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Disputes at port, disputes at sea: how fishing rights and practices shaped Taiwan-Pacific relations from the 1950s to the 1980s

Jess Marinaccio

California State University, Dominguez Hills, CA, USA
Email: jmarinaccio@csudh.edu

Abstract

From the 1950s to the 1980s, disputes about fishing rights and practices that emerged due to decolonisation processes and the expansion of maritime boundaries shaped diplomatic relations between Taiwan and Pacific polities. Whether legal or illegal, fisheries provided a space where Taiwan and Pacific locales engaged at state and non-state levels. Using newspapers and archival materials, this article examines how the Taiwanese fishing community in American Samoa became intertwined in American Samoan society and complicated state-level relationships. This legal fishing community then expanded into illegal fishing incidents in Tuvalu, Niue, and the Cook Islands, again shaping Taiwan-Pacific relations. Taiwan's fisheries history demonstrates beyond-the-state encounters for Taiwan, overseas Chinese communities in the Pacific, colonised and independent Pacific locales, and colonial powers. It contributes to global history understandings of a deep relationality between histories of the Pacific Rim and Oceania that have been separated in historical analysis.

Keywords: Taiwan; Pacific; American Samoa; illegal fishing; diplomacy

Introduction

In 1974, a fishing vessel suspected to be of Taiwanese ownership and crewed by Taiwanese fishermen was observed illegally fishing in the waters off Niue, a Pacific polity colonised by New Zealand and approximately 9,000 kilometres away from Taiwan. The origin of the Taiwanese vessel was not Taiwan itself but American Samoa, a Pacific locale colonised by the United States and only approximately 500 kilometres from Niue. Niue's official complaint about the incident was not transmitted directly to Taiwan or American Samoa but was instead lodged with the New Zealand government, which then contacted the US government, which then contacted the local government in American Samoa, before the Taiwan government was ever informed of the incident.¹ As non-state actors, the Taiwanese fishermen in this case crossed national and colonial boundaries via maritime pathways, embedding the Taiwan government in a fisheries dispute that was beyond its control.

¹Note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for New Zealand to the United States Embassy in Wellington Regarding Violations of Niue's Territorial Seas, 10 July 1974, 020-050206-0030, Institute of Modern History Archives, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan (hereafter, Modern History Archives); Letter from the Governor of American Samoa to the Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa Regarding Intrusion into Territorial Waters, 12 July 1974, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives; Letter from Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa to Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs Regarding Niue Fishing Incident and Violations in Tonga in the Previous Year, 29 July 1974, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives.

As this article shows, from the 1950s to the 1980s, Taiwanese fishermen and fishing vessels created, interceded in, and shaped encounters between the Taiwan government and Pacific polities, implicating non-state actors, colonised and independent Pacific locales, the Taiwan government, and colonial powers in complex histories of interaction. Through fisheries engagements, Taiwanese fishermen became intertwined in Pacific societies and complicated relationships between diverse government structures (including colonial ones), often confounding the state. This article examines why these engagements are important to broadening our understanding of Taiwan-Pacific relations and their connections to global maritime histories.

In 1949, Nationalist (KMT) forces retreated to Taiwan (the Republic of China or the ROC) from mainland China after losing the Chinese Civil War to Communist forces, who had formed the People's Republic of China (PRC).² After the KMT retreat, Taiwan and the PRC both asserted that they were the true government of China, with the PRC also claiming sovereignty over Taiwan. The two have sought recognition from the international community since that time by competing to form official diplomatic relations with countries throughout the world.³ In the 1970s, however, it became apparent that Taiwan was losing out in this competition for recognition, and today only twelve nations formally accept Taiwan as the government of China.

Decolonisation in the Pacific, which began in 1962, roughly aligned with Taiwan's diplomatic decline.⁴ Although many Pacific locales became independent nation-states during and after the 1960s, the decolonisation project in the region is still incomplete, and polities like American Samoa continue to be colonised.⁵ As Pacific nations began gaining independence in the 1960s, Taiwan initially formed relations with a number of these countries.⁶ Many researchers have theorised that the Taiwan government actively sought to form diplomatic relations with Pacific nations to boost its international recognition as part of its competition against the PRC.⁷ In this way, the governments of Taiwan and the PRC have been highlighted as determining factors in Pacific diplomatic histories, while the roles played by Pacific governments, non-state actors, and broader global forces have often been overlooked.

Yet, Taiwan's fisheries history challenges generalisations that Taiwan and its Pacific allies established relations simply because of Taiwan–PRC competition.⁸ In the twentieth century, two major trends brought non-state Taiwanese actors into direct conflict with Pacific polities over fisheries and often independent of Taiwan–PRC tensions. First, by the 1950s, Taiwan's nearshore fisheries were depleted, forcing Taiwanese fishermen to fish farther and farther away from Taiwan. Second, as global decolonisation movements progressed in the twentieth century, discussions of

²Stéphane Corcuff, 'Taiwan's "Mainlanders": A New Ethnic Category', *China Perspectives*, no. 28 (2000): 71–2; David Blundell, 'Taiwan Austronesian Language Heritage Connecting Pacific Island Peoples: Diplomacy and Values', *International Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies* 7, no. 1 (2011): 75–91.

³Shaohua Hu, 'Small State Foreign Policy: The Diplomatic Recognition of Taiwan', *China: An International Journal* 13, no. 2 (2015): 4–5.

⁴Tracey Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 13.

⁵Nic Maclellan, 'Pacific Diplomacy and Decolonisation in the 21st Century', in *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, eds. Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte (ANU Press, 2015), 263–81; Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific*, 14; Epeli Hau'ofa, 'Our Sea of Islands', *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (1994): 148–61; Margot Tudor, 'Gatekeepers to Decolonisation: Recentring the UN Peacekeepers on the Frontline of West Papua's Re-Colonisation, 1962–3', *Journal of Contemporary History* 57, no. 2 (2022): 293–316.

⁶Jian Yang, *The Pacific Islands in China's Grand Strategy: Small States, Big Games* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 9.

⁷Changsen Yu, 'The Pacific Islands in China's Geo-Strategic Thinking', in *China and the Pacific: The View from Oceania*, ed. Michael Powles (Victoria University Press, 2016), 89–97; Terence Wesley-Smith and Edgar A. Porter, eds., *China in Oceania: Reshaping the Pacific?* (Berghahn Books, 2010); Yang, *The Pacific Islands*, 9.

⁸Jess Marinaccio, 'Rearticulating Diplomatic Relationships: Contextualizing Tuvalu-Taiwan Relations', *The Contemporary Pacific* 31, no. 2 (2019): 448–75.

not just ownership of land but also ownership of the sea emerged, and countries began staking claims to maritime areas surrounding their nations where they controlled fishing rights.⁹ Thus, as Taiwanese fishing vessels moved farther away from Taiwan, they entered increasingly contested maritime spaces claimed by other nations.

Given this, during and after the 1950s, commercial Taiwanese fishing vessels were arrested or criticised for illegal fishing in sites throughout the Pacific, including the Philippines, Indonesia, Australia, Tuvalu, Tonga, Niue, and the Cook Islands.¹⁰ At the same time, Taiwan was conducting legal fishing operations in places like American Samoa, which often incited illegal fishing incidents.¹¹ Rather than the Taiwan government moving purposefully into the Pacific to form diplomatic relations and thwart its rival, the PRC, the actions of Taiwanese fishermen and conflicts with Pacific locales over fishing rights dictated diplomatic engagements: the Taiwan government was often called on to resolve fishing conflicts after these conflicts had occurred, determining the government's decisions over when and how official diplomacy took place.

This article uses reporting from the Taiwan newspaper *United Daily News* (UDN) and Taiwan's Diplomatic Archives to demonstrate how emerging disputes about fishing rights and practices shaped relations between Taiwan and various Pacific polities from the middle of the twentieth century onward. The article begins by outlining the history of illegal and legal fishing by Taiwanese vessels in the Pacific. Subsequently, records of the Taiwanese fishing community in American Samoa are analysed to demonstrate how non-state Taiwanese actors became intertwined in American Samoan society, both complicating state-level relationships and shaping their development. Finally, examples of how legal fisheries operations in American Samoa expanded into illegal fishing incidents in neighbouring polities like Tuvalu, Niue, and the Cook Islands are discussed, showing again that fishermen and fishing vessels determined how and where Taiwan-Pacific relationships progressed (see Fig. 1).

