

5 The Whaling Empire

After all, we owe it to whales that Commodore Perry from the United States came to Japan and broke our dream of isolation and opened up the country. Therefore, we should not only acknowledge Perry as the benefactor of Japan's opening to the world, but also honour the virtue of whales as the progenitors our civilization.¹

With these words, Ōashi Bō opened his congratulatory address to the new whaling station of Tōyō Hogeī in Same-ura on 11 June 1911. In his speech, Ōashi, a representative of the regional newspaper Ōnan Shimpō, further praised the benefits that the whaling station would bring not only for the nation but also for the local fishing community:

The fact that this national power expanding historic project [the Same-ura whaling station] has occurred in our region is indeed a good omen for the promotion of the region. We cannot celebrate this enough. We have long been advocating the need for the construction of a fishing port along our coast, and we believe that the start of whaling in this area attests our urgent need for a fishing port. Even from this point of view, the people in provincial areas like us have good reason to welcome the station and celebrate it greatly.²

Little did Ōashi know that the newly christened whaling station would by the end of the year be reduced to ash by the very same fishermen he believed should congratulate the construction of such stations. But how did it come so far? As we can see in this speech, by the late Meiji period whales had been inextricably linked to the founding myth of the emerging Japanese empire and were seen as a key component of enhancing the power of the nation, while also proclaiming that whaling would help industrialise local fisheries.

As we will explore in this chapter, the rise of industrial whaling altered the interaction between humans and cetaceans forever, leading to the anthropogenic destruction of the cetosphere. During the Meiji

¹ Ōnan Shimpō, 'Kaijōshiki ni okeru Ōashi-shi enzetsu no taii'.

² Ōnan Shimpō, 'Kaijōshiki ni okeru Ōashi-shi enzetsu no taii'.

period, new ideas of how to make use of nature, inspired by European and American industrialisation, emerged in Japan. Stakeholders in the bureaucracy and among capitalists often believed in a sharp dichotomy between humans and nature, indicating that industrial processes – and in extension humans making use of these processes – were inherently removed from nature. Once a natural resource was swallowed by the industrial complex it was converted into a commodity that was no longer part of the natural world. This dualism was further expanded on knowledge systems where objective scientific methodology was juxtaposed with a pre-industrial knowledge system that was allegedly based on irrational superstitions. However, as Japanese historians have shown, the reality was much more complicated than these simple bifurcated lines indicate.³ Similarly, the building of a Japanese whaling empire was far from smooth sailing. In this chapter, we will trace how whales became an industrial commodity that was detached from coastal ecosystems and how groups of fishermen around the country began to counter this narrative.

Opening the Country

The nineteenth century was a period of great change in the ocean around the Japanese Archipelago. American and British whaling ships had since the 1820s hunted thousands of sperm whales in the so-called Japan Grounds, while Japanese whalers with the net whaling method effectively emptied the near-coastal regions of right whales and other species. In 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry of the United States Navy arrived in Edo Bay with a fleet of warships, putting pressure on the Tokugawa government to open a number of ports to foreign trade.⁴ As suggested by Ōashi, whales did indeed play a role, as one of Perry's goals was to allow American whalers to refuel water and coal at Japanese harbours. American politicians had especially been annoyed by the poor treatment shipwrecked sailors experienced in Japan but by the 1850s, American whaling already showed first signs of decline due to poorer catches. Probably more important was the recent annexation of California, which had brought the 'Pacific frontier' into the minds of US expansionists and Japan as a way station where the new steamships could refuel their coal reserves.⁵ Perry's visit

³ Miller, *The Nature of the Beasts*, 1–3; Stolz, *Bad Water*; Thomas, *Reconfiguring Modernity*.

⁴ Japan has not been completely 'closed' from the outside world but had been conducting limited trade not only in Nagasaki, but also on the Ryūkyū Islands, Tsushima, and Matsumae during the Edo period, see Hellyer, *Defining Engagement*.

⁵ Mitani, *Escape from Impasse*, 87–97; Rüegg, 'The Kuroshio Frontier', chap. 5.

and the subsequent rise of contact with foreign nations caused widespread political turmoil in Japan. Eventually, samurai from the western domains of Satsuma, Tosa, and Chōshū joined forces to overthrow the Tokugawa Shogunate and ‘restore’ the emperor in the ‘Meiji Restoration’ of 1868.

The introduction of new whaling technology following the opening of the treaty ports Nagasaki, Kobe, Yokohama, and Hakodate seemed like a chance for revival of the struggling whaling proto-industry. Nakahama Manjirō (aka John Manjirō, 1827–1898) was a Japanese fisherman who was cast away in 1841 and rescued by an American whaler. From this experience, Manjirō learned not only English and western navigation techniques but also the fundamentals of American whaling. After his return to Japan, he became crucial in the negotiation between the Tokugawa Shogunate and Commodore Perry. Manjirō was a strong advocate for the introduction of American whaling techniques. He wrote:

If we start whaling in our near coastal waters, we will be able to kill two birds with one stone: [Hunting] whales will not only be of great benefit (*rieki*) for our country, but it will also allow us to learn the art of sailing.⁶

For Manjirō the advantage of western-style whaling lay in the ships themselves as the American sailing ships were able to leave the near-coastal area and hunt the whales on the open sea. As early as 1858, he would spearhead an expedition to the Ogasawara Islands to experiment with the American bomb lance technique, which had only recently been developed in 1846. While his first attempt was of limited success it nevertheless marked the first Japanese push into offshore whaling.⁷ In the long run, these efforts proved insufficient to stop the rapid decline of whaling in the northern Pacific. After a series of poor catches, the Masutomi whaling group of Ikitsukishima, the largest whaling group of western Japan, was forced out of business in 1860.⁸ Similarly, many American whalers ceased their operations in the Japan Grounds after the discovery of crude oil in Pennsylvania in 1859 and due to the hostilities of the American Civil War.⁹

While the decline of American whaling progressed, Japanese officials imagined a revival of whaling in the Meiji empire. Fujikawa Sankei (1817–1889), a major advocate for offshore fisheries and whaling, promoted the usage of American bomb lance whaling in the 1870s on the

⁶ Cited after: Kondō, *Nihon engan hōgei no kōbō*, 160.

