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Negotiating Migratory Tuna: Territorialization of the Oceans, Trans-war Knowledge and Fisheries Diplomacy

"Violent collision between Japan, China and Taiwan! The bloody battlefields of fishermen's 'Senkaku tuna war.'"[1] So read the headlines of a Japanese magazine in 2013, while fisheries diplomacy was ongoing and fishery treaties were being negotiated among the three parties. These negotiations came after a series of violent encounters between fishermen in the waters around a group of uninhabited islets in the south of Okinawa and to the north of Taiwan, called Senkaku in Japanese and Diaoyu in Chinese. This was just one among many headlines in the news about conflicts over marine resources below the surface of the sea, migrating fish being one of them, after the creation of Exclusive Economic Zones, enacted by the third United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982. This international resolution established that zones of 200 nautical miles could be subsumed under national jurisdiction by coastal states, with those states having the sole right to exploit the zones' marine resources.

Remarkably, the prominent role of fishermen and their conflicts in settling access to marine resources in the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute was not exceptional. Although few are aware, fisheries diplomacy—and especially negotiating over tuna in this case—has not solely been in the hands of official diplomats, politicians, or state authorities. We encounter comparable patterns of negotiation in various fisheries management disputes that arose in tandem with the territorialization of the ocean through UNCLOS. Japanese fisheries sought access to tuna fishing grounds that they had free access to before these restrictions through fisheries aid diplomacy. Private actors from the fisheries industry, groups of fishermen, and fisheries experts negotiated over migratory species crossing Exclusive Economic Zones of various states and swimming in the open sea. Before tuna fisheries diplomacy was practiced on a large scale, Japanese fisheries argued against the 200 miles convention, contending that no nation could claim possession of the highly migratory species of fish, notably tuna, which might be in the 200-mile economic zone of a state one day and in a different one the

1. Nitchūtai gekitotsu!! Ryōshitachi no 'Senkaku maguro sensō' sōzetsu shuraba, *Nikkan taishū*, June 25, 2013.

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next. Consequently, according to their argument, Japan was entitled to its previous fishing grounds in perpetuity, even in waters claimed by other nations, because of its maritime fishing culture and its unique ability to catch highly migratory tuna. Fishery knowledge was presented as a unique feature of Japanese culture.[2]

This exceptionalist Japanese approach, claiming a permanent and special status for Japanese fisheries, shaped not only internal perspectives in Japan, but also the perspectives of many in the rest of the world, as is evident in the international press, and in academic research on marine resource management, the territorialization of the ocean, and diplomacy. Japan's success in global tuna fisheries is often told as a story of the Japanese "economic miracle" and a story of a nation's aim to achieve "food security."[3] But to make sense of Japan's supremacy in the global race for tuna, and fisheries aid projects as a means to access them, we have to put these stories in the larger context of colonial development before 1945, and how this was transformed into overseas development aid and technology transfer projects in the aftermath of the Japanese Empire, the coming of decolonization, and the framework of the Cold War.

This article argues that Japan's global success in tuna fisheries was a result of environmental, artisanal, and technical knowledge, as well as claims that this knowledge was exclusively Japanese—claims which Japanese fisheries experts and fishermen pursued through fisheries diplomacy. Following tuna through the oceans, and learning migratory patterns and environmental factors such as currents, enabled their exploitation not only in coastal waters but also in the open sea in the first half of the twentieth century and led to a particular knowledge regime made possible within the framework of the Japanese Empire. In the second half of the twentieth century, when the oceans were territorialized by international law, technology transfer and fisheries diplomacy played a crucial role in sustaining Japan's supremacy of access to these marine resources. But including the imperial dimension and decolonization processes also reveals that this transformative period did not simply sustain or reconstitute Japanese tuna fisheries hegemony, but also was a reason for its demise.

Apart from its overarching argument, this article provides three key insights. Firstly, we can see that not only state actors, but also civilian actors played a crucial role in negotiating tuna access rights and in fisheries diplomacy more broadly. Examining who is dealing with technology transfer projects, it becomes apparent that fishery scientists as well as fishermen experts have acted more successfully as "diplomats" in these discussions than the usual official diplomats or politicians involved in negotiating processes. The Chinese-Japanese fishery treaties from 1955 are a case in point. These were negotiated among fisheries

2. Rachel A. Schurman, "Tuna Dreams: Resource Nationalism and the Pacific Islands' Tuna Industry," *Development and Change* 29, no. 1 (1998): 107–136.

