

Japanese Animal Ethics and Whaling

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1. Introduction

When people from other countries see Japanese people's attitude toward whaling, it may seem puzzling. Why do Japanese people not seem to care about the pain and suffering of whales? Why do they stick to the 'tradition' of whaling while their consumption of whale meat is almost negligible? Part of the answer to those puzzlements lies in the Japanese outlook on human–animal relationship. The outlook has multiple aspects, though the Japanese people themselves are not quite conscious of them. In this paper, I go over some of those aspects and see what (if any) are the implications for Japanese attitudes toward whaling.

I need to warn my readers that I am a philosopher, not a historian or anthropologist. The historical or anthropological material in this paper is mainly drawn from secondary sources (the only exceptions are the materials on the Meiji era, for which I did my own research). If you can read Japanese, you have to turn to the referred books and papers to access more accurate information. As a related issue, the following account involves a lot of conjecture. As a philosopher, my focus is more on making sense of Japanese animal ethics than on being historically and anthropologically accurate. Another warning is that I discuss only Japanese animal ethics and only in the main islands of the country. Japan has two minority ethnic groups, the Ainu culture in Hokkaidō and the Ryūkyū culture in Okinawa, whose views on human–animal relationships differ significantly from the ones described in this paper. I do not underestimate the importance of such minority groups, but dealing with those views exceeds my ability and the scope of this work, so I have omitted reference to them.

The exposition of Japanese animal ethics in this paper goes as follows. Section 2 considers the religious background of Japanese animal ethics, especially in ancient and medieval Japan. Section 3 describes the introduction of Western-style animal-protection movements into Japan; the introduction was not straightforward. Section 4 discusses the ritual of *dōbutsu kuyō* and related practices; the ritual is accompanied by certain ethical viewpoints, which I call the 'ethics of *kuyō*' and 'ethics of *itadakimasu*'. Section 5 provides a summary of the diverse aspects discussed into one coherent picture.

2. Religious Background: Buddhism, Shintoism, and Their Mixture

If you have the preconception that Japan is a Buddhist country, you may be surprised to know that there are very few vegetarians in Japan. What happened to the Buddhist precept of *ahimsa* (nonviolence)? The answer is complicated. Let us summarize some basic features. The following descriptions of people's attitudes toward killing animals in ancient and medieval Japan are based on Karikome (2015).

2.1 Buddhist Precept of Ahimsa in Ancient Japan

Japan is a Buddhist country in which *ahimsa* is taken seriously. Laws that prohibit the eating of certain kinds of animals have existed in Japan for almost 1,200 years. The first such law was established in 675 when Buddhism was introduced in Japan, and it was (at least nominally) effective until it was revoked in 1871. Specifically, the first law prohibited certain types of trap holes and trap spears for hunting and restricted trap fishing between April and September. On the other hand, the law prohibited the eating of five kinds of animals, namely cows, horses, dogs, monkeys, and chickens. Thus, as to hunting and fishing, the law of 675 was not an overall prohibition of hunting but a partial restriction.

At the same time, the force of the Buddhist precept of *ahimsa* was not very strong in Japan. Part of the explanation comes from the peculiar development of Buddhism in Japan, where Buddhism had to coexist with a native religion, Shintoism. Shintoism is a kind of animism that sees 'gods' everywhere and is not a precept-based religion. Japanese people tend not to see the two religions as being in conflict; one influential religious theory holds that Buddhist deities leave 'traces' in Japan as Shintoist gods. This is known as the *honchi-suijaku* theory, where *honchi* means 'true nature', referring to the true nature of Japanese gods as Buddhist deities, and *suijaku* means 'leaving traces'. This mixture of two religions is called *shinbutsu shūgō* (mixing of Shintoism and Buddhism), which persisted until the two religions were severed by the modern Japanese government, which made Shintoism the national religion.

Shintoism did not prohibit killing animals. Dead animals were seen as *kegare* (uncleanness) and avoided within sacred areas, but at the same time, many Shintoist gods asked people to submit hunted game and seafood as offerings. So, in a sense, hunting and fishing were a form of religious activity. Thus, the mixture of Buddhism and Shintoism meant that in ancient Japan, there was a compromise between two opposite views about killing animals. As a result, the Buddhist prohibitions or restrictions of meat-eating, hunting, and fishing that were issued repeatedly in ancient Japan were not strictly enforced.

2.2 Ambivalent Attitudes Toward *Sessyō* (Killing Animals) in Medieval Japan

In medieval Japan (after the 10th century), the situation changed slightly. Following a reformation of Japanese Buddhism, *ahimsa* and other precepts were reevaluated. *Sessyō* (killing animals) was now regarded as a sin, and those who killed animals were seen as destined for hell. This view is called *sessyō zaigō kan* (the killing-animals-as-a-sin view).

Based on this view, local landlords often issued *ahimsa* orders and punished hunters and fishers.

At the same time, many people relied on hunting and fishing to earn a living. To save those people from damnation, some people proposed ways to lessen the sin of *sessyō*. Several Buddhist sects claimed that sins could be cancelled if the sinners called out the name of Amitabha, a Buddhist deity who swore that he would take everybody to the pure land, a kind of Buddhist paradise. Reciting the name of Amitabha is called *nenbutsu*, and under those Buddhist sects, *sessyō* was allowed as long as the hunters and fishers believed in Amitabha and practiced *nenbutsu*.

Another convenient idea is what Karikome (2015) called *sessyō bukka kan* (killing-animals-resulting-in-becoming-Buddha view), according to which hunters and fishers were seen as actually helping the killed animals because the animals would become Buddha (*jōbutsu*) if they were given appropriate funerals (here Buddha does not refer to a historical person but to an awakened spiritual being). The idea was expressed in the *Suwa no kanmon* (Suwa prayer scrolls) associated with the Suwa Shrine (a Shintoist shrine that adopted some Buddhist beliefs through *shinbutsu shūgō*) and customarily recited by hunters. The document says, ‘Even if we release already-dead animals, they will not revive; thus, by human being’s eating them, we let them become Buddha’.¹⁾ This idea brought about the widespread custom of *dōbutsu irei* or *dōbutsu kuyō* (both mean ‘consolation of animal spirit’), which will be discussed later.

