Jammin’ on the Jazz Frontier: The Japanese Jazz Community in Interwar Shanghai

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When you came round,
Last night
So I will call out, ‘Welcome to Shanghai, welcome to Shanghai!’
In the morning, the Shanghai of our fading memory.

Love burns, the throbbing of love,
Adventure, too, and warm tears,
Ahh, there are too many dreams!
Like smoke from a bitter cigar,
Mysterious, ‘Oui madame’, the Shanghai of our hearts.

You will come round sometime,
Last night,
So I will call out, ‘Welcome to Shanghai, welcome to Shanghai!’
Forgotten Shanghai as we once saw it.

Love vanishes, blood freezes,
Our dancing hearts, as well, in the time gone by,
Ahh, there are too many dreams!
Like smoke from a bitter cigar,
Mysterious, ‘Oui madame’, the Shanghai of our hearts.¹

When Americans hear the word ‘frontier’, they usually imagine cowboys and Indians, gunfighters, gamblers, and saloon girls, or isolated settler families braving the elements to eke out an existence on the harsh prairie. Frederick Jackson Turner’s well-known treatise envisaged the frontier as more process than place, through which Americans demonstrated their mettle and inherent virtue. Certainly Turner’s definition of the frontier as the ‘point between savagery and civilization’ has fallen out of favor, but his contention that society constantly challenges and reinvigorates itself through contact with unfamiliar cultures and hostile environmental conditions remains compelling. Today many scholars apply the concept of the frontier to other geopolitical entities (most profitably, it appears, in the field of Latin American history); while there are important temporal, cultural, and environmental ‘variables’ that distinguish each frontier experience, the consensus is that there are also significant cross-cultural similarities.²

Historians sensitive to the perspectives of indigenous peoples no longer use the word ‘frontier’ to denote unsettled, untamed ‘wilderness’ areas, passively waiting for the civilizing impact of an invader. Contemporary historical scholarship treats frontiers as ‘geographic zones of interaction between two or more cultures ... places where cultures contend with one another and with their physical environment to produce a dynamic that is unique to time and place’. Representing ‘both place and process, linked inextricably’, frontiers generate periods of intense human conflict, technological innovation, and cross-cultural pollination. Frontiers so defined are not necessarily ‘wilderness’; they might also be ‘densely populated urban places where different cultures compete peacefully’⁵—or not so peacefully.

Moreover, the frontier exists not only as a place, a ‘state of mind’, or a process of social change, but as a symbol representing a refuge or a rite of passage.⁴ Whether the American West or the Australian outback, the symbolic frontier beckons to and challenges prospective ‘pioneers’, compelling them to develop and rely on survival skills that ‘civilization’ renders dormant. The individual on the frontier encounters hostile natives, lawlessness, adventure, and romance; he conquers the frontier to yield personal fortune and cultivate survival skills and character. I say ‘he’ deliberately because, on the symbolic level at least, the frontier is a hypermasculine environment, to which women are ‘brought’ to perform supporting roles. Ultimately, the symbolic frontier, as generated in the imagination of the ‘pioneer’, is terrain to be conquered and appropriated, to be put to personal use, in an effort to cultivate character, talent, and wealth.

If we understand the frontier as an amalgamation of geographical and temporal circumstances, transformative effects, and symbolic meanings, it is difficult to conceive of a better descriptive term than ‘frontier’ for portraying the Chinese port city of Shanghai in the early twentieth century.⁵ In the years between World Wars I and II, Shanghai was virtually everyone’s ‘frontier’, the colonial playground for transients from over 20 nations. Frederic Wakeman, Jr. and Wen-hsin Yeh have dubbed these people ‘Shanghai sojourners’, ‘denizens ... [whose] stay was on the way to becoming permanent residence, [and whose] loyalties fluctuated between attachment to native place and


⁵ George Wolfskill and Stanley Palmer, ‘Introduction’, in Wolfskill and Palmer (Eds), Essays on Frontiers in World History (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981), p. x. The symbolic functions of the frontier seem to have received considerably less attention than its other qualities. Turner and his scholarly descendants discuss how the frontier transforms people, cultures, and social structures; it seems equally plausible to postulate the converse, that people transform a particular geographic zone into a ‘frontier’ by imbuing that zone with special qualities of a symbolic nature. Human beings, understood in the Geertzian sense as actively ‘symboling’ creatures, thus generate frontiers themselves by ascribing symbolic value and transformative powers to designated geographic areas.

