

Fune Ni Miru Nihonjin Iminshi: Kasato Maru kara kuruzu kyakusen e
[“Japanese Emigration History As Seen Through Ships:
From the *Kasato Maru* to Passenger Cruisers”]
by Michio Yamada

Article 15

Voyage of *La Plata Maru*: The Voyage of *Sohboh*: The Pain and Happiness of Life on Board

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Sightseeing at Ports of Call

Emigrants were usually free to sightsee at ports of call. Although for safety reasons, the supervisors entrusted with transporting the emigrants were reluctant to allow them to go sightseeing, it was the only effective method to relieve the stress of such a long journey.

In a section entitled "Onboard Regulations" in the aforementioned Kaigai Kogyo published *Toko Annai* (Voyage Guide), the passengers were warned to "properly follow the orders of the supervisor when they disembark at a port of call.

To respect the freedom of the emigrants, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, adopted a policy which allowed the landing of emigrants unless local port of call authorities refused them permission to land or if it became necessary to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. However, since it was believed that they were not used to traveling and would be prone to getting lost or into trouble, the Ministry gave detailed instructions for the emigrants to follow when they disembarked and encouraged them to move about in a groups.

The following excerpt from a log taken on the voyage of the *Shinagawa Maru* in the first year of the Showa period [1927] (the exact date is not known).

Moji [a Port City in Japan]: Landed.

Hong Kong and Singapore: Landing is prohibited because of concern over cholera.

Mombassa: Landed.

Laurenco Marques [now Maputo, Mozambique]: By order of the port office, third class passengers are prohibited from landing.

Durban: Landed.

Port Elizabeth: Anchored in the offshore; landing prohibited.

Capetown: Landed.

Rio de Janeiro: Landed.

For reference, let us take a look at a description of the *La Plata Maru*'s ports of call in *Sohboh*.

Hong Kong: Only immigrants who have received permission from the Jichidan (self-governing body) officers and the emigration transport supervisor can land.

Saigon: Landing is prohibited due to concern over cholera and intestinal typhus.

Singapore: Landed.

Colombo (?): Anchored in the offshore; landing is prohibited.

Durban: Landed.

Capetown: Third class passengers are prohibited from landing.

Rio de Janeiro: Landing is prohibited.

At ports of call, though passengers went sightseeing, the main purpose of stopping was of course to load freight and replenish the fuel, pure water, and food supplies.

According to accounts from the early Showa period, since items such as meat, vegetables, fresh fish, water, and fresh water had limited storage life, from Hong Kong onward, the purpose of making port calls was to stock up on these items. As food supplies have already been described in great detail, the following section will describe the use of fresh water on board.

Strict Controls on Freshwater Use

In the summer of 1994, the Japanese archipelago, especially Western Japan, suffered an unprecedented water shortage. However, compared to water supply conditions on pre-war emigrant ships going to South America, this water shortage was a piece of cake.

“Treat each drop as you would one *sen* [Treat water like money]”

“A drop of lingering water is a drop of a *sen*”

“A ship has neither a well nor a spring”

The above were the winners of a slogan contest for water conservation as described in *Sohboh*. The slogans were plastered all over the walls near sinks, baths, and laundry basins and other places where water was used for daily tasks.

Soon after leaving Kobe, the ship's staff would meet with the heads of each family and strongly encourage them to conserve fresh water and explained the schedule for bathing and doing laundry. Between the ship's passengers and crew there were nearly 1,000 people on board, and since the South American East Coast route was so long, efficient use of freshwater on board was a crucial issue.

To avoid confusion, the passengers' self-governing body was put in charge of water matters. Officers were also frequently elected from among the emigrants to manage freshwater.

The proportion of drinking water to overall freshwater on an emigrant ship was determined by regulations. The minimum amount of drinking water as stipulated, in "Ship Inspection Bylaws" (Number 6, Article 91) from the Meiji period, and in "Ship Equipment Bylaws" (Number 2, Article 121) from the Showa period was 2 *sho* (3.6 liters) per person per day. In England, the required amount of drinking water on emigrant ships was 1 British gallon (4.5 liters) per person per day.

