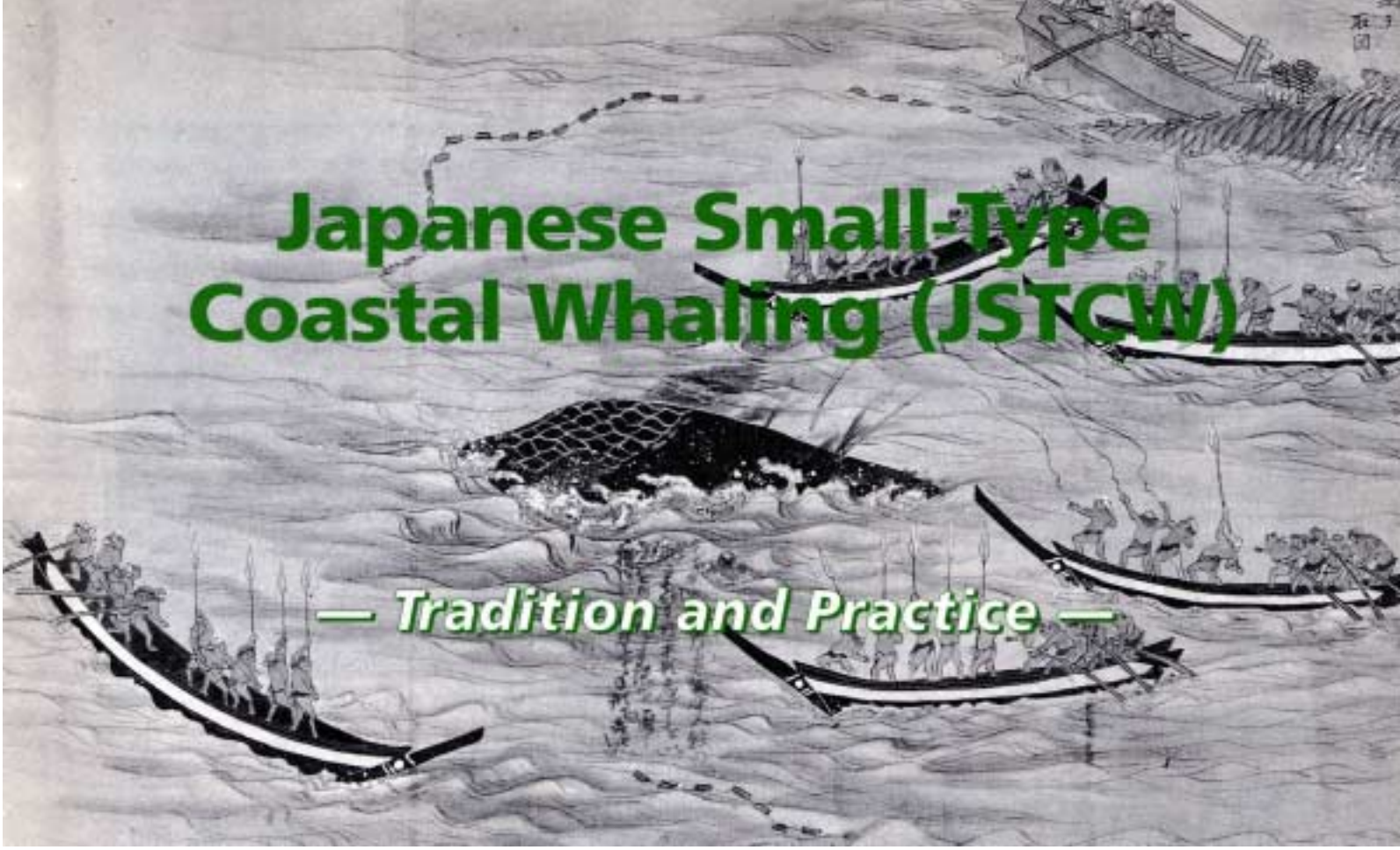


Japanese Small-Type Coastal Whaling (JSTCW)

— Tradition and Practice —

Q1. What are small-type coastal whaling communities?

A. These communities are those which today are regarded as the primary heirs of the country's whaling traditions. Whaling is an integral part of Japan's history and culture.

