-music bands made up of Japanese and Russian musicians, suggesting potential musical exchanges between these performers. The Harbin dance halls opened at eight in the evening and the bands would start to perform at eight o' clock on the dot. As the clients slowly gathered at the dance halls the entertainment continued until three in the morning. Tamaki noted that once the dance hall entertainment had ended, some clients would move on to visit the local cabarets that employed orchestras of 'around four to five Russian musicians'. Tamaki, however, criticized the quality of music performance at these cabarets:

> the [dance] music played by Russians musicians…the waltz is usually too quick, the tango is somewhat awkward, and when it comes to the foxtrot the feel [of the music] is more like the polka. Indeed, many of the cabarets are situated in the basements of story buildings, and it is perhaps difficult to situate good orchestras with many musicians (Manshū Nippō 1935).

He then moves on to praise Japanese tango musicians:

> The musicians performing the dance-music in Manchuria[n dancehalls] are all migrants and settlers from naichi [Japan]. I know this because in Dalian, Fengtian [now Shenyang], Hsin King [now Changchun] and in Harbin, I have met many [Japanese] musicians whom I know from naichi. Therefore, the dance-music they play is not too different from naichi. All of these musicians have performed in naichi, and the music scores from which they play and how they execute the dance rhythms do not differ too greatly [from naichi]. But the tango ensembles play the tango that I had never listened to in naichi, so I asked them if I could observe their music scores. These scores had been directly ordered in from Argentina, because the Dalian port is a duty-free port and the musicians in Dalian are able to do business directly with North America and Shanghai. I was struck by how fortunate these musicians are, and at the same time felt a great respect, sense of praise, mixed with envy, for their studious, inquisitive minds [to aspire to play 'authentic' Argentine tango]. … Main [music] bands have great musicians too, but from what I have listened to, the tango bands seem to have the most solid [good] musicians (Manshū Nippō 1935).

This article by Tamaki was published in what was called at this time the 'Manshū Nippō' (or what was known as *The Manchuria Daily Newspaper*), a Japanese-owned bulletin for the South Manchuria Railway Company, and an advocate of the Empire of Japan agencies, including the Kwantung Army that was based in Manchuria. Thus, just how much of Tamaki's writing was influenced by the censorship is difficult to determine.

However, one crucial element in Tamaki's praising comments about Japanese tango musicians is his excitement at encountering what he considered to be real Argentine tango in Manchuria. It is crucial to note that this was the time when Argentine tango recordings from Buenos Aires were becoming popular in Japan, where people were starting to look to Argentina for tango's authenticity. These tango recordings from Buenos Aires were also starting to cultivate many Japanese musicians' imaginations surrounding Argentina where many of them had never visited (Asaba 2020). While tango recordings from Argentina were becoming widely available in Japan, however, tango music scores from Buenos Aires—i.e. the sheet music of tango compositions from which tango musicians performed—had not yet become obtainable in 1930s Japan. Tamaki's enthusiasm in the article above illuminates the rare moments of Japanese encounters in 1930s Manchuria with tango music scores that had arrived directly from Argentina.

To look further into the accessibility of Argentine tango's related musical objects in this region at this time, it is helpful to briefly turn our attention to how Japanese tango musicians came into contact with tango's 'star' instrument, the bandoneón, in Manchuria. Japanese bandoneón player, Sakamoto Masaichi (1909-1995) noted in an interview in 1957: 'Dalian was a duty-free port at that time, so there was no tax not even on the bandoneón. Music scores were the same. These scores were imported directly from Argentina'. (Satoh 1957: 23-4). Sakamoto, who later became an influential figure in post-war Japan's tango culture, spent his youth performing in Manchuria and Shanghai from 1937 to 1941. Sakamoto had learnt to play the accordion in Osaka in Japan where he performed tango firstly on the accordion and on other instruments including the piano. He then began playing the chromatic bandoneón for the first time after purchasing the

instrument in the Manchurian city of Dalian. The chromatic bandoneón was the main type of bandoneón brought in from Germany to China during the first half of the twentieth century, and it was common for many Japanese musicians to be given or to purchase it, learn to play Argentine tango on it in China, and to bring the bandoneón back to Japan.

Figure 1: Sakamoto Maichi (pictured on the first row, second from the right).
Dance Hall Hapynos, Dalian, Manchuria. 1 January 1940.
Photo courtesy of Koizumi Tatsuji.

