

## People Living Together with Whales : Case Studies from South Korea

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## People Living Together with Whales: Case Studies from South Korea

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### 1. Introduction

The Korean peninsula has a long relationship with whales, but from the mid-19th to early 20th centuries, whalers in the United States, Russia, and Japan have also caught whales off the east coast of the Korean peninsula. South Koreans actively participated in whaling from the end of World War II until the ban on commercial whaling, starting in 1986. Park (1987) studied whaling activities on the Korean peninsula from the perspective of the fishery economic history from ancient times to the 1980s. However, there have been few cultural anthropological studies on people engaged in whaling activities in South Korea, especially in Jangsaengpo village. This paper study explores the establishment of this whaling village by examining the life histories of ten peoples who were involved in whaling in Jangsaengpo.

### 2. Whaling Base Jangsaengpo

In Jangsaengpo, where Korea's only one whaling museum is located, the inlet is narrow all the way to the end, but it is deep enough to allow navigation for ships between 700 and 800 tons; the inlet's geographical features also protect against the effects of typhoons. Jangsaengpo prospered as a whaling base from the 1970s until 1985 and had over ten related industries related to whaling, including shipyards, steelworks, ship-fitting yards, whale meat processing factories, and over 42 whale meat restaurants that were visited by more than 500 people per day. Several villagers described the prosperity using the following expression about the years when whaling was thriving: 'when whaling ships came in, even the village dogs would walk around with 10,000 won bills in their mouths'.

Until the 1960s, whalers in small wooden ships were mainly catching fin whales (*Balaenoptera physalus*) of body length more than 20 meters in the East coast of South Korea, where the fin whales were large and numerous, but in the West coast of South Korea, they often caught minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*). There were 29 whaling ships in 1966: the 23 large whaling ships, and six small coastal whaling ships. On the Eocheongdo of the West coast of South Korea, about 20 whaling ships a year

went out whaling, but the number of catches was small, and whaling ships accounted for only 10% of the ships in the East coast of South Korea on the Ulsan Coast. At that time, there was no processing facility, and maintaining freshness from the ships to the production area to the consumption area was a major issue.

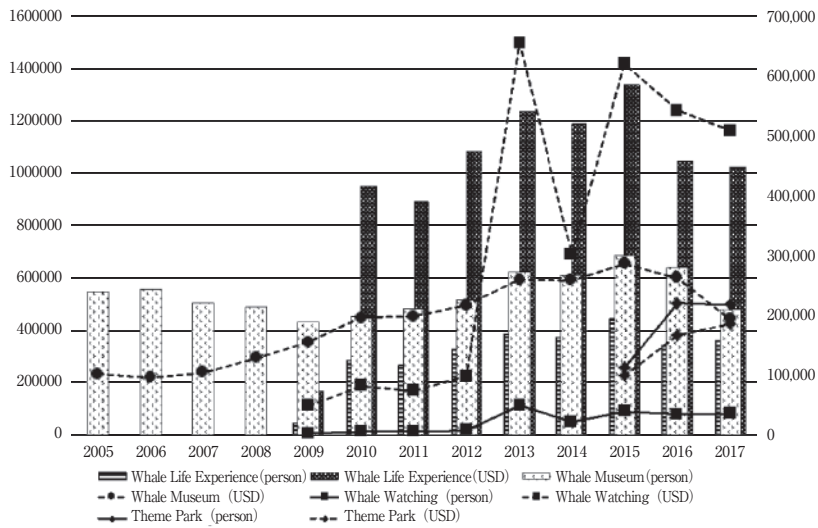
After the 1970s, the main target of capture was minke whales of body length 6–7 meters. Once profits were secured from the export of whale meat to Japan, shipowners started to use sonar-equipped 100-tons iron ships. The frequency of catches also increased sharply. At the same time, the number of small-sized wooden ships catch decreased. After the disappearance of grey whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*) and fin whales from along the Ulsan Coast, minke whales became more important. The constraints of limited fishing grounds and markets and the increasing modernization of whaling ships and equipment made pelagic whaling more profitable and common. The scale of the whaling ships increased, as did the number of transport and processing ships. All the whale meat was refrigerated and exported to Japan, and the blubber was used as a raw material for high-grade candles and cosmetics. More people started visiting Jangsaengpo to eat whale meat, and whale meat speciality shops were spread along the coast.

The Whaling Fishery Cooperatives was renamed the Coastal Fishing Industry Cooperatives in 1977. The fishing grounds were near Eocheongdo from February to July, and near Ulsan between August and November, but 80% of the catch was processed at Jangsaengpo. The whaling ships only sounded their whistles or raised their fishing flags when they called into port if a fin whale had been caught. The minke whale fishing grounds were around Eocheongdo of the West coast of South Korea in March–April; Ulsan in the East coast of South Korea in May–June; Jukbyeon in July; Ulleungdo and Dokdo (Takeshima) in August; and Pohang and Guryongpo in September. In October and November, Hongdo and Heuksando in the West coast of South Korea once again became the main fishing grounds.

In the 1980s, the fin whale became endangered, and minke whales were no longer catchable in the East coast of South Korea, so the fishing fleets had to sail every year to the West coast of South Korea. There was no wind in the summer in the West coast of South Korea, and the ocean became as flat as a pond, so it was easy to operate, but when ten or more whaling ships were operating at once, the number of minke whale captured in the West coast of South Korea decreased sharply, and the price of the minke whale also increased. Whaling was carried out under the quotas set by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) catch quota, but commercial whaling was suspended. In 1985, South Korea stopped its commercial whaling, although the whaling fishermen were compensated by the Fisheries Agency. However, unless they switched occupations or changed to pelagic trawling, longline fishing, large polar net fishing, or other types of fishing, they still faced unemployment (Ii 2012: 270–271).

Although the number of permanent residents in Jangsaengpo was 15,000 until the mid-1980s, in 2005, the number of permanent residents was 1,652, which represents about 10% of the population of 25 years previous (Ii 2007: 137). However, the actual number of residents was only about 500, while the remainder lived in Ulsan City but never changed their residence registration. In addition, the elderly population aged 65 and

over was 232 people (133 women and 99 men) and accounted for about 60% of the number of residents. Residents of working age were engaged in work related to agriculture and fishing, shipping and port distribution, and restaurants, including whale meat speciality stores. In addition, customs staff and navy personnel raised the daytime population to 2,000–3,000 every year, four to six times larger than the number of permanent residents. However, in 2008, the area was developed as a whale-themed tourist destination, and in 2017, about 800,000 tourists visited, bringing in about US\$2million into Jangsaengpo (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** The number of visitors and income of Jangsaengpo.  
 (Source: Created by Sun-ae Li using data prepared by the Whale Tourism Division, South Ward Office Ulsan City)

### 3. People Involved in the Whaling Industry

#### 3.1 First-Generation Whaling Harpooner Kim (Born 1926, Jangsaengpo)

In 1942, at the age of 16, Kim became a crew member as a stoker on board the Japanese whaling ship *Hoyomaru* thanks to an introduction by his maternal uncle. The following year, he became a third-class deckhand; he slept in the daytime, then stood watch during the night, when the other crew members went to sleep. The following year, he became a second-class deckhand on the *Takunanmaru*, but he returned to Jangsaengpo two years later after Japan was defeated in World War II. Whaling technology was still in its infancy in Japan, and most whaling was done around the Hokkaido Hanajima and Kuril Islands. During the Japanese colonial period, the Japanese engaged in whaling at Jangsaengpo, and there were many South Korean people on board the whaling ships. The South Koreans with exceptional vision went to Antarctica, but Kim could not go because

he was still a teenager. Those who went to Antarctica boasted that they earned 10,000,000 won in cash in just half a year and could return home to buy rice paddies. The primary school that Japanese students attended was behind the present-day in 2008 welfare hall, and the school where that Koreans attended was at the main entrance to the present SunKyung medical company. The temple, dedicated to the village's guardian deity, was once under a Japanese shrine, but the shrine was destroyed after the defeat of Japan in World War II, and only remnants of statues and the shrine remain. There were many Japanese whalers, so many people in Jangsaengpo spoke Japanese, and they and the Japanese whalers got along well. Many Japanese people raised after the war have visited the village for sightseeing.