With those manoeuvres, hunting and fishing became acceptable practices from Japanese Buddhism’s point of view, but this did not mean that killing ceased to be a sin. The mixture of this idea that killing was a sin with the Shintoist idea of the *kegare* associated with dead bodies led to discrimination against those who earned their living by killing. Interestingly, meat-eating itself was not regarded as a sin in medieval Japan, as long as somebody else killed the animal being eaten.

Thus, according to Karikome (2015), Japanese attitudes toward animal killing developed for practical reasons during the medieval era within the mixture of Buddhism and Shintoism. On the one hand, killing animals was prohibited and punished as a sin, and those whose vocation involved killing animals were discriminated against; on the other hand, eating animals was not prohibited, and the sin of killing animals could be forgiven through the practices of *nenbutsu* and *kuyō*.

2.3 Indifference to Suffering in Traditional Japanese Animal Ethics

Of course, the influences of Buddhism and Shintoism are much weaker in modern-day Japan, but if we keep in mind this background, many puzzling features of Japanese animal ethics start to make sense. For example, almost all the prohibitions were about killing; other types of cruelty were rarely at issue. Even now, the Japanese people have a strong aversion to euthanasia for animals.

One impressive piece of evidence that religious animal ethics in traditional Japan was indifferent to animal suffering other than killing can be found in the reaction of 19th-century Buddhist to Western vegetarianism, found in Teizo Aoki’s *Soshokuron* (Aoki 1889). This book discusses the virtue of *soshoku* (vegetarianism) from a Buddhist point

of view, and it contains an interesting comment on the use of eggs and milk in Western vegetarianism: ‘It is understandable to allow to use cheese and butter to cook vegetables. However, eggs are nothing other than living things, and it is wrong to equate eating them with eating vegetables. Probably Westerners see eggs as vegetables just like Japanese used to think rabbits are birds. To my opinion, the practice is based on an unreasonable habit and better to be changed’ (Aoki 1889: 6). What is interesting is that the obvious difference between eggs and meat—that is, the idea that killing live animals hurts them but eating eggs does not—did not occur to Aoki. Of course, this does not mean that all Japanese Buddhists are indifferent to the suffering of animals (there are many Buddhists who joined the Tokyo Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), as discussed below). Still, this example is very suggestive.

There is one notable exception of this indifference to animal suffering in premodern Japan: a series of rules collectively known as the *Shōrui Awaremi no Rei* ordinance (Orders on Compassion for Living Things) issued by Shōgun Tsunayoshi Tokugawa (‘the dog shōgun’) of the Edo shōgunate in late 17th century (Nezaki 2006). Those rules not only prohibited killing animals but also prohibited (and defined) ‘cruelty’ in the treatment of some animals, including dogs, cats, and horses. For example, concerning dogs, there were rules on the registration of dogs, prohibitions on abandoning dogs, and requirements to feed stray dogs. The government even built large shelters for stray dogs. Most of those rules were quickly abolished after the death of Tsunayoshi Tokugawa and have been regarded as ridiculous rules until recently. However, many of the items of the *Shōrui Awaremi no Rei* resemble modern animal-welfare legislation; maybe he was too progressive. Anyway, the fact that such reasonable rules (from a present-day point of view) were regarded as ridiculous provides indirect evidence that concerns about animal suffering were considered strange by premodern Japanese people.

2.4 *Sikkai-Jōbutsu-Ron* (Everything Becomes Buddha)

Another interesting development of Japanese Buddhism in the medieval era that seems to have some relevance to Japanese animal ethics is the theory called either *sikkai-jōbutsu-ron* (everything becomes Buddha) or *shitsuu-busshō-ron* (everything has Buddha nature). According to most schools of Buddhism (especially outside of Japan), only sentient beings have the capability of becoming Buddha (the capability is equivalent, roughly, to having a soul or spirit). However, in Japan, there is a prevalent interpretation of the capability according to which nonsentient living things like plants and land also have this capability (Okada 2002; Sueki 2015). The idea of plants or the land having a soul would be foreign to the original 4th-century BCE Indian Buddhists and was probably influenced by the *Shintoist* idea of gods as existing everywhere.

According to Karikome (2015), there is no evidence that the *sikkai-jōbutsu* theory had any influence on Japanese animal ethics, but I conjecture that it had implication related to the weakening of *ahimsa* in Japan. *Sikkai-jōbutsu* theory seems to imply a stronger ban on eating living things because not just sentient being but also nonsentient beings have souls; however, it may also have had an opposite effect: if everything has a soul, there is no point in refraining from eating meat because eating plants also means

consuming souls, and we have to eat to live. Something similar to this argument is frequently raised against present-day vegetarians in Japan.

3. Introduction of Concerns about Suffering in Modern-Era Japan

It is difficult to find evidence of concern for the suffering of animals in premodern Japan. Such concerns were mainly introduced from Western animal ethics. Until recently, the recurrent pattern in Japanese animal ethics-related measures has been that Westerners' criticisms trigger reactions in Japan's government and other sectors, which lead to the enactment of new measures or regulations.

3.1 External Pressure

The first modern animal-protection group in Japan was the *Dōbutsu Gyakutai Bōshi Kai* (the Tokyo Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animal, Tokyo SPCA), established in 1902. Their claims resulted in certain cruelty-prohibition measures in Tokyo. This seems to have been a spontaneous movement, but in the period immediately preceding the establishment, there had been numerous newspaper articles pointing out animal cruelty (especially the abuse of cows and horses in the streets) in Japan, written mainly by Westerners living in Yokohama and Kobe (Iseda 2009a). These articles painted the Japanese people as uncivilized because of their cruel acts. The Tokyo SPCA was established by Japanese intellectuals (mainly in religious and educational sectors) in response to such Western criticisms. The Tokyo SPCA (later renamed *Dōbutsu Aigo-kai*, as I explain in the next section) was effectively dissolved during the Second World War.

