

# Whaling and Dolphin hunting problem as a philosophical and cultural issues

ISHIKAWA Kumiko

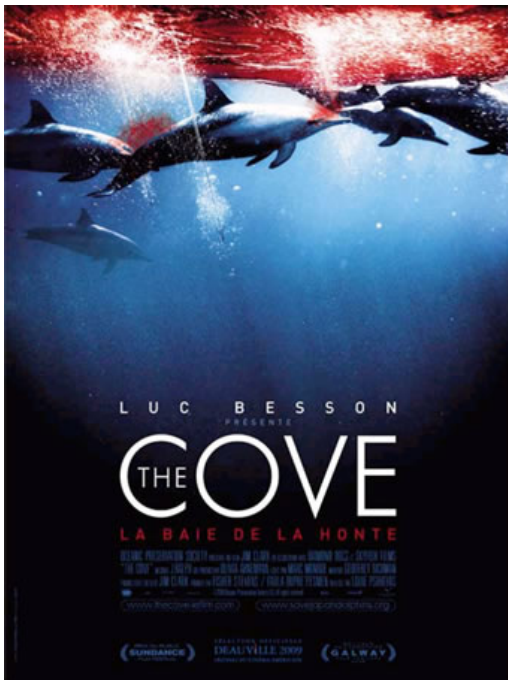
Special Research Associate of Japan Society for Promotion of Science,  
(Japanese political history of thought, thanatology)



## New perspective in thought and culture

Whaling and Dolphin drive fishing continues to be criticized. Dolphin hunting in Taiji, Wakayama Prefecture is depicted critically in the film 'the Cove', which won the Academy Award for the Best Documentary Feature in 2010.

Photo1 The Cove



Map1



Taiji, Wakayama pref. (from Google Earth)

In January of 2014, the US Ambassador to Japan, Caroline Kennedy, criticized dolphin hunting in Taiji, through Twitter ( @CarolineKennedy ), referring to the United States government's position on the issue. "Deeply concerned by inhumaneness of drive hunt dolphin killing. USG opposes drive hunt fisheries". This tweet drew many people's attention on the subject again. Then, if we look at the whaling, harassment incidents such by the Sea Shepherd towards the Japanese research whaling (Feb. 2nd, 2014 Nikkei) are repeatedly reported through news media.



"Ambassador Kennedy's ethnocentric principle" of Nobuo Ikeda is. typical of the argument against Ms. Kennedy, from Japan side. The conclusion of this essay is almost the same as that of Mr. Ikeda's. In this essay, I try to think the whaling and dolphin hunting subjects as the issues of thought and culture.(Mainly I addresses the way we ought to think about whaling, but the same approach is applicable to dolphin hunting.)

## Whaling was not a taboo in the 19th century West

It is known that people actively engaged in the whaling even in the Western countries. Because of the over-whaling in the Atlantic and Arctic Oceans, they began whaling in the Pacific Ocean. A distinctive point of the Western whaling was that they were mainly interested in the whale oil and baleen, not the whale meat. Whale baleen was, for example, used for women's underwear/corsets or umbrellas, and the whale oil as fuel oil or machine oil. But whale meat was rarely eaten.

The U.S. Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry played a leading role in the opening of Japan to the West in the 19th century. One of the reasons of Perry's coming to Japan was that the U.S. wanted harbors in Japan for the whaling fleet after the hordes of sperm whales were discovered around the area called the "Japan Ground". Their whaling was just for whale oil, which was less than 10 percent of the entire bod. The whale meat was dumped.

The discovery of the petroleum and the development of alternative fuel made from the petroleum and vegetable oil made it no longer economical or reasonable for western people to use whale oil. It is very clear from H. Melville's "Moby-Dick" that people in the West, in the 19th century, did not treat whales as special animals that needed to be protected. The special treatment of whales as the intelligent animals close to humans could be asserted only under circumstances where people could do without whaling.

**Photo2 Moby Dick, an illustration from the book(from Wikipedia)**



"Both jaws, like enormous shears, bit the craft completely in twain."

