

A Japanese Joint Venture in the Pacific

Foreign bodies in tinned tuna

Kate Barclay

Routledge Contemporary Japan Series

A Japanese Joint Venture in the Pacific

The Japanese, and other Asians, are increasingly taking over some of the roles previously played by Europeans in the Pacific islands, which is giving rise to interesting new economic relationships, and interesting new interactions between nationalities. This book considers the role of the Japanese in the Solomon Islands, focusing in particular on Solomon Taiyo Ltd, a joint venture between the Japanese multinational Maruha Corporation and the Solomon Islands government, which managed a tuna-fishing and -processing enterprise which was a mainstay of the Solomon Islands economy from the 1970s to 2000. Solomon Taiyo was a prime example of late-twentieth-century Japanese international relations in the Pacific, being a blend of private-sector trading interests, government support for Japanese overseas fisheries, and aid diplomacy. The theoretical driver behind the book is to explore national identities in the context of capitalist economic development involving a large Japanese company and a small island developing country in the Pacific. It considers a range of important themes including the changing nature of colonialism, the degree to which people's ethnic sense of self, and therefore their relationship with others, is affected by how modern (or primitive) their nation is perceived to be, and how all this relates to the development of capitalism, nationalism, and modernity.

Kate Barclay is Senior Lecturer at the Institute for International Studies, University of Technology, Sydney. Her research focuses on the social, cultural and political aspects of economic activity, especially tuna fishing in the Pacific. She co-edited *Globalization, Regionalization and Social Change in the Pacific Rim*.

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First published 2008
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2008.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Barclay, Kate, 1969–

A Japanese joint venture in the Pacific: foreign bodies in tinned tuna/Kate Barclay. p. cm. – (Routledge contemporary Japan series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Japan–Commerce–Solomon Islands. 2. Solomon Islands–Commerce–Japan. 3. Joint ventures. I. Title.

HF3828.S57B37 2008

338.8’889593–dc22

2007034548

ISBN 0-203-93090-8 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN10: 0-415-43435-1 (hbk)

ISBN10: 0-203-93090-8 (ebk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-43435-5 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-203-93090-8 (ebk)

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Preface

The driver and I started back from Noro to Munda about 9pm. Usually I came along this potholed overgrown road sitting cross-legged on big scraps of brown paper in the tray of a truck with the workers and it took an hour or more. With the driver's expert maneuvering in the Solomon Taiyo managers' red Landcruiser with the grey lambskin seat covers it took about 35 minutes. We passed a small patch of bush where the trees were whipping around, leaves and dust flying. Within seconds we were through it and the bush was calm again. The driver said he often passed patches of bush like that on this stretch of road he knew so well. Also, sometimes he saw light-skinned men who weren't there. And voices that sounded like men when he knew there were no men around. 'Me no fraet of them. They do me no harm.' I thought of all the Japanese soldiers who lived here briefly in hellish conditions, without enough food or ammunition to survive. I looked at the round patch of biscuity road visible in the headlights. A road built long ago for the war that changed this place in bigger ways more suddenly than any other event people can remember. Now the main thoroughfare for another harbinger of change involving Japanese people, Solomon Taiyo Ltd.¹

Another night I found myself on a fishing boat illuminated green blue from below the water looking out over the inky waters of the Roviana lagoon, wavelets edged silver from a rising moon, while the anonymous shadows of crew worked around me as I listened to explanations from the Fishing Master. At times like these I wondered how I had ever come to be there at that time with those people. The most common response from people upon hearing of my research topic was to wonder how on earth it ever came about. I first heard of Solomon Taiyo when I visited Munda for a diving holiday in 1993. I was living in rural Japan at the time and had been interested in issues of development and international political economy for years, so was intrigued to find out what kinds of influences a joint venture between the Solomon Islands government and a Japanese multinational might have in a largely non-capitalist economy. And Solomon Islands is intoxicatingly beautiful. I remained curious over two successive visits to Munda and a masters degree in Canberra. When preparing for doctoral studies in 1997 Solomon Taiyo seemed a perfect case study given my Japanese-language ability, interest in processes of change due to capitalism, and love of the sea.

Of all the history that happens, people inevitably pick and choose certain capital-‘H’ Histories to remember and valorize, or demonize, while other parts of the past are ignored. As part of this process of capital-‘H’ History-making the salient identities are shaped and shifted. In the early 1980s debates raged about the ‘invention of tradition’ as academics uncovered factual and historical inconsistencies in various traditions (see for example, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Many people object to the taint of inauthenticity that comes from such deconstruction. Group identities and the rituals of tradition that engender a sense of identity may be sources of strength and pride, so people resent critical questioning of these identities and rituals. Academic challenges to traditions in the Pacific have been criticized on political grounds because they may undermine the group identities from which beleaguered peoples garner confidence and self-esteem (LiPuma 1997).