This article makes a significant contribution to global history by highlighting how actors like fishermen and Pacific governments, who have been sidelined in much international relations literature on Taiwan–PRC competition, actively shaped trans-regional and beyond-the-state processes of diplomacy across the Asian and Pacific regions and based on relationships dependent on the sea. The understandings of informal relationships and non-state fishing actors presented in the article also add to research on mobility, transnational trading communities, and maritime lifeways in the Pacific and Southeast Asia as well as global histories of decolonisation and maritime

⁹Surabhi Ranganathan, 'Decolonization and International Law: Putting the Ocean on the Map', *Journal of the History of International Law* 23, no. 1 (2020): 163–4. For discussion of how maritime boundaries have affected fisheries in the Pacific, see Sandra Tarte, 'Negotiating a Tuna Management Regime for the Western and Central Pacific: The MHLC Process 1994–1999', *The Journal of Pacific History* 34, no. 3 (1999): 274; Elodie Fache, Simonne Pauwels, and Joeli Veitayaki, 'Introduction: Pacific Islanders, "Custodians of the Ocean" Facing Fisheries Challenges', in *Fisheries in the Pacific: The Challenges of Governance and Sustainability*, eds. Elodie Fache and Simonne Pauwels (Pacific-Credo Publications, 2016), 11–13; Joep Tarai, 'The New Pacific Diplomacy and the South Pacific Tuna Treaty', in *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, eds. Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte (ANU Press, 2015), 237–48.

¹⁰*United Daily News* (hereafter, UDN), 'Feilvbin zihua yuqu, zuai wo gonghai buyu; waijiaobu zhengni jinxing jiaoshe, weihuo jieguoqian yuchuan ying bimian qianwang, 27 September 1951, 5 (for the Philippines); *Legislative Yuan Gazette* (hereafter, LYG), 'Waijiaobu yangxikun cizhang baogao fangwen nantaipingyang zhi jingguo, 64, no. 6 (1975): 7 (for Indonesia); Correspondence from Australia-Free China Society to Australian Minister for Primary Industry Regarding Prohibitions on Fishermen from Taiwan, 4 November 1976, 020-011504-0018, Modern History Archives (for Australia); Marinaccio, 'Rearticulating Diplomatic Relationships' (for Tuvalu); Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa to Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 July 1974, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives, (for Tonga and Niue); Letter from Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Taiwan Fisheries Department Regarding Illegal Fishing Issues in the Cook Islands, 11 March 1976, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives, and Letter from the Office of the Premier of the Cook Islands to the Governor of American Samoa Regarding Breach of Cook Islands' Laws by Korean Fishing Vessels, 3 February 1976, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives (for the Cook Islands).

¹¹UDN, 'Taiwan haichan gongsi, linxiuer ren jingli, 14 January 1970, 6; Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa to Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 July 1974, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives.

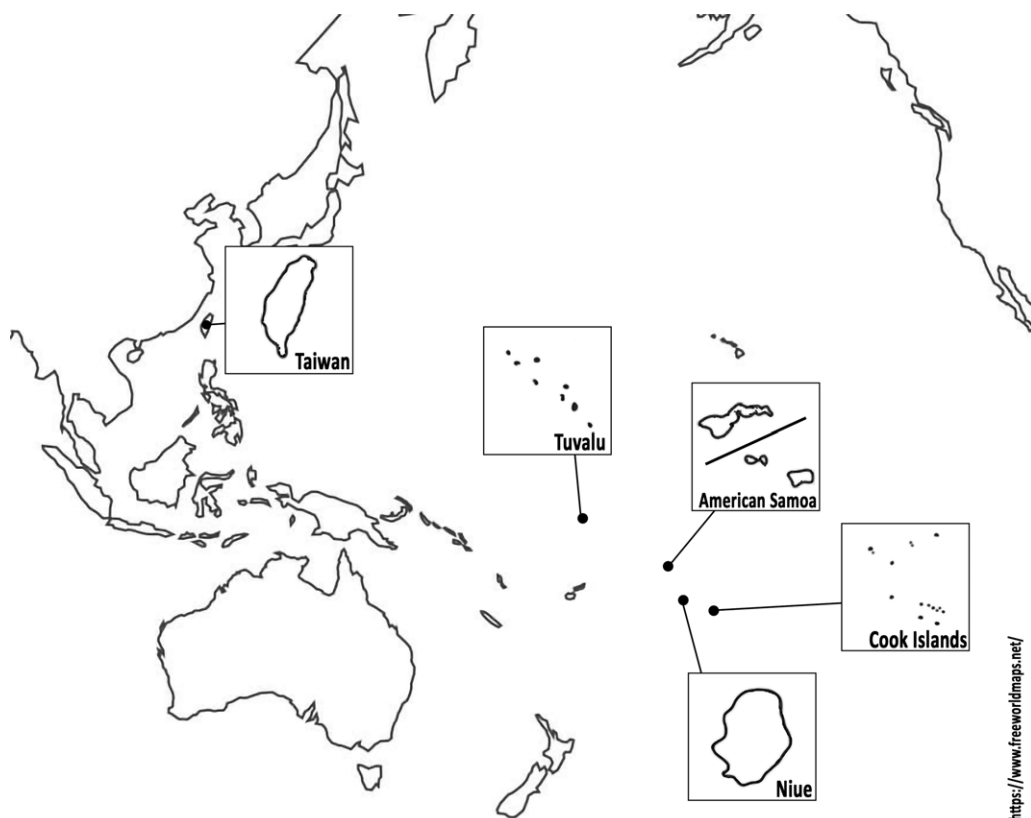


Figure 1. Pacific sites in Taiwan fisheries (Pacific Ocean outline map - Black and white outline map of the Pacific Ocean). Source: <https://www.freeworldmaps.net/ocean/pacific/pacific-ocean-outline-map.jpg>.

worlds.¹² We see how processes of decolonisation and territorialisation of the sea unfolding in the twentieth century changed global ordering, inciting new conflicts and relationships at the local level. At the same time, we witness how actions at the local level moulded broader relations between Pacific and Asian locales as well as with colonial powers like the United States and New Zealand. For specialists of Taiwan or Pacific history, the article offers new perspectives for evaluating Taiwan-Pacific diplomatic relations. Taiwan-PRC competition takes a backseat to complex engagements occurring among Taiwanese fishermen, Pacific governments, and the Taiwan government. Analysis of Taiwanese fishing communities that developed in the Pacific after the 1950s also broadens understandings of how transnational Chinese diaspora communities have been constituted in the region throughout time.¹³

Materials from the Taiwan newspaper UDN and the Diplomatic Archives at Academia Sinica's Institute of Modern History in Taiwan are used as major sources in this article. UDN is one of the

¹²Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific*, 24–5; Sunil Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Alastair Couper, *Sailors and Traders: A Maritime History of the Pacific Peoples* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2009); Jiun-Yu Liu, 'Intertwined Maritime Silk Road and Austronesian Routes: A Taiwanese Archaeological Perspective', *Journal of Global History* 18, no. 3 (2023): 384–400; Lauren Benton and Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, eds., *A World at Sea: Maritime Practices and Global History* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020); Eva-Maria Muschik, 'Special Issue Introduction: Towards a Global History of International Organizations and Decolonization', *Journal of Global History* 17, no. 2 (2022): 173–90.