After World War II, Kim went to Pohang with villagers who had whaling skills. Senior villagers became harpooners, and Kim was employed as a ship's captain. After a few months, the harpooners fell ill, so he worked as a harpooner for a year before being called back by Jangsaengpo's whaling company. After he returned to the village, he mainly operated in Pohang in Guryongpo, went north to Jukbyeon and Mukho, and caught mostly minke whales and dolphins. His ship did not catch fin whales because the ship was small. In Jangsaengpo, Kim worked as a harpooner from age 23 until he was 60 and commercial whaling was banned.

Ulsan was the center of Korea's commercial whaling activities, and the whalers worked on the West coast of South Korea from Heuksando to Daecheongdo and in the East coast of South Korea area from Ulleungdo to Sokcho. At Ulsan, they caught more fin whales and other large whales, but as those became scarce, they started to catch minke whales. At that time, a harpooner was paid more than the captain—100,000 won for four trips, and payment was in advance of each trip. Scouted harpooners (that is, high performers recruited from other ships) could receive an increased salary, ask for raises to their monthly salaries, or ask for raises to the allowance per animal caught.

When a whaling ship returned to the harbor, the shipowner cut the whales' back and neck meat, and the seafarers offered the meat and alcohol at the shrine in a ritual. Kim went to Heuksando every year and worked until November, then he rested through December and repaired the ship to welcome in the New Year. After the New Year, he stayed in Heuksando and Daecheongdo until the end of March by the old calendar (equivalent to April to May), then returned to Jangsaengpo and caught large whales from June to October. In November, they caught grey whales coming south from the Russian coast. When whales were caught, their bodies were cut vertically with a big knife by the butchering division chief; then, the chief supervised the rest of the cutting by the butchery crew. To ensure that the whale meat stayed fresh, the butchering was carried out quickly by a large team. Kim says that he learned most of his whaling and butchery techniques from his time on Japanese whaling ships. After the ban on commercial whaling, he could not find work in other marine-related pursuits, so he had to rely on working in the fields for self-sustenance.

### **3.2 Best Whale Harpooner, Ri (Born 1930, Jangsaengpo)**

In 1944, at the age of 15, Ri joined the whaling ship *Rexmaru* of the Japan Whaling Co.,

Ltd., signing on for one year as a chef. His second-eldest brother was also working on the *Rexmaru*, so Ri was able to get his position with an introduction from his brother's wife's maternal uncle-in-law, who was a deck leader. At that time, about 100 people were involved in whaling-related jobs such as crewing on whaling ships and taking part in butchery operations in Jangsaengpo. Ri's ship operated from June to October in Ulsan, and from October to November they followed the northbound whales to Guryongpo, Jangjeon, and Wonsan in the East coast of South Korea. Ri went to Wonsan to hunt for whales, but there were not many, so he went south and stayed at Jumunjin. The day after he arrived, he found many pods of whales. He spent the New Year in Jangsaengpo, and, at the end of February, he stayed in Japan for two months to repair the whaling ship.

At that time, he was catching fin whales, not minke whales. There were many fin whales at that time, and they often surfaced when the weather became cold. The Japanese did not employ Koreans in high positions such as harpooners, chiefs of engineers, or captains, although outstanding Koreans could become chief mechanics or deck leaders. Seven or eight ships were in operation at the time, but the ship where Ri was working did not catch a single whale, and he was sent to Guryongpo. Even in Guryongpo, he did not catch a single whale, so they began hunting deeper until Jangjeon where, when the sun comes up, he could often see fin whales spouting. Once, as he was going south in November 1944, Ri caught a whale at Jumunjin and butchered it in Guryongpo; in Jangjeon, he caught many whales. At that time, seven or eight Japanese whaling ships could catch barely 100 whales in a year. One year, they caught 120, and this was so unusual that the achievement was commemorated at the Jangsaengpo Elementary School.

Three years after Japan's defeat in 1945, a Korean whaling company was established, and Ri received two 50-tons wooden ships for retirement from the Japanese whaling company and began South Korea's first whaling operation. Twenty-four people worked on the whaling ships, and around ten were engaged in butchering the catch. For about three months from the start of June, they caught 20–30 whales. Then more people started whaling, remodelling general fishing ships and adding harpoons.

Most whaling companies employed 12 people, including the harpooners, to crew each ship for a year. However, if the harpooner was not good at the job, the company could go bankrupt. At Jangsaengpo, many fin whales were caught—20 or 30 in April alone—and the whaling ships were changed from wooden ships to iron-clad 100-tons ships powered by steam or diesel engines. The ships captured the highest numbers of large whales when it was hot—August and September—and sold most of the captured whale meat to Busan. It was said that the Busan people ate ten whales meat a day. Laborers in Busan swore that eating one chunk of whale meat was better than eating rice.

In Jangsaengpo, the whaling ship's crew were given whale meat on their return, and they shared the meat with their relatives and friends, so the whale meat was not bought. In addition to the belly skin, meat, and viscera, they got oil from the fin whales. The fin whale of body length at least 20 meters was considered a parent, and any less than 14 meters or so was a child. All of Korea's whale meat production has been exported to Japan since the 1970s.

Ri worked in Pohang as a deck leader for a minke whaling ship with a 50mm

harpoon cannon for two years. His monthly salary as deck leader was equivalent to the price of one pair of work pants; before the 1950 Korean War, a captain's monthly salary was equivalent to 40kg of rice. In those days, a worker who could receive 1.6kg of rice per day was considered a good earner. After returning to Jangsaengpo, Ri got on a wooden ship equipped with a 70mm harpoon gun and was employed as a first-class deckhand because he captured fin whales well. A 12-man crew consisted of the cook, daily crew (third-class deckhands), second-class deckhands, first-class deckhands, the chief mate, the captain, the harpooner, the chief engineer, and mechanics.

After a year-long contract, good harpooners were sometimes recruited by another whaling ship, sometimes being replaced by a relative. However, harpooners who never caught anything were fired, even in the middle of a contract. Ri entered military service in August 1950, when the Korean War broke out, and he was released in 1954. Pohang lost its whaling ships during the Korean War, and only Jangsaengpo had more than ten whaling ships left. As a result, Ri knew the places where whales could be found and became the navigator, the person who decided where to position the whaling ship. However, the wooden ship he was riding had a decrepit harpoon, so he had a low whale catch. When the whaling company blamed the ship's poor performance on the harpooners, ignoring the faulty equipment, Ri quit the company and became the captain of a whaling ship in Bangoejin in Ulsan. Whaling was still profitable, and catching just one whale was enough to work off any debts accrued during lean periods. However, if Ri caught no whales, the crew received no pay. A harpooner from the age of 31 until the whaling ban, Ri was named the best harpooner twice in his 30-year career (Photo 1).