In the case of (non-beleaguered) Japanese national identity, however, the political implications of challenging conventional Histories are quite different. *Ruins of Identity* (Hudson 1999) and *Multicultural Japan* (Denoon *et al.* 1996) are two examples of academic work that problematize conventional understandings of the Japanese nation as a homogeneous and primordial identity group by presenting evidence that the people who have inhabited the Japanese archipelago had heterogeneous origins and have undergone historical change, rather than all sharing a primordial and unchanging uniquely Japanese essence.

Either way – choosing not to emphasize the recent origins of some Pacific Island traditions, or choosing to point out historical inconsistencies in Japanese national identities – both choices are decidedly political and both are based on the fact that academic representations of peoples can affect peoples’ identities. People themselves, of course, need not accept academic findings. Ghassan Hage has presented an illuminating quotation from Adolf Hitler to demonstrate this point: ‘I know perfectly well, just as well as all these tremendously clever intellectuals, that in the scientific sense there is no such thing as race’ (Hage 1995: 50). Nationalism does not cease to exist once it is pointed out that the categories are objectively unsustainable (Bourdieu 2000: 181). Academic representations of peoples are only one input among many in identity relations. Popular culture is arguably a more powerful input. Nevertheless, academics do have a role in identity formation, the knowledge about people they create carries the weight of scientific legitimacy, and through teaching and writing they inform many non-academic representations.

The history of complicity between social research in the Pacific and colonialism raises questions about the politics and ethics of yet another White researcher basing a career on a study of Solomon Islands.² Through this work I become a participant in processes by which Solomon Islanders, Japanese, and Okinawans are known, with all the power implications that entails. As an English-language background White Australian woman researcher do I have the right to represent these people? This research involves people of various ethnicities, both men and women, from social positions of advantage and disadvantage. In terms of the politics of representation it might be better if this research had been done by a

Solomon Islander woman. But no Solomon Islander women have come forward to do it, nor look likely to. Should it therefore remain undone? Judging from the numbers of Solomon Islanders encountered during research who said they wanted to know more about Solomon Taiyo, and the amount of help they gave towards the work, perhaps it is better done than not. We can only hope that some of the problems of White people dominating processes by which Pacific Islanders are known in the world might be mitigated by people from the groups studied being 'relentlessly radical and skeptical' about the knowledge produced (Keesing 1989: 24).

Notes on method and language

My empirical method was to gather a range of materials to treat as texts to examine for evidence of identity relations. These materials included conversations with around 100 people, from fishers to politicians to managers to residents of relevant communities to bureaucrats to factory workers. I noted most of these conversations in fieldwork diaries, which also included notes of my observations, but I taped and transcribed about 20 more in-depth interviews. As well as interview data I collected documentary sources from media reports, consultancy reports, court records, and the files of several Solomon Islands government offices. These data were treated as texts and analyzed for the discourses contained therein.

Document sources

Archival materials used were mostly stored in the offices that generated the files, with the exception of some older files that had been deposited with the Solomon Islands National Archives in Honiara. References to archive material are in endnotes, rather than in the Bibliography of the book. References to archive material contain the name of the office in which the file was viewed and then the file name and/or number. Some files were not numbered, and most were not clearly dated, so the date on the document is included in the reference. Likewise, company documents are referred to in endnotes rather than in the text and Bibliography. Company documents are listed under the name of the company that produced the documents (for example, Maruha, Solomon Taiyo). Copies of these documents are in possession of the author unless otherwise indicated.

Most newspaper articles were read in the microfilm collection of the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau (PaMBU), which is based at the Australian National University (ANU) and held by several libraries including the National Library in Canberra and the Mitchell Room of the State Library in Sydney. Some other newspaper articles were found in the National Archives in Honiara, or in collections of the Solomon Islands National Library and Solomon Islands College of Higher Education's Library. The *News Drum* and *Nius* newspapers were at various times in their publication prefixed by 'Solomons' and at other times not, in this book they are uniformly listed without the prefix.

Some Parliamentary papers and Hansard for Solomon Islands were viewed in the ANU Library, some in the Australian National Library, some in the Solomon Islands National Parliamentary Library. Some of the older papers from the British Solomon Islands Protectorate administration were found in the Solomon Islands National Archives.

