

WEB Voice

The truth is that anti-whaling America “kills” whales

An interview with

Keiko Yagi, Director of the film *Behind the Cove*

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Minke whale (photo by courtesy of the Institute of Cetacean Research, a corporate foundation.)

The Japanese Government announced its secession from the IWC (International Whaling Commission), which is in charge of controlling cetacean resources, and the restart of commercial whaling for the first time since 1988 on December 26 last year. From July this year onward, Japan plans to resume commercial whaling within its 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone off Japanese shores.

In 2015, Ms. Keiko Yagi début her film *Behind the Cove—Approaching the Puzzle of the Whaling Controversy* to counter the film *The Cove*, which condemned dolphin hunting at the town of Taiji, Wakayama Prefecture in Japan and won an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature in 2009. Ms. Yagi’s film was much discussed. Director Yagi covered the politics over whaling, working behind the scenes. What does Ms. Yagi

think about the Japanese Government's decision? We also talked about the true nature of the international organization called the "IWC". [Interviewed by the editorial staff of the *Voice*.]

Director Yagi's film was highly esteemed by anti-whaling countries as well

---The film *Behind the Cove*, directed by Ms. Yagi, conveys the rich whaling culture in Japan and at the same time, by venturing out to cover anti-whaling environmental groups, the true nature of the anti-whaling movement is displayed. Ms. Yagi, please tell us about what you really want to convey through your film.

[Yagi]: What urged me to make the film was news that the International Court of Justice ordered Japan to stop research whaling in March 2014.

I feared that Japan's traditional whaling culture would be lost and, at the same time, I felt that the history and culture of whaling have not been properly understood, both at home and abroad.

So, I stayed in Taiji-cho in Wakayama Prefecture, where dolphin hunting is takes place, covering and shooting for four months. It cost me ¥ 8 million to produce and distribute the film, all of which I paid myself. I still wonder what got me so involved in and attached to the whaling issue. (Laughs.)

---Thanks to your passion and efforts, the film was first shown in 2015 and has attracted much attention worldwide.

[Yagi]: In 2018, my film won an award for Best Director of a Feature Documentary at the London International Film Producers' Festival, and the Special Award at the New York International Filmmaker Festival. I was very happy that my film was highly regarded in Britain and America, both of which are regarded as anti-whaling.

At the London Festival, my film was praised on three points: passion, balance and good composition. At the New York Festival, the film was appreciated because it conveyed whaling's historical background, which is not well known, and, thus, the film has an educational side to it as well.

The judges at the Festivals were all anti-whaling, which, in a sense, gives a good opportunity to view the film rather flatly or in a detached manner. I would be more than happy if my film provides an opportunity for the world to understand Japan's whaling.

The IWC, where scientific arguments fail



At the IWC General Assembly held in September 2018. (Photo by Keiko Yagi.)

--How did you react to the Japanese Government's decision to withdraw from the IWC?

[Yagi]: The Government's decision was right. Rather, I feel it was a little too late. As the media reported, regarding the decision to withdrawal, it owes much to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Secretary General Nikai Toshihiro of the Liberal Democratic Party. Prime Minister Abe's hometown, the City of Shimonoseki, Yamaguchi Prefecture is known as the "birthplace of modern whaling."

Also, the town of Taiji in Wakayama Prefecture is Secretary Nikai's electoral base. On the occasion when *Behind the Cove* was officially screened at the Montreal World Film Festival in 2015, the film was shown at LDP Headquarters and Secretary Nikai watched

the film, sitting next to me. Diet member Yosuke Tsuruho, who also represents Wakayama Prefecture and a member of a pro-whaling federation of Diet members, reportedly saw the film three times, twice while he was hospitalized and once at Party Headquarters.

---Please explain how Japan came to withdrawal from the IWC.

[Yagi]: Ever since the IWC decided on a moratorium of “commercial whaling” in 1982, Japan began “research whaling” to collect data on whales in the Antarctic Ocean and the North West Pacific Ocean in 1987 and in 1988, Japan stopped commercial whaling.

For 30 years thereafter, Japan repeatedly proposed reopening commercial whaling, based on scientific data, to no avail.