⁵ The term ‘frontier’ seems even more appropriate since the publication of Frederic Wakeman’s study entitled The Shanghai Broadway: Wartime Terror & Urban Crime, 1937–1941 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), which describes how ‘illicit pleasures ... were both a momentary escape from unbearable social tensions & a constant reminder of a cleaved city festering under foreign domination’. Like other frontiers (as zones of cultural interaction and conflict), Shanghai was characterized by lawlessness, nightly shootings, and a tense ‘triangular relationship between the foreign settlement, the Japanese military, and the puppet regime’ (p. 1).
the announcement of a new identity as Shanghai ren (Shanghai people). It was a community (or, more correctly, a collection of communities) that extraterritoriality rendered 'turbulent, unruly, and crime-ridden;' where prostitution became a mass industry; where, in the words of one observer, ‘races mingle but never merge.'

Among these 'Shanghai sojourners' were a number of musicians, singers, stage and 'taxi' dancers, and cabaret and dance hall proprietors of Japanese nationality who comprised a distinct 'jazz community' within the Chinese city. Entrusted with entertaining the Japanese settlement in the Hongkew district (which boasted 20,30,000 residents in the mid-1930s), this community created a 'jazz frontier' in Shanghai. The term 'jazz frontier' was not actually used by the 'pioneers' who created it. I have coined it after a close reading of the imagery, language, and thematic content of the jazz community's oral accounts and folklore, which describe all the romance, danger, and personal transfiguration that are fundamental to frontier experiences. In many respects the 'jazz frontier' is fundamentally different from other frontiers: it is a geographic zone of cultural interaction, but not between native and invading populations. On the jazz frontier the culture that mediates the interaction, jazz, is not indigenous to the zone; the populations that are interacting are all invaders (Americans, Japanese, Russians, Filipinos, etc.); and the natives (the Chinese) are really peripheral to the interaction. But the jazz frontier is more idea than place, the product of the Japanese jazz community's collective imagination, and thus a frontier by virtue of its meaning as well as its location or inherent transformative powers. For Japanese musicians, Shanghai represented a rite of authentication and initiation into the jazz culture, an alternative experience, and a stepping stone to fame and fortune in the homeland's entertainment industry.

Moreover, I use the term 'jazz frontier' because it not only evokes the romance and lawlessness of Shanghai street life, but also highlights the city's status as contested terrain in the early twentieth century. Like all frontiers, Shanghai was prized open by a succession of invading armies, entrepreneurs and big business, and peripheral support groups (such as entertainers). Sheltered by the umbrella of Japan's imperial presence in China, jazz musicians enjoyed relative artistic and personal freedoms while they entertained the troops, financiers, and bureaucrats who were subjugating the Asian continent. They played roles analogous to the wandering minstrels, the honkytonk pianists, and the saloon girls on the American frontier—marginal, perhaps, to the process of expansion, yet quite essential to the morale of the 'expanders'.

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6 Frederic Wakeman, Jr. and Wen-Hsin Yeh (Eds), Shanghai Sojourners (Berkeley, Institute of East Asian Studies, 1992), p. 6.
7 Frederic Wakeman, Jr., Policing Shanghai: 1927–1937 (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995), p. xv; Randall Gould, 'Where Races Mingle but Never Merge', Christian Science Monitor, weekly magazine section, 24 June 1936, p. 4. Prostitution was the single largest employer of female labor in Shanghai, and one in 30 residents 'sold sex for a living'. Even women who were not prostitutes were employed in the 'sexual marketplace', selling their companionship as hostesses, waitresses, and taxi dancers (see Wakeman and Yeh, p. 7; and Wakeman, Policing Shanghai, p. 11).
8 The term 'jazz community' was coined in Alan P. Merriam, and Raymond W. Mack, 'The Jazz Community', Social Forces 38 (March 1960), pp. 211–222. Merriam and Mack's contribution was to expand the focus of jazz sociology to include audiences as well as musicians. I use the term to designate a subculture of primary members or 'producers' (musicians, jazz critics, historians, dancers, record collectors, disc jockeys, and jazz coffeshop and club owners); and secondary members or 'consumers', whose involvement is occasional and transitory, but whose financial support is crucial to the community's survival.
Through the medium of oral history—in which the ‘living source’ is often given complete editorial and interpretive license to determine ‘what really happened’—Japan’s jazz community distances itself from the larger context of Japanese imperialism and portrays its experience in Shanghai as a playful romp, an innocent loss of innocence, if you will. Jazz artists have unanimously maintained that a lack of interest and knowledge of ‘politics’ blinded them to the numerous injustices and atrocities inflicted on the Chinese metropolis. Drummer Jimmy Harada (1911–1995) recalled,