The main cities where such Japanese musicians had purchased or given the chromatic bandoneón included Shanghai, Tianjin, Fengtian, Dalian, and the then British colony of Hong Kong (Takaya Terunobu, telephone interview with the author, 31 January 2020).[8] Sakamoto, in the same interview as the above, commented on the economic accessibility of the bandoneón in Manchuria:

> The bandoneon cost ¥450 [c.£8,540 today] in Japan at that time, but I think it was around ¥320 or ¥330 [c.£6,210 today] in Dalian and over ¥100 [c.£1,900 today] cheaper. I had someone give me the bandoneón as well (which I still play today) for ¥180 [£3,420 today] (Satoh 1957: 24-5).

In the 1930s, most Japanese tango musicians played tango on the accordion due to the

scarcity of the bandoneón in Japan at this time. The first documented account of the chromatic bandoneón—used mainly to play European tango repertoires—became available in shops in Japan, when around twenty chromatic bandoneons made by the Alfred Arnold company were displayed at a music instrument store in Osaka in 1934 (Takayama 1957: 20). While the diatonic bandoneón has come to be considered in contemporary Japan to be the 'most authentic bandoneón' on which to play Argentine tango—and thus more expensive than the chromatic bandoneón—such value system surrounding tango's authenticity had not yet become established in 1930s Japan.[9] Furthermore, it is crucial to note that dance hall musicians were paid significantly higher salaries in Manchuria at this time than in Japan, providing better means to purchase the bandoneón in Manchuria (Sugikawa 2009: 80). Financial affordability entangled with artistic aspirations, many Japanese tango musicians acquired the bandoneón for the first time in the global port cities of China.

Kawasaki Akira (1902-1967; real name Sadaaki Akira) was another such Japanese tango musician. As one of the few Japanese bandoneonists who played on the diatonic bandoneón in the 1930s through to the 1950s, he had spent his youth as a sought after bandoneonist in Shanghai and Manchuria. Upon his return to Japan from Dalian, Kawasaki led the Orquesta Rio in post-war Japan—in which his brother played the piano—having returned from Dalian to the port of Fukuoka on a military-operated ship in 1946. While Kawasaki became a key bandoneonist at Tokyo's Florida and Gajoen dance halls after the war, archival materials on Kawasaki Akira are close to non-existent. His grandson, however, revealed in an interview with me that Kawasaki had attended the Keio University, and was from a relatively wealthy family who owned an affluent family

business (interview, Koizumi Tatsuji, Kyoto, 24 February 2020).[10] From around 1937 to 1946, Kawasaki worked at numerous dance halls in Manchuria and Shanghai, with one of his first jobs being the leader of the tango ensemble at Dalian's Perroquet dance hall. Kawasaki met my interviewee's grandmother, Fujii Ayako, a former actress-turned café owner, in Dalian. Fujii gave birth to my interviewee's mother upon her return to Japan in 1946. Kawasaki and Fujii never married, and they returned from Dalian to Japan separately. While Kawasaki's career as a bandoneonist is clothed in mystery, it is clear that his time in Shanghai and Manchuria had honed his skills as a professional tango musician.

Figure 2: Kawasaki Akira and two of his tango band members.
Hoshigaura Yamato Hotel, Dalian, where they were employed as tango band musicians. Mid-1930s/early 1940s. Dates unknown.
Courtesy of Koizumi Tatsuji.

The accessibility to what were considered more authentic approaches to performing Argentine tango in Manchuria was attractive for many Japanese tango musicians at this time. Japanese tango musicians' encounters with Argentine tango scores and the bandoneón in Manchuria played a key role in directing many Japanese musicians' attention further to Argentina in search for tango's sonic authenticity via Manchuria. This cultivation of tango's authenticity through this region, however, is also entangled with memory and loss.