After the war, a new national animal-protection organization, *Nihon Dōbutsu Aigo Kyōkai* (the Japan Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, JSPCA) was established. This time, Westerners were heavily involved in the establishment of the organization; the JSPCA's first president was Lady Gascoigne, the wife of the British representative in occupied Japan, Sir Alvary Gascoigne.²⁾

The first animal-protection law in Japan, the *Dōbutsu Kanri Hō* (Animal Management Act) was established in 1973. The debate leading to this law was partly triggered in 1969 when a British newspaper, *The People*, revealed that stray dogs received by health centres were being sold to animal experimentation facilities and warned that British dogs should not be sent to Japan. The minutes of the National Diet showed that Diet members, mentioning the impact of Western journalism, including the article in *The People*, worried much about whether Japan could be regarded as a civilized country if it did not have sufficient regulations on animal cruelty.³⁾

The pattern has been changing recently, however. The Animal Management Act of 1973 has been amended in 1999, 2005, 2013, and 2019. The name of the Act has also been changed to include *aigo* ('loving protection', discussed in the next section) in its name; the law is now called the *Dōbutsu Aigo Hō*—roughly, the Loving Protection of Animals Act). Each amendment enriched the content of the law, with more animal protections added. Those amendments seem to have been proposed by Japanese people, without visible pressure from Westerners (though, of course, animal-welfare legislation in

the European Union and other countries has undoubtedly influenced the direction of the development of Japanese animal-welfare laws).

Now we arrive at the issue at hand: What about animal ethics and whaling? How does ‘loving protection’ apply? Currently, the preponderance of external pressures on Japan in the area of animal welfare concerns whales and whaling. If the Japanese people are so anxious to be regarded as civilized by Westerners, why do they resent such pressure rather than accept it?

Here, we must resort to conjecture because we have so little empirical evidence. One possible line of explanation is as follows: as we saw in the section on Japan’s religious background, there has been a longstanding acceptance of hunting and fishing in Japan, and whaling has been regarded as a kind of fishing. Hunting and fishing were seen as ethically admissible because people need to eat: the earliest humans were omnivorous hunter-gatherers, and when people, including the Japanese, agreed that eating meat and fish was acceptable, hunting and fishing to earn a living (selling what they caught) also became acceptable. The morality of hunting and fishing was considered a settled issue in Japan; therefore, external pressures and condemnations of whaling can seem like interference and persecution based on cultural bias. On the other hand, the concept of animal welfare and the prevention of animal cruelty is novel for the Japanese (remember that almost all prohibitions related to animals in Japan were about killing, not other kinds of cruelty). The Japanese people had no objection because there was no previous settlement of this issue.

3.2 *Dōbutsu Aigo* (Loving Protection of Animals)

Thus, the concern about hurting animals (as opposed to killing animals) was introduced in Japan through external pressure from Westerners. This does not mean that Japanese people did not pay attention to animals’ suffering; there has been a version of the animal-protection movement in modern Japan. However, the way Japanese people view animal suffering seems to be slightly different from the Western viewpoint; consequently, when modern animal-protection movements are introduced in Japan, their emphasis differs as well. Understanding these slight changes, however, is essential when we try to understand Japanese people’s attitudes toward various animal cruelty issues.

Dōbutsu aigo is the term that symbolizes those slight changes. As explained earlier, *aigo* literally means ‘loving protection’. *Aigo* is almost always used for animals, though other uses like *kōen aigo* (loving protection of parks) and *shinrin aigo* (loving protection of forests) do exist. *Dōbutsu aigo* is the most common Japanese expression used to refer to animal-protection activities in general. It does not have a counterpart in English. English expressions for the same purpose, like ‘prevention of cruelty to animals’ and ‘humane treatment of animals’ do not have the emotive connotation of ‘loving’. Of course, loving animals is also important for Western animal-welfare groups, but this is not their primary defining aspect.

The original Japanese name of Tokyo SPCA when it was established in 1902 was *Dōbutsu Gyakutai Bōshi Kai*, which was a literal translation of ‘society for the prevention of cruelty to animals’. The Japanese members soon became uncomfortable with including

the word *gyakutai* (cruelty) in the name, and they started to discuss alternatives. The leader of the group, Tatsutarō Hiroi, recalled the occasion some 30 years later: ‘The first proposal was to change the name to *Dōbutsu Hogo Kai* (Animal-Protection Society), like Germany or France. However, it might be misunderstood as livestock enterprise; it was claimed that it is better to use the word ‘*aigo*’, which is Eastern and positive. So we decided thus’ (Hiroi 1940: 76). Thus, they seemed to believe that the ‘loving’ (*ai*) part of ‘loving protection’ (*aigo*) was not much emphasized in Western-style animal-protection organizations’ names. The expression *dōbutsu aigo kai* was introduced as the official Japanese name for the Tokyo SPCA.

Japanese people are fond of the phrase *dōbutsu aigo*. Similar expressions, like *dōbutsu gyakutai bōshi* (prevention of cruelty to animals), have also been used for referring to animal-protection movement but never became as common. As already mentioned, after the Tokyo SPCA was effectively dissolved during the Second World War, a new nationwide organization, the JSPCA was organized; it also adopted the phrase in its name, *Nihon Dōbutsu Aigo Kyōkai*, even though there was little organizational connection between the two groups. The phrase *dōbutsu aigo* is now incorporated in the law; in 1999, the *Dōbutsu Kanri Hō* (Animal Management Act of 1973) was renamed the *Dōbutsu Aigo Hō* (literally means the Loving Protection of Animals Act).

The emphasis on loving in ‘loving protection’ seems to symbolize what Japanese people think *dōbutsu aigo* is about. It seems that they think what really matters is people’s love of animals, not what the animals actually experience; that is, the movement is not for animals, but for human beings. This way of seeing *dōbutsu aigo* in Japan can make sense of some otherwise puzzling features of the animal-protection movement in Japan.

