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Japanese Food Diplomacy and the United States in the First Half of the Cold War: The Cases of Sugar and Whale Meat

*Isami Romero**

This article addresses the role of food diplomacy in US–Japan relations and international relations more generally. In particular, it examines the intersection of Japanese food diplomacy and US–Japan relations in the postwar era by investigating the cases of sugar and whaling, two commodities the US initially promoted for Japan's recovery but later became points of contention between the two nations. After Japan's defeat in the Pacific War, the country experienced a severe food crisis. In response, US President Harry S. Truman and the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) implemented a food aid policy. That policy authorized US food imports, food imports from other countries, such as sugar from Cuba, and Japan's resumption of whaling. These policies helped alleviate the famine but also increased Japan's dependence on US food commodities.

Following Japan's return to in the international community in 1952, Tokyo sought to reduce this dependence. In the process, sugar and whale meat became sources of tension in US–Japan relations. In the case of sugar, Japan's continued importing Cuban sugar after the 1959 Cuban Revolution, causing diplomatic friction because Washington sought to isolate the Revolutionary Government. Tokyo resisted US pressure to sever ties with Havana and maintained sugar imports throughout the Cold War. The dispute over whale meat, by contrast, stemmed from international regulatory conflicts rather than a geopolitical issue. While the US initially mediated whaling debates, it adopted a more critical stance in the 1960s due to the rise of domestic environmental movements, making whaling a persistent source of friction.

*Associate Professor, Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine

1. Introduction

After Japan's defeat in the Pacific War (1941–1945), the country experienced a severe food crisis. The devastation caused by the war significantly reduced Japan's food production capacity. In response, the administration of US President Harry S. Truman (1945–1953), in conjunction with the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), implemented a plan to facilitate Japan's recovery. These measures included authorizing food imports from the United States and permitting the entry of products from other countries, such as sugar from Cuba. Additionally, SCAP gave the go-ahead for the resumption of Japanese coastal whaling and later approved the revival of pelagic whaling in the Southern Ocean, despite opposition from other Allied Powers.

The combination of these food aid policies not only helped Japan overcome the immediate threat of famine, but also laid the foundation for a sustainable food import system in the long term. Moreover, this strategy was a part of Washington's effort to fortify Japan's economic recovery and strengthen the national economy to confront the threat of the Soviet Union (USSR). The American food assistance provided during the occupation period, however, resulted in Japan's substantial dependence on the United States for food commodities. For that reason, after Japan's return to the international community in 1952, the Japanese government sought to address this dependency. Tokyo did not need to negotiate directly with Washington regarding sugar because the Americans lacked complete control over global sugar markets. A similar situation applied to whale meat. Norway and Great Britain were the principal whaling nations at the time, while the volume of whales hunted by the United States remained modest.

Nevertheless, after 1950s, both sugar and whale meat caused friction between Japan and the United States, albeit for different reasons. In the case of sugar, the so-called "Cuban problem" played a central role in the dispute. While the US initially did not oppose Japan's importing sugar from Cuba, the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 caused relations between Washington and Havana to deteriorate significantly. On January 3, 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953–1961) severed diplomatic relations with Cuba. This episode marked the beginning of a policy of containment against the Revolutionary Government, a strategy that continued even after the normalization of diplomatic relations in December 2014. The US also demanded that Japan sever diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba in 1961, but the Japanese government of Prime Minister Hayato

Ikeda (1960–1964) refused to do so and continued to import Cuban sugar, ignoring the American efforts to isolate the Revolutionary Government.[1] Japan maintained this stance throughout the Cold War (1947–1991), and it has remained integral to Japan's current foreign policy toward Cuba.

In contrast, with respect to whale meat, US hostility toward another country did not impact US–Japan relations, as was the case with sugar. Instead, the conflict took a different form. Beginning in the 1950s, Japan engaged in contentious debates with Norway, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and the USSR over the management of whaling resources. The United States tried to play a mediating role in the International Whaling Commission (IWC), avoiding direct confrontation with Tokyo. However, with the rise of domestic environmental movements in the 1960s, Washington changed its stance and became increasingly critical of Japanese whaling practices.[2] This situation persisted even when Japan withdrew from the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) and resumed commercial whaling in July 2019. Whaling remains one of the most contentious issues in US–Japan relations.

While there are obvious differences between sugar and whale meat as commercial products, it is noteworthy that both commodities, initially endorsed by the United States as a way to overcome the famine of the occupation period, later became points of contention between the two nations. A substantial body of research has analyzed the relationship between US food aid policies and postwar Japan's dependence on overseas markets for its food supply. However, no study has yet examined the relationship between Japanese food diplomacy and the United States in contexts where America is less dominant, such as in the sugar and whale meat markets. Furthermore, existing literature often lacks detailed analysis based on primary diplomatic sources.