¹³See Paul D'Arcy, 'The Chinese Pacifics: A Brief Historical Review', *The Journal of Pacific History* 49, no. 4 (2014): 396–420.

only newspapers that has existed in Taiwan from after the Second World War in 1951 to the present day.¹⁴ It allows us to chronologically track the development of Taiwan's fisheries conflicts in the Pacific and demonstrates the major influence these incidents had on government policy and public opinion. The Diplomatic Archives provide declassified files from Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where internal communications from the Taiwan government show how fisheries incidents determined diplomatic decisions.¹⁵ Although biased in their support of the anti-Communist and authoritarian KMT government in Taiwan,¹⁶ UDN and the Diplomatic Archives are under-utilised resources that offer comprehensive coverage of the major impact fisheries had on Taiwan's relationships in the Pacific from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Taiwan's fisheries engagements in the Pacific

Starting in the 1950s, Taiwan's commercial fisheries operations moved out of Taiwan and into the Pacific, embroiling Taiwan in a number of fisheries disputes with Southeast Asian and Pacific nations. As international law with regard to maritime boundaries developed and changed in the mid-twentieth century, the distinction between legal and illegal fishing was not yet fully clear or agreed upon in many locations, and Taiwanese fishermen disputed some charges of illegal fishing lodged against them because maritime boundaries seemed to be inconstant and always shifting.¹⁷ However, to draw a distinction between fishing practices and their outcomes, this article refers to illegal fishing as fishing where vessels from one country were charged with or detained for trespassing for the purposes of fishing in the maritime zone of another country; legal fishing refers to fishing operations where vessels from one country were approved or licensed to fish in the maritime zones of another country and, consequently, were not detained or charged for trespassing there. The dynamic and expanding geography of Taiwan's illegal and legal fisheries in the Pacific is outlined below.

Taiwan has been involved in maritime affairs in the Pacific Ocean for centuries.¹⁸ However, its involvement in the Pacific, especially with regard to fisheries, became most prominent when the KMT retreated to Taiwan from mainland China after losing the Chinese Civil War to the PRC in 1949. When the KMT's state-level administrative structure was transposed from mainland China to the island of Taiwan/Taiwan province, much of the organisation and execution of distant-water fisheries was delegated to fishermen's associations like the Kaohsiung Fishermen's Association (KFA), which were responsible to government bodies such as the Taiwan Provincial Fisheries Department.¹⁹ The KFA is a civil rather than a government organisation and operated through Taiwan's major southern port of Kaohsiung.²⁰ Offshore fishing was initially practised in Taiwan,

¹⁴About Us', United Daily News Group, 2024, accessed 11 January 2024, <https://www.udngroup.com/en/>.

¹⁵About Us', Institute of Modern History Archives Online System, 29 January 2024, accessed 13 May 2024, <https://archiveonline.mh.sinica.edu.tw/mysite/about/2/>. See also 'Waijiaobu dangan (Diplomatic Archives)', Institute of Modern History Archives, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://archives.sinica.edu.tw/project/46/>; 'Danganguan guancang jiansuo xitong benci xinzeng waijiaobu dangan 1050 ce, shouci kaifang zhonghua jiaoyu wenhua jijin dongshihui dangan, huanying duojia liyong! Modern History Archives, 4 July 2018, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://archives.sinica.edu.tw/news/1100>.

¹⁶Patricia R. S. Batto, 'The Consequences of Democratisation on Taiwan's Daily Press', *China Perspectives* 51 (2004); Hui-Ching Chang and Rich Holt, '"New Taiwanese": Evolution of an Identity Project in the Narratives of *United Daily News*', *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* 19, no. 2 (2009): 261; LYG, 'Waijiaobu', 9, 12–13.

¹⁷LYG, 'Waijiaobu', 13; *Tuvalu News Sheet* (hereafter, TNS), 'Taiwan Fishing Vessel Ordered to Pay \$20,000 Fine', 3 August 1979, 11. See also Ranganathan, 'Decolonization and International Law', 166; Correspondence from Australia-Free China Society to Taiwan Consular Affairs Regarding Taiwanese Fishing Arrests in Australia, 5 August 1975, 020-011504-0018, Modern History Archives.

¹⁸See Paola Calanca, Liu, Yi-chang, and Frank Muiyad, eds., *Taiwan Maritime Landscapes, From Neolithic to Early Modern Times* (École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 2022); Damon Salesa, 'The Pacific in Indigenous Time', in *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People*, eds. David Armitage and Alison Bashford (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 31–52.

¹⁹Sing-Hwa Hu, 'Change and Development of Taiwan Fishermen's Associations', *Archives Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (2014): 4–19.

²⁰'Yuhui zuzhi', Kaohsiung Fishermen's Association (hereafter, KFA), accessed 12 January 2024, <http://www.kfa.org.tw/organization>.

but in the 1950s, UDN reported that these fishing grounds, especially those in the north, were rapidly being depleted.²¹ Subsequently, Taiwan's commercial fishing fleets quickly moved away from Taiwanese waters and into Southeast Asia and the Pacific, laying the groundwork for the development of Taiwan's extensive distant-water fisheries in the Pacific as well as the occurrence of various fishing disputes.²²

From the 1950s onward, the movement of Taiwan's fishing fleets into Southeast Asia and the Pacific incited numerous fisheries disputes because, in the same period, colonial powers and newly emerging states were in the process of dividing the Pacific Ocean along state boundaries as part of the decolonisation process in the region.²³ In the twentieth century, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) permitted countries to demarcate a 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) 'from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured', providing for the widespread territorialisation of the sea.²⁴ Under UNCLOS, countries gained sovereign rights over the valuable fish and minerals their EEZs contained, which expanded their maritime resources while allowing them to block other nations from unlicensed access.²⁵ Although UNCLOS was not adopted until 1982 and did not come into force until 1994, countries had already begun to unilaterally declare EEZs long before the 1980s. The United States was one of the first nations to claim exclusive jurisdiction beyond territorial seas in the Truman Proclamation of 1945, and Chile and Peru declared 200-nautical-mile EEZs in 1947.²⁶ Other countries followed suit, asserting their rights to territorial waters²⁷ or proclaiming EEZs or other exclusive areas smaller than 200 nautical miles in size.²⁸ This was certainly the case in the Pacific during the twentieth century given that declaring EEZs and other maritime boundaries provided access to and control over critical fisheries resources, especially tuna.²⁹ Unilateral laws around maritime boundaries, EEZs, and UNCLOS 'consolidated an extractive imaginary of the ocean' and set the stage for conflicts over the legality of Taiwan's fishing operations in the region.³⁰

Changing ideas about territorial waters and EEZs that developed from the 1940s onward and the need in Taiwan to fish further offshore due to a depleted nearshore fishery created situations where commercial Taiwanese fishing operations extended into the Pacific both legally and illegally. This is in no small part due to Taiwan's contested position vis-à-vis the history of EEZs and UNCLOS given that Taiwan has not been a UN member since 1971, cannot sign onto UNCLOS, and does not have a universally recognised EEZ.³¹ Consequently, in the 1950s, UDN began publishing numerous reports on the detention of commercial Taiwanese fishing vessels in both Southeast Asia and the Pacific for illegal fishing. Many of these incidents involved tuna fish stocks and other highly migratory species found in waters surrounding the Philippines and the western and central Pacific Ocean, with reports in the 1960s that tuna stocks might be depleted

²¹UDN, 'Feiguo qin wo yuquan, jiying heli jie jue; gaoshi yuhui jianyi yan zhuxi, bing qing kuozhan gaoxiong yugang', 12 April 1956, 5; UDN, 'Taiwan jinhai bubudao yu, sanshiyi zhi xiaochuan shenqing yuanyang zuoye', 7 May 1967, 2.

²²UDN, 12 April 1956; UDN, 14 January 1970.

²³Ranganathan, 'Decolonization and International Law', 163–4.

²⁴United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (New York: United Nations, 2002), 23.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 22; see also Tarai, 'The New Pacific Diplomacy'.

²⁶Eduardo Ferrero Costa, 'Pacific Resources and Ocean Law: A Latin American Perspective', *Ecology Law Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (1989): 245–57.

²⁷Australia-Free China Society to Australian Minister for Primary Industry, 4 November 1976, 020-011504-0018, Modern History Archives.

²⁸Australia-Free China Society to Taiwan Consular Affairs, 5 August 1975, Modern History Archives; UDN, 'Mei jiang qianglie fandui duzhan haiyang yuye ziyuan; nantaipingyang jingji huiyi dingqi juxing nianhui', 10 September 1977, 5.

²⁹Tarte, 'Negotiating a Tuna Management Regime', 273.

³⁰Ranganathan, 'Decolonization and International Law', 164.