**Photo 1** The last and best whale harpooner in Jangsaengpo, Ulsan, South Korea. (Photo by Sun-ae Ii, September, 2007)

After the New Year's Day passed, Ri would hunt around Eocheongdo in February, operate for a month and a half to two months, and return to Jangsaengpo for fin whale hunting season. On rare occasions, fin whales caught at the beginning of the year could multiply in value. Fin whales were fixed by the tail to the ship and dragged to port and butchered. Fin whales could yield (in addition to edible parts) 40 to 50 drums of oil from the bones and skin. If a fin whale could not be caught, Ri returned to Eocheongdo again



to work, and if he still could not catch one, the ship would head south to Heuksando to work, and then go back to Jangsaengpo. On Heuksando, there was a place, established in the Japanese colonial era, to lift and butcher whale corpses; today, it is a whale theme park. In September and October on Guryongpo, and in November in Jangjeon, simple plants were set up to dismantle large whales. If Ri caught a large whale at Ulleungdo, it would rot before it could be dragged back to Jangsaengpo. When he caught a small one, the crew left it intact to sell at auction.

At Eocheongdo, minke whales were caught most often in February. Once the wooden whaling ships were replaced with iron ships, the butchering crew could use the same ship to butcher the minke whales on board; the whale meat could be refrigerated and kept on ice for later sale or consumption. The most delicious parts of the minke whales were grilled and eaten with soy sauce, garlic, and pepper powder in sauce. After the population of fin whales decreased suddenly in the 1970s, there was a ban on hunting them, so Ri's crew switched to hunting minke whales.

In the 1970s, people in Seoul built the first 99-ton iron ship equipped with sonar and launched it from Incheon. The whaling ship *Dongbangho* recruited seafarers, and they talked about scouting Ri as a harpooner. At that time, the ship's captain supposedly received a salary of 5,000 won, the equivalent of 80kg of rice, but Ri was given an advanced payment of 500,000 won—the highest-ever fee for a single harpooner. From a wooden ship, for two years in a row, he caught more whales than anybody else, catching two or three whales caught in Eocheongdo and 12 whales at Ulsan. The ship's captain bought each of the crew leaders, including the harpooner, a new suit for their endeavors. After being on the same ship for three years, Ri was scouted for the whaling ship *Dongbangho*. For two years, he was able to catch fin whales three days out of four. However, the headquarters of the company was in Seoul, and the president knew nothing about whales. For two years, at the beginning of spring, Ri was forced to go to Eocheongdo to catch minke whales; the hunting season for fin whales began in March, but Ri could not get permission to travel to Jangsaengpo, so he continued to operate in Eocheongdo for three to four months. The sailors missed both their kimchi and their women when they had to stay for a long time in Eocheongdo. When the ship was operating in Jangsaengpo, the crew could return home more often, so they did not have stress, and there was no need for quarrels amongst the crew; however, if they stayed for more than a month, fights occurred due to the stress.

After another ship caught fin whales first, Ri's ship was finally ordered by the company to return to Jangsaengpo. When he returned to Jangsaengpo, the weather was so bad that they could not operate for a few days. Then the company tried to change harpooners, so Ri joined the ship *Jinyangho*.

Ri recalled that he could see where fin whales took a few breaths and then dived, so he could stop the ship, wait quietly for their next surfacing, judging where they would come up and staying at a good distance, and then harpoon them. While the *Dongbangho* caught 12 minke whales in the West coast of South Korea, the *Jinyangho* caught even more. The *Dongbangho* was able to find whales using sonar, but the whales would notice the radar used to follow them and flee. After harpooning a whale, the crews would have



to wait over an hour for the whale to weaken. The *Jinyangho* could carry up to 15 carcasses, and when the weather was good, they would call a transport ship from Jangsaengpo, transfer the minke whale bodies on ice, take extra ice on board, and continue whaling. Ri's crew would hunt while travelling north from Eocheongdo, Daecheongdo, and Socheongdo on the West coast of South Korea. Ri returned to Jangsaengpo around March to hunt fin whales, and then go north to the East coast of South Korea from mid-April to the end of May to catch minke whales. However, since the northeast wind blows in June on the East coast of South Korea, the sea was very rough. Thus, the whaling ship *Jinyangho*'s catch would be 30% less than on the West coast of South Korea. In June, the weather on the West coast of South Korea was fine and brisk, ideal for hunting. They caught so many whales near Daecheongdo in the West coast of South Korea that they had to call out the carrier ships several times during the operation to transfer the whale meat. They operated around Heuksando until the end of October when the northwest monsoon winds blow. If they travelled 100 miles from the island towards China, they would find many whales. If the *Jinyangho* could not catch many whales at Ulsan, Ri would move them to Eocheongdo. If they still could not catch much there, the ship went south to Heuksando Island.

Three or four people would sit on the observation platform, looking for whales. One first-class deck member would be on the lookout platform and would call out instructions, such as port (left), starboard (right), delay (go straight), slow, and stop. When the spotters found a whale, the ship moved in close, and the crew shot the fin whale one to three times. If they could hit the whale's abdomen, it would die immediately, so the freshness of the meat would be good, and there would not be much blood when butchering. The captured whale would be attached by the tail and winched-up, and air would be injected from the air tank in the engine room into the torso of the whale to inflate it for better flotation and easier transport. If the whale was heavy, it might get dropped, lost to the seabed. Once the ship was close to the port, the crew would stab the whale with a spear to release the air, then pull it on deck with a winch. They used large knives first to divide the carcass into large chunks, then use smaller knives to cut those into smaller pieces. In the past, with the slower wooden ships, it was not uncommon for a whale to rot before the ship reached the port, but the iron ships were faster. The crew could kill minke whales with one shot only and take up to eight a day. They did not need to inflate them; the minke whales could be hooked by the tail, pulled onboard with wires, and butchered on board. The meat would be saved in refrigerators with ice and the bones put in the larder. Whether the weather was bad or remained fine, they would call the carrier to transfer the whale meat and continue hunting.

Whale exports to Japan began in the 1960s, with catches worth US\$5–6million. At the same time, whaling technology was advancing. In 1966, Japanese nylon ropes were introduced and radio transceivers installed. If the tip of a harpoon was sharp, it would bounce when it hit the water's surface, affecting accuracy, so the tips were changed to be more like an octopus sucker, which made the harpoons more accurate. At first, the harpoon was 60mm, but a newer 90mm version made it easier to break the whales' skin.

It was still difficult to change a harpoon's direction quickly once it had been targeted.

When Ri went towards Ulleungdo, he caught dolphins with a harpoon and sold them in Guryongpo and Pohang for tobacco. In the 1970s, the number of authorized whaling ships increased to 21. After Korea joined the IWC, the fishing season was restricted from 1 March to 31 October, and whaling was prohibited after 10 August 1986. The fin whales Ri caught around Heuksando in August 1982 were the last ones he caught. Even though many people looked down on whaling, it was the only means of making a living that many men had. When whaling ships went out to hunt, they would each prayed to catch a lot and return safely. At that time, women were forbidden on ships. In addition to Ri three of his family members (his mother's uncle, his brother, and his nephew) were also employed on whaling ships.