First, the stated purpose of the *Dōbutsu Aigo Hō* clearly shows that the goal of the law was not animal protection. Article 1 of the law legislates ‘prohibition of cruelty and disposal of animals, appropriate treatment of animals and other items of *dōbutsu aigo* such as protection of health and safety of animals’ so as ‘to build the climate to *Aigo* animals among Japanese people’ and ‘to help cultivate the mentality of respect for life, friendship, and peace’. These purposes are in turn means for ‘the realization of a society in which human beings and animals co-exist’.⁴ Thus, according to the stated purpose of the Law, the reason why cruelty to animals is prohibited is not that it harms animals but because it disrupts the climate of *aigo*—that is, the loving protection of animals. In this sense, the logic of the law is strikingly human centered.

This emphasis on ‘loving’ side of *aigo* is visible in the agenda of the *Dōbutsu Aigo* organizations. When the Tokyo SPCA was formed in 1902, its main concerns were to improve the situation of animals, especially cart horses and household dogs. However, after they attained original goals, such as a regulation on the treatment of cart horses and stray dogs in Tokyo, the organization quickly became an enlightenment group whose main activity was monthly lectures. Probably because of that, Westerners in Tokyo formed another animal-protection group, the *Nihon Jindō Kai* (Humane Society of Japan). The *Nihon Jindō Kai* was more active in terms of actually protecting animals; for example, they ran animal shelters.

A similar pattern was repeated after the Second World War when conflicts apparently arose between the Japanese and Western members of the JSPCA (Imagawa 1996; Shunto 2018). The Westerners wanted to prevent the cruel treatment of animals, such as the use of stray animals in laboratory experiments, whereas the Japanese members of the JSPCA did not see such active prevention as the main activity; the Japanese members' main concerns were the education of children and enlightenment of adults concerning to the treatment of animals.⁵⁾ Dissatisfied with such an emphasis, the Westerners formed another organization, the *Nihon Dōbutsu Fukushi Kyōkai* (The Japan Animal Welfare Society).

On the whole, Japanese people seem to value the cultivation of a loving attitude toward animals more than they value the prevention of cruelty to animals. In philosophical terms, the difference can be seen as self-regarding versus and other-regarding responsibilities. For Westerners, the main object of humans' responsibility in animal protection should be the animals, and the cultivation of a loving attitude is a means to ensure the fulfilment of that responsibility. This is an other-regarding responsibility. In contrast, for the Japanese, the main object of humans' responsibility in animal protection should be ourselves, and protecting animals is a means to cultivate the virtue of a loving attitude. This is a self-regarding responsibility.

Of course, the Tokyo SPCA and JSPCA also worked toward the prevention of animal cruelty, and Western animal-protection movements also involved education and enlightenment; the difference is a matter of emphasis, not of the nature of the movement.

Still, the difference may explain some features of Japanese animal ethics, such as its indifference to animal use in industry (animal experimentation in medical industry, farm animals in the meat industry, etc.). The fate of lab animals and farm animals (especially those in so-called factory farming) has been a major concern for Western animal-protection movements, and such concerns have led to more radical abolitionist initiatives such as the animal rights movement; in contrast, *dōbutsu aigo* movements of Japan have not been much concerned with industrial animals, at least until late 20th century. The 3R principle of animal experimentation was incorporated into Japanese law only in 2005, and there is currently no legal protection of farm animals in Japan. This lack of interest is understandable if the main concern of the movement is the cultivation of a loving attitude toward animals among ordinary people. As long as industrial animal uses are concealed from ordinary people, the treatment of those animals does not affect their loving attitude toward the animals around them (such as companion animals).

This separation may be partly caused by the traditional Japanese attitude toward killing. As mentions earlier, in the medieval prohibition on killing animals, only those who did the killing were regarded as *kegare* and punished; those who received meat from animals that others had killed were not penalized. Similarly, in the *dōbutsu aigo* movement in modern Japan, receiving the benefit from industries that kill animals is not seen as compromising people's overall loving attitude toward animals.

As for whaling and the 'loving protection' concept, to my knowledge, Japan's traditional *dōbutsu aigo* movements have never picked up whaling as part of the agenda. Those animal rights groups influenced by Western animal rights movements are exceptions, but they remain in the minority in Japan. Since whaling is another industrial

animal use, it is natural that the *dōbutsu aigo* movements do not consider it. As with other industrial animal uses, as long as the actual killing of the whales is concealed from the larger public, their deaths do not interfere with people's loving attitude toward animals in general. Maybe there are other reasons why *dōbutsu aigo* organizations do not address whaling, but this seems to be a plausible explanation.

4. *Dōbutsu Kuyō* (Consolation of Animal Spirit) as a Form of Animal Ethics

4.1 Prevalence of *Dōbutsu Kuyō*

Dōbutsu kuyō and *dōbutsu irei* both mean consolation of animal spirit. The terms refer to certain funeral-like rituals performed for dead animals. Those rituals are often held by the very people who killed the animals. The practices of *dōbutsu kuyō* and *dōbutsu irei* are now widespread in Japan; almost all animal-related industries perform the ritual once a year, including farmers, fishers, certain food companies, animal experimentation facilities, zoos, and others.

In the following paragraphs, I use *dōbutsu kuyō* as a generic term that also covers *dōbutsu irei*; the two expressions are sometimes used interchangeably, and the content of the rituals is not different. On other occasions, *kuyō* is regarded as a more religious notion than *irei* (Takagi 2014: 300–307), but *irei* can cover both religious and nonreligious rituals. In fact, many public organizations prefer *irei* in the name of their rituals to avoid any association with a particular religion. However, in terms of religious implication, *irei* is not totally non-religious. *Irei* can mean the spirit elevated into a god, in the context of pre-WWII Shintoism as the national religion (Veldkamp 2009). In my opinion, the *rei* in *irei* refers to the animal spirit and does not make sense without some belief in an afterlife for animals. The connection between *irei* and Shintoism has been weak since the Second World War. The belief in the animal spirit expressed in *irei* sounds more like a primitive natural religion. Whatever the connotation, I prefer to use the more-inclusive term *dōbutsu kuyō*.