⁷ Rüegg, ‘Mapping the Forgotten Colony’, 126–32.

⁸ Nakazono, ‘Whaling Activities of Ikitsuki Islanders’, 145.

⁹ Dolin, *Leviathan*, 293–325.

Ogasawara Islands and in Katsuyama on the Bōsō Peninsula.¹⁰ Fujikawa made the case that through the harvest of marine resources the Japanese empire should expand from its coastal waters into the open ocean.¹¹ The hunting of whales in the offshore region played a key role in this scheme. In the preface of his 1889 published book *Hogeī Zushiki* (Illustrated Whaling), the politician Nagaoka Moriyoshi (1843–1906) claimed similarly that the ‘knowledge of the use of whales drives the wealth and power of the nation’.¹²

Following the example of Fujikawa, a group of bureaucrats formed the semi-official Fisheries Society of Japan (*Dai-Nihon Suisan Kai*) in 1882. As stated in the editorial of the first issue of its monthly magazine, the goal of this organisation was the active promotion of fisheries knowledge and science in the whole empire, thus enhancing through maritime activities the government policy of ‘wealth and power’.¹³ In their eyes, there was an ‘excess of marine products in our near coastal places such as whales, otters, and seals’.¹⁴ In the following issues, writers for the magazine advocated strongly for the establishment of American-style whaling:

Whaling is for a maritime nation indispensable to guarantee its coastal defense . . . It helps to expand the navy and to detect the influence of other countries [in our waters]. Securing the inexhaustible marine resources is of great benefit for the nations interest and people’s welfare. The whaling industries in the United States and Europe are extremely prosperous and they are always in close contact with their navies. Together they are an essential part of coastal defense, just as the two wings of a bird or the two wheels of a carriage.¹⁵

While Manjirō had in the 1850s emphasised the importance of offshore whaling for gaining sailing knowledge, now whalers were imagined as an extended arm of the navy, echoing the argumentation of Ōtsuki Heisen and Gentaku in the 1800s. This pro-whaling propaganda campaign, however, did not target common fishermen and whalers, but other members of the Meiji government.¹⁶ The discussions surrounding the Fisheries Society of Japan were thus an elite discourse with little regard towards the opinion of the actual fishermen.

¹⁰ Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 36.

¹¹ Arch, ‘Nineteenth-Century Japanese Whaling and Early Territorial Expansion in the Pacific’, 62.

¹² Fujikawa, *Hogeī Zushiki*, 5 reverse. See also, Arch, *Bringing Whales Ashore*, 2018, 73–4.

¹³ Morita, “‘Dai-Nihon suisan kaihō (koku)’ ni okeru kujira, hogeī kanren kiji (1)”, 13–14.

¹⁴ Dai-Nihon suisan kaihō, ‘Honkai setsuritsu no tenmatsu’, 4.

¹⁵ Dai-Nihon suisan kaihō, ‘Kaibō no kyūmu hogeī ni ari’. Cited after, Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 36–7.

¹⁶ Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 36.

The Castle of Sperm Whales

The bomb lance whaling technique was eventually adopted by some of the traditional whaling groups in Tateyama, the Gotō Islands, and in Hirado domain. However, the results of the methods remained underwhelming. In the 1880s, the western Japanese whaling groups hunted altogether only around 150 whales a year.¹⁷ Unlike American whalers, Japanese whaling groups mainly hunted for whale meat, which was often destroyed when using the bomb lance. Some modifications of the lance mitigated the problem to a certain degree, but overall, the bomb lance was mainly used for hunting sperm whales, while other cetaceans were still targeted with the classical net whaling methods.¹⁸

Therefore, members of the Fisheries Society of Japan became involved in spreading American-style whaling to new whaling grounds, where no traditional whaling groups had operated before. One such place was the northern island Hokkaido (formerly Ezo), where the Meiji government was undertaking large-scale colonisation efforts on land and water.¹⁹ However, the local fishing population met attempts to introduce American-style whaling with fierce resistance. For example, in 1885, a whaling ship appeared in the town of Iwanai during the herring season. After they successfully harpooned a whale, the local fishermen went into uproar and demanded that the whale was freed immediately. The whalers had no other choice than to comply.²⁰ Such reports were deeply worrying for Sekizawa Akekiyo (1843–1897), an engineer working for the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce and later a professor at the Tokyo School of Agricultural and Forestry. Sekizawa had promoted whaling in Hokkaido and had, therefore, a keen interest in countering the anti-whaling protests on the northern island. He wrote in 1887 in the *Journal of the Fisheries Society of Japan*: ‘So far, when whales come close to the shore of Hokkaido, they gather herring and other fishes. This is why they are called Ebisu-sama. If [whales] are hunted, [people] thought that this would cause a poor catch of herring and other fishes.’²¹ According to Sekizawa’s description, the fishermen hunting in Hokkaido during the 1880s regarded the world in the same ecological framework as fishermen at the Sanriku Coast. Whales were called Ebisu and believed to be responsible for herring and other fish to come close to the shore. Indeed, as already discussed in the previous chapter, many

¹⁷ Kondō, *Nihon engan hoge no kōbō*, 178–9.

¹⁸ Kondō, *Nihon engan hoge no kōbō*, 182–4.

