

The Four Northern Islands before WWII

Before WWII: The rich fishing resources that drove the development of the Four Northern Islands

The waters around the Four Northern Islands are the southern limit of drift ice in the Sea of Okhotsk, and the various warm and cold currents that flow through them have helped to maintain a highly developed ecosystem of marine life, making the area extremely productive in terms of marine resources.

For this reason, fishing has supported the development of the Four Northern Islands since the Edo period. From the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the Meiji period, certain contractors monopolized fishing grounds there, but in 1876, other entities were allowed to access the fishing grounds. The former contractors continued to play a major role in the fishing industry of the Four Northern Islands, but gradually new entities began to enter the market.

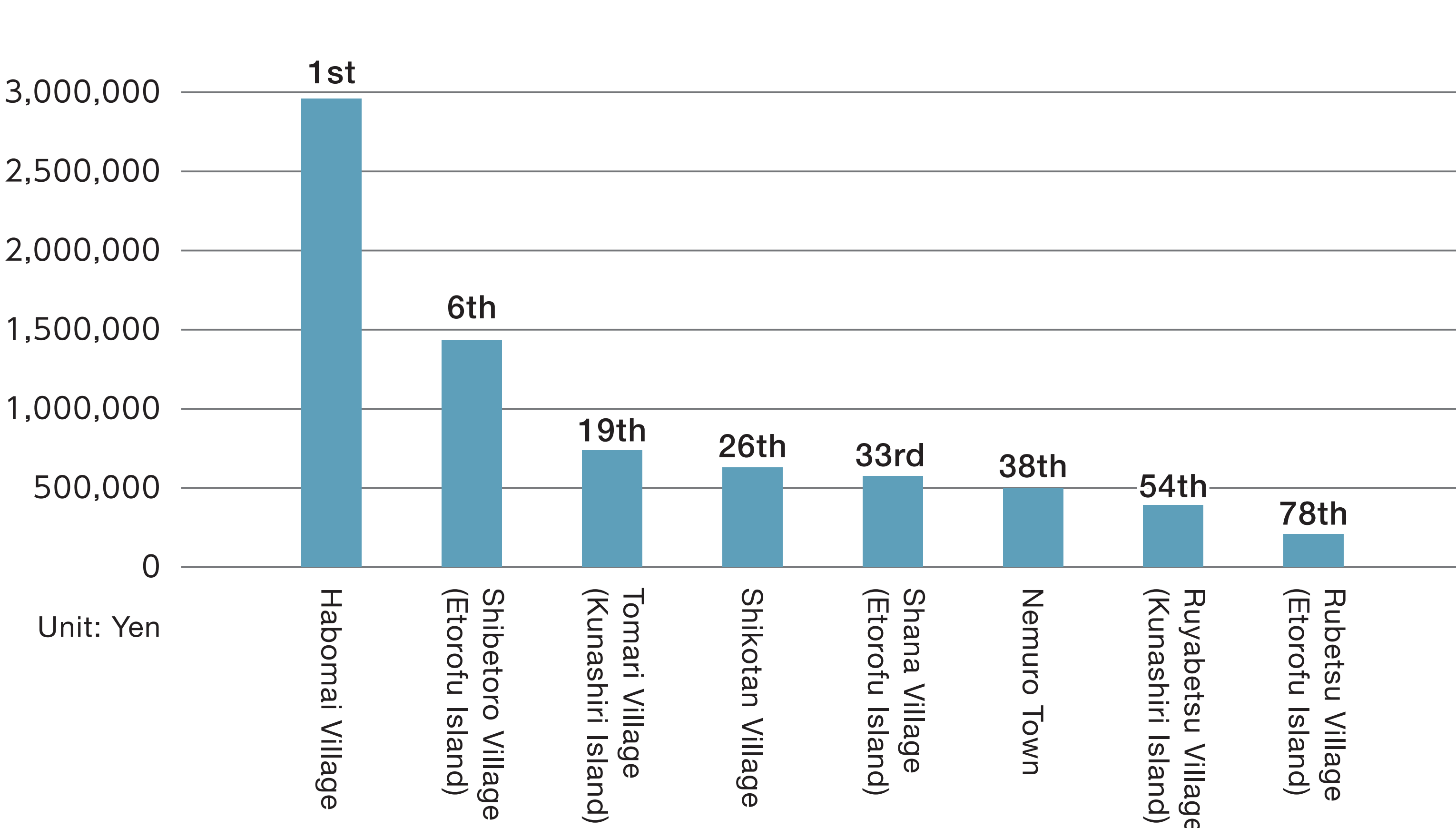
In addition, from the Meiji period onwards, canneries for salmon, trout, crab, shrimp, surf clam and scallop were established one after another, contributing to the development of the fishing industry. Furthermore, hatcheries for salmon and trout were also set up.

