

Doctoral Dissertation

Japanese Whaling and the People Behind It: A Story Untold

(日本の捕鯨業とその背景にいる人々—語られなかったストーリー—)

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Note

I am currently in negotiations with some overseas publishers to publish this doctoral dissertation. The potential publishers are NUS Press, National University of Singapore Press, and University of Hawaii Press. The book title by publishing will be the same one as the doctoral dissertation title. The publishing date will be within 2020. Because of the reason, as a disclosure of the full dissertation text has been temporarily suspended based on the HaSS authorization, so the summary of the dissertation is shown on the Tsukuba repository.

Summary

During most of the 20th century countries all over the world were failing to regulate their own and collective whaling activities, which resulted in a severe depletion of most whale stocks. Partially because of the industry's diminishing returns, but mostly thanks to the exponentially growing interest in whaling from the global environmental activism born in the 1970s, whaling as an industry de facto ceased to be after 1982. Catch limits for all commercial whaling were set to zero by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in order to protect whale stocks. What is

also referred to as a “blanket moratorium” was protested by several IWC member countries, including Japan. They believed (and still do) that there was no scientific justification for making no distinction between whale species and stocks, and some of them could still be taken sustainably. Initially this was introduced as a temporary measure and was supposed to be reviewed in ten years’ time. However, this never came to be and in 2016 the moratorium proponents celebrated its 30th anniversary notwithstanding the increasing scientific proof of multiple whale stocks’ availability for harvesting.

Japanese whaling has been one of the most contentious issues in global environmental governance during the past three decades, attracting heated debates. Although the history of whaling in Japan is longer than for most other countries, it was not among the first to get involved in the global whaling regime. And it also become one of the few to withdraw from the leading international organization regulating global whaling – the International Whaling Commission – in 2019. In between, however, it managed to become one of the most vocal nations when it came to discussing whaling policies. Japan became known for promoting pro-whaling goals and values, and no efforts made by anti-whaling nations, organizations, and individuals managed to stir Japan off its course. After its initial objection to the moratorium, Japan soon withdrew it in the face of threats of economic sanctions from the United States. Almost at the same time – in 1988 – it initiated its first research whaling program, followed by several others later. These programs along with Japan’s open commitment to resuming commercial whaling have been severely criticized by Western countries.

While the international dimension of the problem and the Western perspective on whales and whaling has been getting plenty of attention both in the media and in academic literature, the Japanese way of looking at it, especially from the point of view of the people who take direct part

in this issue, has been largely misinterpreted or ignored altogether. The present research attempts to fill in this gap, contributing to deeper and broader understanding of the issue of whaling in general.

The research goal of this study is to show the issue of whaling from the viewpoint of the Japanese people behind it, giving them back the control over the narrative of their own experiences in the context of the major fluctuations happening in the perception and practice of whaling in the past several decades. The stories shared by chosen individuals and their activities as observed by the author will be interpreted, analyzed and put into context to form a rounded and holistic picture of Japanese whaling.

It is the premise of this study that the Japanese facet of the whaling issue has not been fully considered and understood in popular media, academia and, subsequently, political debates. Japanese whaling is often seen and treated as a monolithic phenomenon with the abstract “Japan” behind it. The distinction between different actors and their varying experiences with regards to it is rarely made, which brings about confusion and misunderstandings. The present study attempts to break down this image and show Japanese whaling as a puzzle, where every piece, be it an involved in it sub-group of individuals, space they occupy, event they organize, or relations between several such groups, has its designated part in shaping the whole.

Without understanding the experiences of people involved in whaling, it is easy to overlook the underlying reasons for the whaling controversy to have lasted for decades now. This underscores the relevance of the overall goal of this study.

To satisfy the above goal the following research questions are addressed in the present research:

1. What does characterize the emic side of Japanese whaling? (What are the experiences of people who have engaged with the issue of Japanese whaling first-hand in different capacities and on different levels?)
2. What is the relationship between the emic perspective on Japanese whaling and the etic perspective?