³¹Bonny Ling, 'The Taiwan Strait: Under the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and its De Facto Status' (paper presented at The Sixteenth Annual Conference of the European Association of Taiwan Studies, Nottingham Trent University, 10–12 April 2019).

due to fisheries activities.³² In these articles, UDN attempted to both alert stakeholders to new/changing international or bilateral rules on fisheries and detail the repercussions encountered by those seen as breaking these rules. In 1951, for example, UDN noted that although the Philippines had already demarcated its sea territory, Taiwan had been unable to negotiate with the Philippines about this matter. As a result, Taiwanese fishing vessels had been continuously detained in the sea territory of the Philippines starting in 1947 and until the Philippines government finally offered to form a fisheries agreement with Taiwan in 1952 to defuse the situation.³³ In this case, the overseas Chinese community (華僑; *huaqiao*) in the Philippines was commended for taking care of Taiwanese fishermen while they were detained and ensuring that measures were taken to have them released and returned to Taiwan.³⁴ It seems, however, that Taiwan and the Philippines never actually signed a fishing agreement, and in 1966, six fishing vessels were detained in the area³⁵ with five additional vessels arrested in 1967.³⁶ Reports of boats sinking in the waters off the Philippines on their way back from American Samoa to Taiwan or even drifting in the area and being rescued and taken to US naval bases were also published around this time.³⁷ This demonstrates the vast number of Taiwanese vessels in the vicinity of the Philippines in the 1950s and 1960s and signals how fishing rapidly became a point of conflict between the Philippines and Taiwan—and later Taiwan and Pacific nations—that served to complicate state-level relationships.

Subsequent to this, it seems that Taiwanese fishing vessels started to move south and to the east in an effort to avoid the Philippines, and there are records of one ship being detained in Papua New Guinea in 1966.³⁸ By the 1970s, Taiwanese fishing boats had already received warnings from the Premier of the Cook Islands, Albert Henry, that all illegal fishing in the twelve-nautical-mile territorial waters of the Cook Islands should cease.³⁹ In the same period, vessels had also been arrested for illegal fishing in Tonga.⁴⁰ This means that in less than ten years, Taiwan's illegal fishing had travelled almost 5,000 to 6,000 kilometres southeast of Papua New Guinea. As outlined below, illegal fishing incidents in the Cook Islands and Tonga were seen as occurring because of the proximity of these locales to Taiwan's legal fishing operations in the US territory of American Samoa,⁴¹ as were occurrences of illegal fishing in Niue around the same time.⁴² This indicates the multi-faceted and multi-sited nature of Taiwan's fisheries in the Pacific as the following description of Taiwan's legal fishing operations in American Samoa demonstrates.

For legal fishing, UDN described Taiwan's distant-water fishing era in the Pacific as beginning in approximately 1963 when the Taiwan Frozen Seafood Company (台灣海產冷凍公司; *taiwan*

³²UDN, 12 April 1956; UDN, 'Yuguan chu zhishi gaoyuhui wang samoya buyu xu xian shidi diaocha', 25 April 1963, 7; UDN, 'Sadao yujia zhuyue tiaozheng bixu zhonghan canjia huishang', 8 June 1967, 2.

³³See UDN, 27 September 1951; UDN, 'Jiejue yuanhai buyu kunnan, wo jiang yu fei xieshang; fei yuan fa haimian tongxingzheng, bianli wo yuchuan tongguo feihai', 31 July 1952, 5.

³⁴UDN, 'Taiwan Will Negotiate with the Philippines', 31 July 1952; see also UDN, 'Gaoshi yuejie ni zutuan fanghua', 23 January 1953, 6; UDN, 'Yuchuan ruifucheng hao bei feifang kouliu', 26 August 1953, 1.

³⁵UDN, 'Wo yumin zaifei shou nuedai, jianyuan cuqing yanzheng jiaoshe; liusou yuchuan jinzaofeiting jieliu, lingyou yisou riqian zaiao beikou', 12 August 1966, 3.

³⁶UDN, 'Gaoyuhui zuo jinggao, yuchuan wujin feihai, mianzao kouliu zhizai', 22 October 1967, 2.

³⁷UDN, 'Wo yi yuanyang yuchuan, fanhang tuzhong chenmo', 10 January 1968, 6.

³⁸UDN, 'Taiwanese Fishermen Tortured in the Philippines', 12 August 1966.

³⁹Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Taiwan Fisheries Department, 11 March 1976, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives; Office of the Premier of the Cook Islands to Governor of American Samoa, 3 February 1976, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives.

⁴⁰Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa to Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 July 1974, Modern History Archives.

⁴¹Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Taiwan Fisheries Department, 11 March 1976, Modern History Archives; Office of the Premier of the Cook Islands to Governor of American Samoa, 3 February 1976, Modern History Archives; Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa to Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 July 1974, Modern History Archives.

⁴²Ministry of Foreign Affairs for New Zealand to United States Embassy in Wellington, 10 July 1974, Modern History Archives; Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa to Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 July 1974, Modern History Archives.

haichan lengdong gongsi), which was funded by the US tuna corporation StarKist, encouraged commercial fishing vessels from Taiwan to fish among the islands of the ‘South Seas’ (南洋; *nanyang*).⁴³ Here, the ‘South Seas’ mainly referred to American Samoa, where StarKist and another company, Van Camp, had established tuna canneries and where the Taiwan Frozen Seafood Company had advertised that the catch was the largest in the world.⁴⁴ Many Taiwanese fishermen at the time did not know much about American Samoa and were reticent to shift operations to that location. Nevertheless, the Taiwan Frozen Seafood Company brought experts from Japan to Taiwan to explain standard pricing for fishing in American Samoa and their willingness to support travel there. At first, when a small number of fishermen began working in American Samoa, the catch was not ideal, but Taiwan’s fishing associations, city governments, and other agencies assisted, and from 1964 to 1965, catch increased tremendously. This piqued the interest of more fishermen, and Taiwan’s fishing bases in the Pacific began to increase.⁴⁵ By 1967, UDN explained that Taiwan’s main fishing bases in the Pacific were located in American Samoa and Santo (Vanuatu),⁴⁶ with reports that a new fishing base was also being developed in the US territory of Guam.⁴⁷ At that time, there were approximately ninety-six Taiwanese fishing vessels operating in the vicinity of American Samoa.⁴⁸ Subsequently, supply ports in Apia, Papeete, and Darwin and transfer ports in Fiji and Santo were also approved by the Taiwan government.⁴⁹ By 1972, there were 238 commercial Taiwanese fishing vessels in the Pacific Ocean, with 160 vessels reported as specifically operating in the vicinity of American Samoa by 1973.⁵⁰ This was an increase of over sixty vessels from the number reported only six years earlier in 1967. In 1963, commercial Taiwanese fishing vessels had produced 9,000 tonnes of tuna at a value of over US \$90,000 (US\$909,032.57 in 2023) worldwide, but by 1972, volume and value had skyrocketed at 100,000 tonnes and roughly NT\$3.4 billion (or US\$581,498,645.61 in 2023), (US\$909 thousand and US\$581.5 million in 2025), respectively.⁵¹

This brief history outlines Taiwan’s illegal and legal fisheries in the Pacific. Given the ubiquity of Taiwanese fishermen and fishing vessels in the region from the 1950s to the 1980s, this history suggests how fishermen and fishing vessels were able to create, intercede in, and shape encounters between the Taiwan government and Pacific locales during this period—the actions of Taiwanese fishermen and disputes about fishing rights and practices often determined when and how the Taiwan government and the governments of Pacific polities engaged each other and directed the pathways of Taiwan’s official diplomacy. This reflects the tensions apparent during and after processes of decolonisation in the Pacific and Southeast Asia as the sea was increasingly envisioned as numerous cordoned-off territories and conflict consequently increased.⁵²

⁴³UDN [Economic Times], ‘Lin Xiuer to Manage’, 14 January 1970.

⁴⁴David J. Doullman, ‘The Tuna Industry in the Pacific Islands Region: Opportunities for Foreign Investment’, *Marine Fisheries Review* 48, no. 1 (1986): 15–22; UDN [Economic Times], ‘Lin Xiuer to Manage’, 14 January 1970.