¹⁹ See, for example, Mason, *Dominant Narratives of Colonial Hokkaido and Imperial Japan*; Walker, *The Conquest of Ainu Lands*.

²⁰ Itabashi, *Kita no hogeiki*, 72–5.

²¹ Sekizawa, ‘Rokoku hoge kaisha setsuritsu no kyo wo kite kan ari’, 15.

fishermen working in Hokkaido were actually *dekasegi* (migrant workers) from the Sanriku Coast, who only came north during the herring runs. It is, therefore, not surprising that these fishermen would also bring their local knowledge when travelling north, explaining their anti-whaling stance. But Sekizawa did not believe that whaling was directly related to poor fish catches. He explained in the same article:

Because the whaling industry has a lot to do with local fishing industry, they should not start an operation without considering the possible [harmful] effects. I did a survey on this. Already in western countries a few years prior there were some people who mistakenly argued that the whaling industry is harmful. However, Dr. Sars conducted research in the local area, and he has made it clear that catching whales will not hinder local fisheries.²²

Sekizawa refers here to the Norwegian zoologist Georg Ossian Sars (1837–1927). As explained by Sekizawa in the following issue of the magazine, the province Finnmark in northern Norway had one of the highest abundances of marine products and also a proliferating whaling industry. However, according to the ecological knowledge of the Finnmark fishing communities, whales would drive herring and other fish towards the shore. Because of the pressure of the fishermen, the Norwegian assembly (*Storting*) had enforced limitations on whaling, but the relationship between whaling and fishing was still poorly understood. Sars was therefore tasked in conducting an impartial field study. After some studies at a whaling station in Finnmark, Sars came to the conclusion that the influence of whaling on the fishing industry was negligible, arguing that fish like capelin swam towards the shore by instinct to lay eggs and whales as well as predatory fish species like cod would simply follow capelin to the shore. Therefore, hunting whales would not influence the behaviour of other fish species.²³

As the Japanese fishing historian Ishida Yoshikazu has argued, Sekizawa introduced his audience in the *Journal of the Fisheries Society of Japan* to Sars's research with the goal to discredit the ecological knowledge of the Japanese fishermen as mere 'superstitions' that were based on misguided religious beliefs.²⁴ To make the connection between the Norwegian and the Japanese case even stronger, Sekizawa claimed that the Norwegian fishermen believed that the whales were 'messengers from heaven' (*ten no shisha*). My own research into the Norwegian primary sources could, however, not find any mention of this term and

²² Sekizawa, 'Rokoku hogeï kaisha setsuritsu no kyo wo kite kan ari', 15.

²³ Sekizawa, 'Hogeï to nishinryō no kankei ikan'. See also, Holm, 'Bringing Fish to the Shore'.

²⁴ Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 25–32.

I suspect that Sekizawa invented it to draw a parallel to the Ebisu belief of the Japanese fishermen.

Sekizawa asserted that impartial western sciences, as represented by the study of Sars, had allegedly shown that whaling and fishing were not connected and, consequently, the anti-whaling protests in Hokkaido had to stop. Using the Norwegian internal colonisation of Finnmark as an example, Sekizawa further suggested that industrial whaling would help create a 'rich country with a strong army' (*fukoku kyōhei*), as the popular Meiji period slogan went, by protecting the northern border against Russia and bringing new industrial technologies and capitalistic practices to the coastal periphery. Following the example of industrial whaling, Sekizawa was convinced that other fisheries would also 'modernise' and subsequently elevate the lives of the poor fishing communities.²⁵ Nevertheless, American-style whaling in Hokkaido never lived up to its promise and came to an inglorious end in the 1890s.

Unperturbed, Sekizawa would next set his gaze on the Sea of Kinkazan, which had for a long time been discussed as a possible whaling site. Only recently, in 1887, had a local entrepreneur caught a sperm whale off Kinkazan in the region the locals called 'the castle of sperm whales'.²⁶ However, a lack of funding, as well as inadequate equipment and fishing boats had made further expeditions unfeasible so far.²⁷ In July 1893, the schooner *Sekikōmaru* set out from Tokyo to the Sea of Kinkazan for investigating the prospect of whaling in the region. As a western-style sailing ship that also used steam power, the *Sekikōmaru* was able to penetrate the Sea of Kinkazan much deeper than any of the small fishing vessels before. The researchers on the *Sekikōmaru* were astounded when they found in the perturbed region not only an abundance of schools of sardines, mackerel, and bonito, but also of sei, fin, and right whales. Completely unexpected for the crew was also the presence of Baird's beaked whales. The expedition successfully caught two sperm whales in the Sea of Kinkazan using the American-style bomb lance whaling techniques.²⁸

The search for a coastal base at the Sanriku Coast, where ships could anchor during the frequent storms and from where sperm whale hunts could be started, was one of the primary goals of the expedition. The researcher on the ship believed the Sea of Kinkazan to be one of the most

²⁵ Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 25–32.

²⁶ Ōu Nichinichi Shimbun, 26 August 1887, cited after: Oshika chōshi hensen iinkai, *Oshika chōshi: Jōkan*, 218.

²⁷ Oshika chōshi hensen iinkai, *Oshika chōshi: Chūkan*, 214–15.

²⁸ Kaburagi, 'Kinkazanoki no gyōba ni tsuite'.

promising candidates for offshore sperm whale hunting, as the mixing of ocean currents and the high sea temperature attracted countless groups of whales during the summer months. Furthermore, they had heard that the region had been visited by foreign whaling ships fifty years ago.²⁹ In their preliminary report about the expedition, published in the *Journal of the Fisheries Society of Japan*, they concluded: 'There is great potential in the future here. It was only regrettable that because of our limited time here we have seen sperm whales only once.'³⁰ Despite these promising results, Sekizawa did not manage to establish a whaling operation in the region prior to his death in 1897.

