

Concluding Remarks

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Whaling studies in the humanities and social sciences have tended to concentrate on traditional historic and prehistoric traditional whaling societies, as well as the history of commercial whaling, especially the Basque, British, American, Dutch, and Norwegian whale fisheries. Archeologists focus on how humans harvested and used whales from the perspective of human or environmental history. Cultural anthropologists also study the harvesting and use of whales, but with a greater emphasis on the social dimension, both historically and cross-culturally.

A common theme throughout much of this volume is that past and present whaling activities were, and for the most part continue to be, viable and legitimate activities that are fundamental aspects of a given society's nutritional, social, cultural, and ideological frameworks. We appreciate the social and political complexity of the various issues in current whaling debates. However, we nevertheless feel that this common theme — whaling as a historically-grounded viable and legitimate cultural pursuit — is rarely understood by those not actively engaged in the study of such pursuits.

How can cultural anthropologists and archeologists contribute to whaling studies and practical activities to promote continuation of whaling activities and cultures in various places of the world? As this volume shows, there are many ethnographic studies concerning aboriginal subsistence whaling and small scale local whaling across cultures. Historical and fishery studies are concerned primarily with commercial whaling. On the other hand, cultural anthropology studies diverse forms of whaling in taking into consideration indigenous views, ecological environments, and the world system, in ways unfamiliar to both historical and fishery studies. We feel that the broader view of cultural anthropology with regard to whaling is its most important academic contribution. At least cultural anthropologists and archeologists can demonstrate that there have been regionally and historically a great variety of whaling activities, and that whaling cultures continue to exist. Such cultures are not frozen in time, but exist in relation to contemporary political-economic factors external to them, and incorporate many historical changes in whaling technologies and methods. We feel that this kind of argument is of particular importance. Cultural anthropology is a discipline that attempts to understand social and

cultural phenomena by examining differences and similarities among individual cases, while seeking insights to the universal aspects of humanity. Currently, Eurocentric anti-whaling arguments seem to be prevailing worldwide through the influence of Western economic and political interests as well as English-dominated mass media. Given this situation, cultural anthropologists can stress that anti-whaling arguments or the notion that whales are not a human food resource is one view only, and that many societies worldwide harvest and consume whales.

Thus, we believe that cultural anthropologists can contribute to the continued viability and acceptance of whaling and whaling cultures through stressing such perspectives as “relativism” and “comparison”. We hope that this volume will stimulate a rethinking of the entire whaling issue. On the basis of the results presented here, we would like to suggest several avenues worth investigating in this regard.

First, various relationships between whales and humans regionally and historically should be explored through the gathering of data relating to variation and temporal changes in human-whale relationships, and by comparing this data systematically. Elucidation of these relationships will contribute to addressing international whaling issues by providing an opportunity to reconsider the complexity of the “whaling problem.”

Second, we suggest that the concept of “aboriginal subsistence whaling” should be re-examined. Indigenous people are not simply relicts or survivors from the past, but contemporary people who share the same world we do. We feel that the IWC concept of aboriginal subsistence whaling as one of “traditional ways of life” only should be reconsidered to reflect more accurately their contemporary situation within economic and political world systems.

Third, we suggest that the anti-whaling movement and the non-consumptive use of whales should be examined from an anthropological perspective. The question “why do so many Western countries (people) oppose whaling?” seems to be an as yet unresolved problem. Although political scientists and sociologists have examined differences in the views of whales between pro-whaling and anti-whaling nations and anti-whaling NGOs, their attempts to understand and resolve the whaling conflicts do not seem convincing to us. We believe that the examination of not only domestic and international anti-whaling movements, but also of such aspects as bioethics, animal welfare, and apparent anthropomorphic concepts of whales, which are behind the Western anti-whaling movements, is essential. Also, we argue that the social impacts on various societies of mass media depictions of whales and whale-harvesting, through, for example, TV programs and movies, should be studied from anthropological perspectives. Furthermore, the non-consumptive uses of cetaceans, such as whale-watching tourism, dolphin exhibitions in aquariums, etc. have not been addressed in this volume, but we feel should be investigated anthropologically in the future.

Finally, the role of the humanities and social sciences as it relates to whale resource management should be explored more fully, in particular as it relates to the issue of “sustainable use.” Given their aquatic environment and the impossibility of controlling the movements of whales, it is more appropriate to manage the behavior of humans who

harvest and use whales. Cultural anthropologists have studied a variety of marine resource management institutions in various parts of the world previously (Ruddle and Akimichi eds. 1984; Kishigami and Savelle eds. 2005), and we argue that such studies, emphasizing indigenous and local knowledge, can continue to make significant contributions to the study of such institutions.

Although this volume is not comprehensive in its coverage of the world's whaling and whaling cultures, it reflects the latest information and research results relating to several of them. We hope that it will provide a basis for further discussion and research of whaling issues.

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