—Page 510.

## Whales close to peoples' life and food culture in Japan

On the other hand, dolphins and whales have been fully used in Japan since the Jōmon period (12,000 BC) . Whale meat was consumed as food. Whale bone tools like harpoons and the Jōmon Pottery with the whale bone patterns pressed into the clay have been unearthed.

"Kojiki", the oldest extant chronicle in Japan in the 8th century, describes dolphins that went ashore or were beached and became important sources of food, as gifts from God received with gratitude. "Azuma Kagami", the 12th century Japanese chronicle, describes people collecting whale oil from the beached whales.

Also from the description in the culinary book "Shijo-ryu Houchou Hidensho (Secrets of Shijo-style culinary knife art) " edited around 1490 and so on, we can tell that around 15 -16 centuries, the whale meat was highly prized and given as gifts to the Imperial court or to those in political power.

In addition, we can understand from "Honcho Shokkan", a food encyclopedia edited in 1697, that in the 17th century, people were using almost every part of the whale including meat, oil, intestines, bones, tail, penis, baleen and teeth. The whale was a very important resource in Japan. It is widely known that the whale meat was an important source of protein even after the Second World War.

**Photo3 "Whale Hunting" ,Katsushika Hokusai,1830**



I myself am familiar with the whale meat because my relatives living in Kouchi-prefecture occasionally sent me whale meat. Just recently I participated in the event "Ocean Gibier (Game), whale meat night!" [[http://tcc.nifty.com/cs/catalog/tcc\\_schedule/catalog\\_131231204465\\_1.html](http://tcc.nifty.com/cs/catalog/tcc_schedule/catalog_131231204465_1.html)] both as a reporter and a member of audience.

I was surprised at the variety of the whale dishes. I enjoyed not only traditional and familiar cuisine like whale meat Yamato-ni or whale skin dressed with vinegared miso, but also the "Nouvelle Vague cuisine" such as basil seasoned whale meat steak or whale meat curry. Thanks to the technological advancement in refrigeration and transportation, there's no unfavorable smell on the meat, and we can enjoy the tender meat. Whale meat is rich in balenine, an anti-fatigue biomolecule. People with allergies to livestock meat such as pork or fish can eat whale meat. In this sense, it is still meaningful for us to consume whale meat as a food resource. We do not need to depend on whale meat as a source of protein any more, but we should not rush to conclude that there's no need for the whaling.

## Animal liberation movement in the 20th century

The different perceptions on whales and dolphins between the West and Japan are very interesting from the philosophical or cultural viewpoint.

Traditionally people in the West strictly distinguish between God, humans and animals. They have the sense of value that animals exist for the benefit of humans and that animals can be used by humans or should be protected. The change in the attitude towards whaling in the West from utilization to protection represents a change in sense of values. Nowadays, whales and dolphins are treated as animals with high intelligence close to that of human beings, and they are considered to be subject of protection. Whaling and dolphin hunting is denounced as an "inhumane act".

Above all, anti-whaling movements represented by the Sea Shepherd are aligned to the genealogy of the animal liberation movement in the 20th century, such as Ethicist Peter Singer [ ] and Tom Regan [ ]. Strictly speaking, there are differences between them, but they both acknowledge animal sensory capacities from the viewpoint of animal welfare and rights, and assert we should not give pains to those animals. When it is unavoidable, they assert that we should try to minimize pains to be given to animals.

Whales and the dolphins with a similar sense to that of human beings were "discovered" in the West in the 20th century, and they were not the object of memorial or a ceremonial services, but they became the object of "technologies" alleviating pain or "laws" banning whaling thought the treaties.

## Japan culture taking the death of the animal into the life



As 'Kokugaku' (Japanese classical) scholar, Norinaga Motoori (1730 - 1801) pointed out, everything with transcendent power is an object of worship, 'Kami' (God) in Japan.