This article aims to begin to fill this research gap by providing a general overview of the cases of sugar and whale meat. Although each issue is distinct, examining them together is useful, particularly in terms of their implications for the US–Japan relations because the US has less influence in both cases. The first section explains the relationship between Japanese food diplomacy and United States overall during the first half of the Cold War. The second and third sections provide a chronological analysis of how sugar and whaling respectively affected US–Japan relations during the same period.

2. Japan's Food Diplomacy And Us–Japan Relations

The concept of food diplomacy occupies a unique place in International Relations Theory. While many scholars associate this term with foreign policy aimed at reducing hunger in the world,[3] others link it with "soft power," a concept coined by Joseph S. Nye Jr.[4] Nye defines "soft power" as "the capacity to influence others countries to achieve desired outcomes without resorting to tangible threats or incentives but rather through the attraction and inducement of others."[5] In other words, compared to "hard power," the concept of "soft power" co-opts people rather than coerces them. An example of this strategy is Japan's global promotion of *washoku* (the traditional Japanese dietary culture).[6] Furthermore, some studies argue that food diplomacy uses food to achieve non-food goals,[7] such as the conditional aid that certain countries provide to those nations that are hostile to them.

This article acknowledges the "soft power" approaches commonly explored in the study of food diplomacy. However, in the analysis of sugar and whale meat, food diplomacy is defined from a different perspective. Here, food diplomacy refers specifically to those foreign policies aimed at securing a particular food that is essential to the country conducting the diplomacy, though not necessarily to others. An example is Mexico's food diplomacy over white corn. This grain constitutes an indispensable component of the daily diet of millions of Mexicans, especially in the production of *tortillas*. As a result, any external change to this crop is perceived as a threat by the Mexican government. The recent criticism by Mexican authorities of the US export of transgenic white corn to Mexico exemplifies this situation.[8]

In Japan's case, the reluctance of the Japanese authorities to accept a potential prohibition on eel fishing and the tuna regulations falls into this category. However, the critical issue for Japan's postwar food diplomacy has undoubtedly been the problem of food self-sufficiency. Some analysts argue that promoting free trade is the best way to ensure a stable food supply, suggesting that there is no need for the government to pursue food self-sufficiency or overprotect domestic producers.[9] Nevertheless, the debate over food diplomacy, especially in the context of Japan, remains unsolved and continues to be a concern.

How problematic has Japan's food self-sufficiency rate been? According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Japan's food self-sufficiency rate has declined significantly in the postwar era. Calculated

on the basis of caloric supply, Japan's food self-sufficiency rate was approximately 80% in the 1950s. By 1965, the rate had fallen to 73% and continued to decline in subsequent years. As a result, the self-sufficiency rate has remained at around 40% since the 2000s.[10] This percentage is significantly lower than that of other G7 countries. Another way to measure food self-sufficiency is in terms of domestic production. In this context, Japan's rate is about 60%, and while surpassing Germany's percentage, is still low compared to countries like Canada or the United States.[11]

Several factors have contributed to the Japan's low level of food self-sufficiency. For instance, rapid industrialization and urbanization during the postwar period led to a significant reduction in farmland. Moreover, Japan's trade policies, which often favor cheap agricultural imports, have exacerbated the decline in domestic food production.

A complete analysis of all the causes is beyond the scope of this article; however, it is important to recognize that this phenomenon reflects a profound transformation in the dietary habits of the Japanese people.[12] Before the Pacific War, rice and vegetables cultivated in Japan (and its former colonies in the Asia-Pacific region) formed the basis of the Japanese diet. Over time, however, the food habits have gradually changed, reflecting a shift toward a more Western lifestyle. While the basics of traditional food culture have maintained, rice consumption has declined, and imports of wheat and meat, primarily from the United States, have increased. This shift has significantly affected Japan's food self-sufficiency and poses a serious challenge to its food security.

However, the changing dietary habits of the Japanese cannot be attributed solely to urbanization or economic growth. The implementation of food aid policies by the United States during the postwar occupation period also played a significant role. As noted in the introduction to this article, American food aid was initially crucial in addressing Japan's immediate postwar needs, but this assistance eventually led to a dependence on food imports from the United States.

This dependency was partly due to Japan's limited capacity to produce wheat and meat in those years, but it was also influenced by American needs at the time. In the late 1940s, European countries began to recover their agricultural production, which had been disrupted during World War II (1939–1945). As a result, international demand for agricultural products declined, creating a surplus for the United States. Washington needed to address this surplus, and the Truman administration seized the opportunity through the Mutual Security Act (MSA) of 1951, which provided military,

economic, and technical assistance to friendly nations, including Japan.[13]