By 1900, it had become apparent that the transition from net whaling to American-style whaling had failed. While western sailing techniques allowed Japanese whalers for the first time to leave the near coastal ground and to deeper penetrate the offshore regions, they struggled with the implementation of the bomb lance technique, which was not suitable for securing whale meat. Furthermore, the American whaling technique was limited to a set range of whale species, which did not differ much from the species already hunted with the net whaling technique. Japanese coastal whaling and American pelagic whaling had together caused the deaths of hundred of thousands of sperm, grey, right, and humpback whales in the North Pacific. Other cetacean species were less targeted, either because the available technology was not reliable enough to catch them or their economic value was too low. Therefore, blue, fin, and sei whales as well as many smaller cetaceans could probably expand their sphere of influence. On the other hand, species that were overhunted were scattered across the ocean and recovered only slowly. Confronted by local opposition and without a way to access the so-far untapped whale stocks of rorquals, Japanese whaling seemed to be at an ecological and economic deadlock and would likely have disappeared from history.

Then, something unexpected happened. In 1890, the markets in Nagasaki suddenly experienced a surge in fin and blue whale meat, even though regional Japanese whaling groups were further reducing their hunting activities. As it turned out, the meat came not from Japan but from Korea, where Russian whalers had recently adopted a new whaling method from Norway, which allowed the efficient hunting of rorquals. The introduction of the Norwegian-style whaling method to Japan would change the industry forever and facilitate the killing of millions of cetaceans in the twentieth century.

²⁹ Kaburagi, 'Kinkazanoki no gyōba ni tsuite'.

³⁰ Dai-Nihon suisan kaihō, 'Chōsha shūryō', 49.

The Rise of Industrial Whaling

When Sekizawa introduced the research of Georg Ossian Sars to a Japanese audience, he acknowledged that the Norwegians were using steamboats for hunting whales, but he completely missed the deeper significance of the new technology for whaling. The new whaling techniques that were developed in Norway in the 1860s were nothing short of a revolution, radically altering not only how whaling was conducted but also fundamentally changing the relationship between cetaceans and humans.

Since the sixteenth century Basque, British, German, French, and Dutch whalers travelled around the northern coasts of Norway and as far as Spitsbergen to hunt for right whales and sperm whales. However, these operations had little relevance to the local population, and it was not until the 1860s that Norwegian entrepreneurs started their own whaling operations. One of the first was the former seal hunter Svend Foyn (1809–1884). In 1863, Foyn commissioned the world's first steamship built for catching whales and established the first modern whaling station in Vadsø, an all-year ice-free harbour in a fjord in eastern Finnmark near the Russian border. Foyn used his coastal whaling station to experiment with new uses for all parts of the whale carcasses to minimise the enormous waste. In addition to the traditional processing of whale blubber into oil, Foyn developed products such as whale fertiliser, margarine, cattle feed, tinned whale meat, and glue from whale bones. This allowed him to reduce the industry's dependence on the commodity of whale oil, which had become less competitive due to the rise of crude oil and find new economic markets for whale products.³¹

Finally, Foyn and his engineers perfected a new design for killing whales efficiently. The so-called harpoon cannon was mounted at the ship's bow and shot steel harpoons into the flesh of the whales where black powder would explode, killing the cetacean instantly, if aimed correctly. The combination of these three new technologies – steamship, harpoon cannon and whaling station – were the fundamentals of industrial whaling in the emerging marine anthroposphere. It was now possible to hunt every whale species, regardless of size and speed and process the carcass efficiently for all its parts.

However, Foyn's inventions also had some major drawbacks, leading to rising protests in the local population. For one, the coastal whaling stations caused widespread environmental pollution, as unprocessed grease, oil, and blood of the whale carcasses were let into the bay, hurting the coastal ecosystem. The firing of the harpoon cannon was also noisy,

³¹ Tønnessen and Johnsen, *The History of Modern Whaling*, 26–32; Niemi, 'Modern Whaling on the Norwegian Arctic Coast', 68–72.

and locals feared that it would drive away fish. Moreover, as discussed above, local fishermen believed that whales would drive capelin and other fish species closer to the shore. While Sars' research was not able to confirm this, later investigations showed that some whales, such as fin whales, did indeed have an at least indirect effect on coastal fishing.³²

Over the course of the next three decades, thousands of whales were killed in the waters around northern Norway, making use of Foyn's new technologies and even whaling supporters had to acknowledge that the whale stocks were declining at an alarming rate. At the turn of the century, a series of bad fish catches further worsened the relationship between whalers and fishermen. A drastic increase in seals from the Russian Coast, which competed with the fishermen for the same fish resources, was believed to be the result of the dwindling whale stocks. Finally, on 1 June 1903, over 1,000 frustrated fishermen gathered in Mehamn, a small fishing town in Finnmark, and went after an argument with the local whalers on a rampage, burning down the local whaling station. Shocked by this outburst of violence, the Norwegian assembly decided soon after on a ban of coastal whaling starting in 1904.³³

The emergence and eventual demise of industrial whaling in northern Norway had also consequences for whaling in East Asia. Otto Lindholm (1832–1914) and Akim G. Dydymov (?–1891) were the first Russians to conduct whaling in the Russian Far East. Lindholm started as early as 1864, working with indigenous people from all around the Pacific.³⁴ In 1885, Lindholm not only faced bankruptcy, but he was also heavily attacked by Akim G. Dydymov, a former Naval Lieutenant, who apparently detested Lindholm for having Finnish ancestry. In 1886, Dydymov left the navy and travelled to St. Petersburg to prevent Lindholm from receiving a monopoly on whaling using his political contacts. Dydymov acquired capital for his own whaling enterprise, where he was introduced to the Norwegian-style whaling method. In 1889, Dydymov hired Capitan Foyn, a relative of Svend Foyn, and several Norwegian whalers, who should instruct the Russian crew on the new whaling techniques. In their first season in 1890, the Russian whalers captured seventy-three whales in the Korean sea. The whale carcasses were brought on land at the Korean port of Wonsan (today part of North Korea), where Dydymov had built a land whaling station after the model of Foyn's stations in Finnmark. Originally, Dydymov had intended to discard the whale meat or donate it to the locals. However, learning from Lindholm's experience,

³² Hjort, *Fiskeri og hvalfangst i det nordlige Norge*.