The town of Shanghai was a place that, since the [early] twentieth century, was said to have been invaded by strong countries seeking to expand their own interests in weakened countries, and thus the world’s arts, culture, and entertainment flourished [there]. I had neither understanding of nor interest in political affairs, but I was drawn by Shanghai’s peculiar, fertile atmosphere, which Japan did not have.10

But, clearly, there would have been no party in Shanghai had there not been a pernicious Japanese imperial presence already in place. The notion of the jazz frontier, then, challenges conventional depictions in which interwar popular culture is uninvolved in and ultimately victimized by the forces of imperialism and nationalism. It supports the emerging thesis that culture (‘high’, ‘popular’, or ‘mass’) actively created, disseminated, and profited from images and information about Japan and foreign entities (particularly China), which facilitated rather than challenged militant nationalism and imperialist aggression.11 Seen in this light, Japan’s jazz frontier looks less like an extended party or fling and more like the ill-gotten booty of Japanese imperialism.

Trailblazing

The ‘opening’ of Japan’s jazz frontier in Shanghai was facilitated by the considerable expansion of leisure travel across the Pacific and the resulting diffusion of American popular music.12 In the years before transnational entertainment conglomerates and their formalized distribution networks, the traffic of American, Filipino, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese musicians across the Pacific in the 1910s and 1920s, with stops in Yokohama, Kobe, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Manila, San Francisco, and Seattle, provided the principal path for the outflow of American popular music to the rest of the world. In the years immediately following the First World War, America began to displace Europe as the principal cultural influence in Asia, particularly in Japan. Intellectuals and political activists were attracted by the Wilsonian ideals of democracy and self-determination, but the so-called ‘masses’ were drawn to the spectacle of American motion pictures and the rhythmic power of American dance music and jazz.

I should take this opportunity to note two important points about the word ‘jazz’ in the cultural history of the early twentieth century. First, if one applies the

12 ‘Diffusion’ is more fitting than ‘exchange’ or ‘cross-pollination’ because the process was almost completely one-way—Asians were learning and appropriating American music, with very little significant musical influence going in the opposite direction.
current, accepted musicological criteria for defining ‘jazz’ as a style—with distinctive aural characteristics such as 'swing', improvisation, and subtleties of pitch identified as 'blues' sonorities—little of the music that Japanese (or Europeans and Americans, for that matter) knew as 'jazz' in the 1920s and 1930s would qualify. In fact, most of the music unproblematically labeled 'jazz' in the first half of the twentieth century is no longer considered to be a part of the 'jazz tradition'. Thus a musicologically formalist approach is ahistorical at best, for the relative importance of musicological criteria such as swing, blue notes, and improvised solos has changed with the music. The word 'jazz' simply has not retained a consistent musicological meaning, and it seems best for historians either to conform to contemporary definition(s) that held sway in the time periods under scrutiny, or to formulate definitions 'based on a sociocultural analysis of jazz rather than on its internal aesthetics'.

The second point is that in the interwar period the word 'jazz' could and did refer to a number of different things: it could refer specifically to popular music, social dance, or other forms of American popular culture sweeping Japan after World War I; yet it also connoted a new set of social mores, fashions, gender relations, and consumer practices otherwise known as ‘modernism’ (modanizumu). Jazz initially found favor among self-styled ‘cosmopolitan modernites’ in Japan’s port cities (particularly Kobe) before spreading to larger metropolises such as Osaka and Tokyo in the mid-to-late 1920s. The first Japanese musicians to play jazz were usually the graduates of youth troupes employed by department stores, street bands known as jiinta, or theatre musicians who accompanied silent films or stage performances.

Japan’s Jazz Age coincided with a time of political, social, cultural, and economic volatility, which fed a gnawing uneasiness over the perceived erosions of traditions and the rising prominence of America in Japanese cultural life. Its development occurred within a context of, and thus was decisively shaped by, expanding state power in the realms of thought, art, and behavior. Moreover, it is fair to say that Japan’s jazz culture was hardly peripheral but rather at the very heart of the turbulence and controversy of the times. Many Japanese at the time felt that the drive to emulate and rub shoulders with the Western powers had been conducted at the expense of Japan’s own national identity. Such fears had been prevalent at least since the 1880s, but the importation of new technologies and forms of culture and entertainment in the 1920s made the complete obliteration of indigenous social and aesthetic values a foreseeable and imminent possibility. The popularization of jazz in the interwar period was part cause and part consequence of Japan’s cosmopolitan impulses, but its nativist impulses guaranteed that the music’s popularity would not go uncontested. For both champions and opponents of cosmopolitanism, jazz was emblematic of Japan’s integration and participation in modern culture, and its social and aesthetic ramifications significantly heated ongoing debates over a nation’s soul. The controversy that jazz and social dance engendered in the homeland made colonial territories in East Asia, particularly Shanghai, attractive refuges for Japanese jazz musicians and aficionados.