### **3.3 Shipswain of Whaling Ship, Choi (Born 1946, Jangsaengpo)**

Choi graduated from junior high school and had no place to work. As his uncle and father were both harpooners, he joined a whaling ship as a stoker and cook. When Choi was 20 years old, he was promoted to first-class deck member thanks to an introduction from his uncle and father. He retired from the army in March 1971 and joined the whaling ship *Dongbangho* for ten months a year. He worked in the same ship as his uncle as a deck leader until the ban on whaling in 1986. From 1986, Choi worked on a tanker sailing out of Singapore for one year, and then, after returning home, he was the chief engineer of a flat-bottomed ship. At that time, he joined the Korean labor union and retired in 2005.

Choi called the whaling ship 'the most gentlemanly kind of ship'. When the weather was bad and they could not see because of fog or their eyes were blinded with rain, or when the waves were high due to wind, the crew took a break from hunting. When hunting, they spoke Japanese 90% of the time. It was their daily routine to find a whale, butcher it, then set the ship's anchor and go to bed in the evening; the next day, they raised the anchor and did it all again. The shipowner recruited seafarers before the New Year who prepared the engine and decks and went to Eocheongdo after the New Year. If there were a lot of whales, they would return to Jangsaengpo in August and September. After the Chuseok (Korean Thanksgiving Day) vacation, they would travel for 20 hours to Heuksando Island in the West coast of South Korea and operate until October, then return to Jangsaengpo. They stayed for about a month on Heuksando, and during that time, they exchanged fish and whale meat with the locals. After several years of this, they became close to the islanders, and when there were no whales, they played soccer and drank alcohol with them.

The whale meat was tendered in the morning at the Shimonoseki Port, and after completing the customs procedures, the ship would depart from the port and arrive in Ulsan the next morning. In the beginning, only the meat from the whales was exported, but after the middle of the 1970s, the skin was also exported, and after the 1980s, the whole body (except the viscera and bone meat) was also exported. Only the lowest dirty skin, viscera, and scrap meat on the bones were consumed domestically. The shells were cut, pickled with salt, and sold. The tails, each 4 or 5 *kin* (about 600g), were reserved by

the whaling ship crews for individuals each year. The tails were expensive and can no longer be used, but they were indispensable for celebrations and funerals during whaling times. Tails pickled with salt could be preserved for several years.

### **3.4 Auctioneer of the Whale Meat, RS (Born 1956, Jangsaengpo)**

RS is the son of Ri, Jangsaengpo's No.1 harpooner. Until the whaling ban of 1986, RS was in charge of auctioning and exporting whale meat to Japan at the Coastal Fishing Industry Cooperatives. There were 13 union members and 21 whaling ships. The shipowner owned three or four carriers alone. When whales were caught in the East coast of South Korea and brought to Jangsaengpo, the shipowner would place a request to the union for a commissioned auction. There were five or six auctioneers, and the bids were divided into lots of butchered whales and those not yet butchered. Whale meat for domestic consignment sale was separated from the meat, ventral pleats, and other parts earmarked for export to Japan. In some cases, if not enough whales were caught for export to Japan, all the whale meat was sold on consignment. Brokers purchased some or all of the whale meat for their clients. Purchased whale meat was be stored (either raw or after boiling) or further sold wholesale by brokers who had appropriate facilities.

When whales were caught in the West coast of South Korea, they were butchered on board, and a carrier ship from Jangsaengpo meet the whalers in Heuksando or Eocheongdo; anything from several to dozens of whales would there be divided into export use and domestic use, then refrigerated and transported. The provenance of whale meat for export from the Korean Coast had to be proven and issued a certificate from the Coastal Fishing Industry Cooperatives; thus certified, the refrigerated meat could be auctioned at Shimonoseki. Domestic use was divided into skin, meat on the bone, viscera, eyes, and other parts, then sold by consignment. There were six brokers registered with the union; some represented only one client, and some represented multiple clients. An obligatory sales fee of 4% was levied on the whaling shipowner and allocated for the operating costs of the union.

When a large amount of whale products was available, immediately after obtaining their certification of provenance, they would be exported directly to Shimonoseki. However, if the amount was small, the whale products would be refrigerated and stored for two or three days until a sufficient volume had been procured. Whales captured on the East coast of South Korea were butchered, divided into various parts, and stored in an iced warehouse for export. The export price was five to ten times higher than the domestic price. Around 25 to 30kg per animal would be taken, and the tenderloin—which had more marbling than beef—would be 20 times more expensive than domestically sold meat. After the hunting ban on large whales like fin whales, about 95% of the catch was minke whales, but occasionally a fin whale was caught and exported as a minke whale.

When signing a whale meat export contract with Japan, Korean carriers could not enter or leave the country except through Shimonoseki Port, the whaling base. The conditions for exporting whale meat were that it had to be kept refrigerated with ice and have a certificate confirming its provenance. At the beginning of the 1980s, RS was

bribed with 10 million yen to issue a certificate of confirmation of provenance from Busan; he refused, knowing that it was frozen whale meat that had been sold on consignment from Taiwan. Taiwan was carrying out whaling without being a member of the IWC. At that time, there were cases in which Taiwan-produced whale meat was falsely certified as a product from South Korea and imported to Shimonoseki; some staff of the Korean Exchange Banker were arrested for it.

During the fin whale hunting era, up to seven whales a day were caught out of Ulsan. There were only two sites for butchering. Each could process and separate only two whales a day for domestic and export use. The rest of the catch had to wait to be processed, and when it was hot, they would rot; by the time of the auction, their value would have dropped by 1–2 million yen. One fine whale, if processed and sold properly, was worth 15 million yen. Most of the auctioned meat went to Busan, and the rest was distributed raw or boiled in Jangsaengpo. About 80% of the whale products sold to the brokers were discarded in the ocean during butchery. The brokers' bid prices were generally 10% lower than the final purchase price agreed with the whale meat retailers. Most whale meat retailers were from Busan, and 80% to 90% of the meat auctioned in Jangsaengpo was sold to retailers from the same village. The rest of the meat was frozen and stored. Everyday meat, skin, and lumps of viscera were boiled and sold wholesale to locals, who further cut it up and sold it in market stalls. Bones that had had the meat removed could be sold as firewood because they were easy to burn thanks to their high fat content. As of 2009, many people still ate minke whales in Jangsaengpo, finless porpoises (*Neophocaena phocaenoides*) in Busan, and dolphins in Pohang. Occasional whale bycatch from fishing nets was auctioned at fishing cooperatives nearest where they were found.

Commercial whaling has been banned since January 1986, but scientific whaling ships have caught as many as 50 whales per year. The number of whaling ships permitted until 1985 was reduced from 21 to four on condition of visual inspection. However, when only four ships were operating, the number of whales per ship increased and it was reported to the IWC that overhunting was occurring and nonsanctioned fin whales were being caught and butchered. After that, large whale hunting was completely banned in 1987.