Even though *dōbutsu kuyō* can be connected to the religious background of Japanese animal ethics, its recent development seems to suggest that this ritual now has taken on a larger life on its own. It is important to understand what is involved in this ritual. As was explained, Japanese Buddhism (mixed with Shintoism) had a peculiar justification for killing animals—that is, the rationale was that the killer was helping the animals they killed by conducting proper funerals that enabled the animals become Buddha. From a Shintoist point of view, the *kegare* (uncleanness) from death is purified by such a ritual. Thus, animal funerals and similar rituals became important components of hunting, fishing, and other animal-killing activities.

The ritual of *kuyō* is often accompanied by the erection of a tomb or a monument. There are numerous animal tombs and memorial monuments throughout Japan (Yoda 2007; 2018). According to his estimation, among the animal tombs and monuments, more than 1,000 are for fish, about 1,000 are for cows and horses, and there are many thousands for other animals. Tombs for family pets are not included in the estimation. In some cases the animals memorized are buried under the tomb, but in the majority of the

cases the monument is not a tomb stone (that is, nothing is buried underneath). Some of them date back to Nara era (8th century), and many were built in the Edo era (17th to 19th century), but their numbers rapidly increased after modernization. The animals for which tombs and monuments have been built are various: dogs, cats, cows, horses, pigs, monkeys, racoon dogs, foxes, wolves, deer, whales, dolphins, rats, insects, birds, reptiles, and fish, to name a few. Even plants have been the object of such memorials. Yoda (2007; 2008) classified the tombs and monuments in Japan into ten categories according to their purposes, including to worship gods and buddhas; uplift the morale of human beings; reward animals for loyalty or service; console animal spirits; and six others. Memorials ‘to console animal spirits’ are the most numerous and relevant to our concern here. Veldkamp (2009) pointed out that avoiding *tatari* (retribution of the dead) was another reason why so many animal tombs have been built. (That purpose is rather practical, in a sense.) In summary, the main reasons such animal tombs and monuments have been built were religious ones (helping animals become Buddha, purifying *kegare*, and avoiding *tatari*) in the sense that those reasons do not make sense without some supernatural beliefs.

Interestingly, the custom of building such monuments and holding rituals in front of them (*dōbutsu kuyō*) persists even in present-day Japan where such supernatural beliefs are generally regarded as obsolete. Not just persistent: given the increasing number of animal tombs and monuments (Yoda 2007; 2018), *dōbutsu kuyō* seems to have become even more widespread after modernization. One striking area where *dōbutsu kuyō* has become more widespread is at animal experimentation facilities. Many such facilities are national universities and research institutions, where religious rituals cannot be held officially. Nishikawa and Morishita (2012) sent a questionnaire to 127 animal experimentation facilities about their memorial services for laboratory animals; of the 83 replies, 73 said that they held memorial services as official events, with 38 facilities holding theirs service in a religious manner (including both Buddhist style and Shintoist style) and 37 facilities holding theirs in nonreligious manner. Asked about their reasons for performing such rituals, the main replies were ‘appreciation’ (*kansha*), ‘comfort of the spirit’ (*irei*), and ‘consolation’ (*kuyō*) (Nishikawa and Morishita 2012).

4.2 Ethics of *Kuyō*

The persistence of *dōbutsu kuyō* even among animal experimentation facilities suggests that it still plays some important function for the Japanese human–animal relationship. My own interpretation is that the ritual has developed into a peculiarly Japanese kind of relational ethics that I call the ‘ethics of *kuyō*’ (Iseda 2018). In the ethics of *kuyō*, human beings owe particular responsibilities to animals for their sacrifice—that is, being killed. This responsibility is felt strongly when the animals’ use involves some intimate relationship between human beings and animals that results in an emotional tie (at least for the humans). Basically, humans perform *kuyō* rituals as acts of gratitude. The gratefulness can also be shown by not wasting the sacrifice—that is, ensuring that animals die for ‘good cause’ (e.g. animals testing to save human lives, butchering a cow for beef, etc.). This responsibility is relational in the sense that the source of the

responsibility is the human–animal relationship (i.e. the fact that the humans sacrificed animal lives) rather than what the animals themselves are like (e.g. whether they can suffer, whether they understand the situation, etc.).

The relational nature of the ethics of *kuyō* can be seen in a surprising feature of *dōbutsu kuyō*—namely, that animals are not the only object of *kuyō* rituals; there are also *kuyō* rituals for plants called *sōmoku kuyō* (consolation of plant spirit). Maybe this is a consequence of the *sikkai-jōbutsu* theory explained earlier, according to which everything (including plants) has the capacity to become Buddha. Plants may not suffer (as far as we know), but that is irrelevant from the viewpoint of the ethics of *kuyō*; what matters is the relationship between human beings and plants, and if we are sacrificing their lives, we owe a certain gratitude, shown through rituals, to those plants.

The other type of showing gratitude—that is, not wasting the sacrifice—is important when we try to understand Japanese animal ethics. This way of thinking can be seen, for example, in the speeches given during *dōbutsu kuyō*. Akita University often post its animal memorial speeches on its website. The speech in 2009 had these lines:

For medical research and practice, experimental animals are indispensable, and we should never forget the feeling of mourning for the irreplaceable life of the sacrificed animals. ... We animal experimenters have a grave responsibility to utilize the invaluable information obtained at the expense of the precious lives of animals as research result that contributes to wider society.⁶⁾

This speech clearly shows that the speakers regard the use of ‘invaluable information’ as a way of fulfilling their responsibility to the animals that die during the research.