Of course, the use of pure water was not limited to drinking. Washrooms, laundry rooms, showers, and cooking kitchens also used a lot of water.

In the case of Osaka Shusen Kaisha (OSK), the schedule for freshwater use in washrooms depended on the length of the sea route. The standard time for supplying water was from two to three hours in the morning, one hour in the afternoon, and one hour in the evening. On some ships, water use was controlled by issuing freshwater tickets, to be exchanged for a fixed amount of water. Consequently, buckets and various types of washing accoutrements were essential for life onboard. Furthermore, water used in the sinks of third class toilets was seawater.

Bathing varied from ship to ship, depending on the number of passengers, but in general, every other day, or at most once every three days was normal. However, on sports festival or general cleaning days, people were allowed to wash as much as they wished. When sailing through the intense heat of the tropics, people would be covered in sweat and would want to bathe every day if possible.

On ships like the *Santos Maru*, which had a large number of passengers, bathing was generally done about two times per week. Although the frequency of baths was limited, the use of hot water [to rinse off] outside the bath was not. As was previously mentioned, seawater was used in the bathtub. This was true for emigrant ships going to South America after the war. The author was aboard such a ship for a period and had the experience of bathing in a bath fed by seawater.

Incidentally, in *Sohboh*, emigrants are described as being able to bathe twice per week. There were five periods from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. during which steerage passengers took their turn bathing.

Although they restricted the time to use freshwater for laundry, the ship's officers made efforts to not inconvenience their passengers. Some ships even supplied water for this purpose day and night.

Freshwater use on ships of the *Santos Maru* class, however, was strictly regulated. According to *Sohboh*, the time for using washroom water was from 8:00 in the morning to 4:00 in the afternoon. As with the baths, steerage passengers were divided into groups when they could use the washrooms. Ships of the *Santos Maru* class had their laundry rooms located in the deck of the ship's stern, below the sickroom area.

The Amount of Water Needed for Passengers En Route to the East Coast of South America.

How much fresh water was actually needed for the ships en route to the East Coast of South America before the war?

According to a meeting (the second International Meeting of Emigrants) held in Havana, Cuba, in March of 1928 (Showa 3), OSK submitted the following written opinion:

"The minimum amount of drinking water per person of 2 *sho* (3.6 liters) per day as stipulated by 'Shipping Inspection Bylaws,' Attached list number 6, insert 2 is not sufficient given the special traits of the Japanese and judging from actual experience with passengers aboard our company's ship. On this company's South American route, on which our ship takes on 925 passengers and travels the long distance in the tropical zone between Colombo and Durban, even when great pains are taken to restrict freshwater use, the average amount per person is 1 *to* and 5 *sho*. This is the

average amount used per person for everyone on board, including passengers and crew, for cooking, face washing, drinking, laundry, and bathing."

This means that when navigating the tropical zones, the minimum amount of freshwater required per person per day was on average 1 to 5 *sho* (27 liters). This amount weighs about 27 kilos. The amount of piped water that the average Tokyo urbanite uses per day is about 250 liters. Although this comparison is unreliable, it does give us an idea of the difference between conditions on an emigrant ship and those in a metropolis where water use is unrestricted.

Let us use 27 kilos as the minimum water use per person per day to assess conditions on the *Santos Maru* class ships.

According to the *Nippon Kisen Kenmeiroku* (Japan Steamship Index), this class of ship carried a total of 936 people, including 830 passengers (40 first class, 192 special third class, and 688 third class) and 106 crewmembers. Based on this number, we can estimate that the total amount of freshwater needed per day when the ship was full would be 25 tons. Since the capacity of a freshwater tank on *Santos Maru* class ships was 406 tons, this meant that with a full complement of passengers and crew there would be enough water for 16 days. The longest leg for OSK ships South American East Coast route was between Colombo and Durban which was 3,610 *ri* (nautical miles). Because this distance took 11 days, the water capacity was sufficient as long as there were no unexpected conditions.