Language

The main language of this research was English but there were other languages involved. Despite the impossibility of perfect translation, multi-lingual and multi-sited ethnography are important forms of social research (Marcus 1995). Much of my research was done in a language other than the first language of either the researcher or the participant or both. For example, interviews with Okinawan fishermen were conducted in standard Japanese, my second language, and the second language of the fishermen, whose first language was the language of their island Irabu. Some of the interviews with Solomon Islanders were conducted in Pijin. All translations into English are my own, with help from Japanese and Papua New Guinean graduate students at Kagoshima University.

The Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Technology, Sydney required that participants in this research remain anonymous. For that reason in this book interviewees are referred to, not by their real names, but by place names. Okinawan fishermen interviewees have been given names of places in the Miyako Islands, Japanese mainlander interviewees are referred to by place names from the mainland, Australians with places names from Australia, and Solomon Islander interviewees are referred to by place names from the Solomons, and so on.

Long vowel sounds in Japanese are indicated with diacritical markings ‘ō’ and ‘ū’, except in place names such as Tokyo where common English-language usage has no diacritical markings. Long vowel sounds in Okinawan place and people names are indicated by ‘ō’ or ‘ū’, as is customary in romanizations of Okinawan language.

Although the word ‘pidgin’ has had negative connotations and has often been used in a derogatory way to label languages, Solomon Islanders have reclaimed the word and are proud of their Solomons Pijin. As a Solomon Islander, Jonathan Fifi’i asserted that Pijin was not bastardized English but was a language with locally grown rules and grammar (Fifi’i 1989: 147). Solomons Pijin seems to have been developed by traders, then used by labor recruiters. The British denigrated the language but Solomon Islanders persisted in using it (Jourdan 1985: 85). I use ‘Pijin’ to refer to the Solomon Islands lingua franca because this is what Solomon Islanders call it, rather than ‘creole’, as some other peoples prefer to call their language (although technically Pijin may be a creole). Most Solomon Islanders speak three or four local languages and Pijin, and many speak English. As the language of officialdom in Solomon Islands, English has developed some local forms and spelling is at times flexible, especially because of the semi-permeable boundary between English and Pijin. In the interests of

accuracy language is presented ‘as it was’ as far as practicable within the competing constraints of consistency and clarity. ‘Mistakes’ of syntax or spelling have not been altered in any quotes from documents and interviews.

By the same token, quotes have not been ‘tidied up’. Because most of us do not speak in full grammatical sentences, spoken language often looks ‘uneducated’ when it is written. This is particularly the case in second or subsequent languages, and in the case of people, such as fishermen, who have not had tertiary education. Quotations have been left as they are in the interests of trying to convey interviewees’ voices as directly as possible, understanding that linguistic diversity reflects cultural and social diversity, and hoping that readers will take quotations in this spirit.

Some of the quotations presented are quite chauvinist. In the interest of understanding the social relations of Solomon Taiyo such quotations are not toned down to avoid inducing distaste in readers, nor played up to present particular groups as more culpable than others. Apparently chauvinist representations are a vital part of identity relations and need to be taken into consideration. By the same token, the absence of chauvinist representations does not necessarily mean the absence of chauvinist sentiment. The *habitus* of some interviewees, Japanese managers with tertiary education for example, predisposed them to be less likely to express overt chauvinism than other people, but no less likely to be implicated in chauvinist social structures. Similarly, some readers may object to explicit use of racial terms such as White, fearing it reifies racial categories. In the interests of a coherent and frank discussion of the salient identities, however, there is no better alternative to using color words to denote racial categories. Terms such as White, Melanesian, Black, Asian, Europeans, are all thoroughly contestable, but in the absence of any more precise, less contentious terms these will have to suffice. Color words are capitalized when they are referring to racial categories – color in a political sense – and not capitalized for color in a physical sense.³ For example, ‘Melanesians are Black people but most of them have brown skin’.

In order to fix this research historically the past tense is used for observations made during fieldwork and in any descriptions of practice that may or may not be ongoing, so as to acknowledge the changes that occur with the flow of time and situate this research as representing only a temporal slice rather than an ahistorical whole. Once the empirical part of the research was fixed historically it seemed strange to engage with writings in an ahistorical manner, so written materials, including secondary sources, are also discussed in the past tense.