This way of fulfilling our responsibility, which may seem natural to Japanese, makes little sense from the viewpoint of Western animal ethics. Western animal ethics starts from the fact that animals suffer, and our main responsibility to animals is to reduce their suffering. In the Western view, nothing humans do after the animals are dead can reduce their suffering, so they see as irrelevant rituals like *dōbutsu kuyō* and such concepts as ‘not wasting the sacrifice’. To be exact, Western people also put up tombs for companion animals; this is possible because of personal ties with the animals (that is, the animals are seen as family members). However, such personal ties are different from the kind of responsibilities in *dōbutsu kuyō* in animal industries we discuss here. The rituals are held for nameless experimental and industrial animals to whom it is hard to feel any personal ties. We can still derive something similar to Western animal ethics from the ethics of *kuyō* (by applying the ‘no waste’ thinking backwardly to living animals), but that is a topic for another paper. I will stop here by simply pointing out that we are dealing with two totally foreign ideas of humans’ responsibility to animals, and without realizing the foreignness of the ideas, we cannot really understand the conflicts between Japanese and Westerners on animal issues.

Where does the ethics of *kuyō* come from? My conjecture is that it is not totally unrelated to *sessyō bukka kan* (the killing-animals-resulting-in-becoming-Buddha theory). Indeed, the puzzling idea of the ethics of *kuyō* becomes easier to understand if we see it

as a secularized version of that theory. As is explained, *sessyō bukka kan* is the idea that human beings are actually benefiting the animals they kill because the animals can become Buddha if they are then given an appropriate funeral. The logic of *sessyō bukka kan* is heavily dependent on the Buddhist idea of becoming Buddha, which has little plausibility in a secularized modern Japanese society. However, for animal killing to be allowable, there should be some benefit human beings can give to the animals. Probably showing gratitude and not wasting the sacrifice were the substitutes the Japanese people came up with. The minimal supernatural element of *kuyō* and *irei*—that is, that those activities presuppose the existence of *rei* (spirit)—is required because without it, the idea of ‘repayment’ after death does not work.

4.3 *Kujira Kuyō* (Consolation of Whale Spirits)

Turning once more to whaling, we see that whales occupy a rather peculiar position in discussions of *dōbutsu kuyō*. A classic study of whale tombs and monuments (Yoshihara 1982) listed about 50 such tombs; according to one estimate, there are about 130 whale tombs and monuments remaining (Nakamura 2010: 74). These whale memorials are generally called *kujira duka* (whale mounds), and we also adopt this term. Usually animal tombs and monuments are built collectively for animals of the same kind, but some *kujira duka* are for individual whales (dead on the shore). This means that those whales were recognized as individuals. This may be because of the significant economic value the individual whales represented.

Kujira duka were sometimes associated with supernatural beliefs. According to Miyawaki and Hosokawa (2008), there was a widespread belief that whales reincarnate to and from human beings, especially handicapped humans. Thus, according to one legend, if people treat a mentally disabled child kindly, the child may come back as a whale and benefit the people. A whale may also reincarnate to another whale that will come back to the shore, giving more benefit. This seems to be another reason why *kujira dukas* have been built.

Whales are also supposed to have the supernatural power to control whether the catches of other fish will be plentiful or not and to cause various disasters (*tatari*) to fishers. The birth of disabled children is also associated with whales’ *tatari*. Traditionally, Japanese whalers paid particular attention to mother whales with babies (Nakamura 2010: 83–93). Impressed by the whale mothers’ sacrifices to protect their calves, they whalers built *kujira dukas* for the mothers and babies and performed *kuyōs* with special care. This may have been both to show respect for the mother whale and to ward off the *tatari* caused by the anger of a dead mother whale for the death of her baby.

Like workers in all other animal-related industries in Japan, whalers continued to practice *dōbutsu kuyō* for whales (*kujira kuyō*, consolation of whale spirit) after modernization. For example, the town of Taiji in the Wakayama Prefecture, well-known for its tradition of whaling and dolphin-hunting, holds five different *kujira kuyō* annually (Miyawaki and Hosokawa 2008: 22), with slight differences in scope (some include other fish, and one is for dolphins) and purposes (some are more about praying for a good catch). There is a large whale monument in Taiji as *kuyō* for whales.

All these things suggest that *kujira kuyō* for whales are not mere rituals; they serve serious purposes for present-day whalers. It is not clear how much of the purpose is related to premodern beliefs about reincarnation and *tatari*. In any case, the stated purpose of Taiji's *kujira kuyō* is similar to that of other modern *kujira kuyō*. In a ritual held on April 2019, for example, the mayor of Taiji reportedly gave the following speech: 'We would like to continue to have the feeling of gratefulness to whales and to pass on the long history between this town and whales to the new era of *Reiwa*' (the current Japanese era).⁷⁾ Here the stated purpose of the ritual is showing gratitude.

'Not wasting the sacrifice' is also strongly connected with whaling. For example, Wakayama prefecture, where Taiji is located, has a page on whaling and dolphin-hunting in its official website. It offers the following justification for whaling in Japan: 'In Japan, captured whales are used without loss; not only is the meat used for food, but other parts are used as materials for craft products. Japanese whaling is different from the whaling of certain other countries before the utilization of petroleum, where the sole purpose was whale oil, and where many whales were killed and the greater part of their body was thrown away into the sea'.⁸⁾ From the viewpoint of Western animal ethics, this 'justification' is puzzling, to say the least. Whether body parts are used or not does not contribute to the welfare of the dead whales. The ethics of *kuyō* seems to be at work here.