The IWC’s scientific committee previously announced that: From an overall estimation of cetacean resources, it is recognized that the number of minke whales in the Antarctic Ocean is 760,000. Based on the current whaling practices, it is possible to catch at least 2,000 to 4,000 whales per year for the next hundred years without causing a problem for maintaining cetacean resources.

However, when Japan asked them to resume commercial whaling based on verified findings, anti-whaling countries would not hear Japan’s proposal, repeatedly saying that, “Whales themselves are symbols of the ecosystem.”

Even though Japan pays about ¥ 20 million every year, the biggest contributor to the IWC fund, Japan’s rights have been silenced by the current thinking that “whaling is entirely incompatible with conservation.”

The IWC was initially established with the view of providing “for the proper conservation of whale stocks and thus make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry,” according to the ICRW (International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling).

However, in the operation of the IWC, the part referring to “orderly development” is totally ignored, as if it had not been stated at all and, instead, over emphasis is placed on the protection of whales.

For instance, during the IWC general assembly held at Florianopolis, Brazil in September last year, Japan made the following proposals:

- 1) Japan proposes to amend paragraph 2 of Article III of the Convention, so that the Schedule may be amended by a simple majority vote (instead of three-quarter vote as is currently required).
- 2) ...Japan proposes a resolution instructing the Scientific Committee to implement the RMP [Revised Management Procedure] to calculate catch limits for abundant wale stocks/species, and expressing commitment by the Commission to set catch limits for such wale stocks.

However, anti-whaling countries quashed Japan's proposals, saying: "Whaling for survival on the part of aborigines and commercial whaling are different and no proposal pertaining to commercial whaling is admissible... The IWC evolves around the sole purpose of protection and we will not allow either the setting up of a 'sustainable whaling committee' or a partial dissolution of the moratorium..." and "Regarding such an important proposal as this, it would be wrong to reach a conclusion in a short period of time, in terms of procedure."

As the decision was made, 41 countries, including anti-whaling America, Australia and the EU countries, were against Japan's proposals, two countries (Korea and Russia) abstained, and 27 countries, mostly Pacific and Caribbean island nations were for our proposals.

Although Japan maintained a balance between protection and sustainable use of cetaceans, and promotion of cooperation among Parties with different standings, anti-whaling countries strongly opposed Japan, stating: "No proposal that allows commercial whaling shall be accepted."

The sound of sonar "kills" whales

---There exist differences in recognition that cannot be closed between countries with a whaling industry and anti-whaling countries.

[Yagi]: Strangely, a fact that is never brought up is that America and Britain, among those who are strongly anti-whaling, are making whales and dolphins suffer, even killing them, through environmental pollution caused by plastic waste, crude oil spills and by noise emitted by commercial ships.

Especially serious is the powerfully sonar waves emitted by U.S. Navy ships during exercises and testing.

The rolling sound waves emitted by low frequency sources 480 kilometers away is 140 decibels (louder than a live heavy metal concert, supposedly a hundred times louder than the sound level that influences the movement of a huge-size whale). Middle frequency sonar is more frequently used.

Recently, we hear news of dead whales washing ashore on beaches. Reportedly, the cause of their deaths could be due to sonar. Many whales and dolphins are affected by sonar--they lose their sense of direction, show brain hemorrhaging and run aground.

The U.S. Navy admitted, in August 2013, that more than three hundred whales and dolphins died due to sonar waves and over ten thousand more were seriously injured and, surprisingly, twenty million cetaceans showed symptoms of abnormal activity.

---It is far more troublesome that over twenty million ocean mammals are seriously exposed to such dangers than the harm caused by whaling.

[Yagi]: Although the U.S. Navy admitted that sonar greatly injures ocean mammals, they have not stopped their operations.

A California District Court's verdict supported an environmentalist's claim concerning damaging sonar, but this was as far as the Court went--it asked the Navy to shut down active sonar when a marine mammal was within 1.25 miles and to power down its sonar under certain conditions.

America, while condemning whaling countries, continues to kill a large number of whales to this day.

Director Yagi of *Behind the Cove* discusses her battle against

anti-whaling propaganda

Ms. Yagi showed the film *Behind the Cove— Approaching the Puzzle of the Whaling Controversy* to rebut the film *The Cove* (the 2009 Academy Award winner for Best Documentary Feature), and her film was much hyped. Director Yagi covered the behind the scenes politics over whaling and now tells us the truth about anti-whaling countries and how she coped with propaganda over whaling.