This history actually begins in prehistoric times with people's use of stranded whales. Based on finds of hand harpoons and porpoise skulls in burial mounds, it would appear that active hunting of small cetaceans probably dates from the Jomon period (10,000 — 300 BC).

Organised whaling, using boats, hand harpoons and land stations, began in the sixteenth century in southern Japan. Then, in 1675, in Taiji, groups of up to three hundred people herded whales into nets and harpooned them, the first incidence of the net whaling method.

From that, over time, Japan's twentieth century whaling evolved. In this centuries-long evolutionary process, and using various harvesting techniques, whaling traditions spread from southern Japan to the northern coast of Hokkaido. In the course of this expansion, whaling came to be defined in three categories: large-type coastal whaling (LTCW), pelagic whaling and small-type coastal whaling (STCW). But, because of the 1982 commercial whaling moratorium, STCW is the only remaining category, and it barely survives, harvesting sustainably only small cetaceans not managed by IWC. Scholars today recognise four communities — Taiji, Wada, Ayukawa, and Abashiri — as the modern concentrations of these traditions and skills.

Q2. Why is small-type coastal whaling so important to these communities?

A. The issue is not one of economics alone, for life is much more than simply money with which to buy those things necessary for survival. Some of these communities also have fishing and fish processing, but this was always in addition to whaling, not in place of it. Recently, there has been some aquaculture added. Tourism is also in addition to whaling — and, of course, without whaling, most whaling communities have little else unusual to offer tourists.

Thus whaling, with its secondary and tertiary industries, is economically important. But as well, around the work of a community evolve social and cultural practices which define that community. For the small-type coastal whaling communities, whaling is the work around which these practices grew, defining their senses of community. It is their culture and part of the larger culture of Japan. Decline of small-type coastal whaling is causing disintegration of these communities. They are trying so hard to overcome the almost-debilitating losses of population and income.

As whaling-related employment decreases, so does the essence of community. Both economics and this diminished sense of community are forcing younger people to work and live elsewhere. Because of the locations of these communities and their relatively limited infrastructures, alternative jobs in whaling communities remain too few to replace those which Western cultures have taken from them by their continued insistence on the 1982 moratorium.

Even the International Whaling Commission, in a 1993 resolution, acknowledged the socio-economic and cultural needs of the Japanese whaling communities and the distress to these communities which has resulted from the cessation of minke whaling.

In conclusion, not only is there limited alternative work available to these communities, but also — and perhaps even more important — the cessation of minke whaling is slowly, and quite unnecessarily, eroding in these places their sense of community.

Q3. What do you mean by "cultural practices"? Why are these so important?

A. Whale cuisine is a specific example of these cultural practices. Cuisine varies from whaling community to whaling community, reinforcing the specific sense of community for each whaling community, as well as contributing to the culture of Japanese cuisine. For all of these communities, whale meat has been an important source of protein. Some of this local traditional cuisine has called for fresh, not frozen, minke, something which pelagic whaling can not provide.

Not only cuisine, but also the rituals and beliefs which surround the hunting and processing of whales serve to define the whaling communities. Whales have been incorporated into the Shinto pantheon and memorialised according to Buddhist beliefs. This has served, simultaneously, to integrate whales into Japanese culture and yet to give these whaling communities a particular sense of their own identities.

Q4. Didn't the International Whaling Commission set the moratorium on whales because whales are in trouble?

A. True, endangered whales should not be hunted. Japan has fully and consistently supported the International Whaling Commission in the cessation of harvest of these species.

However, the North Pacific minke whales which Japanese small-type coastal whalers wish to resume harvesting are available in numbers which would support a fishery. The IWC Scientific Committee data indicates that the North Pacific stock is 25,000; this is a stock size of an amount for which science could support an allocation for coastal minke whaling.

The key word is ‘sustain’. Japan strongly supports the principle of sustainable use. This is an important principle for natural resources management which has gained greater understanding since the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit in Rio).

By managing for sustainable use, one permits for harvest today only that amount which will ensure that the stock remains sufficiently robust to continue to reproduce and thrive. Given what we already know about North Pacific minkes and what the on-going research will tell us, scientists and scholars can support Japan's position that the North Pacific minke stock is indeed sufficiently robust to sustain a managed coastal harvest.