⁴⁵UDN [Economic Times], ‘Lin Xiuer to Manage’, 14 January 1970.

⁴⁶UDN, ‘Zhifu de jieing, xiang yuanyang yuye jinjun’, 22 April 1967, 2.

⁴⁷UDN, ‘Guandao yuan bo di, gong wo jian lengcangku, yuguanchang’, 20 September 1967, 2.

⁴⁸UDN, ‘Yuju jueing quxiao samoyadao daili zhidu; ling yu meiri qiaqian shouyu buji heyue’, 5 October 1967, 2.

⁴⁹UDN, ‘Weiyu nian waixiaozhi yu liuqianwan meiyuan’, 16 July 1974, 3.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*; UDN, ‘Wo jiang zai samoya she zhongguoguan tigong yumin kangle yiliao fuwu’, 24 December 1973, 2.

⁵¹UDN [Economic Times], ‘Annual Export Sales Value for Tuna’, 16 July 1974. Inflation rates from 1963 to 2023 and 1972 to 2023 were calculated using the US Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator and the Taipei City CPI calculator, respectively. The exchange rate from New Taiwan Dollars (NT\$) to US Dollars (US\$) was calculated using the US Department of the Treasury and Bureau of the Fiscal Service’s FiscalData website. ‘CPI Inflation Calculator’, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed 12 January 2024, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm; ‘Taibeishi xiaofeizhe wujia zhishu (CPI) zhangdie ji goumaili huansuan’, Taipei City, accessed 12 January 2024, https://w2.dbas.gov.taipei/price_cpi_curv/cpi_curv.asp; ‘Currency Exchange Rates Converter’, FiscalData, 2020, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://fiscaldata.treasury.gov/currency-exchange-rates-converter/>.

⁵²Ranganathan, ‘Decolonization and International Law’; UDN [Economic Times], ‘The United States Will Strongly Oppose’, 10 September 1977.

Taiwanese fishing communities and legal fishing in American Samoa

Because Taiwan's major base for fishing operations in the Pacific was in the US territory of American Samoa and American Samoa was also the site from which Taiwanese fishermen embarked—whether purposefully or accidentally—on illegal fishing in the waters of neighbouring Pacific locales like Tuvalu,⁵³ it is important to first understand how Taiwanese fishermen as non-state actors impacted the Taiwan government's relationship with the government on American Samoa and the residents there. From 1963 (when Taiwan began developing its fishing base in American Samoa) to 1977, the governor of American Samoa was appointed by the US federal government, reflecting ongoing US colonisation in American Samoa, which began in 1900.⁵⁴ Because government officials from Taiwan mainly interacted with this appointed governor, their relationships with the polity were channelled through colonial pathways, while fishermen engaged with a range of different actors.

In American Samoa, Taiwanese fishermen occupied a fraught place and were the subject of both derision and pity from the Taiwan government and UDN. On the one hand, Taiwanese fishermen were frequently the subject of negative reporting from Taiwan government officials and UDN, where they were described as absconding from their ships in American Samoa's Pago Pago Harbour to gamble, drink, and fight with each other, Korean fishermen, or even the indigenous people of American Samoa on American Samoan soil.⁵⁵ Officials and newspapers blamed the fishermen for causing disturbances and having negative social impacts in American Samoa.⁵⁶ On the other hand, certain Taiwanese officials, especially those resident in American Samoa, reported that some Taiwanese fishermen absconded from ships or moved into American Samoa for what officials saw as more understandable reasons, for example working to pay their fares back to Taiwan after they had decided to leave their position as fishermen.⁵⁷ Yet, even these more acceptable reasons for absconding still brought Taiwanese fishermen into tension with the government of American Samoa and necessitated intervention by the Taiwan government.⁵⁸ Undoubtedly, the moral judgements made about Taiwanese fishermen by the Taiwan government and UDN, which was supportive of the government, were biased and pushed blame toward vulnerable groups, but they are useful to explore here, along with more empathetic views of fishermen, to understand how these fishermen constituted a major, if contested, part of daily life in American Samoa that preoccupied both the Taiwan and American Samoan governments.

Negative descriptions of Taiwanese fishermen in American Samoa from the Taiwan government and UDN degraded them as 'malignant', but the episodes these 'bad actors' were involved in also consistently culminated in engagement between the Taiwan and American Samoan governments as both governments sought to curb fishermen's 'bad' behaviour.⁵⁹ For example, in 1965, a UDN article described a murder on board the Taiwanese vessel *Xiehe* in American Samoa, where the fishermen involved were said to have a reputation for fighting with

⁵³TNS, 'Taiwan Fishing Vessel', 3 August 1979.

⁵⁴JoAnna Poblete, *Balancing the Tides: Marine Practices in American Sāmoa* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), 1, 10.

⁵⁵UDN, 'Haishang dixie yuchuan, ding niansiri digao; xiehe gongsi weixi gaian xiangqing, sharen xiongxian jiang bei kouya zhenxun', 20 November 1965, 3; UDN, 'Gaoyu zai yinduyang tamatafu she yuanyang yuye xinji', 20 August 1967, 2; UDN, 'Zhonghan yumin zai samoya xiedou; liangguo zhu tandao lingshi zuo qianwang tiaojie', 27 January 1968, 5; Letter from Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa Regarding Sending Poor Quality or Malignant Fishermen Back to Taiwan, no date, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives. See also Letter from Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa to Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs Regarding the Behaviour of Taiwanese Fishermen in American Samoa,

9 December 1974, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives.

⁵⁶Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa, no date, Modern History Archives.

⁵⁷Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa to Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 December 1974, Modern History Archives.

⁵⁸Telegram from Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa to Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs Regarding Imprisoned Fishermen, 9 June 1974, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives.

⁵⁹Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa, no date, Modern History Archives.

others, especially over gambling issues, and carrying knives. The article looked to the Taiwan government and Taiwanese fishermen's associations to be more stringent when approving distant-water fishermen and restrict those with a 'rough temperament' from travelling abroad so Taiwan could avoid the negative impacts caused by violent incidents like the Xiehe murder.⁶⁰

Subsequently, in 1968, a UDN article described intense fighting between fishermen from Taiwan and Korea in American Samoa that directly involved the government of American Samoa. After this incident, American Samoa's armed police were ordered to standby to keep the peace; the Governor of American Samoa, Owen S. Aspinall, ordered all Taiwanese and Korean fishermen to stay on their own ships and prohibited drinking alcohol on board; and the Taiwan and Korean consuls general based in Honolulu had to fly to American Samoa to mediate the dispute.⁶¹ After Taiwan's Consul General in Honolulu, Johnson Chun-ti Pao, visited Governor Aspinall to discuss the fighting, he wrote to Aspinall to praise the 'commendable and admirable' manner in which Aspinall settled the matter. Pao assured Aspinall that he had directed Taiwan's 'fishery association representatives and fishermen [in American Samoa] to observe strictly to [Aspinall's] orders' but also suggested that the incident must have been an anomaly as '[t]he Chinese basically are peace loving and friendly people in nature as [a] result of cultivation through their thousands of years of culture and traditions'.⁶² Pao's assurances to Aspinall reflected measures the government in Taiwan was taking to alter fishermen's behaviour.

Immediately before and after this incident, reports in UDN demonstrated policy changes enacted by Taiwan authorities to improve what they saw as fishermen's poor behaviour and to stop fishermen from leaving their vessels, drinking, and wearing improper clothing.⁶³ In 1969, Taiwan's Fisheries Department notified Taiwan's consulates and embassies to inform the department of any instances of disorderly behaviour on the part of fishermen so that these matters could be rigorously investigated and punished.⁶⁴ In this case, the actions of Taiwanese fishermen in American Samoa dictated Taiwan's engagement with the US government on American Samoa and prompted national debate about how to reverse the impacts fishermen were having on Taiwan's image in American Samoa and the wider Pacific.