Only a small number of Japanese were able to take the journey to the ‘home of jazz’

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(jazu no honba), as America was known, so those with musical interests searched for an alternative site, someplace geographically accessible yet musically and culturally closer to 'the source'. The growth of a cosmopolitan society in Shanghai, and the steadily expanding Japanese political and economic presence in China, made Shanghai a logical choice. It is believed that Osaka trumpeter Saitō Hiroyoshi (1903–1981) was the first to take advantage of this opportunity, establishing the 'Shanghai sojourn' as an act of adolescent rebellion and a rite of (musical) passage—he sailed for China in 1921 at age 18, having told his parents that he was only going to Tokyo.\footnote{Uchida Koichi, Nihon no jazu shi: senzen, sendai (Tokyo, Swing Journal, 1976), pp. 66–67. Saitō stayed in Shanghai for four years, performing and studying in a multiracial band at the Olympic Theater.} By the time Saitō returned to Japan in 1925, dance halls and cabarets owned by and catering exclusively to Japanese were opening in Shanghai,\footnote{The first Japanese dance halls in Shanghai employed Filipino bands with a few token Japanese members until the number of Japanese musicians in Shanghai made all-Japanese bands feasible. See Ōmori Seitarō, Nihon no yōgaku, Vol. 1 (Tokyo, Shinmon Shuppansha, 1986), pp. 169–170.} providing entertainment for a growing Japanese population that was presumably permanent.

The ‘Magic Metropolis’

By the late 1920s and 1930s Shanghai had a firm reputation as the ‘Asian jazz mecca’. Hundreds of ‘lavish’ dance halls, casinos, cabarets, and nightclubs catered to a 'large and affluent population of Western bachelors'.\footnote{Wakeman, Policing Shanghai, p. 107; John Pal, Shanghai Saga (London, Jarrolds, 1963), p. 76.} Ernest O. Hauser’s Shanghai: City For Sale (1940) provides an evocative portrayal of Shanghai night life (from the Western bachelor’s perspective, of course):

> You drifted into one of those cabarets, an hour or so before midnight, you chose your table not too far from the floor, and you looked them over: the pretty Chinese girls with their slit silk dresses and with too much rouge on their soft cheeks; the glorious Russians with their décolleté evening gowns—Chanel and Molineux models, if you did not look too closely; the stupid and touchingly attractive Koreans; the slightly simian half-castes; the quick and clever Japanese ... And you bought your ticket and danced with them, and if you invited one of them to your table, you had to pay something extra and the girl had apple cider that turned into champagne on your chin. But if you wanted to go home with her, she would have to ask the management first ... And you might wind up in 'Blood Alley', where you went to get as much local color as possible, among the drunken soldiers and sailors of the armies and navies of the world.\footnote{Ernest O. Hauser, Shanghai: City For Sale (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1940), pp. 261–262.}

A 1934 guidebook similarly raved:

WHOOPEE! What odds whether Shanghai is the Paris of the East or Paris the Shanghai of the Occident? Shanghai has its own distinctive night life, and what a life! Dog races and cabarets, hai-alai and cabarets, formal tea and dinner dances and cabarets, the sophisticated and cosmopolitan French club and cabarets ... prize fights and cabarets ... everywhere, in both extremities of French town (French Concession), uptown and downtown in the International Settlement, in Hongkew, and out of bounds in Chinese territory, are cabarets.
Hundreds of ‘em! High hats and low necks; long tails and short knickers, inebriates and slumming puritans. Wine, women and song. Whooppee! Let’s go places and do things!  

The Japanese media, as well, peddled an image of Shanghai as a mato (‘magic metropolis’), infested with crime and danger, of course, yet irresistible and thrilling for that very reason. This image paralleled nicely the portrayals of Chinese settlements (‘Chinatowns’) as dark, opium-laced netherworlds run by criminal secret societies, as depicted in American and Japanese films, songs, and pulp novels. One of Japan’s most prolific and popular songwriters, Hattori Ryōichi (1907–1993), was just one of several who pimped this romantic, exotic image of China in general and Shanghai in particular in a number of 1930s popular songs.  

This vibrant night life attracted dancers and musicians from around the world to Shanghai. The American composer and arranger Claude Lapham drew attention to the fact that the late-night carousings of Shanghai’s ‘night people’ were to jazz accompaniment: ‘I can assure you on the word of an observant musical globe-trotter that the Orient is MORE interested in jazz than all of Europe with the exception of England’. Lapham incited a minor sensation when he announced to readers of The Metronome that ‘China needs American bands’. The scenario was not as rosy as Lapham portrayed it (as a series of rebuttals insisted), but there were, nevertheless, enough American musicians in Shanghai to attract ambitious Japanese with an interest in jazz. It was the closest access to American performers that Japanese would have before 1945.  