Fujisawa Ranko, one of the pioneering figures in Japan's post-war tango history, and who came to be dubbed 'the tango diva' after her successful tours in Argentina, also spent

several years of her youth in Wafangdian in Manchuria where she began her career as a dance hall tango singer. To recall the earlier comment by Fujisawa—introduced at the start of this article—the personal narrative of Fujisawa who had long refused to discuss her time in Manchuria, revealed memories that had become loss: moments of remembering to forget. Her aforementioned interview was conducted by Japanese journalist Tominaga Takako, herself a Manchuria-returnee, in her book titled 'The Empty Six Hundred Days – What Happened in Dalian After World War II'. In this book, Fujisawa Ranko first appears as a rising tango singer at a Dalian dance hall towards the end of and immediately after World War II. When Tominaga interviewed Fujisawa in the 1980s, however, Fujisawa had kept her silence about her time in Manchuria until Tominaga told Fujisawa that Tominaga's mother had worked as a chef of the Soviet cuisine and had taught at a restaurant where Soviet Officers dined in Manchuria. With her mother and younger brother, Fujisawa moved to Wafangdian in Manchuria on 1 January 1945 to join her father who had been employed in one of its spinning mill factories. Fujisawa had been a mezzo soprano student at the Tokyo University of the Arts until this moment but interrupted her study to join her father in Manchuria (Tominaga 1986: 329-31). In one of Fujisawa's autobiographies, she recalled:

> Manchuria...stunk of chive. Soon [after our arrival] my mother began arguing with my father. Mother [used to] say 'why did you bring us all here, in this smelly, unhygienic place!'... In time, the war ended, and Japan lost. All the factories in Wafangdian were seized and my father lost his job. From that moment on, I had to look after my entire family

financially. (Fujisawa 1987: 23)

The above comment and the narrative at the beginning of this article are the only surviving accounts that reveal Fujisawa Ranko's time in Manchuria.

Equally scarce in the number of existing sources are those on Japanese female tango performers who had worked in the Manchurian dance halls between the 1930s and 1940s. A prominent Japanese tango violinist (anonymised upon interviewee's request) and the daughter of a Manchuria-returnee former dancer, commented in a personal letter to me:

> Out of the dance halls that there were in Dalian, the Perroquet dance hall was one of the most prestigious, and when it came to army personals it was frequented only by senior officers…My father worked as a manager of this venue and my mother was one of several (or several dozen?) dancers. The [dance hall] clients bought dance tickets (10 dance coupons) at the entrance, and some generous people used to give [my mother] one whole volume (10 coupons). Kawashima Yoshiko (the so-called Eastern Mata Hari, executed by the National Government of the Republic of China in 1948) always dressed up as a man, and frequented this dance hall, always asking my mother to dance with her. Because Kawashima Yoshiko dressed up as a man, she always danced with women…At the end of the war, all women (my mother and my aunt too) dressed up as men and with their faces covered with

> mud, escaped [Manchuria] from Russian [Soviet] soldiers and returned to Japan (anonymised with the request from the interviewee, in a personal letter to the author, 26 March 2020).

Covering the face with mud was believed to be the crucial strategy by Japanese female agrarian settlers and other Japanese women residing in Manchuria at this time as many struggled to escape the Soviet invasion of this region that began on the 9th August 1945 (Itoh 2010: 18). Personal narratives of Japanese tango musicians and performers who had lived and worked in Manchuria between the 1930s and 1940s reveal the tension of memories surrounding tairiku (continents), intertwined with the experiences and sounds of Argentine tango that had also come to symbolise disjointed and disillusioned images—albeit at times evocative for many—of continents. The transoceanic memories of Japanese tango musicians in Manchuria, in many respects, illuminate the romanticized ideas of continents at this time that are continued to be entrapped by broken promises of modernity.

By exposing the gaps of the study through a dialogue between a Japan-reflexive scholarship—focusing on and around Manchuria as an area of attention—and a popular culture fabricated by tango musicians, operators and other tango-related objects in Japan's then-puppet state of Manchukuo, this article acts as a post-imperial critique of West-centered approach to understanding transoceanic cultural transmissions during some of the most turbulent times of the twentieth century. Japanese tango historiography, in other words, serve in parallel and in tension with global music histories by centering the voices of individuals who circulated outside the Euro-American West, conditioned by the

political situations of this time and, for many, propelled by artistic and financial needs.