4.4 Ethics of *Itadakimasu* (I Receive It, Sir)

A recent variant of ethics of *kuyō* is what I call the 'ethics of *itadakimasu*'. Knowing the ethics of *Itadakimasu* will help explain what Japanese people think about eating meat.⁹⁾ *Itadakimasu* literally means 'I receive it, sir', and is customarily pronounced at the beginning of a meal. One interpretation of this expression has gained in popularity over the past twenty years. According to the new interpretation, *itadakimasu* specifically means 'I receive your life', and it is addressed not to a deity, as Western listeners might suppose, but to the animals and the plants in the food. The basic claims of the ethics of *itadakimasu* can be summarized as follows:

1. Human beings cannot sustain their own lives without sacrificing the lives of plants and (for many) animals. This taking of life from living things is customarily expressed as *inochi wo itadaku* (receiving the lives).
2. Human beings should show gratitude to the sacrificed animals and plants.
3. The beginning of the before-meal utterance *itadakimasu* is an expression of such gratitude.
4. As a natural consequence of this feeling of gratitude, it is not admissible to waste food or to leave leftovers.

Some Japanese people, especially the young, may think that this is a traditional Japanese thought, but evidence shows that its origins are recent. In the first place, saying '*itadakimasu*' before a meal was not common before the Second World War. In a nationwide survey in 1941, among 58 survey locations, most people said '*itadakimasu*' in

ten of the locations; ‘some’ people said ‘*itadakimasu*’ in six of the locations; and no one said ‘*itadakimasu*’ in most (42) of the other places (Seijo University of Folklore 1990). The custom became prevalent after the Second World War, but until the 1990s, the ‘I receive it, sir’ was addressed to people: farmers, fishers, cooks, etc. (However, some minor uses that led to the current ethics of *itadakimasu* seemed to exist before that.)

At the end of 20th century, the ethics of *itadakimasu* suddenly became a popular idea. A survey of three major newspapers (*Asahi*, *Yomiuri*, *Mainichi*) gives some sense of the suddenness of the appearance of this thought. To create the analysis shown in Table 1, I used the electronic database of those three Japanese newspapers, searching for articles that contained either ‘*inochi*’ AND ‘*itadakimasu*’ or ‘*inochi*’ AND ‘*itadaku*’ in the text. The search results included many irrelevant cases (since *itadakimasu* is a common polite expression used in various occasions). Therefore, I sorted the search results manually to leave only relevant cases—those in which *itadakimasu* or *itadaku* was used as before-meal pronunciation and in which what was supposed to be received was *inochi* (the lives). The result are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Articles from three major newspapers in Japan showing evidence of the ethics of *itadakimasu*

year	No. of appearance	year	No. of appearance
1989	0	2000	10
1990	0	2001	10
1991	1	2002	19
1992	0	2003	9
1993	1	2004	17
1994	2	2005	28
1995	2	2006	33
1996	0	2007	28
1997	3	2008	27
1998	4	2009	24
1999	5	2010	27

As you can see from the description of the method, this survey was a preliminary one and by no means rigorous. To get a more accurate count of the Japanese newspaper articles related to the ethics of *itadakimasu*, we will need to conduct larger searches with other related expressions. However, even taking into consideration the limitations, this preliminary survey was enough to suggest the recent origin of the idea that we are receiving the lives of food when we say ‘*itadakimasu*’ before eating. The idea was rarely mentioned in the early 1990s, was mentioned repeatedly in the late 1990s, and began to spread in the 2000s. All three papers showed the same general pattern. This is remarkable given that *Asahi* and *Yomiuri* have different political leanings; *Asahi* is a liberal newspaper, *Yomiuri* a rather conservative one. Thus, both liberal and conservative Japanese people seem to have accepted the ethics of *itadakimasu* at about the same time.

A typical expression of the ethics of *itadakimasu* is something like this:

Living is eating, and eating means sacrificing nonhuman animals and plants, receiving their lives [Author's note: the verb the speaker used for receiving, *chōdaisuru*, was in the polite form used only for superiors]. Therefore, you experience the feeling of gratefulness that I receive your life, saying *itadakimasu*. Because it is *mottainai* (too valuable to be wasted), we do not leave leftovers.¹⁰

The four elements of the ethics of *itadakimasu* listed earlier appear here in a concise manner. As you can see from this quotation, the 'lives' referred to in the ethics of *itadakimasu* include lives of plants.

This sudden spread of the ethics of *itadakimasu* seems to be related to the educational reform in Japan. From 2000, Japanese schools started to incorporate *sōgō gakushū no jikan* (time for an integrated study), which is supposed to remedy 'cramming education' and give pupils some real-world experience. As part of the content of this new curriculum, some schools started farming and eating education in which pupils raised animals, then slaughtered and ate them. The ethics of *itadakimasu* provided a convenient ethical backbone for such practices. Many early mentions of the ethics of *itadakimasu* in the newspaper articles were related to such educational activities.

Even though the ethics of *itadakimasu* has such a relatively new origin, the rapid spread of the idea throughout Japan seems to suggest that the idea resonates with Japanese animal ethics. As readers may have already figured out, the logic of the ethics of *itadakimasu* has much in common with the ethics of *kuyō*: when we eat meat and plants, we owe some responsibility to the sacrificed lives. That responsibility is fulfilled by performing the very minimal ritual (e.g. saying *itadakimasu* at the beginning of meal) and not wasting the sacrifice (not leaving leftovers). The minimal supernatural belief in the existence of a spirit in animals (and plants) is implicitly introduced by addressing *itadakimasu* to animals and plants; if there is no such spirit, what are we talking to? Thus, the ethics of *itadakimasu* can be seen as a convenient and simplified version of the ethics of *kuyō*.

Again, Japanese people should realize that the entire idea of the ethics of *itadakimasu* is totally puzzling from the viewpoint of Western animal ethics. The feeling of gratefulness for sacrifice seems misplaced if the sacrifice was coerced (rather like robbers thanking their victims). Neither saying '*itadakimasu*' nor leaving no leftovers contributes to the welfare of the (already dead) animals (and plants, for that matter), so they mean nothing from the Western point of view.