However, the 25 tons figure already assumes strict water conservation efforts. Further, as discussed earlier, this class of ship often took on more than 900 passengers. In actuality, therefore, the water situation was very oppressive. This examination of the logistic conditions of the ship gives us a good glimpse of the context behind the slogan "Treat each drop as you would one sen".

The highest priority of both OSK and NYK emigrant ships on the South American East Coast route when they reached a port of call was to take on a full load of freshwater. From Hong Kong and beyond, freshwater was loaded through water pipes. Hong Kong and Singapore also had water supply ships. Although evaporators (to produce freshwater) could be found on ships at the time, they were not put to practical use. As a rule, however, if ships had been equipped with an evaporator, the minimum amount of drinking water would have been reduced by half. In such a case, the minimum amount of water required per day was 1 *sho* (1.8 liters).

Freshwater Tank Capacity

At the Second International Emigration Conference, Nippon Yusen Kaisha (NYK) submitted the following written opinion regarding the supply of freshwater:

"According to article 91 of the Ship Inspection Attachment, the amount of water supplied per day per person should be approximately 2 *sho* (3.6 liters). In reality, however, about 2 *to* (36 liters) are used per person per day (including for bath and laundry). Further, in the case of the Brazil route, during long legs between ports (such as from Singapore to Mombassa which takes 16 days), 3 tons

per day is allotted for the first 100 emigrants. For each additional 100 people, an additional ton is allotted."

Consequently, 2 to (36 liters) were used by each person daily on NYK ships. Since this was nearly 10 liters more than on OSK ships, the conditions were especially tight. As an example, for the passenger ship *Kanagawa Maru*, which sailed to Northern Europe during the era of emigration and had a complement of passengers and crew that totaled 800, the amount of freshwater required for a single day of full use was roughly 29 tons. Given that the capacity of the ship's freshwater tank was 271 tons (according to *Nippon Kisen Kenmeiroku*), the tank would be empty inside of 10 days.

Such conditions made the consumption limit expressed in NYK's written opinion a necessity. Strict limits were imposed on the long sea routes such as the one between Singapore and Mombassa. On that route, 3 tons per day was allotted for the first 100 passengers and an additional ton added for each 100 more passengers. However, this meant that when the ship was at full capacity of 800 people, the daily consumption would be limited to 10 tons, which was only 1/3 of the minimum required [for the *Kanagawa Maru*].

During the first year of Taisho [1912], which was in the early years of emigration to Brazil, the number of emigrants on NYK's old Northern Europe route exceeded 1,500 people. Given that the freshwater tank of ships on that route were similar [to the *Kanagawa Maru*], we can assume that water use had to be strictly regulated. However, by the end of the Taisho period [1925], the number of emigrants being transported by NYK drastically decreased. Since the number of passengers traveling by sea by that time rarely exceeded 500, the conditions of water supply inside the ship were mitigated. During this period, one could bathe every other day.

How was this passenger freshwater tank capacity that we have been discussing decided? Though it swayed greatly from the number of passengers, crew, and sea route, in the case of British vessels transporting emigrants, one day's use was calculated in the following manner.

First, and second class passengers	1 ton per 25 people
Emigrants and lower crew members	1 ton per 75 people
Hygienic purposes	0.5 - 5 tons
Cooking use (1st, 2nd class)	1.5 tons per 100 people
Cooking use (emigrants and lower crew members)	0.5 ton per 100 people

When you apply this British calculation to the *Santos Maru* class of ship, the essential amount of freshwater for one day would be 21 - 25 tons, which amounts to 27 liters per person. This conforms to the essential amount expressed in the previously mentioned OSK written opinion. From this perspective, the 406 ton capacity of a freshwater tank for the *Santos Maru* type of ship (according to the English method), under normal conditions, contained enough pure water for about 16-19 days.