3. For a recent example in scholarship see: Roger Smith, *Japan's International Fisheries Policy: Law, Diplomacy and Politics Governing Resource Security* (New York, 2015).

associations at a time when official diplomatic relations had yet to be established between the People's Republic of China and Japan. After conflicts between Japanese fishery boats and the Chinese government, Japanese and Chinese fishery associations negotiated treaties in which they created different zones within the East and South China Seas. These zones can be compared to the later Exclusive Economic Zones. The treaties emphasized the importance of cooperation in research and technology regarding fish, fishing gear, and techniques, as well as conservation of fish stocks.[4] Notably, these features were only "officially" established much later, after UNCLOS included transnational tuna management regimes established by inter-governmental institutions in the South Pacific from the 1980s onwards. Further exploration of these tuna negotiations opens the possibility of being in conversation with studies on recent fisheries diplomacy, which explore how new forms of regional fisheries diplomacy can be a means to solve conflicts over living marine resources from an international relations and political science point of view.[5] Exploring these negotiations also contributes to scholarship within science and technologies studies that is involved in an effort to provide a novel understanding of the science diplomacy phenomenon and its relevance. Generally speaking, one of the key questions this field addresses is how scientists and science and technology are a conduit within inter-state relations.[6] This article aims at also including forms of knowledge other than "scientific" and "technological" and does not limit itself to what could be subsumed under "science diplomacy."

Secondly, tracing back the trajectories of recent fisheries diplomacy demonstrates how these disputes can be better understood in an imperial rather than national framework. In common with much recent scholarship, this study explores diplomacy occurring across and outside the temporal boundaries of the Cold War. Fisheries aid projects during the Cold War, resulting from fisheries diplomacy, ensnared both migrant fishermen and fisheries experts acting in the context of pre-1945 Japanese imperial fisheries. This context was important for both fisheries treaties and for joint ventures, such as between the Japanese fishing industry and Pacific island states that had been part of Japanese imperial territory before 1945. The approach in this article connects current scholarship on development aid and the emergence of new technocratic regimes in Cold War East Asia to their origins in the Japanese Empire, while still being deeply entangled with decolonizing transformations in the region. Studies on this so called trans-war dimension of developmentalism, promoted and carried out by networks of technology, explore continuities in Japan's economic growth on the

4. See paragraph 5 of the treaty, in: Nitchū gyogyō kyōgikai, *Nitchū gyogyō sōran* (Tokyo, 1957), 3.

5. See the essays in Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte, ed., *The New Pacific Diplomacy* (Canberra, 2015), and in particular Suzanne Lowe Gallen, "Micronesian Sub-Regional Diplomacy," in *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, ed. Fry and Tarte, 175–188.

6. See for instance: Simone Turchetti and Peder Roberts, ed., *The Surveillance Imperative: Geosciences During the Cold War and Beyond* (Basingstoke, UK, 2014).

level of government, bureaucracy, and political leaders. More recently, scholars have focused on the role of engineers, scientists, and intellectuals within trans-war networks of technology and development.[7] This article contributes to this research and explores the role of environmental and artisanal knowledge and fishermen as "experts" on top of technological expertise.

The third point is that these migrant actors and fisheries diplomats were steered by the migrating fish in the process. Tuna care little about national boundaries. From a state policy perspective, their migration is, in the best sense of the word, subversive. In order to use them economically, people, and with them knowledge, must also transcend national boundaries. Migration studies have shown that transnational approaches in no way make the nation disappear, but rather enable new perspectives on how nations are constituted.[8] The same can be said for migrating fish, which certainly have the potential to exacerbate and complicate inter-state conflicts. Migrating tuna shape regional fisheries diplomacy.[9] Even though scholarship acknowledges this influence, resource conflicts and fisheries diplomacy are mostly treated on a case-by-case basis. Most scholars focus on specific legal aspects such as treaties; research on this topic is often policy-oriented and investigates resource management among nation states and intergovernmental institutions.[10] What most of the studies have in common is a focus on nation states, or international institutions considered as an entity, as historical actors.

Even while moving away from national and geographic containers and international institutions and state actors to use tuna as a lens, we cannot overlook the ocean and its environmental disposition.[11] The spawning grounds of many tuna lie in the southern waters of Australia and tuna wander through the Black Tide up to Taiwan, the Senkaku/Diaoyu and the Japanese Islands, and from

7. For an example of recent scholarship on trans-war networks of technology see: Hiromi Mizuno, Aaron Stephen Moore, and John DiMoia, ed., *Engineering Asia: Technology, Colonial Development, and the Cold War Order* (London, 2018).