The taste of whale meat varied by region. In Jangsaengpo, the whale production area, fresh meat was common. However, in Busan and Pohang, which were far from the production area, the freshness dropped during distribution, and slightly smellier meat was more common. RS's cousin's whale meat store was in Busan, but when RS took fresh meat there, his cousin thought that the produce was fake whale meat because the freshness and taste were so different from what he was accustomed to in Busan. Customers from Busan often remarked that the taste of whale meat in shops in Jangsaengpo was different from what they were accustomed to. As they had never eaten fresh whale meat, they did not know what it tasted like. Because his father was a harpooner, RS always had fresh whale meat at home; he did not eat beef, pork, or fish until he was an adult. Beef was considerably more expensive than whale meat, but most people could not distinguish lean whale meat from beef. About 90% of the whale meat

was eaten in *chige* (a kind of Korean stew) for breakfast or lunch. The fresh meat and ventral meat of whales was exported to Japan, so ventral meat was not commonly eaten by any Koreans other than the harpooners. Large quantities of oil could be obtained by cutting the whale skin to a length of 10–15cm and a thickness of 7–12cm, then scoring the pieces at every 1cm and simmering them in a large pot. Once the oil had been extracted, RS ate the left-over boiled skin as an afternoon snack when he was at elementary school. There were many pear orchards around Jangsaengpo, and people bought the whale oil to use as an insect repellent there. In the 1980s, 20kg of oil cost around US\$7.

### 3.5 Daughter of Whaling Ship Owner, Ro (Born 1954, Jangsaengpo)

Today, Ro volunteers as a sightseeing guide around Ulsan City. Her great grandfather lived in Jangsaengpo, and her parents are also from there. Her grandfather sold whale meat at Ulsan Central Market, Seongnam Market, and the old Ulsan Train Station Market. Her father was a police official, but because his salary was low and he had three boys and three girls, he left the police force when Ro was a primary school student and returned to Jangsaengpo where his grandparents were for the education of his children.

In Jangsaengpo, Ro's father sold a field of about 2,645 square meters and used the profits to buy land and a house. In front of the house, they could pay to cross the ocean on a small ship where the crossing was at its narrowest. Ro's father worked in a noodle factory and a general store until his mother-in-law's relatives helped him become a whale meat broker. Before long, he was able to purchase and captain a wooden whaling ship. He told Ro that it was possible to catch large whales in the summer, but due to the slow speed of the wooden ships, the outer parts of the whale would rot before being butchered; nevertheless, it was still possible to make an excellent profit from the unspoiled inner parts of the whale. In the village, the sound of a long whistle meant that the people should get ready to butcher because a large whale had been caught.

Ro's father brought high-quality whale meat at auction for export to Japan. The remainder of the meat was frozen, and sometimes the viscera and low-quality meat were boiled in a large pot and sold to Ulsan and merchants from the village. Ro ate the most delicious parts, such as the kidneys and intestines, but she did not like the actual meat that much. The flavoured and seasoned grilled meat and the tail were considered essential eating on ceremonial occasions. The soft meat from the sinewy parts and skin was put in a whale meat soup with beansprouts and green onions, and the lean meat was hung to dry and then eaten (Li 2013). (Ro said that they developed a whale jerky for tourists, but it did not sell well.)

Whale meat was abundant in the summer hunting season, but less so in the winter. On ceremonial occasions, whale meat was prepared for guests. The internal organs such as the large intestine and small intestine were boiled and eaten with spicy salt. People from Jangsaengpo particularly enjoyed eating spicy salted anchovies. In the evening, the canteen boiled whale meat before dinner, then served Ro's family the best bits. The villagers who had placed orders would come and collect the lower quality pieces of whale meat the next day in the market at Ulsan. Many people would also buy whale

meat from Daegu.

While Ro's father's ship caught the whales, Ro's mother handled the accounting. She used her sewing machine, with its built-in storage compartment for a footstool, as a safe. She counted the cash at night, and then two bank clerks collected the cash in the morning. At that time, many people in the whale hunting industry got rich.

On the days the whaling ship departed, Ro's mother selected a good fortune-teller and called a shrine maiden to hold a ceremony in the house, port, and ship to pray for the safe return of the seafarers and for good whaling. There was a big market in front of Ro's house, and there was a post office, bank, cinema, and shops in the downtown area of the village. The waterfront was lined with Japanese style houses on stilts, but when Ro was 18 (1972), there was road construction, and she moved to a place where the pottery museum currently stands. Many of the people who lived there have since moved to the area where the whaling museum is now located. In front of the original whale meat restaurant, there is now a ferry ship port, but around there was once was a daily morning market where freshly caught fish sashimi was sold; Jangsaengpo was replete with an excellent breakfast eatery. In 1969 the waterside houses, of which only the eaves remained, were knocked down; the following year, Ro moved to a house next to the current post office.

At the site of the current Hanjin Heavy Industries factory, there was once a whale butchery, where whales of around 20 meters in length were butchered, then transported elsewhere by small ships. At that time, the water in the sea was clean enough to use to salt the Chinese cabbage, but the sea became dirty after the industrial park was built at the end of the 1970s. At that time, transportation to the junior high school and high school was convenient, and Ro could get there by taking a microbus for 25 won or a long bus for 10 won. Many people in the village were employed in the whaling industry or related industries that supplied oil and water to the ships.

At that time, in front of the current whaling museum, there was an international crew rest area reserved for foreign seafarers called the Citizen Hall. There, Ro said that she and her friends had many opportunities to get their hands on imported products such as Japanese-made and American-made cosmetics and so on. The morning market sold local agricultural products and seafood. Many people from nearby villages (e.g., Daeil, Yangjuk, Napdo, and Dongbukpo) used the Jangsaengpo market as well.

Since the Japanese colonial period, the area villages have had many pear orchids, so they were half-fishing, half-farming villages. Rice was sold by nearby farmers who came by ship. In the late 1970s, the environment began to decline such that, especially in the spring and winter, there were smells and smoke from the many local factories and the traffic situation worsened. Until the middle of the 1970s, the locals could catch starry night octopus, cook it on bonfires, and eat it with seaweed taken from the local rocks. However, after that, the air pollution from the chemical factories in Ulsan got so bad that even the leaves on the ginkgo trees withered and people would vomit. The industrialization of Ulsan continued. In 1984 the locals were forced to move out of the surrounding villages when a large industrial park was built. However, because Jangsaengpo had flourished as a whaling village until 1986, it was designated a



development-restricted area, so even as the surrounding villages were being completely redeveloped into industrial areas and the residents forced to move, Jangsaengpo remained untouched until recently.

The minke whale quota system was enforced between 1982 and 1985, and then commercial whaling was banned in 1986. Ro's parents also owned wooden whaleships and were whale meat brokers until Ro's father died in 1988. Ro's current house is next to the Jangsaengpo post office near a canvass building and the pottery museum. Behind her house is a steep staircase up a hill; from the top, she can see the chimneys of the plants once used for boiling whale meat. In the old days, behind the chimneys stood a large arch—a whale's jawbone—and there used to be a large pot for simmering whale meat, but now only small pots remain.