Educational and Sports Events via Youth Groups

The daily conditions of the emigrants on the of 12,000 *ri* (nautical mile) sea voyage from Kobe to Santos could be roughly divided into three stages:

1. Period 1: Test stage (East China Sea)
2. Period 2: Tedium stage (East China Sea, and Indian Ocean)
3. Period 3: Stress stage (Atlantic Ocean)

The several days of the first stage which took place on the first leg between Kobe and Hong Kong was a severe period of testing in which one had to fight both the sadness of leaving and seasickness. Although the emigrants had grown accustomed to sea travel by the second period, which was from Hong Kong to Durban, time hung heavily over them. Along with the hardship of severe heat and the fear of becoming sick, however, there were also happy moments. During the third stage from Durban to Santos, because the emigrants began to feel that Brazil, once so distant, was near, fear prevailed over anticipation and the atmosphere in the ship became tense.

Youth group and women's group activities were initiated under the guidance of the emigrant supervisor and his associate during the second stage after the ship left Hong Kong. Education, sports, and entertainment arts were the three main components of their activities. In general, the activities were similar to those on present-day training cruises or youth ships run by municipal governments or companies. The emphasis on this type of charter cruises by the Shosen Mitsui Passenger cruise fleet, the heir apparent to OSK, may be considered a part of a tradition that goes back to the days of emigration transport ships.

With no further ado, let me introduce some of the contents of these activities.

Education Activities. Amongst these, the most serious consideration was the previously discussed establishment of the ship's elementary school. Classes were held in the morning. In the case of OSK ships, the classroom was the third class cafeteria. Among the emigrants there were often people with teaching experience who were able to guide children. For adults, there were short lectures on Portuguese and on the conditions of their destination. The women's group held courses on cooking and western dressmaking.

The anniversary picture of the banner which reads "Santos Village Community Elementary and



High School," shows the ship's elementary students who arrived in Brazil in March, 1933 (Showa 8). The site of the picture was aft of the ship's bridge. The male students are on the derrick boom. The teachers can be seen as well. Although photographs of emigrant groups usually seem to carry a somewhat grim mood, no such feeling can be seen in the children's faces.

Sports events included Kokumin (national citizen's) exercises, judo and kendo, sports festivals, and sumo wrestling. Temporary canvas pools (filled with seawater) set up by the ship company thrilled the children.. According to the photograph below, on *Santos Maru* class ships, the pool was placed between the front deck's hatch and the bulwark. This temporary pool was not be used when the ship pitched and rolled since it was feared that children romping about with floaters would fly over the bulwark and into the ocean.

The Kokumin exercises, are today's radio exercises (**my added remarks: which workers and students do before they start the work day**). The daily morning exercises which children did and that adults did after dinner took place on the rear deck. On postwar emigrant ships, the daily exercises took place after they got up .

The sports festival took place after the ship departed from Singapore. In *Sohboh*, the sports festival was held the day before they arrived in Colombo, the halfway point of the trip. The emigrants would begin to complain as depression and boredom fell over them when they reached the Indian Ocean. Sports festivals and sumo meets, as well as stage performances, were a means to release excess energy and frustrations.



The events at the sports festivals included footraces, bread eating contests, paper lantern races, *daruma* races (bag races?), two- and three-legged races, and obstacle courses. On the *Santos Maru*, the sport festivals were held on the back deck along the 4th and 5th hatches. The events in the sports festivals on postwar South American emigrant ships were recorded as follows: cigarette

lighting contests, bread eating contests, candy eating contests, *binzuri* (bottle hanging) races, balloon popping races, and ball passing contests. The sports festivals on the postwar eastern route were held when the ships passed the region off Acapulco.

The sports festival was the most popular outdoor event among the emigrants. The anticipation started growing several days beforehand. As a result, everyone forgot their homesickness toward the old country and their anticipation and anxiety toward their new home; they became merry as children.

Equator Crossing Festival and Variety Show Break the Tedium

Photo Caption 1 (p. 208) The temporary pool of the *Santos Maru*. The usual place was in front of the ship's bridge tower. It is believed to be the second side hatch. (OSK Ship Mitsui)

Photo Caption 2 (p. 208) The Sports event snap on the *Santos Maru*. The place for the event was the back part of deck 5, and the fifth side hatch. (OSK Ship Mitsui)

The emigrants heading to South America on OSK ships crossed the equator in the Indian Ocean. Around the second day after leaving Colombo, they had approached the halfway point in their voyage to South America.