³³ See Holm, 'Bringing Fish to the Shore'.

³⁴ For more on Lindholm, see Jones, *Red Leviathan*, chap. 2.

he instead brought seven tons of whale meat to Nagasaki to sell it there. His ship disappeared with its whole crew in 1891 in the Korean Sea.³⁵

After the tragic end of Dydymov, other Russian entrepreneurs started their own industrial whaling operations. The most successful was Count Heinrich Hugovistsj Kejzerling (1866–1944), who founded the Pacific Whaling Company in 1894. Kejzerling not only took over the land whaling station from Dydymov in Wonsan, but also bought two Norwegian whaling steamers, the *Nikolaj* and *Georgij*, and hired Norwegian gunners. Like his predecessors, Kejzerling sold the whale meat to Nagasaki and even moved to Nagasaki, where he hired Japanese experts to perform the salting process of the whale meat. Kejzerling's biggest coup was the purchase of a 3,643 metric ton factory ship that was remodelled in Danzig to become the world's first whaling factory ship under the name of *Michail* in 1903. The *Michail* could not only dismantle whales on board but could also process the blubber into whale oil, making a land-based whaling station redundant and increasing the quality of the oil. As it was a prototype, however, not everything worked as planned and only the oil of one whale per day could be processed instead of the planned six. With his whaling fleet, Kejzerling could now follow the whaling migration route in the Sea of Japan between Kamchatka and the Korean Peninsula all year long. This maximised his profits but put further pressure on the already struggling blue whale stocks.³⁶

Norwegian-Style Whaling in Japan

The sudden appearance of the Russian whale meat in 1890 in the markets of Nagasaki caused concern among Japanese whalers. Plans to work with the Russians were dissuaded by the Meiji government, which saw Russian whaling as a threat to Japanese maritime interests. The establishment of land whaling stations and the hunting of whales off the Korean coast was seen as a way for the Russian empire to intensify their colonisation efforts on the Korean Peninsula. It was also feared that the Russians would hunt whales near Hokkaido and the Kuril Islands and thus undermine the still volatile colonial Japanese presence there, bringing Heisen's fear into fruition almost one hundred years later. To counter these Russian advances, Japanese politicians encouraged private investors to start their own Japanese whaling operations in the Sea of Japan (East Sea).³⁷

³⁵ Neff, 'Russian Whaling in Korea'; Kaminaga, 'Hokutō Ajia ni okeru kindai hōgeigyō no reimei', 53–8.

³⁶ Kaminaga, 'Hokutō Ajia ni okeru kindai hōgeigyō no reimei', 59–62; Tønnessen, *Den moderne hvalfangsts historie*, 2:186–8.

³⁷ Kaminaga, 'Hokutō Ajia ni okeru kindai hōgeigyō no reimei', 57–8; Okamura, 'Modern Whalers of Nagato Kitaura', 103–4.

Among the first Japanese entrepreneurs to pursue industrial whaling was Oka Jūrō (1870–1923) from Hagi in Yamaguchi Prefecture (formerly Chōshū domain). Oka had studied at Keio University under Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901), one of the most prominent Meiji period intellectuals, and became a local politician in Yamaguchi Prefecture in 1896. To raise funding for his whaling enterprise, Oka went to Tokyo and received support from politicians, many of whom were also of Yamaguchi descent. In May 1899, when the necessary funding was finally secured, Oka left as a temporary employee of the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce to learn more about Norwegian-style whaling in Europe. In Kristiania (renamed Oslo in 1925), he bought whaling equipment and placed an order for a steam whaling ship. Next, he went to the north to witness Norwegian-style whaling in Finnmark firsthand at the Mehamn whaling station (the same station that would be burned down four years later). Back in Japan, Oka's founded a whaling company, Nihon Enyō Gyogyō, in 1899. He hired the Norwegian gunner Morten Petersen, who had worked on a Russian whaling ship. Oka paid him the extraordinary wage of 200 yen per month plus 30 yen for each whale caught and gave him a three-year contract. As ordering a whaling ship from Norway would take too long, Oka commissioned a steam whaling ship from a Japanese shipyard, which would be called *Chōshūmaru* and began operating in 1900. However, the ship was stranded in December of the same year on a sandbank during a storm and could no longer be used.³⁸

Oka had also leased the *Olga* from an English-Russian whaling group and, after the shipwreck of the *Chōshūmaru*, chartered the Norwegian ships *Rex* and *Regina*. These ships were under the command of two experienced Norwegian gunners: Frederik Olsen and Carl Amundsen. The Norwegians received the high sum of 5,000 yen a month for the charter, but they were not allowed to open their own whaling stations on Japanese soil and were contractually obligated to sell only to the Japanese. This system was intended to exclude foreign competitors from the Japanese whale stocks, while still making use of the foreign expertise. Indeed, Norwegian gunners were instructed to teach Japanese sailors how to use the harpoon cannon, leading to the (justified) fear in Norway that Norwegian gunners would make themselves obsolete in time.³⁹ However, it was not until the early 1930s that all Norwegian gunners had been replaced by Japanese.⁴⁰

³⁸ Akashi, *Honpō no noruē-shiki hogeishi*, 205–6; Okamura, 'Modern Whalers of Nagato Kitauro', 104–7; Okamura, *Kujira to hoge no monogatari*, 125–9.