In the Habomai Islands, there was a large catch of kelp, and in the Shikotan Islands, whaling was popular in addition to cod, seaweed, and crab.

Kunashiri Island was blessed with the largest variety of marine products of the four islands. Etorofu Island was prosperous in fishing for salmon, trout,

cod and other fish, as well as whaling, and the amount of these catches was the largest of the four islands. The salmon, trout and whaling businesses on Etorofu Island were managed by large-scale capital from Hakodate.

Ranking of fishing catches by Hokkaido town and village in 1938 (Out of 127 towns and villages)



Shikotan Island: Dissection of a blue whale
Collection: Chishima-Habomai Islands Residents Association



Canning factory in Tofutsu, Tomari Village, Kunashiri Island, 1934 (Showa 9)
Collection: Chishima-Habomai Islands Residents Association



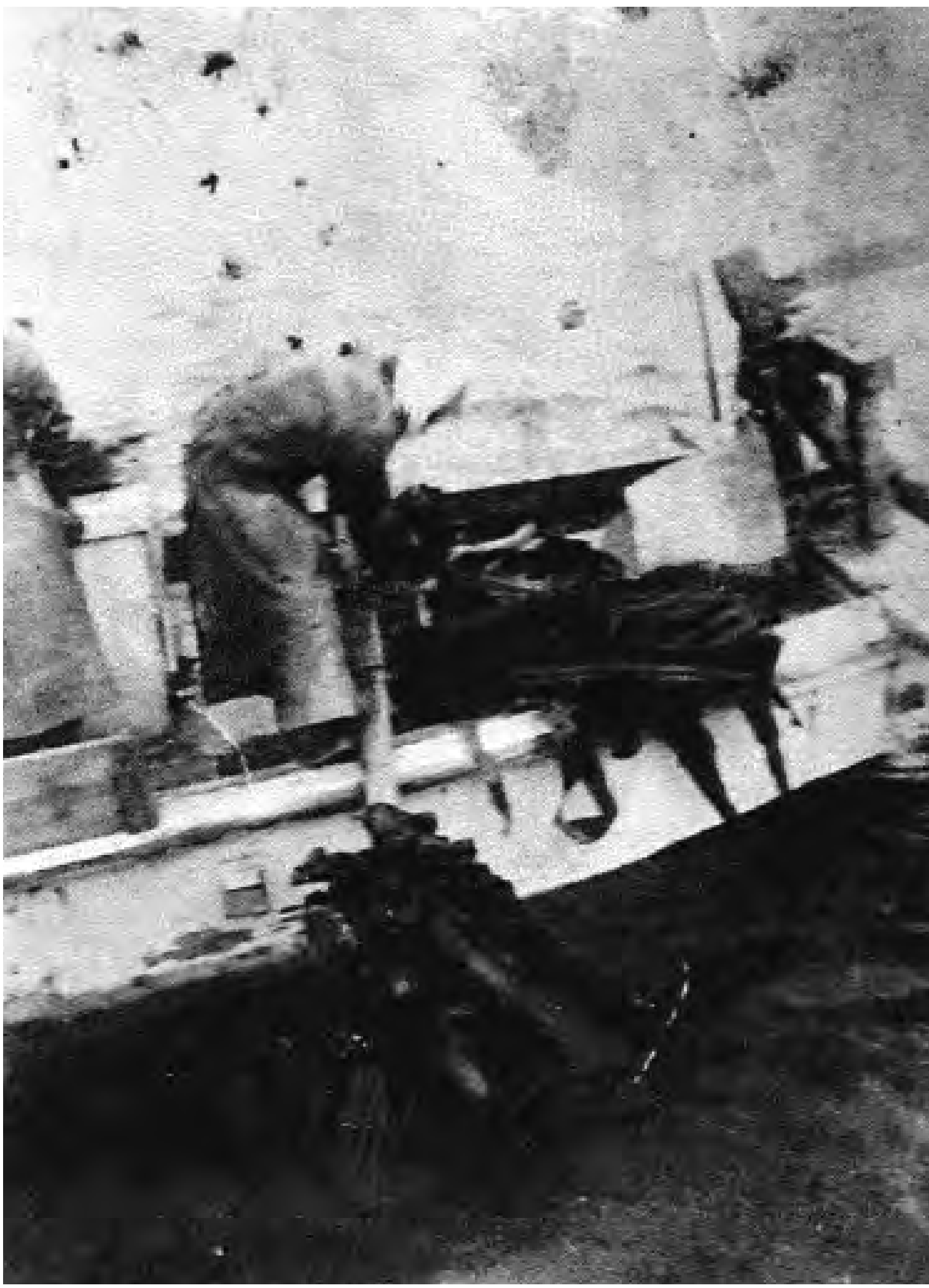
Etorofu Island, Egg inspection at a hatchery
Collection: Northern Territories Issue Association