### 3.6 Whale Meat Restaurant Owner, Park (Born 1944, Jangsaengpo)

The price of whale meat when Park was a child was very low, which eased the lives of the common people as they ate it often instead of beef. Park had grown up on a farm where she had no chance to encounter whales. However, when she was 22, Park married and move to Jangsaengpo, where she learned how to boil and cook whale meat by helping her mother-in-law. Sometimes Park boiled the whale meat, but more often the mother-in-law boiled it, then took it to a whale meat restaurant run by her sons. The mother-in-law (born 1918) started selling whale meat at street stalls to earn a living since in 1948, and Park was now the third generation of the family to do so.

In the 1970s, Jangsaengpo was economically healthy. There were five luxury cars in all of Ulsan, and people in Jangsaengpo owned four of them. At that time, there were two hospitals, two high-class restaurants, and a theatre in Jangsaengpo, making it a busy downtown area people from Ulsan and Jeongja went to watch movies. In Jangsaengpo, many people farmed dry-fields due to the small rice fields, and the Jangsaengpo people bought rice produced in Samsan and fish caught in Bangeojin at every morning market at 8:00 in the morning. However, more than half of Jangsaengpo's population was somehow associated with whaling.

Most of the guests who went to Park's family's whale meat restaurant were family, although there were many businesspeople entertaining and groups having dinner. The guests' average one-time spending was US\$50–83. Initially, Park sold whale meat by sections or single item in the 1970s; to increase the restaurant's proceeds, she developed sampler dishes that allowed the guests to taste different whale meats. The sampler dishes contained five parts: *suyuk*, *yukhoe*, *une*, *obegi*, and red meat. *Suyuk* contains many whale sections (e.g., internal organs, skin, rib, tang, lung, heart, and kidneys), and it can be cooked to be mature meat. Park said that when you make mature meat, you must be careful not to cut off the skin, blood, or red meat or the meat will lose value. If the skin is taken off, the meat could not sustain its value as a commodity. *Yukhoe* is fresh red meat served raw. *Une* is striped uneven meat from the mandible to the abdomen of a baleen whale; the word comes from *mune*, which means 'chest' in Japanese. Almost all *une* was routinely exported to Japan; in Korea, it was such quality meat that nobody but the harpooners were usually able to savor it. *Une* was served raw. *Obegi* is red meat



from the root of the whales' tail and fin; it has fine veins of fat and is ranked the highest quality. The amount of the meat varied according to the size of the whale. Minke whales produced about 10kg. Whale meat with fine veins of fat was considered so delicious and savory that even sirloin or tender red beef could not compare. When there was a feast or portrait, *obegi* were served. The regular customers visited her whale meat restaurant every two or three months.

### **3.7 Whale Meat Restaurant Owner, Yun (Born 1955, Jangsaengpo)**

After graduation from senior high school in 1973, Yun got a job at Hyundai Motor Company. In 1992, when he was married and lived in Jangsaengpo, he bought his friend's sushi restaurant and started a whale meat restaurant in Ulsan City. Yun was able to easily supply the restaurant with whale meat because his parents were whale wholesalers in Jangsaengpo.

The whaling ships of Jangsaengpo left early in the morning and returned in the evening, sounding its horn as it entered the port. The horn sounds differed for each whaling ship, so even if Yun was in his house, he could tell from the sound of the horn when his father's whaling ship had returned. The whaling ships operated around ten hours a day. His father was a chief engineer of a whaling ship. At that time, Yun's older brother was working as a sailor on a whaling ship and making a good income, so Yun also tried to become a whaling ship sailor, but his parents discouraged him from doing so.

The whaling ships travelled to Eocheongdo in early March to start whaling and headed north again in winter. In May and June, they returned to Jangsaengpo from Eocheongdo. In Eocheongdo, the whaling ships anchored at sea during the whaling period. When going to Eocheongdo, newly married couples and sailors who met the conditions to do so could leave the ships and, with their wives, rent rooms on Eocheongdo and return to Jangsaengpo together. About one-third of the sailors were accompanied by their wives in this way; the wives' staying close allowed them to manage their husbands' money and keep their sex lives safe. Whaling ships caught whales while heading south, and when the days grew dark, the ships went to an island close to the whaling areas such as Yokjido and Narado in the South coast of South Korea and anchored. Starting in May and June, after whaling mainly in Jangsaengpo, if the ships had not caught any whales they would depart for the East coast of South Korea and anchor at the Mukho Port. Fin whales were not caught every year. Around 15,16 fin whales were captured in 1975–1976, but many whales rotted and were thrown into the sea. Whaling ships were high-end ships, and they operated only an average of 15 days a month because they suspended hunting when the weather was inclement.

After South Korea joined the IWC in 1978, the number of whales caught in South Korea was limited to 100, and this was a trial operation. The Jangsaengpo Modern Whaling Fisheries Association reported to the IWC that whaleships had captured only the limited number of whales even if they had caught more the quota. When this fraud was reported to the IWC, commercial whaling in South Korea was completely banned. At that time, the staff of the Jangsaengpo Modern Whaling Fisheries Association confiscated the film when a visitor took a picture of a whale being dismantled. When commercial

whaling was banned in early 1985, Yun's mother stopped working as a whale meat boiler, and Yun became a middleman with his father as a wholesale wholesaler of whale meat. His mother had worked for a whale meat wholesaler since Yun was in elementary school.

When Yun started a whale meat restaurant, his wife objected at first, but at the time, it was good to be able to supply fresh whale meat to customers with confidence. However, even with 300–400 whales in the bycatch per year, the supply is no longer enough to meet Yun's demands. Also, as the number of whale restaurants that handle whale meat increased, the supply has been roughly halved. Previously, buying one whale could earn Yun US\$16,543, but today he has to buy two whales to make that much. In 2008, with the maritime police crackdown and the terrible weather, Yun had to close his whale restaurant for three months.

Dolphin meat is also sold at the Ulsan Agricultural and Fisheries Market, but most whale meat restaurants sell only minke whales. The bid price for minke whales over 5 meters was around US\$24,814 in 2008. There is a middleman in each port. Yun gives the middleman his personal phone number, and he pays 4% of the whale meat bid price as a sales fee. When a whale comes in, the middleman calls; Yun checks the condition, length, and size of the whale, then goes to pick up the whale meat that has been bid on locally.

When Yun grew up in Jangsaengpo, he learned to dismantle whales, so he has enough knowledge about whale meat amounts. Middlemen who handle ordinary fish might not know much about whales, so Yun negotiates the price over the phone but will return the whale if it is in bad condition. Three days after it is killed, the whale's body is filled with gas, so its skin looks strong, but its inside will have rotted. When Yun buys a whole whale, he has JU to dismantle it, as that is his speciality. If the whale is large, Yun pays about US\$248 for dismantling it, but there is no fixed price. He stores the purchased whale meat in the freezer and takes out only as much as necessary to cook. Since the massive crackdown by the maritime police on the distribution of illegal whaling products in 2007, Yun has personally stockpiled his freezer.

When Yun was young, he made his restaurant a whale grilled meat (restaurant specialising in whale dishes) both to differentiate it from other restaurants and to experiment with grilling whale meat with briquettes at Jangsaengpo. The cost of whale ribs meat is high, but it is tender and tasty. Whale soup contains less meat than whale stew. The assorted dishes are *suyuk* (boiled intestines and whale skin), *une* (striped, uneven meat from the mandible to the abdomen), *obegi* (tail and dorsal fins), and red meat. Yun's whale restaurant customer base included many businesspeople, mainly men in their mid-40s to late 50s. An average of four men can eat an assorted whale dishes and whale soup for costs around US\$130—it is more expensive than eating in restaurants featuring beef and fish dishes. Whale meat costs US\$300–340 per kilogram, while beef costs US\$42–49, whale meat is expensive about seven times more than beef. Previously, many customers came from Busan, but now most of them are from Ulsan because the number of whale meat restaurants has increased in Busan. Families still come from time to time, but rarely because of the high cost.