Q5. But how do we know that taking North Pacific minke whales would be sustainable? To be on the safe side, Japan should not resume coastal minke whaling until we know more.

A. Japan also endorses the precautionary approach to natural resources management. One may understand this approach as a corollary to sustainable use management. It is a "no regrets" policy. The precautionary approach mandates allowing only a relatively smaller harvest of any resource about which the best scientific information available is particularly limited. As more information becomes available, managers are better able to assess the possibility of a larger allocation.

Using the precautionary approach to sustainable use management, and given what we already do know and what we are learning about North Pacific minke availability, science could support an allocation for coastal minke whaling. Specifically, this allocation would be based on IWC's Revised Management Procedure (RMP), which does itself reflect the IWC Scientific Committee's risk-free, precautionary approach.

Q6. What is the urgency to resume small-type coastal minke whaling?

A. The people and their communities are suffering. While others indulge in academic debates, these people are needlessly in professional and social limbo. They have had greatly diminished both a way of life and a food which has been a vital part of their lives — a food, incidentally, of a significant nutritional value as well.

We have scientific data which indicates that resuming coastal minke whaling on the North Pacific stock could be sustainable. We are talking about a culturally important food resource which should not be — indeed can not effectively be — managed independently of the ecosystem of which it is an integral part.

All of what the scientific community has been learning about multispecies management reinforces the need to broaden our approach to managing marine resources to include whales and other marine mammals. These species are substantial predators of fish species. Not surprisingly, it has not worked to manage these mammals in isolation. The sooner we shift to a balanced ecosystem/multispecies approach, the sooner we will begin to develop truly sustainable resource management programmes which better ensure stable productivity of all elements of marine ecosystems.

Two reasons, then for urgency; first, people and their communities are suffering, not only from serious depopulation, but also from the subsequent losses of sense of community which this causes. Second, what we now about resources management makes irresponsible attempts to defend only species-by-species management, especially when those species, marine mammals, are significant predators within their ecosystems.

A History of Cultural Continuity

Introduction: The Evolution of Japanese Whaling

From the beginning, Japanese whalers' mobility has played a decisive role in shaping and disseminating Japan's whaling culture throughout the country. This is why even communities which are no longer actively involved in whaling do have whaling traditions which are an integral part of their community cultures.

These whaling traditions go back to beginnings in prehistoric times with the use of stranded whales. Next, based on finds of hand harpoons and porpoise skulls in burial mounds, it would appear that active hunting of small cetaceans probably dates from the Jomon Period (10,000 — 300 BC).

Scholars consider that active whaling began in the sixteenth century, but it was only toward the end of that century that whaling developed into a large-scale endeavour. Then, toward the end of the seventeenth century, Japanese began to use nets. In 1675 in Taiji, large groups of people organised to drive whales into big nets in the open sea, then used harpoons to attack the entangled whales.

From that, over time, Japan's twentieth century whaling evolved. In this centuries-long evolutionary process, and using various harvesting techniques, whaling traditions spread from southern Japan to the northern coast of Hokkaido, and became not only coastal but also North Pacific and Antarctic pelagic whaling. In the course of this expansion, whaling came to be defined in three categories: large-type coastal whaling (LTCW); pelagic whaling; and small-type coastal whaling (STCW).

However, because of the 1982 commercial whaling moratorium, STCW is the only remaining category. Scholars today recognise four communities — Taiji, Wada, Ayukawa, and Abashiri — as the modern concentrations of these traditions and skills.

Small-type Coastal Whaling Today

Today, the Japanese government regulates STCW. It licenses boats to take various species, among them, the minke whale, Baird's beaked whale, and the pilot whale, none of which come under the IWC.

Minke whales, however, fall under the International Whaling Commission's mandate, which means that IWC sets quotas for this species. As a result, therefore, the quotas are currently zero. IWC refuses to recognise that its own Scientific Committee data indicates that the North Pacific stock is 25,000 strong, a stock size which could support an allocation for coastal minke whaling.