At the time, Japan was experiencing an acute food shortage, primarily because of poor performance of Japanese harvests during the period, making the import of basic foodstuffs unavoidable. Accordingly, the Japanese government of Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida (1948–1954) sought food assistance under the MSA. On March 8, 1954, the Yoshida government and the Eisenhower administration signed the Agreement between Japan and the United States Regarding the Purchase of Agricultural Commodities based on the provisions of Section 550 of the MSA. This agreement allowed the United States to export agricultural surpluses to Japan, but only for military purposes as required by the MSA, thus not fully addressing Japan's domestic food shortage. To remedy the problem, President Eisenhower signed the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act, or Public Law 480, on July 10, 1954. This law legitimized the sale of US agricultural surpluses for Japanese domestic consumption by stipulating that the US would use the accumulated funds to develop overseas commodity markets and other initiatives that would benefit the American interests during the Cold War.[14]

As a result, Japan's food supply became increasingly dependent on imports from the United States, especially wheat and meat. This significant shift marked a critical juncture in Japan's postwar recovery and contributed to a decline in food self-sufficiency in the following years, eventually causing friction in US–Japan relations. Furthermore, other food products the US promoted during the occupation also came to strain bilateral relations, even though those products were not vital to American interests. Two of those products—sugar and whale meat—will be discussed in the next two sections.

3. Sugar

According to the Japan Sugar Refiners' Association, Japan's per capita sugar consumption was 15.3 kg in 2022. This figure is below the global average (22.1 kg) and significantly lower than the sugar consumed in the United States (30.8 kg), South Korea (31 kg), Thailand (37.4 kg), Australia (42.8 kg), Cuba (42.8 kg), Brazil (45.5 kg), or Malaysia (56 kg).[15] Despite its relatively low consumption in Japan, sugar holds an important place in contemporary Japanese cuisine, often used as a secret ingredient in various many dishes, including *sushi*. Moreover, many food-type souvenirs (*omiyage*) available at airports and train stations in all regions of Japan

incorporate sugar.

Where does Japan's sugar come from? Like the United States, Japan is a net importer of sugar and has never been self-sufficient in terms of production. Currently, 60% of the sugar consumed by the Japanese people is imported, primarily from Australia, Thailand, and Guatemala. The remaining portion is produced domestically, primarily from beet sugar in Hokkaido and cane sugar in Okinawa and Amami Islands. In light of this, the following section explores the historical relationship between Japan and sugar, focusing on its interaction with the United States.

In the seventh century, the Japanese diplomatic missions to the Tang Empire (610–907) introduced sugar to Japan.[16] Initially, the Japanese regarded sugar as a medicinal substance, making domestic production impossible. Later, during the Muromachi period (1335–1573), as a result of trade relations between Japan and the Ryukyu Kingdom (1429–1879), which was then a tributary state of Ming China (1368–1644), sugar ceased to be regarded as a medicinal substance and began to be used as a sweetener. However, its consumption remained relatively low, maintaining a position as a luxury item. By the late sixteenth century, after the establishment of the Nanban trade (1543–1614), the supply of Chinese sugar decreased, and Javanese sugar exported by Dutch traders became more widespread in Japan. Finally, in the middle of the Edo period (1700–1750), sugar became an essential condiment in Japanese cuisine, though still considered a luxury item.

The situation changed dramatically during the Meiji Era (1868–1912). After Japan's triumph in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), the island of Formosa (Taiwan) became a Japanese colony. Taiwan's favorable geography and weather conditions enabled large-scale sugar production, with several Japanese companies taking part. This led to a significant reduction in sugar price, making the sweetener an integral part of the Japanese household kitchen.[17] Despite this development, Japan continued to import sugar from overseas, with main sources being Manchuria, China, the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), and, to a lesser extent, the Philippines and Cuba. By the 1930s, through mass production in it is colonies across the Asia-Pacific region, Japan became "self-sufficient" in sugar for the first time, but only by virtue of colonization.

However, the aftermath of the Pacific War left Japan's sugar industry in crisis. Japan lost Taiwan, its principal source of sugar before the war. Moreover, the American army controlled Okinawa Prefecture, the Amami Islands, and the Ogasawara Islands, which had previously produced cane

sugar. War also significantly reduced beet sugar production in Hokkaido, Japan's only beet-growing region. As a result, Japan once again had to rely on sugar imports, as it had during the Edo period (1604–1868).[18]

Under these conditions, famine in postwar Japan reached alarming levels by early 1946. The occupying authorities under SCAP decided to import sugar but faced challenges in selecting supplier countries. The International Sugar Agreement of 1937 had divided the world sugar market into two trading systems. The first was a quota system controlled by the Allies, with countries like Great Britain and France having direct access to their colonies in Africa and Asia. The second was a free market, where sugar-importing countries traded without preferential arrangements. Japan, Spain, and Canada were part of this category.