The study employs a conceptual and methodological approach based on a combination of phenomenology and ethnography. In particular, the concepts of emic and etic, central to ethnographic methodology, were utilized. Both phenomenology and ethnography place routine life, the ordinary (for the participants, but not necessarily for the rest of the world) at the forefront of their inquiry. In the present study, in addition to 42 in-depth interviews with participants representing different levels and ways of engagement with the issue of Japanese whaling, this was addressed through fieldwork techniques of observations, casual interviews and informal group discussions, as well as consulting pamphlets and reports from participants and their affiliated organizations. Of special value were participant observations by the author of the present study during Japanese whaling events – a wide range of activities intended for promotion of whale meat-based cuisine, explaining and promoting whaling culture in Japan, as well as Japanese whaling policies etc. A unique opportunity to attend the 67th International Whaling Commission Committee meeting that was convened in Florianopolis, Brazil on the 10-14 September 2018 also greatly informed the results of the present study. These meetings are not open to the public – usually only government representatives, accredited media representatives and registered NGO

representatives are allowed to be present at the venue. Additionally, they are currently only held biennially. The above regulations and timing were factors initially making the author of this study doubt the possibility of attending IWC-67. But thanks to plausible circumstances this noteworthy component of fieldwork was added to the methodological arsenal of this study, providing access to more perspectives, as well as the opportunity to verify the previously obtained data. IWC-67 was a stage where all players of the global whaling dilemma appeared to play out their usual roles – most well-rehearsed and polished with very little improvisation. But as such it was a fascinating “show” (quoting Japan’s commissioner Hideki Moronuki) to witness for the author of this study in the context of the present research. Additionally, the closed-door high-level events such as the post-IWC withdrawal information sessions held first at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and later at the headquarters of the ruling Liberal-Democratic Party of Japan served as important sources of data for the present project.

The phenomenological and ethnographic approaches are also used to create a holistic picture of the whole by either collecting descriptions of its elements or by bringing to light “essences” actual for many experiences of the same phenomenon. While phenomenology focuses on the phenomenon of interest through individual accounts of it, ethnography helps to illuminate people’s understanding of themselves as a group with certain accepted “rules of engagement”. Thus, both these methodological components of this study do justice to its goal – to see what Japanese whaling is like through the eyes of those who belong to the group directly involved in it.

The whaling-related world of Japan is, using phenomenological terminology, a particular “lifeworld”. As such it has its own features and rules of engagement, making it qualitatively different from the ones experienced by non-whaling-related people. By inquiring into the aspects of this “lifeworld” the present research attempts to shed light on the first-person viewpoints of

people whose positions are often ignored or misunderstood and actions misinterpreted. Aggregating insights from the obtained data, interpreting and analyzing it, the research deepens the understanding of whaling developments using the “through the eyes of” participants’ perspectives.

The methodology was guided by the phenomenon of interest, not the other way round, and this concerned the first step of data gathering process – the choice of study participants. For the present study the most important criterion for qualifying to be an informant was for a person to be directly involved in Japanese whaling on some level and in some capacity. Active past involvement was also considered to be fitting this requirement, but there was in the end only one participant who agreed for an interview and actually took part in the research among the ones who retired/were transferred/changed occupations from their whaling-related positions. Thus, the sampling was purposive.

This research is based on triangulation of data and a number of different research approaches. Which means that the interview and fieldwork conduct, data interpretation and analysis were also informed by not one, but several research paradigms. Phenomenology and ethnography were not used consecutively with separate data sets as a result, but rather in combination, generating a mixture of data that was then analyzed as a whole, which helped to form a multidimensional picture of the Japanese whaling landscape as a result. Such convergence of data from different methodological origins is known as “inter-method” (or “between-method”) approach and joining phenomenology and ethnography is considered well-suited to respond to certain research goals.