On the post war eastern sea route, the ship crossed the equator the day before entering Belem (?), a harbor in the Amazon estuary. Because this was the last leg of the trip, this was a time of restlessness.

A festival was held on the stern of the main deck on the afternoon of the day that the ship passed the equator. The highlight of this event was a short performance of a play called "The Dragon King" that dramatized the simple story of the sea god Neptune giving the ship's captain the key to the gates of the equator. After the dragon king performance, a masquerade line of emigrants and crew formed and paraded. This type of performance occurred both before and after the war.

The Equator Crossing Festival probably originated in the various rites of passage events of different countries during the era of sailing vessels, but had not been universally observed from days of old. Even when the *Taisei Maru*, a training sailing vessel, crossed the equator in the South Pacific in the last year of Meiji (1911) on its way to become the first Japanese ship to sail around the world (eastbound), the only celebration of this rite of passage was a luxurious lunch of *gomoku han* (steamed rice with vegetables), *tamago toji* (scrambled eggs), *suimono* (soup) and *kinton* (mashed sweet potatoes with sweetened chestnuts). On emigrant ships, Equator Crossing Festivals were of course carried out to entertain the emigrants.

On postwar emigrant ships, dinner on the day of the Equator Crossing Festival was held on deck. On the menu was Argentinean *asado*, a South American-style barbecue. The rustic charm of the deck food is carried on even now by the cooking staffs of Shosen Mitsui passenger ships. The author ate with gusto when he went on a long cruise with this same company.

Though it was customary to hold a *Jiman Taikai* (Boasting Competition) after the on deck dinner, there was no special event on the night of the Equator Crossing Festival on prewar emigrant ships. The variety show, which was organized by the entertainment chairperson of the Seinendan (Youth Group), was held on a different day. In contrast to the exotic Western flavor of the Equator Crossing Festival that the emigrants were not completely comfortable with, the variety show, like the sports festival, was intimately familiar. In *Sohboh*, the variety show was held when the ship passed offshore Madagascar island. The event is described:

"The sound of drumming and singing from the morning of the day that the variety show was held made it feel as if we were on a pleasure cruise of entertainers. From the afternoon, under the direction of the culture committee, the Seinendan officers built a stage and a *hanamichi* (a passageway to and from the stage to the backstage) on D deck (author's note: this was above the fourth hatch). By 6:00 p.m. when the show began, a large audience of emigrants formed in front of the stage. Even the first class guests came down to see the show. The purser and the chief engineer also were present. The doctor forsaking malnutrition and pleura also came with two nurses." (source: Shincho bunko)

The show included various performances such as children's skits and songs, sword dances, *anrai* (?) *bushi*, *nagauta*, and *yagi bushi* to plays and comic dialogue. Among the emigrants, who had come from all over Japan, were those who sang the folk songs of their home regions.

In any case, because there were many emigrants, there was no lack of entertainers. It is said that there were those who would put even professionals to shame, prompting those watching to think it was a waste for them immigrate to South America. In *Sohboh* the following dialogue between the Director and the emigrant supervisor is described:

"It's a shame to send them into the boondocks of Brazil, isn't it? They could make a living if we put them in the Tokyo vaudeville."

"I guess. But if we did that, we'd have our hands full on the next ship with Tokyo entertainers."

Disembarking in Brazil:

Both the pain and happiness living on board the ship came to an end when it reached Brazil after a month and a half to two months at sea. The first port in Brazil for both OSK and Nihon Yusen ships was Rio de Janeiro. Medical examinations, immigration processing, and customs inspections were carried out together at this port. Belem was the first port of call on the postwar eastern route and the same procedures were carried out there.

A section entitled "Rules for Disembarking" in the previously mentioned *Toko Annai* (Voyage Guide) describes disembarking process:

"The employees of the Brazil branch of Kaigai Kogyo Kaisha will take care of all matters after you disembark at the Brazilian port until you leave for your final destination. When the ship reaches Brazil, there will be a medical and passport inspection at the port of Rio [de Janeiro] or the port of Santos. If a person has a severe case of trachoma, he or she will fail the inspection and be sent

back to Japan. There is also an inspection of bags at customs. All should wear Western clothes at the time of disembarkation at Santos since they will be in Brazil.