SCAP initially attempted to purchase sugar on the free market but faced resistance from the Truman administration, which believed that US wartime sugar stocks were sufficient for Japan's needs. However, as a domestic demand in the United States increased, American reserves were rapidly consumed. SCAP requested additional sugar imports, but Washington continued to show little interest in addressing the issue. The situation changed significantly after former President Herbert C. Hoover visited Japan in May 1946. Hoover, who was part of a special mission to assess the food situation in Asia, observed the acute scarcity in Japan and advocated for immediate action, including the importation of wheat and rice as well as the establishment of a school lunch program.[19]

Washington responded to these recommendations, but President Truman's position on sugar remained unchanged. Eventually, however, because of the severe food shortages in Japan and the need to rebuild the Japanese economy to counter the communism in Asia, Truman authorized the importation of sugar. SCAP then initiated sugar purchases on the free market. At the time, sugar from China appeared to be the optimal choice due to its proximity, but the political instability during China's 1945–1949 civil war and the eventual Communist victory made this option untenable. Ultimately, the occupying authorities turned to Cuba, which they considered the most suitable supplier.[20]

Despite the great distance from Japan, Cuban sugar was the most competitive in terms of price on the free market. Moreover, the United States had dominated Cuba since 1898, making it a "semi-protectorate."[21] In other words, Cuba was less problematic politically than Taiwan. However, at that time, occupied Japan lacked sufficient foreign currency to import significant quantities of sugar. To resolve this problem, the

Truman administration employed the Government Appropriation for Relief in Occupied Area Fund to provide Japan with foreign currency for sugar purchase.[22] Cuban sugar became a dominant product in the Japanese domestic market. Even when Japan began importing sugar from Taiwan and Australia, Cuban sugar remained significant, and Japan continued to rely on it after it rejoined the international community in 1952.[23]

In short, the United States played a crucial role in promoting Japan's dependence on Cuban sugar. This dependence led to a Japanese trade deficit with Cuba, exacerbated by Havana's protectionist measures against Japanese exports, especially textiles, since 1935. Therefore, after normalizing diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1952, Tokyo sought to negotiate a trade agreement that would grant Most Favored Nation (MFN) status to Japanese textile products. Significantly, despite its role in forcing Japan to import Cuban sugar, the United States did not intervene in resolving the larger trade conflict between Japan and Cuba. As a result, Japan proceeded independently.

In 1954, the Yoshida government entered into negotiations with the dictatorial Cuban regime of Fulgencio Batista (1952–1959) to establish a trade agreement. However, General Batista, who had close ties to the domestic textile industry, refused to eliminate Cuba's protectionist policies toward Japanese textiles. Instead, he demanded that Tokyo agree to import a large quantity of Cuban sugar annually as part of the trade agreement. In response, the Japanese authorities eventually decided to break off the negotiations with Cuba.[24]

In the following years, Batista attempted to pressure Japan to resume formal negotiations, but he continued to show no willingness to eliminate the protectionist practices against Japanese textiles. Moreover, when Japan joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in September 1955, Cuba invoked Article 35 to maintain its protectionist treatment of Japanese products under the trade regime.[25] For that reason, the Japanese authorities decided not to resume trade negotiations until Cuba eliminated the discriminatory practice.

In retaliation, Batista unilaterally imposed new trade conditions on Japan. Cuban Law No. 14 had previously established "minimum tariffs" on all products from countries that had a trade deficit with Cuba, including Japan. In September 1957, Batista amended that law to reverse this policy and imposed "maximum tariffs" on all products from GATT signatory countries, such as Japan, that did not have a bilateral trade agreement with Cuba. The Japanese government demanded the removal of that measure, but Batista

refused. Instead, the Cuban authorities proposed an interim agreement that would, in principle, grant MFN status to Japanese exports, except for textiles. With few alternatives, the Japanese government of Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi (1957–1960) signed the interim agreement, known as the "Modus Vivendi," on February 20, 1958.[26] But this agreement did not address Batista's desire that Japan commit to importing large quantities of Cuban sugar, which had been a primary concern of his government. Consequently, the Modus Vivendi was also disadvantageous to Cuba.

In the following months, Prime Minister Kishi attempted to engage in negotiations to revoke the "Modus Vivendi" and pursue a revised trade agreement, but Batista refused to participate. The situation changed, however, after the Cuban Revolution's victory on January 1, 1959, when Batista was overthrown by Fidel Castro. The nascent Revolutionary Government offered a counterproposal to Japan, offering to end protectionist measures against Japanese exports. At the time, Japan was the second largest importer of Cuban sugar after the United States and possessed the necessary technology and foreign currency that Castro's government needed. Thus, in July 1959, Castro sent Ernesto "Che" Guevara to Japan to convey the pro-Japanese position of the Revolutionary Government to the Japanese authorities. Finally, the Kishi government and the Cuban Revolutionary Government signed the Agreement of Commerce between Japan and the Republic of Cuba on April 22, 1960.[27] This agreement included a "secret sugar pact" in which Japan promised to import 450,000 tons of sugar annually under special conditions.[28]

The agreement marked a significant shift, ending decades of protectionist Cuban trade policies against Japan and ensuring a steady supply of sugar to the nation. Ironically, a food product that the United States had facilitated being imported from Cuba during the occupation now became the cornerstone of Japan's dependence on the United States' new enemy Cuba. As a result, when the United States demanded in January 1961 that Japan sever diplomatic and trade relations with its principal foe in the Western Hemisphere, Japanese authorities refused. For Japan, Castro was not an enemy, and its dependence on Cuban sugar was difficult to avoid. More importantly, Tokyo could not ignore all the effort involved in securing the trade agreement. Therefore, despite American pressure, Japan chose to honor the trade agreements in the following years, reflecting its commitment to its economic interest and the importance of maintaining commercial relations with Cuba.

