

Japan Doesn't Mean to Take Every Whale in the World

English 3C

Mr. James A. Elwood

Tsukuba Naoko

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In 1982, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) decided to put a moratorium on commercial whaling in order to protect the whales for the reason that they are threatened with extinction (UD, 2005). With this decision, Japan hunts about 4 hundred whales each year for research whaling (Tamura, n.d.). Precisely, what was the cause of the decrease in the number of whales? What influence does the moratorium have on the Japanese culture? I'd like to explain why the IWC should grant Japan permission for commercial whaling with the result of the Japan's research whaling.

The background of the sharp decrease of whales was reckless hunting by Western Europe and the United States only for whale oil. When the Industrial Revolution broke out, the more whale oil they needed, the higher the added value of whales became. In 1864, Norway-style whaling developed in which whales were hunted by shooting a harpoon, and it enabled whalers to hunt blue whales and fin whales. When the skill to make margarine and soup from whale oil developed in Germany, large-scale whaling fleets were organized all over the world. From 1930 to 1931, the largest number of fleets in history (41 whaling fleets) went hunting to the Antarctic Ocean, and they killed over 34000 great whales (UD, 2005). This whaling for oil to make soup, paint, margarine, and explosives caused a sharp decrease of whale resources in the Antarctic Ocean, and it led up to the formation of the IWC.

One of the reasons that the IWC put a moratorium on commercial whaling is that the number of whales is decreasing, but now this is only applicable to great whales

such as blue whales. The number of middle-sized whales such as fin whales and humpback whales has been gradually increasing since 1990 at 14 to 16% each year, and 760,000 minke whales live in the Southern Hemisphere (ICR, n.d.). With such numbers, hunting 2,000 minke whales poses no threat to the species (IWC, 2005). Minke whales eat mainly mackerel, sardine, sand lances, trout, squid, and walleye pollack. Moreover, all whales in the world eat 2.8 to 5 hundred million tons of marine resources a year, which is three to six times the total catch of fish in the whole world (SS, 2003). Of course, it is important to maintain the number of whales, but if minke whales continue to breed as they do, a decrease in marine resources and in the number of blue whales, whose food is same as minke whales, will become a serious problem.

The West only used whale oil, baleens, and teeth, and they did away with other parts of the whale, but in Japan, it has been said that one whale enriches seven villages, and Japanese made use of whales from tip to tail. For example, we use whale meat and cartilage for eating, baleens for workmanship such as combs and springs of marionettes for traditional entertainment called *bunraku*; one bottle-nose whale supplies the demand for baleen for two years, skin for glue and oil, strings for strings of bows, blood for medicine, bones for oil and manure, and dung for incense called *ryuzen-ko* (Torisu, 2005). One of the treatises on whales which was published late in the Edo Period tells us the recipes for whale meat from 70 different regions.

Some say that it is cruel to do whaling, but Japanese whalers use a harpoon with explosives in the tip, and it enables them to shorten the time during which whales feel pain. That lethal time and the death rate don't behind those of wild animals such as deer and kangaroos, and Japan has continued developing better harpoons through postmortem examinations on whales in research whaling (ICR, n.d.). In addition, it is a fallacy to think that Japanese don't lament victimizing whales. Japanese gave each whale calf a posthumous Buddhist name as is done for human beings, and we enshrine a Buddhist memorial tablet and a death register inside the rest-in-peace pagoda as an expression of thanks and apology. In Yamaguchi Prefecture, a Buddhist memorial service is performed every April (UD, 2005).

Compared with the Western and the U.S. whose main purpose of whaling was getting oil, Japan has made the best of whales, and it is not an exaggeration to say that whales helped create the culture unique to Japan. Japan's sustainable whaling will be one of the measures to strike a balance of ecosystem, and it will prevent the depletion of other marine resources while helping blue whales. If the moratorium continues, Japan will be brought to the verge of whether it can pass on Japanese food culture and the traditional entertainments which are concerned with whales to the next generation. For these reasons, the IWC should grant Japan permission for commercial whaling.

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