8. Adam McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York, 2008).

9. Transform Aqorau, "How Tuna is Shaping Regional Diplomacy," in *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, ed. Fry and Tarte, 223–235.

10. Taiga Takahashi, "Left Out at Sea: Highly Migratory Fish and the Endangered Species Act," *California Law Review* 99, no. 1 (2011): 179–234; Colin Hunt, "Cooperative Approaches to Marine Resource Management in the South Pacific," in *The Governance of Common Property in the Pacific Region*, ed. Peter Larmour (Canberra, 2013), 145–164; Jope Tarai, "The New Pacific Diplomacy and the South Pacific Tuna Treaty," in *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, ed. Fry and Tarte, 237–248; James Manicom, "Japan's Ocean Policy: Still the Reactive State?," *Pacific Affairs* 83, no. 2 (2010): 307–326.

11. This is a claim I share with other scholars within the realm of environmental history. See for instance: Kären Wigen, "Introduction," *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006): 117–121; Ryan Tucker Jones, "Running into Whales: The History of the North Pacific from below the Waves," *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 2 (2013): 349–377; W. Jeffrey Bolster, "Putting the Ocean in Atlantic History: Maritime Communities and Marine Ecology in the Northwest Atlantic, 1500–1800," *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 1 (2008): 19–47.

there to the waters around the west coast of the United States. Therefore, their migration pattern depends on environmental changes, such as the moving of the Black Tide or El Niño, as emphasized by both fishermen and oceanographers.[12] It therefore becomes obvious that the claim to national sovereign rights over living resources within 200 miles from the coast according to international sea law becomes tricky in the case of migratory species such as tuna. They migrate through the exclusive economic zones of various nation states, sometimes overlapping, as well as the high seas where they are available for everyone. Knowing their migrating patterns was therefore key for successfully negotiating tuna resources and securing access to them through fisheries aid projects.

The nature of tuna, and of the oceans, means that it is impossible to explain fisheries diplomacy as purely a state-driven foreign policy, generally explained by "Japanese culture." This article starts with the tuna, exploring the trajectories of tuna negotiations and the imperial legacies shaping them. We find that the driving force behind negotiating tuna was a specific knowledge economy with imperial roots.

THE (RE)-DISCOVERY OF TUNA IN THE JAPANESE EMPIRE: FORMING PELAGIC KNOWLEDGE POLITICS AND APPROPRIATING MARINE RESOURCES

Japanese imperial expansion on the Asian mainland always went hand-in-hand with maritime expansion. The continental empire that emerged on the mainland was not in fundamental conflict with the maritime empire, but they were rather linked in manifold ways, complementing and influencing each other. In this regard, William Tsutsui coined the term "pelagic empire" to point to the importance of fisheries and the ocean as resource for Japanese Imperialism.[13] Japan developed its deep-sea fleet in the Pacific extensively, not least to ensure a stable food supply for the army in the 1930s.[14] Apart from whale meat, tinned tuna and skipjack tuna flakes (*katsuobushi*) were of particular importance. Up to 50% of this tuna species was caught near the South Sea Islands and then processed into flakes.[15] Among the main producers of these flakes in the South Pacific was the *Nanyō bōeiki gaisha* (NBK Company), originally a trading company that expanded into the marine products sector and made a huge profit through canning, processing, refrigerating, and transporting tuna, among other

12. Robin Allen, James A. Joseph, and Dale Squires, ed., *Conservation and Management of Transnational Tuna Fisheries* (Hoboken, NJ, 2010).

13. William M. Tsutsui, "The Pelagic Empire: Reconsidering the Japanese Expansion," in *Japan at Nature's Edge: The Environmental Context of a Global Power*, ed. Ian Jared Miller, Brett L. Walker, and Julia Adeney Thomas (Honolulu, HI, 2013), 21–38.

14. Roger Smith, "Japan's High Seas Fisheries in the North Pacific Ocean: Food Security and Foreign Policy," in *Japan at the Millennium: Joining Past and Future*, ed. David W. Edgington (Vancouver, 2003), 67–90; and Georg Borgstrom, *Japan's World Success in Fishing* (London, 1964).

15. Torakku kyōiku shikai, ed., *Torakkutō shashinchō* (Truk, 1931).