4. Whaling

During the first half of the Cold War, whale meat consumption was a significant part of the Japanese diet. According to the Japan's Fisheries Agency, whale meat consumption increased during the occupation and peaked at 230,000 tons in 1962. By comparison, in the same year, Japanese consumption of pork, chicken, and beef was 220,000 tons, 120,000 tons, and 110,000 tons respectively. After 1962, however, the whale meat consumption began to decline sharply. Following the 1988 moratorium on commercial whaling, consumption dropped to about 3,000 tons, and it is estimated that by 2021, the Japanese consumed approximately 1,000 tons.[29]

Nowadays, Japan's whaling faces international condemnation, especially after it withdrew from the ICRW in 2019 and resumed commercial whaling.[30] And Japan's controversial whaling policy has long been a source of diplomatic tension between Tokyo and Washington. Japan has defended its right to hunt whales as a matter of sovereignty and cultural tradition.

Academic research into Japanese whaling diplomacy, particularly during the first half of the Cold War, has so far been insufficient. Fumitaka Cho notes that while numerous studies have analyzed Japan's whaling policy, most have focused on the specific aspects of the whaling industry itself or its impact on Japanese coastal communities that depend on whaling for their livelihoods.[31] Furthermore, much of the existing literature on these topics often lacks a detailed analysis based on primary sources. A notable exception to this research gap is Harry N. Scheiber's multi-archival historical analysis, which in fact highlights the need for further research on Japan's whaling diplomacy.[32] In light of this dearth of research, this section examines the historical relationship between Japan and whale meat, with a particular focus on Japan's interaction with the United States.

The massive Japanese consumption of whale meat began in the late 1940s. Because of this, some scholars, such as Jakobina Arch argue that the consumption of whale meat in Japan is merely an "invented tradition."[33] In other words, whale meat consumption is a relatively new element of Japanese food culture, and it has since become a distinctive symbol of postwar Japanese identity.[34]

However, the Japanese in fact have used whales as a maritime resource for thousands of years. Archaeological evidence suggests that primitive whaling activity dates back at least 6,000 years.[35] The introduction of Buddhism in the seventh century, which prohibited the consumption of livestock animals, led to an increase in the consumption of whale meat.

At the time, the Japanese government's view that whales were fish and not mammals, exempted them from the Buddhist prohibition. Eventually, whale meat, along with fish, became one of the sources of animal protein in Japan. Despite its nutritional value, whale meat consumption during this period was sporadic, except in a few maritime locations.

During the Edo period, whaling became a pre-industrial activity in Japan, although the technology of the time made pelagic whaling impossible. The Japanese people obtained whale meat from whales that passed by the Japanese coast.[36] The Meiji era marked a significant change. After identifying areas for whaling stations, Japan adopted the technologies of their foreign counterparts, leading to the introduction of Norwegian-style whaling (catcher whaling), which used motorized boats and powerful harpoons.[37] Whale meat began to be consumed for the first time on a large scale in Japan in the 1910s. By the late 1920s, Japan had the third-largest whaling fleet in the world, surpassed only by Norway and Great Britain. Japan's whaling industry not only contributed to domestic consumption but also exported its products, especially oil, to the United States and Europe.[38]

Unlike the prewar sugar trade, which did not cause significant friction with other nations, Japanese whaling was a source of considerable international conflict. The primary reason for this conflict was the Japanese whaling methods, which often violated existing regulations governing the hunting of cetaceans. The League of Nations was sufficiently concerned with the problem of over-hunting that it convened an international conference on whaling in Berlin in April 1930, where Japan argued against a ban on hunting the North Pacific right whale (*Eubalaena japonica*). Ultimately, the participants failed to reach agreement on this issue.[39]

Nevertheless, the Berlin Conference laid the groundwork for an agreement to regulate whaling, and in September 1931, the whaling nations met in Geneva under the auspices of the League of Nations to conclude an agreement to regulate whaling. Japan maintained its position from the Berlin Conference, refusing to ban the hunting of the North Pacific right whale, but the United States and Canada opposed this stance. Japan responded that it would reluctantly sign on to an agreement, but only if it could preserve its ability to hunt the North Pacific right whale. Great Britain and Norway accepted the Japanese proposal because their priority was to force Japan to join the agreement and they could tolerate sacrificing the North Pacific right whale hunt issue. However, Canada and the United States maintained their opposition. This species of whale was available off their coasts, so allowing Japanese whalers to hunt these cetaceans posed a

threat not only to their domestic fishing industries, but also to their national security. The conference organizing committee also opposed the proposal, fearing that it would set a harmful precedent.[40]