Discrimination against Japan from European countries and America

--Norway and Iceland continue their commercial whaling operations and aborigines, like the Inuit in Alaska, are allowed to catch whales. Why, then, was Japan not allowed to catch whales on a commercial basis?

[Yagi]: At the bottom of it all, there is discrimination against Japan from European countries and America, and the ensuing strong, political pressure on the part of America plays a role as well.

When the IWC decided on temporary suspension of commercial whaling in 1982, the whaling countries of Iceland, Norway and Japan submitted objections.

At that time, America openly threatened Japan, saying if Japan opposes the suspension, America will not allow Japan to fish within 200 nautical miles off the shores of the United States. Consequently, Japan abstained from submitting an objection.

However, America did not ask much of Norway or Iceland. The two countries are now engaged in commercial whaling without any quota. This is nothing short of “Japan bashing.”

In *Behind the Cove*, there is a scene in which a Norwegian scientist says, “I hear the American Government will not meddle with Norway.”

I prefer not to use the word “racism”, but we cannot help but notice the fact that Japan is segregated by the white community, whether we like it or not.

Especially at the time when Japan enjoyed high economic growth from 1970 to 1980,

having become an economic power, Japan became an object of jealousy and anger by European countries and America.

--I cannot help but wonder how America and Britain turned into anti-whaling countries after they had been actively engaged in whaling.

[Yagi]: Plainly speaking, the European countries and America found whales no longer useful.

America used to catch whales to obtain whale oil. After they took oil out of a whale, they threw the rest of the whale out. This is quite contrary to traditional Japanese whaling. The Japanese used every part of a whale, leaving nothing unused.

However, in America, digging for fossil fuel began in 1859 and soon an oil rush took place. After that, there was no demand for whale oil. Gradually, whaling ceased to be profitable and in 1940, it was decided that whaling would completely stop.

Moreover, in the 1950's, after the IWC was established, "the Olympic method" was in effect, in which each country competed to catch whales until they reached the limit that was previously agreed upon.

When it comes to competing, in a manner of "get set and go," Japan was second to none and in the 1950's Japan became the world's biggest whaling country.

However, it must have been quite disagreeable to see Japan beat other countries, and "the Olympic method" was abolished in 1959. Britain stopped whaling in 1963.

It was no longer necessary for European countries and America to catch whales and they became anti-whaling, suddenly chiding Japan for continuing to catch whales.

---Once Japan showed overwhelming strength within the rules set by all parties, anti-whaling countries tried to change the rules themselves.

[Yagi]: Among anti-whaling countries, some point out that "among European countries and America, there is a need to atone for whaling." However, they are not reflecting on their own misdeeds but only looking out for good excuses in order to defend

themselves.

It was Japan's fault for obediently following the propaganda that blithely stated that whale catching countries are underdeveloped and behind the times.

The composition of domestic conflict between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Fisheries Agency

--I hear much international criticism against Japan's withdrawal from the IWC.

[Yagi]: I think Japan is overly conscientious of Europe and America. Some media overlapped Japan's withdrawal from the IWC, an international organization, with Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933. The two incidents are entirely different matters in terms of both time and background.

Is it commendable if Japan remains a country that cannot say "No," no matter the unreasonable treatments or pressures that Japan receives?

I don't think it serves Japan's interests to attend fruitless meetings of international organizations established by Europe and America and being forced to contribute money.

The Japanese Government and concerned ministries and agencies failed to explain why Japan withdrew from the IWC to the Japanese people and media. Therefore, mostly the negative side of the withdrawal was reported. When Japan resumes commercial whaling, it is feared that those who are engaged in whaling may undergo pressure or obstruction from anti-whaling countries and environmental activists. We don't know yet what measures the Japanese Government will take to protect people in the whaling business and others.

After Japan's withdrawal from the IWC, I interviewed the director of the Fisheries Agency in charge of whaling to get at the truth, without paying heed to the rumors.

It was generally reported that there had been a plan to permit Japan to resume commercial whaling in waters adjacent to Japan in exchange for stopping research whaling in the Antarctic Ocean. But I knew that this was not true, from the start.