Yun said that the whale festival seems to have become a whale meat inventory-

disposal festival, so its meaning is no longer clear. Whale meat quality has degraded because individual merchants sell whale meat at festivals. The festival should sell fresh whale meat at a low price. Yun said that if the supply of whale meat were stable, it could be sold at a price according to the parts, as in Japan.

### **3.8 Whale Meat Retail Wholesaler, KY (Born 1925, Byeongyeong, Ulsan)**

KY married at the age of 19 (1944) and moved to Jangsaengpo at the age of 23 (1948). Her older brother, who was working in the sales department of the offshore whaling fisheries association, realized that her life was difficult. He suggested she move to Jangsaengpo and deal with the trawlers and whalers to earn a living. Her husband found work with the trawler fishing association, and initially, KY sold dried plaice with a friend; later, she sold boiled whale meat at the market. Then, with the introduction of an acquaintance, she got a job measuring the weight of boiled whale meat at a whale meat wholesaler. When her husband brought a whale, she boiled it at home and sold it next to the Jangsaengpo post office, or she went to Busan or Pohang by truck with her husband and sold the boiled whale meat to a retail store.

The whale meat from dismantled whales she bought through bidding had been rapidly cooled and stored in a frozen warehouse; she paid about US\$2.5 per box to the frozen food company. KY stored some whale meat in the freezer of her house and thawed and sold only the necessary amount. Because she worked at a whale meat wholesaler and saw a lot of boiling whale meat, she naturally learned how to cook and boil the whale meat herself. She was even about to buy 12-meter-long fin whales for \$17 each until commercial whaling was banned. She used the fresh raw whale meat for *yukhoe* and boiled the rest together, mixed with meat, bone meat, skin, and fat from the whale, bundled with straw and sold. There were about ten retailers then, but now there is only one. KY often ordered 15 loaves of boiled whale meat from a retailer who sold it at the five-day interval village market, and once she retailed more than 100 loaves of it at the agricultural and marine products market. The wholesale price of a loaf of boiled whale meat is currently US\$2.50, and the retail price is about US\$4. KY currently supplies boiled whale meat to a market retailer in downtown Ulsan, collecting the money from them the next day.

Around 1965, KY's husband was hired as a salesman by a wholesale whale meat store in Jangsaengpo. In Jangsaengpo, there were 4–5 brokers who specialized in whale meat. The brokers, along with two business partners, stocked whales from Yuan's whale-dismantling place (across from the current Jangsaengpo Whale Museum). They also hired one man and four women to sell boiled whale meat to the whale meat wholesaler and to sell the loaves made by mixing the unsold meat, skin, and viscera parts directly to retailers. They have made and sold thousands of loaves of boiled whale meat (Photo 2). The work begins in spring and is settled twice a year at the end of August and November, with total sales amounts divided as half to the three owners and half to the five employees. At the time, there was no ice, so when they bought a whole whale, they had to boil it overnight to avoid spoilage. In Jangsaengpo, there were four such whale meat business partner groups and four wholesalers boiling and selling whale meat.

When the whaling ships returned to Jangsaengpo Port after whaling, the captains took the meat of the chest and tail of the caught whale after first offering it in a thanking ceremony to the village guardian deity. They then sold it to the market.

Since the commercial whaling ban in 1986, KY has bought minke whales and dolphins directly, with her elder son, from Jumunjin, Pohang, and Guryongpo. However, because the wholesalers who boiled and sold whale meat disappeared from Jangsaengpo, she had to boil the whale meat in drums at home to sell to retailers and wholesalers. After her eldest son died, she gave her home and her whale meat shop to her daughter-in-law. She now works in her second son's whale meat restaurant. The second son sometimes boils whale meat, but his wife cooks the whale meat. Her second son quit driving a taxi five years ago to start the whale meat restaurant in Jangsaengpo. KY's youngest daughter also sells boiled whale meat and steamed monkfish next to her brother's whale meat restaurant. KY's grandson also has a whale meat restaurant in Jangsaengpo. KY's husband died in 1994 at the age of 76.

KY and her family eat Risso's dolphins (*Grampus griseus*), but they do not eat other dolphins, considering them smelly and greasy. Striped dolphins (*Stenella coeruleoalba*) were once available when the cold wind blew, and their skin is thick and delicious, but they have not been seen since 1986. The value of each product of the minke whale, from high to low, is this: raw meat, intestines, blood, *obegi*, and *une*. The price of raw meat retails for around US\$33/kg. In Jangsaengpo, *obegi* is still an important dish for big events like funerals and weddings.



Photo 2 Whale meat retail wholesaler and whale meat (Photo by Sun-ae Ii, 2013)

### 3.9 Whale Dismantler, JU (Born 1952, Yeongdeok)

When they have bycatch whales, brokers across the country call JU and ask him to dismantle it because he is currently the only whale dismantler in South Korea. In 1975, he learned whale and dolphin dismantling skills while working at the whale meat retail shop in the Pohang fish market. It took three years to learn how to dismantle a whale. For the first year, he was mostly an observer, helping only a little. By the second year, he helped dismantle the whale. After three years, he could dismantle a whale by himself.

At that time, large warehouses were full of caught whales. JU had once dismantled up to 86 whales and dolphins a day, and he was able to identify a whale skeleton and the location it had come from. After dismantling two or three whales, he had mastered dismantling through experience and just having a knack for it. There were three trading companies in Pohang. When these trading companies bought whales captured in Ganggu and near Pohang, there were three whale-dismantling experts employed to dismantle these whales. Two whale-dismantling experts with long swords began to dismantle the whale, following the instructions of the dismantling chief. The skin, rib meat, and intestines of the whales were sold and consumed in South Korea at a price of about 10% of the total cost per whale.

In 1979, after he was completed three years of military affairs, JU became an independent whale dismantler, travelling anywhere in the country when a request to dismantle a whale came; he ate and slept at a hotel near the Pohang intercity bus terminal. There were ten dolphins fishing ships in Pohang that had not received fishing permits.

There were many dolphins along the coastal area of Pohang, so one person could capture 40–50 for five or six days with three-meter-long harpoon. When they pricked the dolphins' body with a harpoon, it would be separated from the wooden pole. The harpoon for dolphins is narrower than harpoon for minke whales, and it is five centimeters long; the total length, including the rod, is three meters. JU once dismantled whales for three months and earned US\$3,000–4,000. The whaling ships disappeared from the commercial whaling in 1986, but from 1986 to 1990, there were the 20 ships for striped dolphins fishing in Pohang. The fishing for striped dolphins soon died out too, because permissions were not extended after the 1990s. Prior to 1986, a striped dolphin cost US\$17–25 and was mainly used as fox feed in Daegu Dalseong Park. However, after whaling was banned, the Pohang people started to eat striped dolphins and finless porpoises instead, even though they were greasy. Dolphin fishing was banned in 1991 because the regulations in South Korea were complicated, there were no maritime police to distinguish the types of dolphins caught in the sea, and there was a risk of conflict with fishermen. Since only bycatch whales have been used for edible purposes since the whaling ban, the whale-dismantling work has plummeted, so JU is currently the only expert in whale dismantling (Hur 2010).