In September 1931, 19 nations signed and later ratified the Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, the first international treaty to regulate whaling (which went into effect in January 1935), but Japan abstained from signing the agreement.[41] The Japanese refusal to join the Geneva Convention became the main point of friction in the following years. However, another issue arose between the whaling nations and Japan. It was the tension over the Japan's whaling in the Antarctic Ocean. To understand this, it is necessary to go back in history.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the North Atlantic whale population had dwindled due to excessive hunting by European countries, resulting in significant population declines for many of species. As a result, Great Britain and Norway began to expand their whaling operations into other seas. In 1904, Norway established a whaling shore station on South George Island, followed by Great Britain doing the same. By the mid-1920s, the advent of factory ships—vessels capable of processing whales offshore without the support of land-based facilities—enabled the expansion of pelagic whaling. Later, countries such as New Zealand, South Africa, Argentina, and the United States became involved in pelagic whaling in the Antarctic Ocean. By the mid-1930s, Japan, Germany, and the Soviet Union began their pelagic whaling operations in the South Pole.[42]

Japan pursued an aggressive style of whaling with its modern whaler, which posed a threat to the interest of traditional whaling nations. For that reason, Norway and Great Britain express concern over Japanese pelagic whaling and disapproved the Japan's presence in the Southern Ocean. Meanwhile, Australia, New Zealand, and Argentina viewed the whaling resources of the South Pole as part of their exclusive territory and similarly expressed concern about the Japan's activity.[43]

What motivated Japan's decision to fully enter the Antarctic Ocean? Roger D. Smith notes that one of the reasons for Japan's expansion at the South Pole was what is known as the *Mare Liberum* regime.[44] This concept of international law, proposed by Hugo Grotius in his 1609 book *Mare Liberum*, asserts that the sea is an international territory open to all nations for commerce. This principle prevailed for nearly 350 years and explains why the seas were minimally regulated in the 1930s. At that time, territorial waters extended state jurisdiction only three miles from shore.

Thus, no legal restriction prevented Japan from hunting in the Antarctic

Ocean. However, additional factors contributed to the emergence of Japanese pelagic whaling at the other end of the globe. After the Manchurian Incident in 1931, the United States imposed economic sanctions on Japan. As a result, the Japanese needed foreign currency to purchase essential commodities such as oil, steel, and rubber, and one way to obtain currency was to export whale oil.[45]

In addition, American economic sanctions resulted in Japan needing more alternative food sources, thereby increasing demand for whale meat in the Japanese domestic market. Although whale meat had been a component of the overall Japanese diet since the 1910s, it was not a staple before the mid-1930s. However, with the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941, Japan ceased pelagic whaling, and the consumption of whale meat virtually disappeared.

After the Pacific War, Japan's whaling industry was in ruins. In contrast, the traditional whaling nations such as Norway and Great Britain began to resume whaling, despite their economies also being in crisis. In this context, the United States emerged as the only actor capable of establishing new whaling regulations. For a long time, however, the US avoided addressing the issue of whaling. Eventually, Remington Kellogg, a prominent cetacean researcher who had been part of the US delegation to the League of Nations whaling conferences, persuaded the Truman administration to take lead in creating a new regulatory regime.[46]

Kellogg argued that the inadequacies of the prewar regulations were due to Great Britain and Norway's insufficient power to lead whale conservation efforts. However, Kellogg believed that postwar the United States, with its enhanced global influence, had sufficient power to create a new regulatory body based on scientific principles to ensure effective management and conservation of whale populations.[47] Finally, on December 2, 1946, the major whaling nations signed the ICRW, establishing the IWC. The new international regimen came into force on November 10, 1948. The Allies excluded Japan from joining the ICRW at that time. In this sense, Japan was not in a position to reactivate its whaling industry. However, the United States and SCAP ignored this situation and permitted Japan to resume whaling in order to help address the postwar food shortages.[48]

Importantly, the revival of Japan's whaling industry was not only aimed at solving famine; it also had a political dimension. As Roger D. Smith notes, with the advent of the Cold War, the United States sought to strengthen Japan as a strategic ally against communism. For this reason,

Washington and SCAP were not to interfere with Japan's pursuit of its maritime policy as it saw best.[49]

The resumption of whaling led to a significant increase in whale meat consumption, a phenomenon Japan had not previously experienced on such a large scale.[50] Nevertheless, the revival of the Japanese whaling industry caused tensions within the Allies. Great Britain, in particular, viewed Japan's renewed whaling with concern and sought to limit it, fearing that Japan could become a threat to the security of the Asia-Pacific region.[51] Norway, for its part, was displeased with the American decision to permit Japan to whale in the Southern Ocean, especially since Japan had refused to sign the relevant prewar agreements regulating whaling. Japan had a reputation for disregarding regulations and engaging in excessive whaling. Australia and New Zealand perceived Japan as a potential threat to their whaling industries, which they hoped to develop further in the future. Furthermore, they did not consider Japan to have fully atoned for its wartime actions, and many Australians and New Zealanders still saw it as a hostile nation.[52]