³⁹ The Journal of the Fisheries Society of Japan, 'Training Whaling Gunners'.

⁴⁰ Mageli, 'Norwegian-Japanese Whaling Relations in the Early 20th Century'.

With these three ships, the company captured over sixty whales in their first three seasons. Despite being made out of steel, these early types of whalers, weighing between 100 and 130 metric tons, were nimble and reached up to ten nautical miles per hour. They had an operation range of up to 100 nautical miles. The crews consisted of a Norwegian gunner, a Japanese captain, an engineer, firefighter, and around ten sailors, some of them being poorly paid Korean workers. The whaling cannon was mounted on the bow of the ship. On a hunting day, the ship set out at 5 o'clock in the morning and travelled to the whaling ground. A lookout on a watchtower would report any whale sightings and the ship would close to around forty metres when the gunner fired the cannon. If hit, the head of the cannon exploded inside the body of the whale, and an attached wire cord with a winch tied the injured animal to the ship, preventing it from escaping or sinking to the bottom of the sea when killed. The carcasses were towed to the boat and brought to the coastal flensing stations.⁴¹

The introduction of Norwegian-style whaling transformed cetaceans into industrial commodities. While the hunt itself was fairly similar to its Norwegian counterpart, Oka saw industrial whaling as a continuation of net whaling and aimed for similar markets, most notably the selling of whale meat. Initially, the flensing process, as well as the drying and salting of whale meat at the whaling coastal stations resembled more the traditional Japanese flensing styles than the new Norwegian methods, even though some innovations, like the usage of a winch, were transferred from Norway and adapted to fit the Japanese working conditions.⁴²

The Rise of the Japanese Whaling Empire

Most of the early East Asian industrial whaling activities were concentrated on the Korean Sea, where Japanese and Russian whalers fought over territorial dominance and access to marine resources. In February 1904, rising hostilities between the two empires eventually escalated to the Russo-Japanese War. During the war, the Japanese Imperial Navy confiscated four of Keizerling's whaling ships, among them was the factory ship *Michail*. One reason for the confiscation was the suspicion of the Japanese navy that Russian whaling ships were used for spying.⁴³ Keizerling vehemently denied this allegation and demanded to have his ships returned to him, but to no avail.⁴⁴ After the Japanese

⁴¹ Akashi, *Honpō no noruē-shiki hōgeishi*, 3–4.

⁴² Kondō, *Nihon engan hōgei no kōbō*, 207–8; Morita, 'Shokuminchi shihaika no Kanhanōto engan hōgei to nihon no kogata engan hōgei bunka no seisei'.

⁴³ Japan Times, 'A Suspicious Whaling Vessel in Korean Channel'.

⁴⁴ Kaminaga, 'Hokutō Ajia ni okeru kindai hōgeigyō no reimei', 74–5.

victory in 1905, Oka pressured the Korean government to nullify Keizerling's leasing contract on his whaling stations under the pretext that Keizerling had not paid rent during the war. Oka then took over the three former Russian whaling stations in Korea and bought the confiscated Russian whaling ships from the navy. Japanese whalers not only possessed most of the Russian whaling assets in East Asia, but they had now also exclusive access to the Korean whale stocks.

In this way, the Japanese victory over Russia in 1905 marked the beginning of the Japanese whaling empire. During the war, the Japanese army had discovered canned whale meat as a cheap and effective alternative to beef, thus stimulating demand for whale products.⁴⁵ After 1905, twelve whaling companies were quickly established and among these, Oka Jūrō's newly founded Tōyō Gyogyō was the uncrowned king. He commanded a whaling fleet based on the four whalers *Rex*, *Regina*, *Olga*, and *Nikolaj* and the factory ship *Michail*. The latter, however, seems never to have been used by the Japanese to produce whale oil, as had been originally intended. Instead, the *Michail* was used as a transport ship.⁴⁶

Already in 1906, the competition in the Korean Sea between the newly established industrial whaling companies was fierce. With most of the former net whaling groups gone or in deep decline, the Japanese whaling grounds were unattended. Again, Tōyō Gyogyō was the most assertive company. From March to July 1906, they followed the traditional pilgrimage route of the whales from the old whaling places in Nagato, Kii Peninsula, and Tateyama to new places along the Sanriku Coast. The catch of a total of 111 whales along this route can be considered very successful for the whalers as many places did not have a whaling station yet and many whales had to be flensed on board.⁴⁷ In the following years, provisional whaling stations were established along the coast every seventy to eighty nautical miles. In western Japan, the industrial whaling companies focused on places where whaling had already been conducted during the Edo period. Farther north, however, new places for whaling had to be found. Tōyō Gyogyō established their stations in Tateyama, Chōshi, Ayukawa, and Ryōishi while competing companies located their stations in the same or nearby villages.⁴⁸ Before the widespread introduction of the factory ships in the 1920s and 1930s, of which the *Michail* can be seen as the first prototype, whaling stations functioned as bridgeheads to the offshore whaling grounds. Their introduction together with the power of the steamships encouraged people to rethink the boundaries of

⁴⁵ Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 73.

⁴⁶ Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 72–3; Watanabe, *Japan's Whaling*, 26–35; Yamashita, *Hogeii II*, 184–5.