The Japanese government does set quotas for Baird's beaked whales and for pilot whales, because these do not fall under the IWC's mandate. Japanese boats continue their coastal hunts for these species.

However, the opportunity for STCW today is relatively limited by the fact that Japanese cannot now hunt minkes. As a result, the four whaling communities are suffering: not only is there limited alternative work available to these communities, but also — and perhaps even more important — the cessation of minke whaling is slowly, and quite unnecessarily, eroding in these places their sense of community.

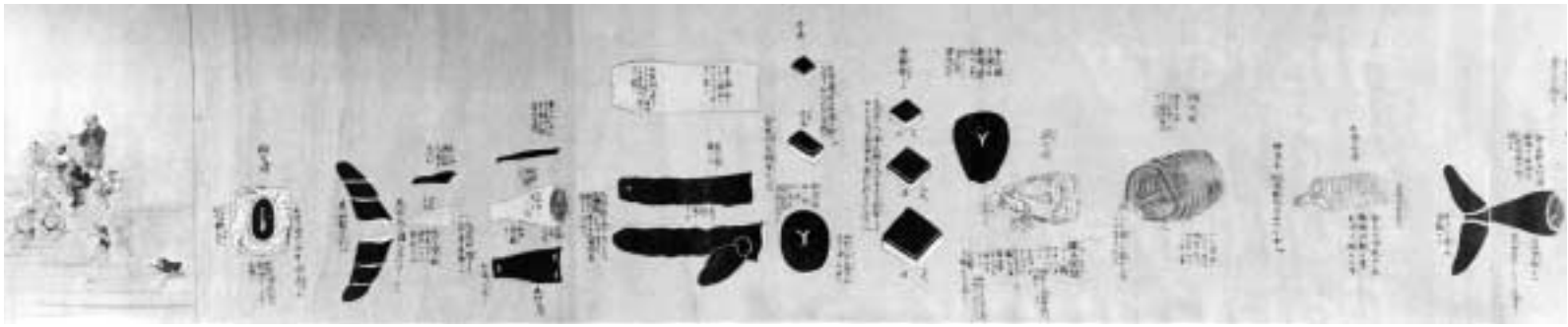
Evolution: Prehistory to the Twentieth Century

There is a Japanese proverb which says, "A whale on the beach is wealth for seven villages."

Early organization — People's use of stranded whales goes back to prehistoric times. This passive whaling utilised whales which were dead or dying, on the beach or in nearshore water.

Although this passive whaling was certainly the dominant method, it appears, based on findings of hand harpoons and porpoise skulls in burial mounds, that primitive active hunting of small cetaceans probably dates from the Jomon Period (10,000 — 300 BC). This type of passive whaling lasted well into the sixteenth century. (Nor did it disappear with the advent of active whaling)

Scholars consider that Japanese active whaling started in the sixteenth century, but it was not until



toward the end of that century that this kind of whaling developed into a large-scale endeavour. In this method, whalers in several boats used harpoons — the harpoon method — and brought the killed whales back to especially established land stations for processing. This technique became particularly important in Wakayama, Shikoku, Northern Kyushu, and Sea of Japan coast of Yamaguchi.

Then, in 1675, Wada Kakuemon in Taiji developed a method in which large groups organized to drive whales (usually slower moving species like right and humpback whales) into nets which they had set in the open sea. Once the whales were entangled, the whalers then attacked them with harpoons.

This net method spread rapidly throughout most of southwestern Japan. And until the end of the nineteenth century, it continued to dominate Japanese whaling. Whales caught this way were gray whales, right whales, humpbacks, fin wales, and probably some minkes. Whalers continued to use hand harpoons until the twentieth century in only two fisheries: the Baird's beaked whale fishery in Chiba and the pilot whale fishery in Taiji.

Western competition — American and British whalers discovered the rich whaling grounds between Hawaii and Japan in 1820. Very soon, hundreds of whaling ships from the United States and other Western countries were operating in the ocean off Japan.

It is not surprising, then, that coincidentally, Japanese whalers were catching many fewer whales, for the whales they had caught from smaller vessels in their coastal waters were now being caught by the Westerners further offshore.