Despite these critical voices, SCAP ultimately rejected other Allied powers' objections, and Japanese whalers hunted in the Antarctic Ocean after 1946.[53] Moreover, some SCAP officials began advocating for the establishment of conservative, science-based restrictions on Japanese whaling.[54] The rationale was that Japan would eventually have to join to the ICRW and accept the postwar multilateral regulations. Thus, if Japan adopted a credible conservation policy during the occupation, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand would eventually accept the presence of Japanese whalers in the Antarctic Ocean.[55] Finally, persuaded by SCAP, the Japanese accepted the new IWC rules.

By early 1951, the United States had concluded that Japanese membership in the IWC was a viable option even before the signing of the peace treaty formally ending the Pacific War and the Allied occupation of Japan later that year. Washington wanted to strengthen the Japan's fishing and whaling industries and create better conditions for its future autonomy, while bringing Japan under IWC regulation.[56] Therefore, at the third session of the IWC in April 1951, the United States proposed that Japan be granted full membership in the ICRW. Although Norway, Great Britain, and Australia initially objected, Washington exerted pressure on the Allied Powers. Eventually, they agreed, but the Soviets continued to object, citing the absence of a peace treaty with Japan.[57]

The Soviet representative also argued that the Far East Commission

(FEC) had not approved Japan's membership in the IWC. In response, the U.S representative noted that the proposal had been circulated to all FEC members, and none had objected, including the USSR. Furthermore, he pointed that Article 10, paragraph 2, of the ICRW allowed any non-signatory country to accede upon request to the depositary nation, which in this case was the United States. The American representative also emphasized that, given Japan's whaling potential, its membership would be beneficial to the entire whaling community. After this discussion, the Soviet representative accepted the American proposal, and Japan became a full member of the IWC.[58]

In the following years, Japan and the USSR cooperated and established specific policies within the whaling regime. However, after the second half of the 1950s, the IWC became a battleground, with Japan, Great Britain, Norway, and the USSR frequently clashing. The United States tried to mediate, but despite these efforts, the confrontational situation in the IWC persisted. By the late 1950s, Great Britain and the Netherlands ceased whaling, and Norway withdrew from the Antarctic waters, leaving Japan and the USSR—referred to as the "two problematic countries"—as the primary whaling nations in the Southern Ocean.[59]

In summation, the evolution of Japan's whaling practices, from the prewar period through the postwar occupation, reflected ongoing tensions between Japan and other nations. In this context, the United States played a pivotal role reactivating Japan's whaling industry and facilitating its return to the waters of the Antarctic Ocean after the end of the war. Thus, consumption of whale meat became integral to Japan's overcoming its postwar food crisis, with whale meat becoming a new symbol of postwar food culture. This resurgence of Japanese whaling with its new cultural significance also led to conflicts with other whaling nations and the United States which continue to today.

5. Conclusion

This article has examined the complex relationship between Japanese food diplomacy and US–Japan relations through the case studies of sugar and whale meat—two foods products used to address Japan's postwar food crisis. The analysis shows how these seemingly ordinary commodities played a significant role in shaping US–Japan relations during the first half of the Cold War, while also highlighting the conflicts they generated. This new perspective on Japanese food diplomacy presented in this article falls

within the framework of New Approaches in American Studies to which this edition of the JJAS is devoted. By emphasizing the dynamic interaction between economic policy and international relations, this approach is crucial for understanding how food, initially supported by the United States to facilitate Japan's recovery, eventually became a contentious issue in the US–Japan relations.

It is important to reiterate that the existing literature on these topics often lacks detailed analysis based on primary diplomatic sources. To fully understand the policymaking process, future research should make greater use of these sources. Such studies will provide a deeper understanding of the factors that shaped the US–Japan relations and contribute to an understanding of the role of food diplomacy in international relations.

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Notes

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[2] For details about the Japanese whaling see, Harry N. Scheiber, *The Inter-Allied Conflicts and Ocean Law 1945–54* (Taipei: Institute of European and American Studies, 2001); Kurkpatrick Dorsey, *Whales & Nations. Environmental Diplomacy on the High Seas.* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013); Jakobina K. Arch, *Bringing Whales Ashore: Oceans and the Environment of Early Modern Japan* (Seattle: University of Washington State Press, 2018); Fumitaka Cho, "Shogyo Hogei Moratoriamu (1982) wo Meguru Nihon Gaiko" [Japanese Diplomacy over the 1982 Moratorium on Commercial Whaling], *Kokusai Seiji* 212 (2024): 97–112; Shin'ichi Tsuji, *Hogeishi* [History of Whaling] (Tokyo: Shinzansha, 2024).