In the course of this study several so-called pillars of the Japanese (emic) perspective on whaling were identified. Firstly, it is the diversity of actors participating in whaling-related policy-making and practice in Japan.

Generalizations and simplifications are routinely used by the English-language media when it comes to Japanese whaling, and we see this tendency manifest itself in the treatment of Japanese whaling-related actors as well. The latter are mentioned in the passing and it is often assumed that the reader is aware of who is who in Japan when it comes to commissioning whaling ships, conducting research or small-type coastal whaling and other related procedures and activities. Perhaps, given the specifics of the genre, a certain lack of details in the media can be understood if their focus is not on actors, but on their actions. However, reading academic articles on whaling also does not shed enough light on these blind spots. In the academic literature on Japanese whaling the focus is often somewhat narrow. Again, due to the specifics of the genre and the complexity of the problem, most existing academic articles and even books look into a particular aspect of Japanese whaling and also from a certain angle. It could be the culture surrounding whaling; a specific type of whaling – small-type coastal whaling and large-type coastal whaling, pelagic or research whaling; the international dimension of the issue mostly embodied by analyses of the IWC and its work, the effect of it on Japanese policies and Japan's relations with and within this organization; the animal rights perspective and the status of whales in the context of the issue; or public opinion of the problem. Researchers also devote special attention to particular developments of the issue. For instance, the International Court of Justice case against Japanese whaling in the Antarctic provoked a large number of academic publications, as well as Japan's withdrawal from the IWC. Although having a narrow focus is justified in most cases mentioned above, this creates a blurred background effect – seeing the big picture of the social landscape of Japanese whaling is

not easy, as is understanding the relations between its different elements. Moreover, after having conducted the present research it became clear that certain quite important players on the Japanese whaling scene are almost entirely ignored by the existing texts pertaining to the problem. This section is included in the present work in an attempt to reconcile this gap and bring more details of the existing diverse and complex Japanese whaling scene to light. The different institutions, groups and individuals that keep this practice alive are presented, and their roles and connections between them are deliberated upon.

Another pillar of Japanese whaling identified in the present dissertation is continuity. History's significance is undisputable in its role of providing context for any problem as it develops over time. In the case being analyzed here, however, history is so seamlessly integrated into the present Japanese whaling world that it is hard to tell at times where that threshold between history and the present is. By a number of varied means continuity is being established by whaling-related actors between what is of historical importance and what constitutes today's reality in Japanese whaling.

Continuity is a value that is being upheld and actively perpetuated by the pro-whaling Japanese side. This manifests itself through material ways of paying respects to history, namely carefully preserving any remnants of the past days of whaling, as well as constructing new monuments to it – in the broad and even metaphorical sense of the word. History and succession of traditions are a part of the Japanese national academic and media discourse on whaling – numerous articles talk about it directly or presuppose the significance of whaling history for how whaling should be perceived today and what future direction related policies should assume. Not least importantly, the theme of history, traditions and culture have very often emerged in the interviews that were conducted for this project, and the language used when the Japanese people

involved in whaling speak about this practice also reflects their desire to ground it in history and show it as a part of Japanese culture – the words *hogeï bunka* (culture of whaling) or *geishokubunka* (whale-based food culture) were frequently used.

Throughout the long history of whaling in Japan there have naturally been changes in hunting locations, species targeted, as well as innovations in techniques and technology used for catching cetaceans. However, unmistakably there is continuity and consistency in the development of whaling in this country. Specifically, the locations where some of the chronological milestones occurred demonstrate that in certain areas of Japan people have kept to their whaling traditions for many generations. Two of the three towns that are most prominently mentioned in the historical materials on whaling in Japan were visited as part of the fieldwork conducted for the present project – Taiji in Wakayama prefecture and Wadaura in Chiba prefecture. Both Taiji and Wadaura were found to be openly and visibly devoted to their whaling history and present. In the 21st century the streets of both towns are still dotted with shops and restaurants providing whale meat and whale meat based cuisine. There are statues and other artifacts, as well as immaterial cultural elements reminding visitors of these places' unique histories and present specialization. Wadaura's train station and roadside station buildings currently host small whaling museums that feature items and explanations related to the town's involvement in this industry throughout the years. Taiji would, perhaps, rank first in terms of how much of its culture is shaped around whales and whaling out of the whole of Japan. This becomes evident to a keen eye everywhere around the town – from obvious representations like monuments to whales that are decades old, and a harpooner statue built in 1998, and the 69-meter-long vessel Kyo Maru No. 1, retired from research whaling in the Southern Ocean, that has been on display here since 2012, to small modern details like images of whales on bus stop signs, tiles, information boards and manhole covers. These and many other