Transoceanic Fragments

Japanese encounters with the bandoneón and Argentine tango scores in Manchuria transformed sonic imaginations surrounding Argentina in Japan between the 1930s and 1940s. In many respects, Manchuria became, for Japanese tango musicians, a musical in-between site where belonging to continents—thus becoming the 'citizens of "the world"' (i.e. 'true cosmopolitans' [Collins and Gooley 2016])—was imagined to be possible. These musicians' expertise in Argentine tango music performance, cultivated in Manchuria, became crucial in strengthening the Japanese imaginations surrounding Argentina. Many of the Japanese tango musicians who had lived and worked in Manchuria between 1935 and 1946 became pioneering tango performers in post-war Japan, with some of them migrating to Argentina and Chile after the war, demonstrating the wider musical circulations outside the Euro-American West.

At the same time, however, entangled with artistic and financial pursuits the experiences of Japanese tango musicians in Manchuria illuminate the tensions between memory and loss surrounding the sonic histories of migration and Japan's imaginations of tairiku. Deeply troubled and often unspoken recollections of Japan's 'exits' from Manchuria continue to frame the narratives of Japanese encounters with 'real' Argentine tango in China. This article has thus endeavored to restore complex pieces of missing memories of this time by examining the personal narratives of Japanese tango musicians who had lived in Manchuria. The histories of Japanese tango musicians in Manchuria

between 1935 and 1946 reveal the memory and inheritance of the island/continent dichotomy, which illuminates the musical circulations that transcends any geo-oceanic framework.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the anonymous peer-reviewers and the editors of the *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture* for their helpful comments on this article. This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 846143. This essay is based on the paper presented at the online symposia, 'Resonating Across Oceanic Currents: A Maritime History of Popular Music in and from Japan, 1920s-1960s', held as WIAS Top Runners' Lecture Collection, supported by Waseda Institute for Advanced Study.

REFERENCES

Anonymised (2020), anonymised upon the interviewee's request), personal letter from an interviewee to Yuiko Asaba, 26 March.

Armitage, David, Bashford, Alison and Sivasundaram, Sujit (eds.) (2018) *Oceanic Histories*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Asaba, Yuiko (forthcoming 2025), *Tango in Japan: Cosmopolitanism Beyond the West*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. In Production with the Press.

Asaba, Yuiko (麻場友姫胡) (2020), 'Nijusseikini okeru tangono juyōto "honba" ishikino keisei: Naimenka sareta modānitii toiu shitenkarano ichikōsatsu' (*The Reception of Tango and the Creation of its Authenticity in Twentieth Century Japan: A Study from the Perspective of "Internalized Modernity"*), *Popyurā Ongaku Kenkyū* (*Popular Music Studies*), 24, pp. 3-15.

Atkins, E. Taylor (1999), ' 'Jammin' on the jazz frontier: The Japanese jazz community in interwar Shanghai', *Japanese Studies*, 19:1, pp. 5-16.

Byl, Julia, and Sykes, Jim (eds.) (2023) *Sounding the Indian Ocean: Musical Circulations in the Afro-Asiatic Seascape*, California: University of California Press.

Collins, Sarah and Dana Gooley (2016). 'Music and the New Cosmopolitanism: Problems and Possibilities', *The Musical Quaterly*, 99:2, pp. 139-65.

Dansu to ongaku ('Dance and Music') (1935), 'Manshū no butōkai (ichi) butōba' ('The worlds of dancing in Manchuria [1] the dance hall'), October.

Fellezs, Kevin (2019), *Listen but Don't Ask Question: Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar Across the Transpacific*, Durham: Duke University Press.

Field, Andrew David (2010), *Shanghai's Dancing World: Cabret Culture and Urban Politics, 1919-1954*, Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.

Fujisawa, Ranko (藤沢嵐子) (1987), *Kantando – Tango to Ranko to Shinpei to* (Cantando – With tango, Ranko and Shinpei), Tokyo: Rokkou Shuppan (in existence until 1992).

Furukubo, Sakura (古久保さくら) (2003), ' "Kindai kazoku" to shiteno Manshū nōgyōimin kazokuzō: "Tairikuno hanayome" wo meguru gensetsu kara' ('Understanding Manchurian Japanese Farming Immigrants as "Modern Families": On Discourses surrounding the 'Brides of the Continent'', in Sumio Obinata (ed.), *Nihon kazokushi ronshū 13 Minzoku・sensō to kazoku* (*Collected Essays on the History of Family in Japan 13 Ethnicity, War, and Family*) Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, pp. 152-65.