Acknowledgments

My first thanks go to my interviewees. For reasons of confidentiality I cannot list your names but if you ever read this you will know who you are: Solomon Islander, Okinawan, Japanese, Filipina, and Australian people who generously gave your time and your stories. Your stories are the backbone of this book. This project would not have been possible without the permission and cooperation of the joint venture partners to Solomon Taiyo, the Solomon Islands Government (via the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development), and Maruha Corporation (via the Overseas Operations Department). Thanks also to publisher Routledge and editors Peter Sowden and Tom Bates.

A huge thank you to Morita Keiko and David Goodman in the Institute for International Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney. I couldn't have wished for better support in terms of assistance in finding funding for travel costs, computing facilities, ample workspace with a window, and being shouted coffee at Bella Ciao when I got in early enough. You told me honestly when it would not work and sent me back to try again, and praised me extravagantly when it did work. Thank you also to Milica Gavran, who helped sort out many administrative issues, and Sandra Margon, who helped with complicated travel plans. Thank you also for the moral support given by my various office mates over the years, especially Martin Williams and Monica Wulff. This project was carried out not only at UTS, but spent a year of its formation at Kagoshima University Marine Social Science Department. I am very grateful to my supervisor there, Matsuda Yoshiaki, and also to other academics who helped me along the way, such as Koh Sunhui and Lou Xiaobo. Thank you to the graduate students of various countries who made my stay in Kagoshima enjoyable, and especially thank you to the students who painstakingly checked my transcriptions of interviews. The doctoral research on which this book is based also spent some time gestating in the Division of Pacific and Asian History in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University. I am very grateful to all the people there who talked with me about my project and suggested helpful readings and contacts. Some of these people were Ewan Maidment, Donald Denoon, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Brij Lal, Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, John Naitoro, Joeli Viteiyaki, Glynn Rence, Chris Ballard, David Hegarty, Greg Fry, Gavin Mount, and John Docker. Other academics who offered helpful comments

along the way include Annette Hamilton, Shankar Aswani, Ghassan Hage, Akimichi Tomoya, Devleena Ghosh, and Stephen Muecke.

The Irabu Town Fisheries Promotion Section in Okinawa was very helpful in finding interviewees, introducing me and ferrying me around the island, especially Mr Yamaguchi and Mr Hamagawa. Thank you also to the Tomitanis. Your warm hospitality and delicious cuisine made my stay in Irabu one I will never forget for personal as well as professional reasons. The list of people who helped me in Solomon Islands with introductions to interviewees, access to files, transport, and accommodation is a long one. In Honiara the staff at the National Archives, the National Museum, the Parliamentary Library, and the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education Library were all very helpful. Thank you to the Registrar of Lands and the Registrar of Companies for giving me access to records, and to the Immigration Department for dealing with my unusual visa requirements promptly. In fact, I went in to this fieldwork prepared for some bureaucratic wrangles in Solomon Islands because of the comments of previous researchers, but there was not one wrangle in Solomon Islands, which is more than can be said for either Australia or Japan. From the Forum Fisheries Agency I would like to thank Transform Aqorau, whose own PhD was still so fresh in his memory that he was especially helpful. The staff in the High Court helped me with case records, thank you to Johnson Makona. Various people in the Fisheries Division helped me in different ways, particularly Eddie Honiwala in the Research Section. The Hundelby family of Solomon Sights and Sounds helped me out with perfect accommodation in the most convenient location for the first stay in Honiara, and the Cartwright family invited me into their home with the gorgeous view for the second stay.

In Munda the Kera family helped me out with a special deal at Agnes Lodge. The fieldwork for this research does not represent the anthropological rite of passage in a Melanesian village. I had a private room with a ceiling fan and a kettle, even if there were some sewage problems. Typing up transcripts is a pain, but the agony was somewhat relieved by looking over the top of the laptop out the window to the limpid waters of the Roviana Lagoon lapping the shore not ten meters away. My biggest source of help at Noro was the hardworking and committed Town Clerk David Mamupio. The rest of the Noro Town Office staff were also very friendly and helpful when I used the Town Office as my base while in Noro. The staff of Solomon Taiyo, from the General Manager down, cooperated with my interview schedule and enabled me to observe operations in the factories and on board one of the catcher boats. It was a shame to be able to view only the baitfishing in the lagoon, not the pole-and-line fishing out at sea, and it was a shame not to have access to company records, but I am grateful for the access I was given. Thank you also to the many drivers who gave me lifts between Noro and Munda. In the mornings I generally caught the trucks with the cannery workers but coming back to Munda in the afternoons I caught a range of vehicles, from Billy Veo's truck, to the blue Copra crushing-mill truck, to an unmarked white semi trailer. Mostly it was the Ports Authority people who drove me home, however, and they generally gave me a seat in the cab rather

than making me ride in the back with the other hitchhikers. It was on the trips to and from Munda that I really gained a sense of what it was like to work in Noro.