For most Japanese, who have virtually no real contact with foreigners, the process of cultural appropriation occurs at a considerable distance from the original source and thus is conducted through artifacts and media, such as magazines, newspapers, recorded music, and motion pictures. Formally and informally imported jazz recordings and scores were the media through which Japanese musicians and aficionados learned about jazz in the 1920s. Their ‘jazz studies’ rarely entailed more than the exact replication of jazz sonorities, rhythms, and improvised solos, with little if any under-

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20 I am very grateful to the anonymous reader for Japanese Studies who drew my attention to these points. Stefan Tanaka’s Japan’s Orient: Rendering Pasts into History (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993), similarly discusses the Japanese imagination of China, in terms of academic and popular historical discourse.
22 The first ‘dance hall girls’ in Shanghai in the 1920s were said to be mostly White Russians fleeing the Russian Revolution: ‘In jaded Shanghai, ever on the alert for a new sensation, much addicted to the pleasures of the senses, the voluptuous Russian girl was an immediate success’ (Marc T. Greene, ‘Shanghai Cabaret Girl’, Literary Digest, 23 October 1937, p. 25). Chinese dancers (sōnig) were hired in greater numbers in the 1930s. By the end of the 1930s there were 2500 to 5000 taxi dancers in Shanghai (Wakeman, Policing Shanghai, p. 108).
standing of the theoretical intricacies of rhythm, melody, and harmony that would allow them to apply the language of jazz in original ways themselves.\textsuperscript{25}

But the Shanghai sojourn represented an opportunity to circumvent this pattern, to learn jazz performance directly from established American artists, and to master and apply jazz techniques with the powers of their own imaginations. The jazz luminaries who resided in Shanghai included Teddy Weatherford (1903–1945), a progressive pianist who had jammed with Erskine Tate and Louis Armstrong.\textsuperscript{26} Weatherford’s ‘pupils’ included future Japanese stars such as drummer ‘Shanghai’ Yamaguchi Toyosaburō (1905–1970) and trumpeter Nanri Fumio (1910–1975),\textsuperscript{27} both of whom later convinced their compatriots that Shanghai was the place to go to learn how to ‘play for real’. ‘Teddy Weatherford, who was at a high-class foreigners’ club, came by to hear me play’, Nanri recounted. ‘He asked me, “Who’d you learn from?” and when I said “Louis Armstrong’s records”, he said, “I’ve played with Louie. Come over to my hotel”... He showed me blue notes and tenth chords. It was the best lesson’. When such stories began circulating in Japan’s jazz community, the exhortation ‘If it’s jazz you want, go to Shanghai!’ became the Japanese jazzman’s equivalent to Horace Greeley’s ‘Go west, young man!’

Shanghai was more than a musician’s ‘woodshed’; it also represented a place where youthful romantic fantasy was played out, where the chase was more fun than the capture, where the social rules governing public intercourse between the sexes held little sway. ‘Deceiving the ladies in four/four time’ (onna damasu mo fūbito),\textsuperscript{28} as Jimmy Harada put it, was part of the total Shanghai experience. The classic, romantic scenario for the voyage to the ‘jazz frontier’ entailed a male musician and a female dancer running off together, shirking responsibility, shocking friends and family, but eventually returning to Japan in glamorous triumph. The romance of this image withers when one considers that musicians actually received bounties or financial advances from dance hall owners as a reward for bringing female dancers with them from Japan. Thus there was as much avarice as romance behind the standard pickup line ‘Let’s run away to Shanghai together!’ (jutari de Shanhai e nige yo); the musicians most accomplished at this delicate art of persuasion were dubbed ‘advance kings’ (bansukingu).\textsuperscript{29} The awkward social implications of this arrangement are illustrated in the following confession by clarinetist Ōkawa Kōichi, who was in Shanghai from 1938 to 1941: ‘I was married at the time, but I had a dancer I liked on the side and we went to Shanghai together. When we got there the dancer said to me, “We can get by just fine on my earnings, so you send all of your income to your wife in Japan”’.\textsuperscript{30}

Music and hormones filled the air, but Shanghai was not without its travails, which only added to the romantic mystique of the ‘jazz frontier’. Japanese faced fierce competition for jobs from nationalities with better ‘musical reputations’, such as

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\textsuperscript{25} Saxophonist Maeno Kōzō (1897–1977) confessed that in the mid-1920s, when jazz was the rage in the Osaka–Kobe area, ‘I did not understand theoretically why one “fakes” [improvises]. What I relied on were jazz records and I imitated those as best I could’. Quoted in Ōmori, Nihon no yōgaku, p. 149.