Haneda, Masashi and Oka, Mihoko (eds.) (2019) *A Maritime History of East Asia*, Kyoto: Kyoto University Press.

Hoshino, Yukiyo (星野幸代) and Nishimura, Masao (西村正男) (eds.) (2020), *Idōsuru mediato puropaganda: Nicchū sensō kara sengoni kaketeno taishūgeinou* ('The Media and Propaganda in Motion: Popular Arts between the Sino-Japanese War to the Postwar Era'), Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan.

Iguchi, Junko (井口淳子) (2019), *Bōmeishatachi no Shanhai gakudan: Sokaino ongakuto baree* ('Music worlds of refugees in Shanghai: Music and ballets of the settlements'), Tokyo: Ongaku no tomo sha.

Imai, Keiko (今井圭子) (2001), 'Aruzenchin shuyōshini yoru senzenno nihon imin wo meguru hōdō' (*Images of Japanese Immigrants in the Main Argentine Newspapers before World War II*), *The Bulletin of the Faculty of Foreign Studies Sophia University*, 36, pp. 149-170.

Irving, David R.M. (2010), *Colonial Counterpoint: Music in Early Modern Manila*, New

York: Oxford University Press.

Itoh, Mayumi (2010), *Japanese War Orphans in Manchuria: Forgotten Victims of World War II*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Iwano, Yuichi (岩野裕一) (1999), *Ōdō gakudono kōkyōgaku: Manshū shirarezaru ongakushi* ('The symphony orchestra of the royal paradise: The unknown history of music in Manchuria'), Tokyo: Ongaku no tomo sha.

Kanie, Takeo (蟹江丈夫) (2006 unpublished), 'Nihon no tango gakudan' ('Tango Ensembles of Japan'), *The Association of the Yokohama Porteña Music Twentieth Anniversary Project* (tango association booklet).

Kasai, Amane (葛西周) (2015), 'Nicchūsensōkino Manshūni okeru bunkakōsaku oyobi ongakujanrukan ni kansuru kōsatsu' ('A study on cultural productions in Manchuria during the Sino-Japanese War and perspectives on music genres', in Takeshi Baba (馬場毅) (ed.) , *Takakuteki shitenkara mita Nicchūsensō — Seiji・keizai ・gunji・ bunka・ minzokuno sōkoku* ('The Sino-Japanese War from Multiple Perspectives: Frictions between Politics, Economics, Military Affairs, Culture and Ethnic Groups'), Fukuoka: Karansha, pp. 175-96.

Koizumi, Tatsuji (小泉達治) (2020), in-person interview with Yuiko Asaba, 24 February.

Koga, Yukiko (2016), *Inheritance of Loss: China, Japan, and the Political Economy of Redemption after Empire*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Koh, Bunyu (黄文雄) (2003), *Nihon no shokuminchino shinjitsu: Taiwan, Chosen, Manshu* ('The truths about Japanese colonialism: Taiwan, Korea, Manchuria'), Tokyo: Fusosha.

Manshū Nippō (*The Manchuria Daily Newspaper*) (1935), 'Manshū no butōkai' (The worlds of dancing in Manchuria), 27 June.

Matsuda, Matt (2012) *Pacific Worlds: A History of Seas, Peoples, and Cultures*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Monna, Toshio (門奈紀生) (2014), in-person interview with Yuiko Asaba, 9 April.

Nathaus, Klaus and Nott, James (eds.) (2022), *Worlds of Social Dancing: Dance Floor Encounters and the Global Rise of Couple Dancing, c.1910-c.1940*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Nor, Mohd Anis Md and Stepputat, Kendra (eds.) (2019), *Sounding the Dance, Moving the Music: Choreomusicological Perspectives on Maritime Southeast Asian Performing Arts*, London & New York: Routledge.

Ōe, Shinobu (大江志乃夫) et al. (1993), *Kindai Nihon to shokuminchi 7* ('Moden Japan and colony 7'), Tokyo: Iwanamishoten.

Ouyang, Lei X. (2022), *Music as Mao's Weapon: Remembering the Cultural Revolution*, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Palomino, Pablo (2020), *The Invention of Latin American Music: A Transnational History*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Sakaguchi, Mitsuhiro (坂口満宏) (2010), 'Darega imin wo okuridashitanoka – Kantaiheiyō ni okeru nihonjin no kokusai idō・kishi' ('Who sent over the immigrants – An overview of the Japanese international movement across the Pacific'), *Ritsumeikan Gengobunka Kenkyū*, 21:4, pp. 53-66.