At the same time, after Taiwan's consulate in American Samoa was established in 1973,⁶⁵ the consulate took pains to suggest that 'not all of the fishermen who absconded from ships were bad people'.⁶⁶ Consulate reports provided examples of fishermen who had absconded from their vessels not to fight or gamble but to marry indigenous American Samoans and open businesses in American Samoa⁶⁷ or fishermen who, having felt the need to leave the vessels they were working on, had been engaged to manage gardens or work in restaurants for indigenous American Samoans so they could earn money to continue to live in American Samoa or pay their own return fare to Taiwan.⁶⁸ Yet, despite these more positive portrayals of Taiwanese fishermen, the actions of these fishermen still ran in contravention of American Samoan policies. In 1974, the consulate in

⁶⁰UDN, 'Bloodshed on Fishing Vessel at Sea', 20 November 1965.

⁶¹William M. Blair, 'Bloody Clashes Trouble Samoa: Five Chinese and Koreans Killed in Recurring Feud', *The New York Times*, 28 January 1968, 6; UDN [Economic Times], 'Taiwanese and Korean Fishermen Fight in Samoa', 27 January 1968.

⁶²Correspondence from Consulate General of the Republic of China, Honolulu, Hawai'i to Governor of American Samoa on Disputes between Fishermen, the Behaviour of Taiwanese Fishermen in American Samoa, and Diplomatic Matters, 020-050206-0030, 12 February 1968, Modern History Archives.

⁶³UDN [Economic Times], 'Kaohsiung Fisheries Establishes', 20 August 1967.

⁶⁴UDN, 'Yuanyang yuchuan chuanyuan dongtai yuyeju jue jiaqiang guanli', 19 August 1969, 8.

⁶⁵UDN, 'Waijiaobu jue yu jinqinei zai samoya xinshe lingguan; yi pai liuendi wei shouren lingshi', 8 May 1973, 2.

⁶⁶Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa to Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 December 1974, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives.

⁶⁷Diary for the Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa for 14 January 1977, 14 January 1977, 020-050202-0104, Modern History Archives.

⁶⁸Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa to Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 December 1974, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives.

American Samoa informed Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs that at least thirty-four Taiwanese fishermen who had left their vessels to cultivate crops or operate businesses for indigenous American Samoans had been arrested by the government of American Samoa for illegal residence. The government of American Samoa asked the consulate to ensure the fishermen were returned to Taiwan as soon as possible.⁶⁹ In leaving their vessels without authorisation, whether to gamble, obtain alternative employment, or marry, Taiwanese fishermen brought themselves into conflict with the government in American Samoa, thereby affecting relationships between the government in American Samoa and the Taiwan government and dominating Taiwan's diplomacy in American Samoa.

The interactions described above even migrated into independent Samoa, showing how Taiwanese fishermen mediated and transcended the boundaries between colonised American Samoa and its independent neighbour across the sea. For example, in 1970, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote to its embassy in New Zealand about Taiwanese fishermen based in American Samoa who had been purchasing vegetables in independent Samoa because the ministry had heard that independent Samoa had barred Taiwanese fishermen from stopping there. The ministry described the relationships it hoped would develop between the Taiwanese fishermen based in American Samoa and the overseas Chinese businessmen based in independent Samoa who could potentially look after the fishermen.⁷⁰ This is an important reminder that, aside from Taiwanese fishermen, overseas Chinese populations that frequently regarded Taiwan/the ROC as the government of China were also prevalent in the Pacific from the 1950s to the 1980s, with the overseas Chinese community in independent Samoa boasting hundreds of people.⁷¹ The significance of these overseas Chinese communities will be discussed further in the conclusion, but it is sufficient here to indicate their connection with Taiwanese fishermen and the Taiwan government and to note how, given their facility at sea, Taiwanese fishermen were able to develop cross-border relationships with these communities that spanned national divides.

From legal fishing to illegal fishing: engagements with Tuvalu, the Cook Islands, and Niue

In American Samoa, Taiwanese fishermen moulded relationships between Taiwan and the US government, necessitating engagement between the two governments over disputes the fishermen had in port and the fact that they left their ships without authorisation. Whether treated with derision or pity, fishermen were often looked upon as a liability compared to their compatriots in the region.⁷² Nevertheless, they ultimately dominated interactions between the Taiwan government and the government of American Samoa. The influence of Taiwanese fishermen also radiated out from American Samoa whenever these fishermen left the territory on fishing expeditions near the maritime zones of other Pacific polities. For the Cook Islands, Niue, and Tuvalu, which all now share maritime boundaries with American Samoa or are in the vicinity of these boundaries,⁷³ fishermen embarking from American Samoa on legal fishing trips and

⁶⁹Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa to Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 June 1974, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives.

⁷⁰Letter from Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Taiwan Embassy in New Zealand Regarding Taiwanese Fishermen Purchasing Supplies in Samoa, 13 May 1970, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives.

⁷¹UDN, 'Yangxikun nantaipingyang zhi lv', 21 October 1974, 2; Joan S. H. Wang, 'In the Name of Legitimacy: Taiwan and Overseas Chinese during the Cold War Era', *China Review* 11, no. 2 (2011): 65–90; James Jiann Hua To, 'Sino-Pacific: Extra-Territorial Influence and the Overseas Chinese', in *Looking North, Looking South: China, Taiwan, and the South Pacific*, ed. Anne-Marie Brady (World Scientific, 2010), 64–70; LYG, 'Waijiaobu', 9.

⁷²LYG, 'Waijiaobu', 7–9.

⁷³Pacific Hailed Global Leader in Determining Shared Maritime Boundaries', Pacific Community (SPC), 11 July 2019, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/2019/07/pacific-hailed-global-leader-in-determining-shared-maritime-boundaries>.

crossing illegally into their waters were a consistent—and unwanted—presence that had extensive diplomatic repercussions.⁷⁴

Taiwan's illegal fishing in Tuvalu in the late 1970s, which originated from American Samoa, laid the groundwork for the establishment of diplomatic relations and fisheries agreements between Tuvalu and Taiwan in 1979 and 1981, respectively.⁷⁵ This was largely through the actions of the Tuvalu government, which demanded intervention from the Taiwan government after experiencing incidents of illegal fishing by Taiwanese fishing vessels, detaining these vessels, and imposing fines.⁷⁶ As the perpetrators of illegal fishing in Tuvalu, Taiwanese fishermen impinged on increasingly rigid definitions of maritime boundaries that were developing during the decolonisation era in the Pacific. This provided the justification for Tuvalu to make demands on the Taiwan government, thereby shaping the terms of Taiwan's official relationship-building with Tuvalu.

The same is true of illegal fishing incidents that originated from vessels based in American Samoa and that affected Niue in 1974 and the Cook Islands in 1976. In 1965 and 1974, respectively, the Cook Islands and Niue became self-governing states in free association with New Zealand. Previous to those dates, they were of non-self-governing status.⁷⁷ Today, both countries largely control their own foreign affairs while defence is conducted jointly with New Zealand.⁷⁸ In 1961, New Zealand formed diplomatic relations with Taiwan (or the ROC), which would have extended this relationship to the Cook Islands and Niue as well. However, by 1972, New Zealand had established relations with the PRC and its relationship with Taiwan had concluded.⁷⁹ The Cook Islands officially formed relations with the PRC in 1997, while Niue only did so in 2007.⁸⁰ Given New Zealand's relationship with the PRC in 1972, the actions of the Cook Islands and Niue in protesting illegal fishing incidents did not result in the establishment of diplomatic ties with Taiwan as they did in Tuvalu and were mediated through the colonial rule of New Zealand. Nevertheless, protests against illegal fishing did lead to the development of a fisheries agreement between the Cook Islands and Taiwan in the early 1980s.⁸¹ Like Tuvalu, the Cook Islands saw illegal fishing as compromising its resources and constituting an ongoing nuisance, and demanded that this practice be converted into legal activity that included payment to its government through the conclusion of official agreements for the purchase of fishing licences. Here, again, illegal fishing motivated interactions and set the terms by which the Taiwan government engaged with Niue and the Cook Islands.

⁷⁴TNS, 'Sien Tsing Lung Ran Aground', 20 February 1981, 12–13; Ministry of Foreign Affairs for New Zealand to United States Embassy in Wellington, 10 July 1974, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives; Office of the Premier of the Cook Islands to Governor of American Samoa, 3 February 1976, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives.