\textsuperscript{26} Weatherford was the epitome of the globetrotting ‘jazz exile’. He was married to a Japanese, and spent several years in East Asia and Europe before settling in India before World War II. He died in Calcutta in April 1945, leaving very few recordings.


\textsuperscript{28} Quoted in Saitō Ren, Shōwa no bansukingu tachi: jazu, minato, hōō (Tokyo, Music Magazine, 1983), p. 35.

\textsuperscript{29} Saitō, p. 24; Uchida, p. 69.

\textsuperscript{30} Quoted in Saitō, p. 24.
Filipinos and Americans, and earned only a fraction of the pay that musicians of other backgrounds commanded.\(^{31}\) Nanri Fumio related his experience of poverty in the pursuit of art: ‘Of course, when I was listening to [Teddy Weatherford] play I couldn’t work, so I found a day job, but even with that I had no money; I’d pick up daikon leaves at the market and boil them by burning old newspapers, and for three or four days that’d be all I’d eat. Even now when I see a daikon I remember my Shanghai days and become nostalgic’.\(^{32}\) In Nanri’s testimony, we find poverty romanticized and exalted as the crucial dues-paying experience which ‘authentic’ jazz artists are expected to endure.

Japanese also faced the antipathy of the locals. Anti-Japanese sentiment exploded in the violent demonstrations conducted by Shanghai students and workers in May 1925, and grew ever more hostile as the aggression of the Japanese military in China persisted.\(^{33}\) Legend has it that jazz singer Mizushima Sanæ (1909–1978) responded to the increasingly dangerous, anti-Japanese climate of the 1930s by donning Chinese clothing and passing as a native. She adopted the stage name Daria Sagara and sang jazz and tango songs (occasionally in Spanish) with a mixed band of Chinese and Filipinos. The ruse worked for about a year, until one night when a Japanese in the audience remembered her from her days as the ‘mama-san’ of a Tokyo music coffee shop and blew her cover, compelling her to return to Japan in 1936.\(^{34}\) After the Japanese occupation began in 1937 the dangers increased exponentially, as Morioka Masako, a taxi dancer, could attest. In February 1939 she, a Japanese army photographer, and two others were shot in the street in broad daylight by a Chinese terrorist. Morioka survived the attack, as a bullet glanced off her ribcage.\(^{35}\)

A sojourn on the jazz frontier was dangerous, perhaps, yet not without rewards. Those musicians, singers, and dancers who dared to undertake this risky venture enjoyed prestige as ‘Shanghai returnees’ (Shanghai gaeri) when they returned to Japan. The very word ‘Shanghai’ conferred a degree of authenticity for which people who merely copied records could not hope. Shanghai gaeri were said to have learned from the source, to have ‘paid their dues’, to be real jazzmen. As I have argued elsewhere,\(^{36}\) authenticity is one of the cardinal virtues in jazz culture, and the music’s history in Japan revolves around how musicians and aficionados of Japanese ethnicity constructed and contrived strategies (both musical and discursive) to ‘authenticate’ their music as ‘real jazz’. In the interwar period, a sojourn on the jazz frontier of Shanghai represented one such authenticating experience, comparable to that which Boston’s Berklee School of Music promises young Japanese musicians today.

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\(^{31}\) One account states that Japanese earned about one dollar a night, compared to their foreign counterparts’ 30 dollars a night. Matsuzaka Hiro (Ed.), ‘Nihon no jazu sôshiki kara daijirâ taijin ni taisen made’, \textit{Jazu hishô} 12 (1972), p. 29.

\(^{32}\) Quoted in Nanri and Segawa, p. 217.

\(^{33}\) One Chinese writer described the tension at the beginning of the 1930s: ‘With three of their provinces forcibly taken away from them, it would be against human nature for the Chinese in Shanghai to love their Japanese neighbors as before. Similarly, elated by the unexpected success in Manchuria [in 1931], the Japanese in Shanghai would have to be angels before they would not be stirred to emulating the example of their compatriots’. Hsû Shuhsi, \textit{Japan and Shanghai} (Shanghai, Kelly and Walsh, 1938), pp. 11–12.