Until 2000, JU had no work dismantling whales, so he worked moving luggage. In 2004, JU moved from Pohang to Ulsan to continue dismantling whales, and he opened a whale meat restaurant. However, by 2005, the numbers of bycatch whales had decreased significantly. In the 1980s–1990s, JU was dismantling 120–130 whales annually, but in 2005, he dismantled only 78 minke whales. In 2008, however, 12 dolphins were caught in Yangnam, North Gyeongsang Province, and sold for US\$5,700–8,270 each. Currently, those who need whales dismantled hire JU and three or four assistants. When he dismantles dolphins, he uses a kitchen knife like that used in ordinary households, but for minke whales, he has a dedicated dismantling knife. He can do a normal-sized minke whale using three knives and a big minke whale using five knives (Photo 3). Whales cut into parts are chopped again to fit the size of the boxes in which they are stored in the

freezer.

Minke whales are about 3.5 meters long when they are born, and they feed on their mother's milk until they grow to about four meters. A 24-month-old minke whale is about seven meters long, and they grow up to nine meters by mating age. Dismantling a seven-meter-long minke whale takes two and a half to three hours and requires four to five assistants. The bid price for a seven-meter-long minke whale is about US\$82,723. There are ten fixed whale meat restaurants that ask JU to dismantle minke whales—three in Guryongpo, two in Pohang, three in Ulsan, and two in Jangsaengpo. Bycatch whales from all over the country come together in Pohang or Ulsan, and the whale purchase volume on both sides is almost the same. There is no fixed price for dismantling, but JU receives about US\$248 for a big minke whale and US\$165–\$207 for a small minke whale, depending on the whales' size or the mood of the client. Whales have a high body temperature of 49°C degrees, and because they decay quickly after they die, they must be dismantled immediately to maintain freshness. Boiled humpback whale meat is delicious because the meat is red, with many tendons and has little oil, but minke whale meat is suitable for serving raw as sashimi or *yukhoe* (Ii 2008).

JU thinks that dismantling whales is his lifetime job. He is regarded as having mastered a special skill and is a symbol of human victory to the local media, but he has been called a barbarian for killing whales by anti-whaling groups and the center media. JU thinks that, in accordance with Western-centered thoughts and standards, the Korean government and anti-whaling groups now think of whales as special animals and ignore whale experts who preserve and use whales as maritime resources.



**Photo 3** A whale dismantler, his dismantling tools, and a minke whale he dismantled (Photo by Sun-ae Ii, September, 2008, in Pohang)

### 3.10 Fifth-Generation Whales Meat Retailer, BY (Born 1929, Pohang)

In Pohang, there is fifth-generation retailer whose family has been boiling and selling whale meat for 100 years. BY was 22 years old (1948) when his maternal grandmother died and left the whale meat retail business to her daughter. In 1964, BY had been serving as a police officer in Dokdo for 16 years, but at the request of his aunt, he quit his job and started helping her with the business. At that time, all he knew was that buying whale meat from Jangsaengpo, Ulsan, and selling it to Pohang was profitable.



BY's maternal family had been in the whale meat retail since before his maternal grandmother was born. When there was no refrigeration facility, the salted whale meat from Jangsaengpo, was transported to Pohang by truck, which took six or seven hours. There were no problems arising from this long trip since slightly decayed whale meat was okay after boiling. In 1972, BY inherited the business from his aunt. He was a retailer of whale meat for 34 years, helped by his two daughters and eldest son, but in May 2005, he passed the business to his eldest son—the fifth generation.

In Jangsaengpo, it was possible to dismantle like a big fin whale (around 20 meters), but Guryongpo had no facilities to dismantle such big whales. So, BY mainly dealt with small whales like striped dolphins and minke whales. He exported minke whale meat to Shimonoseki, Japan, until 1985s and sold byproducts such as the skin, intestines, *une*, *obegi*, and bone meat to Pohang.

BY said that if the South Korean government does not solve the whaling problem, Japan will catch all the whales on the East coast. He cannot get the whales unless they are caught in fishing nets as bycatch. In 2004, he bought a seven-meter-long minke whale for US\$119,933 in Busan, and he currently sells whale meat to restaurants nationwide. His eldest daughter sells whale meat at her shop next to the eldest son's whale meat shop, and his youngest daughter opened up a whale meat restaurant with his wife in downtown Pohang. BY's daughters purchase whale meat from his eldest son. In 2008, there were six whale meat sellers and ten whale meat restaurants in Pohang. The bidding price for a Class A minke whale of five meters was US\$28,950, roughly equivalent to the price for ten cattles. Class A minke whales have a thick skin. Minke whales that enter gill nets are not fresh, so he discards their meat and internal organs. A six-meter minke whale will have a thick skin and be delicious, but anything more than seven meters is not so delicious. Fin whale meat is considered the most delicious and fragrant.

There are thousands of striped dolphins in the Pohang coastal sea and prey on more than 10kg of high-end fishes a day. Animal lovers insist on protecting whales, but dolphins are still caught. Minke whale meat prices range from US\$83–\$125/kg, while dolphins' price is \$33. Thousands of finless porpoises are caught annually in Eocheongdo and Daecheongdo in the West coast of South Korea, but their meat is considered low quality and not delicious. They are caught and sold in large quantities without an inspection, lumped in with minke whale meat. Whale meat has also been exported to Shimonoseki, Japan (Ii 2007).

In 1975, 30 years ago, a fishery joint venture was formed, and BY served as the union leader for 20 years. At the time, he taught whale-dismantling skills and methods to JU, which he learned beginning in 1972 when he went to buy whale meat in Guryongpo and Jangsaengpo; there, he observed and recorded the whale dismantling method, then bought and tried to dismantle a whale from Guryongpo. After he had dismantled five whales and learned to do it, and he created and settled the fare system. Now, when a broker hires someone to dismantle a five-meter minke whale, the broker must hire three assistants to help the dismantler and pay about \$58 per day to the broker.



#### 4. Conclusion

The above sections have provided some background on whaling in the South Korean village of Jangsaengpo. This information can be summarized as the following three points. First, Jangsaengpo became a whaling village in the prime whaling period of Russia and Japan. However, the men of the village developed their own whaling technology after gaining experience as seafarers for the Japanese whalers. Second, whale meat was supplied to Ulsan and its surrounding cities and exported to Japan, and Jangsaengpo was reconstructed as a center for producing and selling whale meat. After the ban on commercial whaling in 1986, whale meat became a high-quality delicacy, but before that, whale meat was cheap and a major source of protein for workers. Finally, although whaling was one of the nation's largest industries until commercial whaling was banned, only Jangsaengpo remains a fishing village in the area; its neighbouring fishing villages have all become industrial parks. After the ban on commercial whaling, the lively whaling village began to lose its vitality due to population decline and economic stagnation. However, after the 57th International Whaling Committee held at Ulsan in 2005, and whaling attracted new interest from both inside and outside South Korea. As a result, Jangsaengpo has been revived as a whale tourism village. Thus, it seems that Jangsaengpo villagers will continue to live together in close relationships with whales.

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