⁷⁵Marinaccio, 'Rearticulating Diplomatic Relationships'; TNS, 'Highest Fine Ever to be Imposed for Illegal Fishing', 3 April 1981; UDN, 'Tuvalu shi wo yuanyang yuchuan zuoye diqu', 20 September 1979, 2; UDN, 'Wo yu yindu dengguo jiang qian yue xieding', 16 October 1980, 6; UDN, 'Wo yu tuwaluguo jin qian yue xieding', 5 November 1981, 2.

⁷⁶Marinaccio, 'Rearticulating Diplomatic Relationships'; TNS, 'Government Issues Warning', 31 August 1979.

⁷⁷Caroline McDonald, 'Decolonisation and Free Association: The Relationships of the Cook Islands and Niue with New Zealand' (PhD diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 2018), 1–2.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*; 'Niue and Tuvalu Officially Establish Diplomatic Relations', *Television Niue*, 2022, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://tvniue.com/2022/07/niue-and-tuvalu-officially-establish-diplomatic-relations/>; 'Joint Centenary Declaration of the Principles of the Relationship between the Cook Islands and New Zealand', New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2001, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/Countries-and-Regions/Pacific/Cook-Islands/Cook-Islands-2001-Joint-Centenary-Declaration-signed.pdf>.

⁷⁹'An Introduction of Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in New Zealand', Taipei Economic and Cultural Office, New Zealand, 4 May 2023, accessed 12 January 2024, https://www.roc-taiwan.org/nz_en/post/299.html.

⁸⁰'The Chinese Embassy and the Government of Cook Islands Jointly Celebrate 25 Years of China-Cook Islands Diplomatic Relations in Rarotonga', The Embassy of the People's Republic of China in New Zealand (Cook Islands, Niue), 19 December 2022, accessed 12 January 2024, http://nz.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgxgs/202212/t20221219_10991895.htm; 'The Chinese Embassy and the Niuean Government Jointly Celebrate the 15th Anniversary of China-Niue Diplomatic Relations', The Embassy of the People's Republic of China in New Zealand (Cook Islands, Niue), 16 December 2022, accessed 12 January 2024, http://nz.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgxgs/202212/t20221216_10991236.htm#.

⁸¹UDN [Economic Times], 5 November 1981.

For illegal fishing in Niue, in 1974, the Governor of American Samoa, John M. Haydon, sent a letter to Taiwan's consul in American Samoa to which he attached a cable received by the US Embassy in New Zealand from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁸² The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs had written to the US embassy on behalf of the government of Niue to lodge a complaint about vessels operating out of American Samoa, which were seen as inciting illegal fishing incidents occurring in Niue.⁸³ In the cable, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed the deep concerns of the government of Niue 'at the increasing instances of violations of its territorial seas', explaining that:

On 11 March a fishing vessel, understood to be registered in the territory of American Sam[oa] was seen to be operating at Tapa Point, off Avatele Harbour. It was obvious to the local fishermen that the vessel, which was identified as the *Tongwha No. 5*, was engaged in fishing for pelagic species. . . .

[The] Government of Niue has no vessels of its own with which to police its waters, and is therefore depending on the Masters of fishing vessels having respect for its territorial sea and the cooperation of the governments in the territories of which such vessels are registered.⁸⁴

In response to the cable, Haydon encouraged the Taiwan consul in American Samoa to 'make it perfectly clear to your fishing masters that this type of activity can do them nothing but perhaps some day land them in jail with the confiscation of their vessels assured'.⁸⁵ Although the message from Niue as conveyed from New Zealand to the US embassy to American Samoa to the Taiwan government was transmitted through the voices of colonial governments and representatives, it demonstrates how non-state fishing actors embarking from American Samoa and running afoul of Niue's territorial seas shaped Niue's relationship with Taiwan. It also simultaneously impacted Taiwan's relationships with the colonial governments of New Zealand and the United States because these governments ultimately decided the trajectory of Niue's message and provided their commentary on it,⁸⁶ highlighting the ongoing impacts of colonisation as Pacific nations moved toward independence during and after the 1960s.

After receiving the communication from the government of American Samoa and the cable from New Zealand, the Taiwan authorities insisted in an internal letter that the vessel that illegally entered Niue's territorial waters in this case—the *Tongwha No. 5*—was a Korean vessel and not part of the Taiwanese fleet.⁸⁷ Yet, despite these internal claims of innocence, the message from Niue as transmitted through New Zealand and the United States triggered the Taiwan government to immediately dispatch a warning to all relevant agencies in Taiwan that vessels should avoid the territorial waters of Niue and other locations. This was done so that Taiwan would not suffer further reputational damage in the Pacific due to illegal activities, indicating how non-state actors affected the Taiwan government's actions in the Pacific, decided its areas of focus, and determined its priorities.⁸⁸

⁸²Governor of American Samoa to Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa, 12 July 1974, Modern History Archives.

⁸³*Ibid.*; Ministry of Foreign Affairs for New Zealand to United States Embassy in Wellington, 10 July 1974, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives.

⁸⁴Ministry of Foreign Affairs for New Zealand to United States Embassy in Wellington, 10 July 1974, Modern History Archives.

⁸⁵Governor of American Samoa to Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa, 12 July 1974, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa to Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 July 1974, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

In contrast to the Niue incident, the case of illegal fishing in the Cook Islands in 1976 triggered communication directly from the premier of the Cook Islands to the governor of American Samoa—that is, communication between an indigenous head of government and a colonial representative. This demonstrates the differential tactics adopted in the Niue and Cook Islands cases vis-à-vis New Zealand while also strongly highlighting the choice by the Cook Islands to circumvent New Zealand and directly engage American Samoa/the United States, especially given the much closer proximity of the Cook Islands to American Samoa than to New Zealand.⁸⁹

In his letter to American Samoa, Cook Islands Premier Albert Henry noted his ‘grave concern’ regarding ‘the frequent breach of our laws by Korean fishing vessels operating out of Pago Pago’. Henry explained that during the most recent incident on 5 January 1976, only one offending vessel had initially been reported but that a boat sent to investigate the matter had found ‘five other Korean vessels immediately off [Palmerston] island’ about 480 kilometres northwest of Rarotonga.⁹⁰

Objecting to the ongoing incursions of fishing vessels into the territorial waters of the Cook Islands, Henry clearly indicated Korean vessels as the perpetrators in these incidents.⁹¹ However, the US government in American Samoa still alerted the Taiwan Consulate on American Samoa to the matter at Henry’s request and asked that Taiwan’s consul in American Samoa send Henry’s complaint to Taiwan given the large number of Taiwanese fishing vessels in American Samoa and the possibility that they too might violate the waters of the Cook Islands.⁹²

The path of action implemented by the Cook Islands was slightly different from that adopted by Tuvalu, where the Tuvalu government blamed the Taiwan government for not curbing illegal fishing in newspaper articles to shame Taiwan and prompt action, including the finalisation of a fisheries agreement.⁹³ Nevertheless, the result of protests on the part of the Cook Islands was similar to that in the Tuvalu case. By 1981, Taiwan had signed a fisheries agreement with the Cook Islands similar to its agreement with Tuvalu, which provided compensation to the government of the Cook Islands for Taiwanese fishing conducted in the Cook Islands’ waters. Negotiations surrounding the agreement had begun in 1979 after the Cook Islands had declared a 200-nautical-mile EEZ in 1977, which expanded its maritime space while bringing its boundaries even closer to American Samoa and the fishing vessels there.⁹⁴ This again demonstrates how illegal fishing incidents and non-state actors influenced Taiwan’s relations with Pacific locales and dictated the Taiwan government’s decisions in terms of which Pacific places it should sign agreements with and how it should develop relationships in the region.

The incidents outlined above show how cases of illegal fishing in a period of increasingly territorialised seas entangled the Taiwan government in confrontations between New Zealand and the United States and between the Cook Islands and American Samoa over fishing disputes

⁸⁹Office of the Premier of the Cook Islands to Governor of American Samoa, 3 February 1976, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁹²Letter from Taiwan Consulate in American Samoa to Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs Regarding Illegal Fishing Issues in the Cook Islands, 25 February 1976, 020-050206-0030, Modern History Archives.