examples of cultural elements (discussed in detail in the full version of the dissertation) provide strong proof of intentionally sustained and cultivated continuity between history and the present day reality in Taiji. All of the details presented in this section form a single coherent narrative built by this town entirely around whales and whaling. They reveal that its townsmen take pride in the past of their birthplace. An impressive variety of means have been explored by the local government and local organizations to highlight the importance of the relationship Taiji has had with whales for more than four centuries. And the conversations that were held in the course of this study with people who live and work in this town proved that there is also a lot of hope for the future where they will enjoy an equally strong connection with these animals, including through whaling and using their products for the benefit of the community. Thus, continuity in Japanese whaling manifests itself through material ways of paying respects to history, namely carefully preserving any remnants of the past days of whaling, as well as constructing new monuments to it – in the broad and even metaphorical sense of the word.

In course of this project it was also established that from the emic perspective whaling is perceived as natural, nostalgic and familiar. And continuity in whaling and consuming whale products for food has a lot to do with these feelings. Tracing back the challenges and solutions whaling brought to the Japanese people is a useful exercise. It provides one with a glimpse into the multiple layers of meaning whaling has had for those engaged in it in one capacity or another. However, a long history is not only a reason why a community could and should continue a certain cultural practice. Nor is it only an excuse, as the anti-whalers see it, suggesting that not all traditions are worthy of sustenance. Continuity offers a simple, but strong explanation for the feelings Japanese people have for whaling. As was established in this dissertation, depending on the region, people were in contact with this practice for over four centuries, having it present in

their lives for generations. This prolonged contact produced the effect of normalization. Seeing people buying, selling and cooking whale products, eating it as a part of school lunch, or having it as a favorite dish you used to eat at family dinners while growing up, paves the way for familiarity and trust.

The next pillar in Japanese whaling identified in the course of the present project is reactivity. In psychology the term is used to talk about the tendency to change one's behavior in response to being watched. This dissertation argues that reactivity as a concept can help explain many aspects of the Japanese actors' behavior within the issue of whaling. In International Relations theories the idea about international norms influencing countries' behavior is widely discussed. This is applicable to the case of Japanese whaling as well. However, the term reactivity was borrowed from psychology and brought into the discussion in the present study, as its conceptual and methodological framework represents an approach where individual and small-group levels are prioritized. Judging by the conversations I had a chance to have in the course of the fieldwork for this study, the representatives of the Japanese whaling scene are not cognizant of their own reactivity vis-à-vis the Western anti-whaling sentiments. Yet both the primary and the secondary data analyzed provide plenty of examples of how this phenomenon manifests itself in the whaling controversy.

A remarkable evidence that the actors on the Japanese whaling scene view themselves through the prism of what the opposite, anti-whaling side says about them, and how the anti-whalers behave, is the concept of *han-han hogei* or “anti-anti-whaling” that has emerged from the emic side. *Han-han hogei* was mentioned by multiple participants on multiple occasions throughout the duration of the project. In the end, it became clear that there is no Japanese