\(^{36}\) See my ‘Can Japanese Sing the Blues? “Japanese Jazz” and the Problem of Authenticity’, in Tim Craig (Ed.), \textit{Japan Pop: Inside the World of Japanese Pop Culture} (forthcoming). This paper was originally delivered at the Japanese Popular Culture Conference at the University of Victoria, 11 April 1997.
Artistic authentication, adolescent rebellion, greed, and romance were not the only motivations for fleeing to the jazz frontier. Nanri Fumio and others have mentioned the increasing pressure of city ordinances, the police, and rightwing activists on the dance halls in Japan as another impetus for making the voyage to China. Around 1929, Nanri claimed, ‘ruffians with samurai swords came to harass the dance halls every night. I couldn’t put up with that, so I went over to Shanghai, not knowing whether I could survive’. Nanri’s comment highlights the two profound, yet conflicting, sociocultural trends afflicting Japan in the 1920s and 1930s: the development of a relatively open, cosmopolitan society, characterized by leftist political activism, open ideological debate, and an escapist, mass media-based popular culture; and the parallel flowering of cultural traditionalism and ultranationalist militancy among agriculturalists, the intelligentsia, the military, and, later, the state. At best the dance hall culture, the very heart of interwar Japan’s jazz community, was receiving mixed signals from Japanese society. Business was so good that the halls raised admission fees to slow down the flow of customers; yet local ordinances, police, and rightwing paramilitary groups constantly challenged the dance halls’ social legitimacy and contained the industry’s expansion. The response of some jazz musicians, dancers, singers, and dance hall proprietors was to escape this tense situation by going overseas.

Jazz musicians have consistently expressed disgust for rightwing and militarist movements, but the expansion of Japan’s empire in East Asia provided the very ‘safety valves’ to which they could flee. Shanghai is but one example: following the establishment of the colony/puppet state Manchukuo in 1932, some prominent jazz musicians, singers, and dancers followed thousands of ‘pioneers’ to make their fortunes there (when Nanri worked at the Pereko dance hall in Dairen, he made ¥500 a month, at a time when ¥1000 would buy a house with a garden in Tokyo). Japan’s jazz frontier thus expanded apace with Japan’s imperial presence in Asia, and the allegedly subversive jazz subculture profited accordingly. But Manchuria, while certainly viewed as a frontier by many Japanese in the 1930s, lacked the symbolic significance of Shanghai. Shanghai offered a stage on which to act out adolescent romantic fantasies; a chance to make (and squander) fortunes; a sanctuary from the suppression of the jazz culture in the homeland; and an authenticating experience, which transformed musicians, dancers, and singers into jazumen, with all the prestige, fame, and fortune that such status entailed.

The ‘closing of the frontier’, or the point after which a particular geographical or cultural zone no longer constitutes a frontier, is a perennial topic of debate among historians. The closing of the jazz frontier, however, is relatively unambiguous. With the Pacific War and, eventually, the Communist takeover, Shanghai’s reputation as a

37 Quoted in Nanri and Segawa, p. 217.
38 Nanri Fumio, interview in Uchida, pp. 75–76.
39 Stars such as Nanri Fumio and trombonist Shūtō Isamu, who had made enviable fortunes in China, returned to Japan, by their own admission having exhausted their money partying (Saitō, p. 252; Uchida, p. 76). In an editorial in a dance periodical, commentator Funabashi Yōji chided musicians who made two or three times the monthly income of most people, and yet failed to save or invest it. ‘I have seldom heard talk of saving ... it seems that there are many wasteful people [in the jazz world]’. He recommended that musicians save a portion of their incomes, invest in the necessary materials to form strong individual bands, and thereby attain independence from the increasingly vulnerable dance halls. Funabashi Yōji, ‘Jazukai no dōkō wo ronjite gakushi shokun ni ataru’, Dansu to ongaku, April 1935, pp. 38–39.
40 Hudson, p. 13.
lawless, cosmopolitan playground for the world’s great powers declined drastically. Although during the war there was still a substantial Japanese presence in the city—tied even less ambiguously to Japan’s military, political, and economic expansion in the region—the entertainment districts withered amid slogans such as ‘frivolity is the enemy’. The Japanese-owned dance halls in Shanghai, to which a number of musicians and dancers fled following the domestic dance hall ban of November 1940, were shut down in December 1941. Needless to say, Japanese musicians were unwelcome in establishments outside of the Japanese concession. For them, the jazz frontier was essentially closed.

Coda

The concept of the jazz frontier provides us with a broad theme to characterize the folklore of Japan’s interwar jazz community. In oral accounts of Shanghai, we can detect the jazz musician’s belief in the primacy of American models, the hunger for ‘authenticity’, and the desire for a place where the jazz culture could thrive independent of political pressures. All of these things could be found and attained only on the jazz frontier, a place of mythical status that Japanese themselves created in Shanghai.