⁹³TNS, ‘Government Issues Warning’, 31 August 1979; TNS, ‘Sien Tsing Lung Ran Aground’, 20 February 1981; TNS, ‘Highest Fine Ever’, 3 April 1981; UDN [Economic Times], ‘Tuvalu and Taiwan Sign Fisheries Agreement’, 5 November 1981.

⁹⁴UDN [Economic Times], ‘Tuvalu and Taiwan Sign Fisheries Agreement’, 5 November 1981; UDN, ‘Tuwaluguo jingji haiyu zhun wo yuanyu zuoye, wo meinian fu bawan wuqian meiyuan, 6 November 1981, 2; ‘Agreement between the Government of the Cook Islands and the Taiwan Deep Sea Tuna Boat Owners and Exporters Association Concerning the Licensing of Fishing Vessels of the Association to Fish within the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Cook Islands’, Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute, 7 October 1981, accessed 13 January 2024, http://www.pacii.org/pits/en/treaty_database/1981/2.html; Jon Michael Jonassen, ‘The Cook Islands, the Development of an External Affairs Department in an Emerging Microstate’ (Master’s thesis, University of Hawai’i, 1982), 63–5, 96–8; ‘Cook Islands Exclusive Economic Zone (200 Nautical Miles)’, Pacific Data Hub, 30 April 2019, accessed 13 January 2024, <https://pacificdata.org/data/dataset/exclusive-economic-zone-of-the-cook-islands>.

occurring in the Cook Islands and Niue. These incidents further highlight how Taiwanese fishing vessels and the occurrence of fishing disputes shaped Taiwan's official relations in the Pacific, consistently drawing the Taiwan government into contentious interactions and prescribing its trajectory of state-to-state relations.

Conclusion

The new stories and case studies articulated in this paper show how commercial Taiwanese fisheries, especially Taiwanese fishermen resident in American Samoa, mediated and shaped interactions between the Taiwan government and Pacific locales from the 1950s to the 1980s and during the period of decolonisation in the Global South. In this period, Taiwanese vessels were accused of fishing illegally in sites throughout the Pacific, including Australia, Tuvalu, Tonga, and Niue, reflecting the progressive territorialisation of the sea before and after UNCLOS. Taiwanese fishermen became intertwined within American Samoan societies, where they fished legally, as well as independent Samoan societies. Fishing vessels radiating out from American Samoa also instigated illegal fishing incidents in Tuvalu, Niue, and the Cook Islands and expanded Taiwan's presence in the Pacific, moulding how the Taiwan government engaged with Pacific locales. Recognising the impact Taiwanese fishermen had on the development of Taiwan-Pacific relations challenges generalisations about these relationships, overturns disempowering ideas of Pacific passivity in diplomacy, and highlights questions about the Chinese diaspora in the Pacific.

In many cases, when Pacific nations or locales dealt with Taiwanese fishing transgressions, their goal may not have been to forge official diplomatic relations with Taiwan and may have been mediated through a colonial power (or powers). However, Matt Matsuda's argument that the Pacific is constituted of interconnected histories dependent on the sea is clear here because in the cases of the Cook Islands and Niue, 'direct engagements' between actors from Taiwan, American Samoa, the Cook Islands, New Zealand, the United States, and Niue 'took place and were tied to histories dependent on the ocean'.⁹⁵ These stories only make sense when they are 'linked to other stories and places'⁹⁶—histories of divergent colonialism often explain the diplomatic acrobatics that required New Zealand to send a diplomatic note on behalf of Niue to the US Embassy in Wellington, which would then communicate with American Samoa about an incident of illegal fishing committed in Niue's territorial waters near American Samoa. Although mediated through colonial pathways, these incidents demonstrate that Pacific places were not merely at the beck and call of the PRC and Taiwan as diplomatic relationships developed in the region but had a clear voice and purpose. These incidents also show the complex histories of Taiwan's engagement in the Pacific, which belie any reading of Taiwan as a unified presence in the region given the contentious relationship between the Taiwan government and Taiwanese fishermen.⁹⁷

When compared to explanations of Taiwan's diplomacy in the Pacific which hold that Pacific nations formed relations with Taiwan in the 1970s and 1980s at the whim of Taiwanese chequebooks because these nations were 'small, under-developed and recently independent',⁹⁸ we find that the realities of building diplomatic and extra-diplomatic relations in the Pacific were far beyond the control of the Taiwan government. These relations were dependent on the actions of individual fishing vessels and Pacific peoples and governments regardless of whether these actions were influenced by colonial governments or so-called superpowers.

Highlighting new stories about Taiwanese fishermen in the Pacific, and in American Samoa specifically, also posits novel perspectives on the Chinese diaspora and regional connections. In

⁹⁵Matt K. Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds: A History of Seas, Peoples, and Cultures* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5.

⁹⁶Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds*, 5.

⁹⁷See Graeme Smith, 'Chinese Reactions to Anti-Asian Riots in the Pacific', *The Journal of Pacific History* 47, no. 1 (2012): 93–109.

⁹⁸Yu, 'The Pacific Islands', 93.

considering the Taiwanese fishing community in American Samoa and how Taiwanese fishermen became entrenched in the lives of American Samoans and developed connections to independent Samoa, we can further contemplate the history of the Chinese diaspora in the Pacific region and how Taiwanese fishermen might form a part of that diaspora. We can also examine the complex regional connections that embedded Taiwan in some Pacific locales through illegal fishing and in places like American Samoa, where large Taiwanese communities were present for legal work purposes.

In Taiwan, Taiwanese fishermen in the Pacific were frequently the object of great ambivalence, especially when they were seen as damaging Taiwan's international reputation in ways the Taiwan government could not control.⁹⁹ However, overseas Chinese communities in the Pacific, which were often from China and could be seen as representing either Taiwan/the ROC or the PRC depending on whether they identified with one government or the other,¹⁰⁰ were viewed positively and lauded for their skill at forging relationships in Pacific countries or for helping Taiwanese fishermen when they experienced difficulty overseas or inevitably fell afoul of the law.¹⁰¹ Although literature on Chinese diaspora communities in the Pacific is not lacking, we rarely have access to internal archives outlining the perspectives of the Taiwan or PRC governments about these groups.¹⁰² The ways in which Taiwanese fishermen became intertwined in Pacific societies, whether through fighting, marriage, or labour and often to the chagrin of their home government and the government of the nation in which they were fishing, is also an untold story. This article provides an opportunity to consider how these fishermen formed a part of the wider Chinese diaspora in the Pacific, especially as they became rooted in Pacific places and developed connections and intermingled with Chinese communities in the region.

Using UDN and the Diplomatic Archives, this article has shown how the Pacific worlds of Taiwanese commercial fishing and Pacific EEZ expansion collided through the movement of people and fish and how recognising this collision provides greater complexity and nuance in examining Taiwan's relationships with Pacific polities both at and beyond the diplomatic level. It demonstrates Pacific interventions and beyond-the-state encounters for Taiwan, overseas Chinese communities in the Pacific, and both colonised and independent Pacific locales and highlights a deep relationality between co-existing histories of the Pacific Rim and Oceania.

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Jess Marinaccio is an Assistant Professor of Asian Pacific Studies at California State University, Dominguez Hills but was most recently employed in Tuvalu's Department of Foreign Affairs. Dr Marinaccio received her doctorate in Pacific Studies from Victoria University of Wellington and researches understandings of diplomacy in the Pacific. She has published in the *International Journal of Cultural Policy* and *The Contemporary Pacific*.

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¹⁰⁰Wang, 'In the Name of Legitimacy'; To, 'Sino-Pacific', 64–70.

¹⁰¹LYG, 'Waijiaobu', 7–9; UDN, 'Taiwan Will Negotiate with the Philippines', 31 July 1952; UDN, 'Kaohsiung City Fisheries Industry', 23 January 1953; UDN, 'Yang Hsi-kun's Visit', 21 October 1974. See also UDN, 'Nuhai yifa, shengsi zhengzha; piaoliu liushijiuri, qisi ersheng, jipi yujiu yumin, sansheng you xing, 13 August 1968, 3.

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