Such discrepancies led to unfounded criticism on the part of the media, such as: “If Japan had swallowed the initial IWC recommendation, Japan would be by now freely catching whales in waters off shore. Instead, Japan dragged on for too long in responding and it turned out that Japan cannot go to the Antarctic Ocean any more. There is no merit in Japan’s withdrawal from the IWC this time.”

---Changes brought about by the withdrawal do not seem to be understood by the Japanese people.

[Yagi]: Against a simple question the Japanese people may have, no measures have been taken to inform the general public of the situation. I’m worried about the fact that, on the Japanese Government’s decision to withdrawal from the IWC, the relevant ministries and agencies in charge of the matter have yet to come up with adequate plans.

Rather, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose responses have been unsatisfactory, now seems to be turning for the better.

The U.S. newspaper, *The New York Times* (dated December 31, 2018) headlined an editorial: “Japan: Stop Slaughtering Whales,” which criticized Japan’s withdrawal from the IWC as a “dangerous and foolish move.”

The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs submitted a letter in response: “It is unfair to single out Japan” and “It is offensive to dismiss Japan’s concern for protection of its own cultural heritage and the industry closely related to it...”

Moreover, *The Los Angeles Times* also criticized Japan’s withdrawal from the IWC. The Japanese Consulate in Los Angeles countered the newspaper’s criticism.

The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, mindful of international criticism, has been in conflict with the Fisheries Agency, which promotes the resumption of commercial whaling. However, this time, the Foreign Ministry is doing its work in a solid manner.

I would like the Fisheries Agency to be fully prepared to resume commercial whaling in July this year and to disseminate information lest the Japanese people and those engaged in whaling be worried about the resumption of commercial whaling.

Efforts to establish an international organization led by Asia

Now that Japan has abandoned the IWC, how should Japan deal with the international community on the whaling issue?

[Yagi]: I think that Asia should play a leading role in establishing an international organization unlike that of the IWC.

Most international organizations present today, not just the IWC, but also the United Nations, are led by the victorious Allied nations of World War II.

Over seventy years have passed since World War II ended and yet Japan tacitly follows the rules set by the victorious countries—Japan cannot disseminate its own views. Efforts are limited in progressive discussions and things remain as they are today.

China and Russia, both of which often conflict with Japan over territorial and historical issues, are not against whaling. In recent years, the two countries have gained momentum internationally and there is a possibility of cooperation for commercial whaling.

It is globalism, in the truest sense, that Japan can exchange views on equal terms with other countries of the world, and not just obediently follow Europe and America. As a first step forward, Japan representing whaling countries, should play a major role in building a platform for fair discussion.

---It is often pointed out that beside the whaling issue, Japan failed to effectively disseminate information about historical view such as the comfort women issue. Against the rampant anti-Japanese propaganda in the world today, how should Japan cope with this situation?

[Yagi]: Regarding the issue of the military comfort women, it is necessary for Japan to involve the entire international community in discussions, mentioning cases in Europe and America on the issues of the military and sex. Sexual mistreatment of women in wartime is a matter of concern not exclusively to Japan.

For instance, it is said that many *lai dai Hhan* (*lai* referring to “half-blood” in

Vietnamese and *dai han* meaning “Korea”) were products of rapes between Korean military soldiers and local Vietnamese women.

U.S. soldiers have been praised as valiant heroes who liberated France from Nazi Germany during World War II. However, a professor of European history at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, revealed that many French women were raped by American soldiers following the invasion of Normandy.¹

Moreover, U.S. magazine *Time* reported that in Okinawa, young children were raped and later killed by U.S. military personnel.

One of the reasons why Japan created the military comfort women system was concern over hygiene, to prevent the spread of venereal diseases. As a result of making official facilities and strictly regulating them, Japan alone has been continuously castigated, to this day.

These unfair criticisms are also due to an inadequate ability to disseminate facts on the part of Japan and propaganda spread by other countries. Now, it is necessary for Japan to disseminate factual information speedily and effectively to the world.

As for the comfort women issue, Japan should focus on the sexual mistreatment of women all over the world in wartime, and not just on Korean women as activists would have us to do.

I think it is vital for Japan to continue to disseminate its views on the whaling issue, both domestically and abroad, as well as against other types of propaganda. One attempt is not at all enough.

¹ *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France*, by Mary Louise Roberts, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2013.