equivalent for “pro-whaling” that would be used by all of the representatives of Japanese whaling. People would use longer descriptive or more specific ways of putting it, or just say *han-han hogei*. The convenience of using “anti-anti-whaling” from the emic side can be tied to what is discussed in the earlier sections of the dissertation – the normalcy of whaling for most Japanese people, and especially for those who were involved in it before the moratorium came into effect, or whose families or towns were involved in it for generations. It was also concluded that even now, with all the attention the problem received in the media in the last few decades and with the aggressive popularization of the anti-whaling agenda through Western pop-culture, the social landscape of Japanese whaling still only has a weak anti-whaling presence, that in essence is just non-pro-whaling rather than anti-. This was confirmed in numerous conversations held during the present project. In the 1970s, when the anti-whaling campaigns started to appear in the West accompanying a broader movement of environmental consciousness, people in Japan were even less critical of whaling than now. They were not pro-whaling, they were simply taking it for granted. Given that eating whale meat was a norm in Japan, it took norm contestation for some actors to reflect on it and come up with their own opinion. Quite understandably, there cannot be any pro- without some anti- appearing first. And that is exactly the position the current anti-anti-whalers were starting from – neutral. This does not mean that it was a good place to be in, given the collapsing whale stocks. But it is a fact – a lot of what the Japanese people and later on their foreign allies were doing starting from approximately the 1970s was a manifestation of reactivity. *Han-han hogei* is a linguistic reflection of that. To paraphrase it using the conceptual framework chosen for this study, the etic perspective has been of crucial importance in shaping the Japanese emic.

However, reactivity is not only valid as a concept for understanding the verbal framing of personal and group experiences. It is equally useful when it comes to explaining concrete actions of the Japanese whaling actors. That dimension of reactivity is a lot simpler to see and assess. A lot of the work done by the Japanese in the context of whaling was done in direct response to the actions of predominantly Western anti-whaling forces.

On the national government level, such effect of anti-whaling resulted in quite wasteful tendencies. In Western discourse it is common to view animal rights and environmental NGOs as entities who either bring about positive changes, or, in the worst case scenario, fail to make a difference. The case of Japanese whaling, however, showcases how anti-whaling NGOs involved in this matter had a measurable negative effect overall. First of all, they greatly increased the workload of the government officials. And greatly is not an exaggeration here, from the testimonies of people serving at WAO, some of them were focusing exclusively on protecting the Japanese research whaling fleet from Sea Shepherd's harassment in the Antarctic Ocean.

The last pillar of Japanese whaling explored in the present dissertation is orientation towards the future. The above deliberated upon manifestations of reactivity in Japanese whaling are highlighted in Western discourse, because they directly relate to the West and its opinions, therefore they are of more interest to the Western readers and viewers. However, in the course of the interviews and fieldwork conducted for this study, it became clear that there is another dimension to whaling policies and practice in Japan that has also heavily influenced the developments of the issue. This side of Japanese whaling is self-reflective and self-aware. It is embedded in the experiences (understood in broad phenomenological sense) that look into the now of Japanese whaling through the lens of its ideal future. Some of the participants of this study –

institutions as well as individuals – saw the goal of their work in the resumption of commercial whaling. But most of them also recognized verbally or demonstrated with their actions that *han-han-hogei* is an interim objective, and more work is needed on the whaling-promotion arena. If having won, Japan would find that it still lost, because the timing was lost, this whole debate with the West would be meaningless. What the actors on the Japanese whaling scene are most concerned about, is the irreversible loss of consumer interest, both in Japan and in the countries that supported Japan in the IWC. This idea was clearly voiced after Japan announced its withdrawal from the IWC – first at a MAFF whaling discussion session that gathered most of the various whaling-related people on January 21, 2019, and then repeated in a conference room in the headquarters of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Japan, where some of the same people, as well as journalists were treated to the leading party’s take on the latest developments on February 1, 2019. Multiple speakers stated that no one should forget that “*this is not the end, this is just the beginning*” (personal observations). Meaning that the Japanese whaling complex should look into the future and be guided by an ambitious and transformational vision of itself.