Satoh, Kumiko (佐藤くみ子) (1957), 'Sakamoto Masaichi shi hōmon' (Visiting Mr. Sakamoto Masaichi), September, *Chunanbei Ongaku*, 49, pp. 22-9.

Solis, Gabriel 2015. 'The Black Pacific: Music and Racialization in Papua New Guinea and Australia', *Critical Sociology*, 41:2, pp. 297-312.

Sugikawa, Yūichi (杉川雄一)(2009), 'Ima, watashiga kangaeteiru koto. Bandoneon sōsha Sagawa Mine san ni kiku' (What I am thinking now. Interview with the bandoneonist Mr. Sagawa Mine), *Shunyu HIROSHIMA*, 26, pp. 78-81.

Tajima, Hayato (田島隼人) (2009), 'Modan Nihon no merodrama teki sōzōryoku to "ekkyō":Aruzenchin/tango wo meguru gensetsu bunseki' ('Modern Japan's Melodramatic Imagination and "Border Crossing": Discourse Analysis of Argentine Tango'), *Bigaku Geijutsu Kenkyū*, 27, pp. 157-205.

Takaya, Terunobu (高谷照信) (2020), telephone interview with Yuiko Asaba, 31 January.

Takayama, Masahiko (高山正彦) (1957), 'Takayama Masahiko kibō taidan (3) Gesuto Sakamoto Masaichi' (Much desired interview [3] Guest Sakamoto Masaichi), *El Tango Porteño*, March.

Tamanoi, Mariko Asano (2009), *Mamory Maps: The State and Manchuria in Postwar*

Japan, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press.

Tominaga, Tanako (冨永孝子) (1986), *Dairen – Kūhaku no roppyakuichi – Sengo, sokode naniga okotta* (‘The empty six hundred days – What happened in Dalian after World War II’), Tokyo: Shinhyoron.

Zhang, Canon (張佳能) (2020), ‘ “Dareka Riru o shinaika?” “Shanhai Riru” o meguru ongakushiteki kōsatsu’ (*Where is Lil?: A Music Historical Study on Shanghai Lil*), *Popyurā Ongaku Kenkyū* (*Popular Music Studies*), 24, pp. 85-100.

[1] Throughout this article, I use Manchuria, instead of Northeast China, to refer to former Manchukuo. On the contested use of the geographical name, Manchuria, in present-day China, see Koh (2005: 254-5).

[2] All translations from Japanese to English have been undertaken by the author unless otherwise stated. English journal titles of Japanese journals are included in parentheses where the English titles appear on the Japanese journals.

[3] Dance halls in China at this time had also been built by architects from Britain, France, United States, Russia and Germany. For more details, see Field (2010).

[4] Tairiku was also used in pre-1945 Japan to refer to China, and in the Japanese popular song genre called ‘*tairiku kayo*’ (*continental popular songs*) that sang exclusively about China. See Zhang (2020).

[5] Between December 2019 to March 2020 during my field and archival work in Japan, the World Health Organization declared coronavirus a global pandemic. I thus returned to England and have continued to conduct telephone interviews.

[6] From the perspective of the transnational circulations of social dancing in the early to mid twentieth century, a set of performances consisting of ‘jazz and tango’ were common in many dance halls across various countries at this time (see Nathaus & Nott 2022).

[7] The main Yamato Hotel building in Lüshun was situated in the former Nakamura machi.

[8] According to Takaya, who worked as the member of the acclaimed Gakudan Minamijyuji Sei, the Japanese popular singer, Fujiyama Ichirō (1911-1993) gave his bandoneon to one of his band members during the war in China.

[9] One of the first Japanese musicians who played the diatonic bandoneón was Midorikawa Yoshinobu who had built his bandoneón. He led the Verde y Su Orquesta, appearing regularly on the NHK radio programmes until around 1950 (Kanie 2006 : 11).

[10] Along with the Waseda University’s Orquesta Tango Waseda, the Keio University is home to the KBR Tango Ensemble. Both of them are semi-professional tango groups. The Orquesta Tango Waseda was established in 1951, and the KBR Tango Ensemble was founded in 1947.