The Sanyo Maru and Japanese Pearling in the Arafura Sea, 1934-1938

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ABSTRACT

This report reconstructs from English-language sources the activities and the sinking of the Sanyo Maru, one of several mother ships which serviced Japanese pearl fishing in the Arafura Sea in the 1930s. To achieve this reconstruction, the report also examines the pearl shell industry of the day and its diminishing market, the increasingly vigorous extraction of pearl shell off northern Australia by Japanese pearl vessels, relations between Aborigines and Japanese crews, and the hostile reaction by many white Australians to what seemed to them an alien incursion.

KEYWORDS: Aboriginal protection; Darwin; Fukutaro, Tange; Haultain, Charles; luggers; Japanese-Australian relations; Mitsui; Nanyo; Nanyo Kohatsu; Sanyo Maru; Palau; pearl shell industry.

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