This has been addressed on two levels – domestic and international. On the domestic level whaling as a cultural element important for Japanese identity, as well as whaling products as sources of important nutrients are promoted through educational and entertainment events held by various Japanese whaling scene actors. As soon as one starts following the key people in this domain, it becomes clear that promotional activities are organized frequently and with relative success. Some of them are small, inviting 10-15 people, but some attract up to 500 attendees. Only selected events were attended in the course of the present research, and even that number was close to 30 between 2016 and 2018. With more freedom for PR-campaigns as whaling became a regular

commercial activity from July 2019 it is likely that these efforts will only grow in scale and frequency.

On the international level the orientation towards the future manifests itself through Japan's leadership in the international pro-whaling arena. The small island nations, as well as West African countries that were Japan's allies in the IWC could potentially become whaling nations in Japan's opinion. While the idea outrages the West, if one remembers that there are places where people struggle to feed themselves and at the same time have strong bonds with the ocean and are used to receiving their calories from marine resources, and if sustainability is the guiding concept, the idea of developing whaling industries is perfectly reasonable.

CONCLUSION

The concepts of “emic” and “etic” of this dissertation were central to this research. Emic being the view from inside, and etic being the outside perspective, these two components of understanding the whaling dilemma are equally important. These terms with origins in anthropology, sociology and fieldwork methodology related to these disciplines, presuppose that “inside” means from the inside of the social group of interest, while “outside” is what the researcher brings into the study with her, through her own previous experiences and knowledge. In the present study the emic approach was inquired into as prescribed – accounts of own experiences were sought from the Japanese whaling-related individuals and observations of their whaling-related activities were conducted in order to understand the internal elements and functioning of the Japanese whaling landscape. The concept of etic, however, was understood and utilized more broadly. Rather than the researcher's view, the views of anti-whaling camp openly expressed in published and broadcasted resources were seen as the embodiment of the etic

perspective. And the relationship between the etic and the emic in the case of Japanese whaling was then considered and analyzed. If anti- and pro- is often seen as a simple antagonism in the whaling debates, in the present research this relationship is shown to be more complicated and intersubjective. They evolve together in a common environment, use the same terms to justify their stance (e.g. the use of “sustainability” concept by both pro-whaling and anti-whaling sides; the discourse of work for the sake of future generations – a commonality between the two camps that is rarely noticed for the difference of details) and devise their next steps as responses to the steps of the opponent. It is also argued that the lack of understanding and respect towards the emic perspective of the opposite side of the pro- and anti- whaling spectrum is the cornerstone of the stalemate we currently witness in the development of the issue.

There is a general understanding that the issue of whaling is about “saving the whale”. And this idea is in no way denied legitimacy in this dissertation. The fact that whales, as much as other non-human animals and the environment overall, deserve humans’ close attention and protection is unquestionably supported here. The work done to stop and reverse the loss of whale populations is of extreme importance. It holds a lot of potential in terms of providing encouraging examples for solving other environmental issues. In the 20th century we did drive certain species of whales close to extinction. But there is no denying that the story of saving “the whale” is also a positive one. Although there can be resonant claims that the provided solutions were late to come, in critical times critical measures were in the end taken by the international community. This resulted in very promising tendencies in whale stocks’ recovery – some species are presently taken off the endangered species’ lists or moved to other categories of less pressing concern. And as such whaling is a great example of how the global society can and should deliver. But is this story over? And, more importantly for the main goal of this project, does this story end with “saving the

whale”?. The stance taken here is that saving the environment should go hand in hand with considering the changes in human conditions any such strategy entails. While in this particular study the main topic is whaling and the Japanese people involved in the battle for their right to continue this activity, this research was not intended as a defensive statement in support of the Japanese side. Admittedly after having listened to the many internal voices of Japanese whaling, it is difficult not to empathize with humans who are in distress because of the current situation. Still, the overall aspiration of this undertaking was to broaden awareness of this issue and uncover the sides to the Japanese way of looking at the problem in order to be better informed as a global society and be able to make educated decisions in this and other cases with similar variables in the future.