Clearly, then, if Japanese whalers wished to continue whaling, they would have to modernise to compete with the Westerners. First, the Japanese tried in various places throughout the country to adapt the American method of whale hunting. But most of these attempts were unsuccessful and did not, therefore, have any real impact on the development of Japanese whaling.

It was through Russian whaling that the Japanese were introduced to the Norwegian method. Russian companies had adopted Norwegian techniques and, by the early 1900s, were transporting whale meat to Japan. Several Japanese whaling pioneers who had served aboard Russian whalers sought to introduce the Norwegian method to Japan. Their efforts from the late 1890s and the Japanese government's steps after the Russo-Japanese War can be said to have established modern coastal whaling for large-type whales (LTCW) in Japan.

From this would evolve three distinct approaches to whaling — LTCW, STCW and pelagic whaling — all of which were finally established by beginning of the Pacific War.

Large-type coastal whaling — LTCW was firmly established, but that does not mean that it did not undergo significant changes in the decades which followed. Briefly, these changes included (1) new land stations, among which were those in Ayukawa (1906) and in Abashiri (1915); (2) new whaling grounds opened further to the north (including the Kuril Islands) and to the south around the Ogasawara (Bonin) Islands, as well as off Taiwan; (3) new whaling stations from Ogasawara (25˚N) to the Kurils (50˚N) so the whalers could work winters in the south, summers in the north; (4) changes over time in the relative importance of the species the whalers were taking, which in turn influenced to some degree the distribution and consumption of the whale carcasses; and (5) the consolidation of the whaling companies to, finally, in the late 1930s, three large companies (Nissui, Taiyo and Kyokuyo) which had, in fact, been established to fiance Antarctic pelagic whaling.

Pelagic whaling — Although European pelagic whaling dated from medieval times and spread through the centuries to most of the world's oceans, it was the Norwegians who sent modern vessels to the Antarctic at the turn of the century. For several reasons, however, and despite their extensive LTCW operations, the Japanese did not go to Antarctic until thirty years later, in 1934. (This was because the oil market had collapsed; there had been in 1930-1931 the highest production ever of oil; a world-wide depression; and new regulations on whaling.)

After an inauspicious beginning, they caught up quickly. And in 1940, they sent a factory ship and four catcher boats to the North Pacific for the first

time, and that fleet returned to the North Pacific the following year. Thus, by the beginning of the Pacific War in 1941, Japan had emerged as one of the world's leading pelagic whaling nations.

Pelagic whaling was so successful in just a few years that it was producing more than all other types of whaling combined. It also played a vital part in sustaining the whaling culture in many of Japan's whaling communities, for it opened up new possibilities for unemployed whalers in southwest Japan. A significant percentage of the pelagic crews came from Kyushu and Wakayama Prefecture, and those who came from Ayukawa and Kugunari in Miyagi Prefecture traced their roots to southwest Japan.

Small-type coastal whaling — Japan has been conducting STCW for at least as long as it has done LTCW and pelagic whaling but, perhaps because it is a less apparently dramatic operation, it is less well-known.

For centuries, Japanese used nets to trap small toothed whales in the bays into which they had driven the whales. Even though they still occasionally used nets, it was the development of the harpoon method which was important in understanding today's Japanese STCW. Until recently, some communities have used hand harpoons to take pilot and Baird's beaked whales. Taiji for pilot and Katsuyama for Baird's beaked are the examples to which we go to find the roots of modern STCW.

With the modernisation of LTCW, it was inevitable that the STCW whalers would adapt the new technologies of powered boats and harpoon guns. By the early 1910s, two forms of STCW using harpoon guns had emerged, one in Taiji, the other on the Boso Peninsula.

It was not until the early 1930s, that whalers in Ayukawa, using a boat from Taiji, developed a catcher boat for taking minkes. This new design was successful, leading to general adoption of small-scale whaling boats (generally 15 to 20 tons) using powered harpoons to take minke and Baird's beaked whales.

Japanese whaling in the post-war period — With the beginning of the Pacific War and serious food problems, coastal whaling received special considerations. Pelagic whaling had stopped. But under the new regime, the productivity of LTCW reached a peak at 34,800 tons, of which 28,600 were used for food. And because STCW boats were permitted to hunt large-type whales as an emergency measure, this form expanded during the war.