⁴⁷ Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 76. ⁴⁸ Kondō, *Nihon engan hōgei no kōbō*, 291.

the coast. For the fishermen, the coastal sea had previously ended where they lost sight of land, but now the limit was the distance a steamship could travel from a land station.⁴⁹

This sudden burst of whaling activities in the Korean and Japanese waters put a lot of stress on the slowly recovering whale stocks. The Norwegian Embassy, keeping an eye on the Norwegian gunners in Japan, had a special interest in documenting the development of the Japanese whaling industry. In 1907, the embassy concluded that the whaling industry had created an economic bubble and would soon be in financial trouble.⁵⁰ The report for the next year was similarly dramatic: 'Whaling, which has been conducted in the Japanese and Korean waters for the past five years, has risen to great importance. It is, however, to be expected that it will not be of long duration, as the hunting is done too violently, and the animals will have gone extinct in the near future, if the hunt is not regulated.'⁵¹ That regulation was needed also became apparent to the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, which had jurisdiction over fisheries and whaling. In the 1908–1909 season, the whaling companies captured together 1,312 whales on a total of 28 ships.⁵² According to one report, during the winter months, thirteen whaling ships were hunting in southern Shikoku and ten off the coast of the Kii Peninsula, but in summer they all moved to the Sea of Kinkazan and twenty-two ships were here during the high peak of the season, overexploiting the whaling grounds.⁵³ Because of the migration patterns of the slower-moving cetaceans, net whaling groups had mainly hunted during the winter in western Japan. The new steamship could hunt faster whale species and follow them to their spring and summer grounds in the Sea of Kinkazan and Hokkaido. Prices for whale carcasses in the summer months were, however, much lower than in winter, as whale meat could not be stored efficiently without refrigeration technology and so most whale carcasses were processed into less valuable fertiliser. To make the situation worse, this method was extremely inefficient and large parts of the carcass were thrown into the ocean, unused.

The ministry, therefore, proposed a whaling ban during the summer months, modelled after the Norwegian example, to protect whale stocks and the price of whale meat. On 2 September 1907, a delegation of most whaling companies was invited to the ministry's office to debate the new law. Unsurprisingly, the whalers criticised these plans arguing that a ban would only affect Japanese whalers and foreign vessels could conduct

⁴⁹ Yonemoto, 'Maps and Metaphors of the "Small Eastern Sea" in Tokugawa Japan (1603–1868)'.

⁵⁰ Utenriksdepartementet, '32/07 Japan (Tokio) 1907', 7.

⁵¹ Translated by the author from German. Utenriksdepartementet, '32/08 Japan 1908', 8.

⁵² Tønnessen and Johnsen, *The History of Modern Whaling*, 142.

⁵³ Maki, 'Noeruē-shiki hogei gōdō ni kan suru iken'.

whaling at their leisure.⁵⁴ At this point, foreign whaling activities had almost completely ceased around Japan, nevertheless, the ministry gave in to the pressure of the whaling lobby and retracted its proposal. Instead, the ministry urged the whalers to consolidate in order to reduce the competition between them. Oka Jūrō immediately jumped at the chance and used his contacts in the government and his influence to bring most of his competitors together under a new company called Tōyō Hogeï on 1 May 1909. Oka Jūrō had again secured the position as president and his company controlled twenty of the twenty-eight whaling boats, making him the undisputed king of the Japanese whaling industry.⁵⁵

The consolidation, did, however, little to release the pressure on the whaling stocks. Oka, himself did not believe that overhunting was a problem. At an investor conference in Osaka in January 1910, he explained that two theories existed regarding the sustainability of whaling. The first theory was that continued whaling over time would kill all reproductive females, leading to the extinction of a whale species. The second theory argued that the size of the ocean would allow whale populations to recover in offshore regions. As long as there was food near the coast, new groups of whales would keep coming and whaling could continue indefinitely. According to this logic, whaling would even lead to an overall increase in the number of whales in the ocean. Unsurprisingly, Oka himself was a supporter of the second theory.⁵⁶ The decoupling of nature and humans allowed whalers to imagine whales as a limitless resource in the vast oceans that could fuel the Japanese whaling empire for eternity. In this way, the whaling industry absolved itself from any criticism regarding overhunting.

Rising Opposition Against Industrial Whaling

The rapid expansion of industrial whaling and the construction of whaling stations all over the Japanese Archipelago provoked a backlash among the local fishing communities. In 1910, Akashi Kiichi, a leading employee of Tōyō Hogeï, wrote:

At that time, coastal fishermen in the area were not aware of the real nature of the whaling industry, and when this type of business was first attempted in the

⁵⁴ Dai-Nihon suisan kaihō, 'Zenkoku hogeï gyōsha daikai'.

⁵⁵ Tønnessen and Johnsen, *The History of Modern Whaling*, 142; Akashi, *Honpō no noruē-shiki hogeishi*, 276–8. The smaller companies from the old whaling towns in Kii and Tosa could not be convinced to join, however, as the old whaling families from these regions were not willing to work with 'outsiders'. Also, they could rely on local consumer markets that would buy their whale meat. Some other small companies were later integrated into Tōyō Hogeï, see Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 99–100.

⁵⁶ Akashi, *Honpō no noruē-shiki hogeishi*, 28–34.

vicinity, they felt that it would be greatly disrupting their own fishing industry due to the large scale of the operation. In particular, the bonito and sardine fishermen have a kind of superstition (*meishin*) about whales, and they do not understand that whales are devouring bonito and sardines, which are the basis of their fisheries. They have been insisting . . . that whaling is harmful because . . . blood from dissecting whale bodies causes the death of sardines . . . Any negotiations are futile due to their stubborn resistance.⁵⁷

As we can see Akashi asserts that the ecological knowledge of local fishermen was nothing more than ‘superstition’ and that the local fishermen did not understand how industrial whaling worked nor were the locals interested in any form of compromise. Akashi remains, however, vague on how widespread these anti-whaling resistances were. We find some clues to this in a 1910 published article in the Journal of the Fisheries Society of Japan. Its author, Ayabe Kazuo, a bureaucrat working for the Fisheries Bureau, reports that there were protesters against industrial whaling in Kii-Katsuura (Wakayama Prefecture) and Totoro (Miyazaki Prefecture). Moreover, in Ushitsu City on the Noto Peninsula (Ishikawa Prefecture), all fishermen had gathered in a large movement which aimed to stop whaling at all costs. Ayabe further noted that the pollution issue caused by Norwegian-style whaling was not new and referred to the Mehamn Incident of 1903.⁵⁸