But the term ‘jazz frontier’ also reminds us that Shanghai was the site of an invasion and of intense cultural encounters. It recontextualizes the jazz community’s fantasy land within the larger framework of Japanese expansion on the Asian continent, a connection about which the oral record is disingenuous. The jazz community has consistently portrayed itself as an outcast in the days of militant nationalism. However, its opposition to the state was based not on political convictions against imperialism and racism, but rather on the desire to preserve its art and lifestyle. Those artists who were unwilling to tolerate the intervention of police and government in their lifestyles and artistic aspirations were quite eager to take advantage of, and profit from, Japan’s pernicious profile in East Asia. Moreover, when the jazz frontier closed at the beginning of the Pacific War, the jazz community found ways to integrate with the nationalist mainstream, by designing a jazz-based, national popular music and playing ‘jazz for the country’s sake’.41

I would like to conclude by briefly recounting a scene from Saitō Ren’s award-winning play The Shanghai Advance Kings (1979). This play and the movie version were immensely successful, for they played to the nostalgic sentiments of the 1970s’ ‘Shōwa boom’, which reconfigured the pre-Pacific War era as a glamorous, yet more innocent age. With a playful spirit, yet a tragic undertone of mono no aware, Saitō’s play has done much to romanticize the Shanghai experience in the public’s memory. It has become a franchise unto itself, resulting in spinoff albums, concerts, and books; I have even seen the term Shanhai bansukingu used to describe the genre of Dixie-swing jazz associated with the 1920s and 1930s.42

Yet, in spite of the play’s appeal to the insatiable yearning of the audience for a

41 See my ‘The War on Jazz, or Jazz Goes to War: Toward a New Cultural Order in Wartime Japan’, Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique 6:2 (Fall 1998), pp. 345–392.
42 Examples of the Shanhai bansukingu franchise include Kushida Kasumi’s film version Shanhai bansukingu (Nippon Eiga, 1987); Saitō Ren’s own collection of oral histories entitled Shōwa no bansukingu tachi, cited earlier; the soundtrack album cited in footnote 1; and the comeback album by Jimmy Harada and the Old Boys, with the play’s star Yoshida Hideko, Shōwa no bansukingu tachi (Nippon Victor: SJX-30244, 1984).
sanitized trip down memory lane, the playwright Saitō appears not to be completely blind to the jazz musician’s awkward and ambivalent stance in the violent context of Japanese expansion in East Asia. This awareness is suggested in the central character, trumpeter Bakumatsu (supposedly based on Nanri Fumio). Bakumatsu is an inveterate gambler who has chosen to settle in Shanghai with his Chinese wife Lily. His expressions of patriotic pride at the ‘excellent’ victory in Nanjing are genuine. Perhaps he envisions an even more prosperous life in a China dominated by Japan. Still, it is with resignation rather than relish that he accepts his draft notice. Leading his band at the St. Louise cabaret one last time before entering the army, Bakumatsu accepts some Japanese sailors’ requests for the Navy favorite ‘Umi yukaba’. After one reverent chorus, clarinetist Jirō takes up the melody and irreverently swings it, with the band falling in behind him. Gravely offended by such impudence, the sailors rush the stage, causing the band to resume a more proper treatment of the song and Bakumatsu to salute the angry sailors meekly. The scene is intended to illustrate the cultural chasm between soldier and jazzman, a chasm that Bakumatsu’s jingoism had rendered insignificant in earlier scenes. But on the jazz frontier, where the jazzman’s fantasy was facilitated by the Japanese military’s aggression, those connections were most clear and the chasm bridged.

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43 In addition to viewing the play (on its last run with the original cast in 1995) and the movie, I have consulted the movie script Eiga Shinhai bansukingu (Tokyo, Dageeru Shuppan, 1988). The trumpeter’s proper name is Matsumoto Wataru, but his affection for gambling (bakuchi) has earned him the nickname ‘Bakumatsu’, a pun which also denotes the final years of the Tokugawa bakufu in the mid-nineteenth century.

44 ‘Umi yukaba’ (‘If I Go to Sea’) was a poem, written by Ōtomo no Yakamochi, from the ancient Man’yōshū. It was set to music by Nobutoku Kiyoshi in 1937 when it became a favorite of Imperial sailors. The lyrics, as translated in Ben-amit Shillmony, ‘Universities and Students in Wartime Japan’, Journal of Asian Studies 45:4 (1986), p. 782, are: ‘If I go out to sea/My corpse will be covered by water/If I climb the mountains/My corpse will be covered by moss/It is for the emperor/That I am going to die/And never return’.