There are lots of examples of people with transcendent power were enshrined as Gods and became the object of worship like Sugawara no Michizane (845-903).

Whales and dolphins were also regarded as God visiting from a different world to this world.



The folklorist Shinobu Orikuchi(1887 - 1953) found the archetype of Japanese festivals in the banquet where people welcomed and entertained 'Marebito' who comes from a different place/world. Linked to the faith toward fishing, whales and dolphins were deified and awed as incarnation of Ebisu, a God of fishing that brings a large catch.

Therefore Japanese whaling came to have systemized rituals too. During the ritual, the impurities are removed from the whaling tools. For example, in Taiji, Wakayama prefecture in Japan, fishermen held a banquet the day before whaling as one of the ceremonies called 'Kumidashi-no-iwai', and people dance 'Hanesashi-odori' to a song praying for a large catch. Many other rituals are held even after whaling is began, and fishermen finish whaling with a ritual known as 'Hanakiri'.

On the way back to the beach, "Hatsuho Girei" a ritual to express people's appreciation for the first whaling catch is held. In the ritual, fishermen throw whale meat at the shrine near the shore and to the seabirds considered to represent the God 'Ebisu'.

It is said that in the 17th century a priest known as 'Kanman' recited chants holding up 'Gohei' (a wand with hemp and paper streamers used in a Shinto ceremony) in his hands. Following these rituals, people held feasts on the beach.

While whaling and dolphin hunting's savagery has been recognized in Japan too, it did not lead to denouncing or banning whaling or dolphin hunting. Rather whales and dolphins became the object of empathy, personified as animals with a special relationship with human beings. People held memorial services for game whales or dolphins with a ritual for death and burial of the game. Extant whale graves, memorial stupas, whale towers, 'ema' (small wooden plaques with votive picture) in various places in Japan are the remains of those traditions. Sometime the game whales were given a posthumous Buddhist name and we can find those names in the record books or memorial tables for those game whales.

For example, in the whale tomb at the Taiji Toumyo Temple built in the 18th century, we can find an inscription praying that both whales and human beings become Buddha. In particular, people held a warm memorial service to the whales when a fetus whale was found from a mother whale. It is a characteristics of Japanese whaling that people consider whales as gifts from God, and for this reason, they utilize every part of them, and hold memorial services. Whales and dolphins have long been the object of culture and traditions through such worship and ritual.

## Unification of God and people in Japanese festivals



Folklorist, Kunio Yanagita (1875 – 1962), cites the ‘Naorai’ (banquet / feast) as one of the biggest features of festivals in Japan. We can consider ‘Naorai’ as one of the rites when both God and human beings eat the same food. More specifically, the shrine parishioners eat and drink the sacred food and ‘Sake’ initially offered to the deity.

The concept of sharing food and drink between God and people is quite a contrast from the concept of Ancient Judaism’s holocaust, where sacrificed sheep or goats were burned completely and offered to God. People never ate those sacrificed animals. God and people were clearly distinguished.

For Yanagita who considered about the way of Japan mainly based on rice growing culture, the sacred foods offered to God were mainly rice and ‘Sake’ in Japan. However it is very clear that the festival after whaling was also a ‘Naorai’ ritual where the main sacred food offered to God was whale meat.

Yanagita and Orikuchi considered ‘Naorai’ and the faith as being at the center of the people’s lives; that the Japanese communities are formed and administrated based on these two principles. Therefore whaling and dolphin hunting is not simply a matter of food resource or preservation issues, but also a matter of community formation or administration, deeply related to people’s faith, culture and belief.

In this sense, when we talk about whaling and dolphin hunting issues, it is very important for us to pay attention to cultures deeply rooted in their localities and to respect cultural diversities, rather than emotionally proclaiming “it is cruel” and stop thinking,

It is very important for Western people to have cultural tolerance, and on the other hand, it is very important for Japanese people to have the intelligence to explain our cultures to people of different cultures in a courteous manner, overcoming rice-centered principles and historical dogmas and respecting the diversity of regional cultures.

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