Matsuzaki Masahiro, a leading employee of Tōyō Hogeï, insisted in the following issue of the journal that the anti-whaling protests were not as frequent as suggested by Ayabe, rather some technical and legal issues were responsible in the mentioned places for the delay of whaling. While he acknowledged that there were some small conflicts between whalers and fishermen, he argued that these were not specifically against whaling. Such disputes could be seen every time new fishing methods – for example purse seines or drag nets – are introduced and local fishermen perceived their traditional ways of living as being threatened. Matsuzaki reassured the readers of the Journal of the Fisheries Society of Japan that over time such prejudices would disappear, and fishermen would recognise that whaling was not hurting fisheries.⁵⁹

In most cases, primary sources about the introduction of industrial whaling are few and far between, but at least in the case of Ushitsu City, Matsuzaki’s claims that technical or legal issues were responsible for a delay in whaling do not withhold closer scrutiny. A series of reports from the Hokuriku Times in the years 1909 and 1910 show that fishermen of over thirty villages came together to intervene directly with the

⁵⁷ Akashi, *Honpō no noruē-shiki hogeishi*, 242–4.

⁵⁸ Ayabe, ‘Noeruē-shiki hogeï ni taisuru gojin no kibō’.

⁵⁹ Matsuzaki, ‘Noeruē-shiki hogeigyō no hinan wo benzu’.

Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce as well as with the Governor of Ishikawa Prefecture to stop whaling.⁶⁰ We also have a rare eye-witness account from the protests surrounding the whaling operations in Chōshi (Chiba Prefecture). Ōno Shishiku, a writer for the magazine *Bungei kurabu* (Literature Club), travelled in 1907, like he did every year, to Chōshi to escape the Tokyo summer heat. In this year, however, the whole town was in uproar because of the whaling activities by Tōyō Gyogyō. Ōno heard from the locals that the whalers had unexpectedly arrived in March of the previous year with two whaling ships: the *Olga* and the *Nikolaj*. Even though there was no flensing station in Chōshi, the whalers brought three to four whales a day onshore:

The truth is it was prosperous circumstances. . . . However, the local fishermen driven by their envy, their own interests, and their feelings for their district (*chihōteki kanjō*), made a fierce commotion. . . . Corresponding to this resolution, some wanted to negotiate [with the whalers], but others cried to destroy the whaling place. . . . Every evening, a crowd of fishermen was meeting before the station, and the situation has become unbearable.⁶¹

Ōno showed little empathy for the problems of the fishermen, which he regarded as petty. Nevertheless, from his report it becomes clear that the protests were not small-scale but consumed the whole town. He further reported that the main concern of the locals was that sardines would no longer come to the coast. Furthermore, they feared that the coastal pollution caused by the whale blood in the water would scare away fish from the coastal waters.⁶² On the Sanriku Coast, the situation was similarly tense as in Chōshi. In Iwate Prefecture (formerly Morioka domain), the local government actively tried to attract whaling companies, but opposition from all large ports, including Miyako, Yamada, and Kamaishi, made the search for a suitable whaling place difficult. After many discussions with the local fishing unions, the station was eventually built in the little fishing port of Ryōishi.⁶³

Conclusion

Since the arrival of the American ‘black ships’ under the command of Commodore Perry in 1853, Japanese policymakers pushed forward the idea of pelagic whaling as a way to rekindle the struggling net whaling proto-industry and expand the influence of the emerging Japanese empire into the offshore regions of the Japanese Archipelago. Pioneers like

⁶⁰ Katsuyama, *Kitariku Umi Ni Kujira Ga Kita Koro*, 213–19.

⁶¹ Ōno, ‘Chōshi monogatari’, 556. ⁶² Ōno, ‘Chōshi monogatari’, 556.

⁶³ Kamaishi-shi hensan iinkai, *Kamaishi Shishi*, 118.

Nakahama Manjirō introduced American whaling techniques in order to close the technological gap between Japan and its western competitors. However, bureaucrats such as Fujikawa Sankei and Sekizawa Akekiyo saw the building of a whaling empire as a matter of national security, as it pushed the borders of the Japanese empire farther into the ocean and secured valuable marine resources. However, while American whaling expanded the physical range of whaling operations into the open sea it did not allow to hunt for new species that had not already been decimated by Japanese and American whalers in the past decades. Coupled with the anti-whaling protests in Hokkaido and the inability to adapt the new technique to harvest whale meat, the most important commodity for the Japanese whalers, it had to be given up.

The arrival of Norwegian-style whaling techniques through Russian whalers changed the situation completely. Now, industrial whaling became a tool of competition and expansion against the Russian Empire over the control of the Korean Peninsula and its marine resources. This conflict eventually ended in the total dominance of the Japanese whalers over the Korean waters and it functioned as an important steppingstone to bring industrial whaling back to the Japanese main islands. As industrial whaling allowed for the first time to hunt whales also during the summer months, more potential whaling ground became available for the emerging industry, at the forefront being the ‘castle of sperm whales’ in the Sea of Kinkazan. But without the ability to properly store whale meat in the summer heat, environmental pollution also increased, while many fishing communities had in the past centuries learned to depend on the summer migrations of whales for their own fishing. In the following three chapters, we will take an in-depth look at how the introduction of industrial whaling was negotiated at a local level and eventually, after fierce debates and the burning of a whaling station, accepted and embraced by the local population.