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[10] "Japan's Food Self Sufficiency Rate," Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, accessed August 29, 2024, https://www.maff.go.jp/j/zyukyu/zikyu_ritu/012.html.

[11] "World Food Self Sufficiency Rate," Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, accessed August 29, 2024, https://www.maff.go.jp/j/zyukyu/zikyu_ritu/013.html.

[12] For details about the change of Japanese consumption, see Midori Hiraga, *Tabemono kara Manabu Sekaishi* [Learn World History toward Food] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2021), 97–136.

[13] See Shigeki Shibata, "Nihon no enjo ukeire seisaku to sono jidai haikei: senryoki kara 1950nendai niokeru nichibeikan enjo wo chushintoshite" [Japan's aid acceptance policy and the historical background: Focusing on Japan–US aid from the occupation period to the 1950s], *Shakai Kagaku*, no. 61 (1999) 77–109.

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[21] For details of US–Cuba relation, see Leslie Berhell, ed., *Cuba: A Short History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Louis Pérez Jr., *Cuba in the American Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Lars Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

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[25] Isami Romero, "Nihon to Kyuba Kakumei: 1959 nen no Gebara Shisetsudan" [Japan and Cuban Revolution: Guevara Mission of 1959], *Kokusai Seiji* 207 (2022): 100.
[26] Ibid., 102–103.
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[28] Ibid., 103–108.
[29] The Situation Surrounding Whaling, [Hogei wo Meguru Josei] Fisheries Agency, accessed August 29, 2024 https://www.jfa.maff.go.jp/j/whale/.
[30] Nobuhiro Kishigami, ed., *Hogei to Hanhogei no aidani* [Between Whaling and Antiwhaling] (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 2020).
[31] Cho, "Shogyo Hogei Moratoriamu," 99.
[32] Scheiber, *Inter-Allied Conflicts and Ocean Law*.
[33] Jakobina Arch, "Whale Meat in Early Postwar Japan: Natural Resources and Food Culture," *Environmental History* 21 (2016): 468; The "invented tradition" is a concept coined by Eric Hobsbawm. According to Hobsbawm, invented traditions are cultural practices that are presented or perceived as traditions from a remote past, but in reality, are relatively recent practices and in some cases deliberately created. This use of invented traditions is part of nationalism and the creation of a national identity that promotes national unity or seeks to legitimize cultural practices. For detailed information see Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invented Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
[34] Arch, "Whale Meat in Early Postwar Japan," 471.
[35] Seiji Osumi, *Kujira to Nihonjin* [Whales and Japanese] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003), 45.
[36] See, Arch, *Bringing Whales Ashore.*
[37] Jakobina K. Arch, "Birth of a Pelagic Empire: Japanese Whaling and Early Territorial Expansions in the Pacific," in *Across Species and Cultures: Whales, Humans, and Pacific Worlds*, ed., Ryan Tucker Jones, and Angela Wanhalla (Honolulu; University of Hawai'i Press, 2022), 101.
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[39] Yasuhiro Sanada, "Kokusai Hogei Rejimu no Tanjo to Nihon no Sanka Mondai; Juneebu Hogei Kyotei to Kokusai Hogei Kyotei no Jirei toshite" [The Birth of the International Whaling Regime and the Problem of Japan's Participation: The Case of the Geneva Whaling Convention and the International Whaling Agreement], *Keizai Kenkyu*, no. 37 (2006): 87.
[40] Ibid., 88.
[41] The countries that signed and ratified the convention were Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, Great Britain, Italy, Mexico, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, the United States and Yugoslavia. However, there were other nations that only signed the treaty. For details, see International Convention for Regulation of Whaling 1931, accessed October 25, 2024, https://api.parliament.uk/uk-treaties/treaties/6411.
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Occupation," in *The Economic and Business History of Occupied Japan. New Perspective*, ed. Thomas French (New York: Routledge, 2017), 77.

[46] Dorsey, *Whales &Nations*, 92.

[47] Ibid., 92.

[48] Scheiber, *Inter-Allied Conflicts and Ocean Law*, 108.

[49] Smith, *Japan's International Fisheries Policy*, 33.

[50] Arch, "Whale Meat in Early Postwar Japan," 468.

[51] Smith, *Japan's International Fisheries Policy*, 32.

[52] Christopher Aldous, "The Anatomy of Allied Occupation: Contesting the Resumption of Japanese Antarctic Whaling," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 26 (2019), 343.

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[55] Ibid., 56.

[56] Tsuji, *Hogeishi*, 419.

[57] Ibid., 418–419.

[58] Ibid., 419.

[59] For details about Soviet whaling see, Yulia V. Ivashchenko and Philip J. Clapham, "Too Much is Never Enough: The Cautionary Tale of Soviet Illegal Whaling," *Marine Fisheries Review* 76, no. 1–2 (2014): 1–21; Ryan Tucker Jones, *Red Leviathan. The Secret History of Soviet Whaling* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).