"When you head to your plantation after landing in Santos, you will pack portable items such as daily-use goods, cooking utensils, carpentry tools, and sleeping things in a bag smaller than a *sanbangoori* to be carried aboard the train. You will then depart to your destination under the leadership of an appropriate guide. (Large items will be separated and arrive later). The train fare and luggage transport from Santos Station to your destination will be completely free.

Photo Caption 1 (p. 209) The Equator Crossing Festival on *La Plata Maru*. A picture of the Festival highlight, "Dragon King." Like the sports festival, this event was held on the open deck. (Osaka Shosen Mitsui Ship)

Photo Caption 2 (p. 209) A picture of a variety show on the Santos Maru. The stage was above the deck's hatch cover. Above the stage, wrapped gifts of money are lined up. The ship's officers names are also visible.

From this (above quote), we know that medical examinations and other procedures were carried out in the ports of Rio de Janeiro and Santos before the war. The description in *Sohboh* corresponds with this. Under Brazil Epidemic Prevention Regulations, medical examinations were to be carried out at the ports of Rio de Janeiro and other provinces. The examination had two parts. The entry examination occurred on the ship. After the ship entered the port, it was stopped, and boarded by an authority from the quarantine office. The emigrants, dressed in their best western attire, lined up on the deck to be examined. Though entry procedures and customs inspections were simple, the medical examination was a different matter. As written in "Rules for Disembarking," Brazil was extremely vigilant against trachoma. Consequently, everyone on the ship's staff from the captain and doctor down paid special attention to trying to make sure that every emigrant was able to enter the country. In addition to treatment during the voyage, eyewashing and eye ointment applications were carried out right before the medical examinations. There were even cases after the war where nurses on the emigration ships received the medical examination in place of immigrants.

Following all of this, the ship reached the port of call Santos. In *Sohboh*, disembarkation took place at 2 p.m. Having finished their last meal (lunch) on the ship and being seen off by many of the crew, the emigrants descended the gangway and headed toward the train cars reserved for them. Ishikawa describes the scene:

"Take five, six steps and stop. It isn't the deck under my feet. It is the earth of Brazil. I unconsciously look back at the ship and say "Ahh, Japan!" to myself. I realize separation from this ship is separation from Japan. The *La Plata Maru*, which we never really saw from the outside, majestically imposes itself on the port to the point where we can't believe that we were ever on her. The emigrants keep coming out behind us.

When the emigrants left the ship, the interior of the ship became lonely as if a flame had been burned out. The job of taking down the temporary bunk beds began in the empty steerage compartments. This space became storage on the return trip. This work was done by local laborers before the war, but was taken over by ship's crews after the war.

The emigrants boarded special cars headed for Sao Paulo, a trip that took about four hours. In Sao Paulo, they stayed for several days in (San Paulo) State camps until they were sent to different farms. Brazil also had public emigrant camps in Rio de Janeiro.

Photo Caption: The *Santos Maru* at port in Singapore. The group is probably returning from sightseeing and women can be seen boarding the ship. The hose along the railroad tracks was probably a water supply pipe.

Photo Caption on page 206 A commemorative picture of the primary school on board the *Santos Maru*. The writing on the deck post in the background reads as follows: "Santos Village Primary and High School." This photo was probably taken in 1933. (OSK Mitsui Vessel)

Photo Caption on page 207 A Language Lesson on an emigration ship at the beginning of the Taisho period (1912 - 1926). The name of the ship is not known. During the Meiji (1868 - 1912) and Taisho periods, many of the emigrant ships did not have a public room appropriate for classroom use. Therefore, lessons were held on the open decks.

Photo Caption 1 (p. 210) Landing at the port of Santos. The emigrants on the pier get in rail cars headed to San Paulo.

Photo Caption 2 (p. 210) Sao Paulo Camp. The building for *Kasato Maru* emigrants

Photo Caption 3 (p. 210) A Japanese immigrant family house in Brazil during the Taisho period