By the end of the war, however, Japan had lost 94.6 percent of her whaling vessel tonnage and more than half the pre-war whaling grounds. At the same time, however, the people had become more dependent than ever on whale meat because of the food crisis in the immediate post-war years.

To help alleviate this, General MacArthur authorized Japan's re-entry into international whaling. As a result, the industry recovered remarkably quickly. STCW had not been hurt by the defeat; in fact, the fleet continued to expand, reaching a total of 83 boats in 1947. LTCW had not been so fortunate, but it too recovered in a couple of years and remained fairly constant until the early 1970s.

Another turning point for LTCW came when the 1946 International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) limited whaling to the six-month period from May to October. Because most whales migrate these months in northern waters, the regulation meant the end for most whaling in southwest Japan. Of the nearly twenty land stations operating in the 1950s, most were in northeast Japan.

Because pelagic whaling had been so productive in the late 1930s and because of the food crisis, the occupation forces also gave Japan permission to resume Antarctic whaling. By the 1960/61 season, Japan was sending seven fleets to the Antarctic, and in the following season, these reached an all-time

production peak of more than 300,000 tons of oil and meat.

North Pacific pelagic whaling was slower to recover, though Japan was permitted to resume whaling off Ogasawara (Bonin Islands) as early as the 1945/46 season. In 1952, however, IWC defined this operation an coastal whaling with the same restrictions as applied to Japanese LTCW: no whaling between the first of November to the end of April — just the time when sei whales are around these islands.

But 1952 was also the year Japan sent its first post-war pelagic fleet to the North Pacific. Production reached a peak in 1967 with more than 90,000 tons.

The emphasis on meat production after the war meant that about 47 per cent of the animal protein the Japanese consumed in 1947 came from whale meat; even in 1964, this percentage was as high as 23 percent.

Japan had become a member of IWC in 1951, and by 1960, she had become the world's leading whaling nation.

Although many people do not know, or choose not to remember, IWC was created not so much to conserve whales as to protect the price of whale oil. Japan had begun in 1909, on her own, to regulate domestic LTCW activities. And by 1947, even before Japan become a member of IWC, all Japanese whaling required licenses which were not easy to get.

In the 1960s, reflecting growing international concerns for the status of whale stocks, IWC regulations did become more strict. Japan's Antarctic quota was fixed at 33 percent (though she increased this by buying fleets and quotas from other whaling nations). Quotas on all Antarctic species were reduced or eliminated during the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1978/79 season, whalers took only sperm and minke whales in the Antarctic.

In the North Pacific, IWC introduced quotas for fin, sei, and sperm whales, but from 1976, it prohibited hunting fin and sei whales. North Pacific minkes went under IWC regulations in 1977.

For conservation, small quotas for certain species could have worked. But by this time, whales had been appropriated as a symbol of those who claimed to be protecting the environment and animal rights. This was clear in 1972 at the UN Stockholm Conference on Human Environment; the Conference passed a resolution calling for ten-year moratorium on commercial whaling. And in 1982, IWC declared a blanket moratorium on all commercial whaling beginning with the 1985/86 season.

Threatened by American domestic legislation, the Japanese government sent its last fleet to the Antarctic in the 1986/87 season. LTCW shore stations were closed in 1987, ending Japanese LTCW. From 1988, STCW boats were prohibited form taking minkes. Now Japan only takes Antarctic minkes for research purposes as provided for under Article VIII of the ICRW. The government has licensed the remaining small coastal vessels to catch a few dozen Baird's beaked and pilot whales, for these species are not under IWC.

As a result of IWC's Draconian — and unscientific — regulations and positions, then, all Japanese whaling has been forced to contract substantially. The social, economic, and cultural losses to Japan's whaling communities and to Japan are significant.

It is time for IWC to behave responsibly on these issues, and among other actions, to act on its 1993 resolution which acknowledged the socio-economic and cultural needs of the Japanese whaling communities and the distress to these communities which has resulted from the cessation of minke whaling.

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Part of a picture scroll illustrating whaling in the Edo Period (1603-1867) in Japan. — Courtesy of the Shoko Museum of Arts.

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