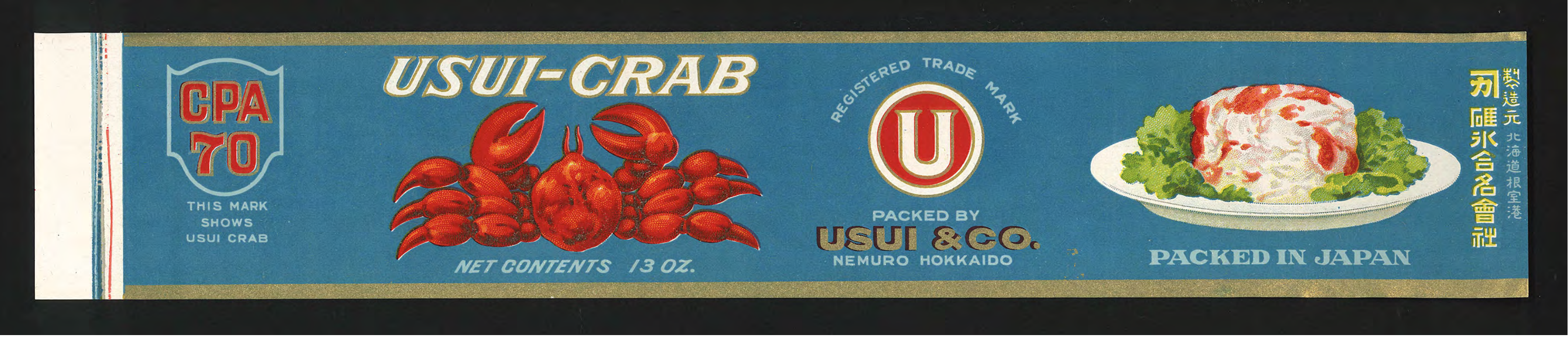
Etorofu Island, Drying cod
Collection: Northern Territories Issue Association



Kunashiri Island, Woman throwing scallop shells into the sea
Collection: Northern Territories Issue Association



Tarakuto Island (Habomai Islands), Kelp fishing
Collection: Northern Territories Issue Association



Canned crab label (13 oz)
Collection: Northern Territories Issue Association



Canned shrimp label (8 oz)
Collection: Northern Territories Issue Association

The rich oceans surrounding the Four Northern Islands sustained the people living there.