The ethics of *itadakimasu* is also applicable to whales. For example, in the *kujira kuyō* in Taiji, an officer of the Fisherman's Association of Taiji said, 'We do not forget the spirit of *itadakimasu*', in relation to the resolution that they do not capture whales at will but obey proper resource management.¹¹ Here, the idea of 'not wasting the sacrifice' is used in a backward manner to imply 'not capturing too many unnecessarily'. In any case, when Japanese people support whaling by eating whale meat, they generally say '*itadakimasu*' and try to 'repay' the whales by not wasting their meat.

5. The Overall Picture of Japanese Animal Ethics

Thus far, we have examined various aspects of Japanese animal ethics. There are so many different aspects, it is hard to put everything together into a single picture. However, it is not total chaos, either. Let me try to give a somewhat coherent picture.

At the basic level, there are religious background beliefs stemming from Buddhism and Shintoism. On the one hand, we have *sessyō*—that is, killing animals (but not hurting them)—has been regarded historically as a sin and prohibited accordingly. On the other hand, there are many loopholes that make hunting, fishing, and other animal-killing activities allowable (*sessyō bukka kan*, for example). This premodern obsession with killing animals and the contrasting indifference to hurting animals (‘cruelty’) set the foundation for modern Japanese attitudes toward animals. Western animal-protection movements (which are mainly concerned with preventing suffering in animals) were introduced into Japan as external pressure. Those movements found supporters in Japan, but the Japanese people interpreted those movement slightly differently, putting more emphasis on people’s education and enlightenment than on preventing animal suffering (signified by the expression *dōbutsu aigo*). With the secularization of Japanese society, the Buddhist notion of *sessyō* as a sin receded into the background, but a certain secularized version of the idea persists in modern Japanese society. For example, the ethics of *kuyō* and the ethics of *itadakimasu* seem to be secularized versions of *sessyō bukka kan*. This basic story is complicated by other premodern beliefs such as *kegare*, *tatari*, *reincarnation*, and *sikkai-jōbutsu-ron*, among others, which may or may not have some influence on modern Japanese animal ethics.

Suppose that this overall picture captures the basic features of Japanese animal ethics. What should we do about that? It depends on what your interest is. For example, suppose that you are a Western-style animal-protection activist who wants to stop the ‘cruel’ practices of whaling and dolphin-hunting. You may be puzzled why Japanese people are so indifferent when you point out the predicament of whales and dolphins. You may also be surprised by Japanese people’s strong reaction to animal euthanasia, even when it is required to reduce the pain of animals. By keeping the overall picture described here in mind, you will see that avoidance of the cruel treatment of animals is simply a foreign idea for Japanese people. If you know this, and if you understand what Japanese people are thinking, you may be able to develop strategies to talk to them.

Now suppose you are a Japanese person who is puzzled by what you see as unreasonable interference in and the devaluation of Japanese culture by anti-whaling activists. Probably many items in the overall picture, such as *aigo*, *kuyō* and *itadakimasu*, are already familiar to you. However, you may not realize how strange those ideas are for Westerners. You can use this summary to try to explain your outlook to Westerners, and you can also use it to reflect on your own ethics and philosophy and think about the questions that arise: Should *aigo* be a self-regarding responsibility? Are the ideas of *kuyō* and *itadakimasu* really reasonable or logical, and does it matter if they are not?

For more fruitful communication, understanding each other’s basic outlook and ways of thinking is essential. I hope this paper will help people from all cultures communicate

fruitfully on the various issues related to animal ethics.

Notes

- 1) This translation of mine is based on Karikome's translation into contemporary Japanese. c.f. Karikome (2015: 141–142).
- 2) Imagawa (1996) claimed that the originators of the JSPCA were Westerners led by Lady (Lorna) Gascoigne and that afterward the organization was taken over by Japanese staff, with the Westerners then organising another animal protection organization. However, according to Shunto (2018), the situation was more subtle. When the JSPCA was approved by the city of Tokyo in May 1948, the main figures were Japanese, and some of them were associated with prewar organizations (e.g., *Dōbutsu Aigo Kai* and *Nihon Jindō Kai*). They named the new society *Nihon Dōbutsu Aigo Kyōkai*. However, somehow the group was taken over by Lady Gascoigne and other Westerners at the time of the presidential appointment (December 1948). Thus, what happened afterward was not a take-over but a regaining of the power by the Japanese.
- 3) The newspaper *The People* was mentioned specifically by Shizue Kato in the Upper House Budget Committee on 8 June 1969, according to the committee's minutes, online at <http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/SENTAKU/sangiin/061/1110/06105081110010a.html> (accessed on September 17, 2020)
- 4) The translation is not an official one, but by the author. The Japanese text of *Dōbutsu Aigo Hō* is available at: https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/search/elawsSearch/elaws_search/lsg0500/detail?lawId=348AC1000000105 (accessed on September 17, 2020)
- 5) Shunto's paper provided, as an appendix, the original prospectus of the JSPCA written by the leading Japanese members of the organization (Shunto 2018: 218–219). The document clearly shows that education and enlightenment were the main purposes of JSPCA as they conceived it.
- 6) See <http://www.med.akita-u.ac.jp/~doubutu/Default/ireisai/ireisiki21/ireisiki.html> (accessed on May 20, 2020)
- 7) Kyodo Tsushin, 29 April 2019. <https://this.kiji.is/495470919508608097> (accessed on May 20, 2020)
- 8) See <https://www.pref.wakayama.lg.jp/prefg/071500/iruka/index.html> (accessed on May 20, 2020)
- 9) There has been virtually no academic investigation into the origin and content of this thought. My own blog entries on this issue seem to be among the few available resources.
 - (1) <http://blog.livedoor.jp/iseda503/archives/1895393.html> (accessed on May 20, 2020)
 - (2) <http://blog.livedoor.jp/iseda503/archives/1895492.html> (accessed on May 20, 2020)
- 10) The *Mainichi Shinbun* (*Daily News*) Osaka edition, 31 August 2000, a published article by Akio Okumura.
- 11) See *Asahi Shinbun*, 30 April 2019. <https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASM4X5TWDM4XPXLB00H.html> (accessed on May 20, 2020)

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