As well as ethical approval from their institution researchers should be required to seek the approval of friends and family because any project this large inevitably seems to impinge on their lives. I very much appreciate the patience of husband John, and I am endlessly grateful also for the practical and moral support of my mother, Lesley. Without her I never would have visited Solomon Islands and discovered Solomon Taiyo in the first place. She has not only been a kind and generous mother but, as a strong woman who bends much of her surroundings to her optimistic will and succeeds beyond anyone's wildest expectations, she has also been an excellent role model.

This research was funded by an Australian Government Postgraduate Award, a Japanese Ministry of Education scholarship for postgraduate research, and a National Visiting Scholarship from the Australian National University in Canberra. The original research was conducted through the Institute for International Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney, and the Institute has supported its writing up. Subsequent fieldwork was supported by an AusAID-funded post-doctoral fellowship at the Australian National University.

Permission to reprint material was granted by the following people and organizations: Jully Makini (formerly Sipolo) for her poems 'Civilized Girl', 'Development', 'Solomon Blue', 'Okinawa Fishermen', and 'Noro'; John Palmer for his post to the discussion group Iu Mi Nao (iu_mi_nao@yahoo.com); Wakabayashi Yoshikazu for his version of a Sarahama song about going fishing in the South Pacific; the Solomon Islands Development Trust for their poster on development; *Nations and Nationalism* for parts of my paper 'Between modernity and primitivity: Okinawan identity in relation to Japan and the South Pacific'; Tomiyama Ichirō and *Social Sciences Japan Journal* for the English translation of the Yamanoguchi Baku poem 'Kaiwa'; and Bob Gillett for his line drawings of fishing gear.

Abbreviations and non-English words

Official documents often referred to Solomon Taiyo Ltd as ‘STL’. The company was also often referred to as ‘Taiyo’ and ‘Soltai’. In the interests of clarity acronyms have been kept to a minimum and Solomon Taiyo Ltd is referred to here as ‘Solomon Taiyo’ except in quotations from originals that used other words.

ACP	Africa, Caribbean, Pacific country, for purposes of Lomé Convention (see below)
<i>arabushi</i>	Smoked skipjack loins before final processing into <i>katsuobushi</i> (Japanese)
BSIP	British Solomon Islands Protectorate
CBSI	Central Bank of Solomon Islands
CPUE	catch per unit of effort (way to measure sustainability in fisheries)
ECLA	Economic Commission for Latin America
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone (200 nautical miles from coastline)
EU	European Union, formerly the European Economic Commission
FFA	Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, based in Honiara
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
ICSI	Investment Corporation of Solomon Islands (in which government ownership of companies like Solomon Taiyo was vested)
<i>kastom</i>	tradition, customs, indigenous Solomon Islands culture as opposed to Western culture (Solomons Pijin)
<i>katsuobushi</i>	smoke-dried skipjack cured with a mold used for flavoring in Japanese food (Japanese)
KFPL	Kolumbangara Forestry Plantations Ltd
Lomé Convention	agreement by former colonial powers to allow former colony products to trade preferentially in the EU, superseded by the Cotonou Agreement
mt	metric tons

NFD	National Fisheries Development, the other main tuna fishing company in Solomon Islands
OFCF	Overseas Fisheries Cooperation Foundation (Japan)
Solomons Pijin	lingua franca of Solomon Islands
RIPL	Russell Islands Plantations Ltd
SDA	Seventh Day Adventist Church
SIDT	Solomon Islands Development Trust
SIEA	Solomon Islands Electricity Authority
SIG	Solomon Islands Government
SINUW	Solomon Islands National Union of Workers
SIPL	Solomon Islands Plantations Ltd
SIPPA	Solomon Islands Planned Parenthood Association
SIWA	Solomon Islands Water Authority
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SPPF	South Pacific Project Facility, part of the World Bank group, based in Sydney
STL	Solomon Taiyo Ltd
TAC	total allowable catch, government limits set on fisheries
TGKK	Taiyō Gyogyō Kabushiki Kaisha
UK	United Kingdom
US/A	United States/of America
<i>wantok</i>	relative, member of language group, member of in-group (Solomons Pijin)
WTO	World Trade Organization