

# The Cultural Construction of Value

'Subsistence,' 'Commercial' and Other Terms in the Debate about Whaling

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*ABSTRACT* This paper examines the distinction between 'subsistence' and 'commercial' forms of whaling, as used by the International Whaling Commission, and argues that it is underpinned by a Western-biased value system which is not necessarily accepted by either indigenous or non-Western peoples. In focussing on the cultural construction of value, on whaling and whales as a form of commodity exchange, and on long – as well as short – term transactional systems, the author argues that Japanese cultural attitudes towards money, gifts and capitalism in general are totally different from those found in Europe or the United States. This needs to be recognized by members of the IWC if they are to arrive at an equitable and sustainable development strategy for whaling in general.

## Subsistence and Commercial

Over the past decade or so, there has been a long, drawn-out and at times confusing argument about the differences between 'commercial' and 'subsistence' whaling and whether 'small-type whaling,' or 'small-type coastal whaling' (Akimichi et al. 1988), really is a form of commercial whaling, as classified under the International Whaling Commission's Schedule. Recently, it has been argued that there are enough similarities in coastal whaling operations conducted in Greenland, Iceland, Japan and Norway to warrant the establishment of a separate management category for Small-Type Whaling (STW) by the IWC (ISGSTW 1992).<sup>1</sup> I do not wish to enter here into what is often little more than political wrangling, but merely wish to start by noting that an *ad hoc* Technical Committee Working Group of the International Whaling Commission has related 'subsistence catch' to the 'local consumption' of 'indigenous peoples' (IWC 1981:2-3), while the Commission itself has recognized a *qualitative* difference between commercial and subsistence forms of whaling (*ibid.*:10).

On the political front, in the forum of the IWC, the argument is now being put forward that both the concept of sustainable development strategies in human/environment relations and human rights doctrines in international law make the establishment of a new management category of STW desirable (Doubleday 1992; ISGSTW 1992). In this paper, however, I want to examine the cultural assumptions underlying the distinction between 'commercial' and (aboriginal) 'subsistence' types of whaling. By focussing on Japanese whaling in particular, I will show how a non-Western people has had to come to terms with the dictates of essentially Western concepts at the international negotiating table. My argument here is that the 'qualitative' difference between 'commercial' and 'subsistence' recognized by the IWC cannot be sustained logically, and that the two are in fact false oppositions, each category having been created, or at least adhered to, by

different sets of people who have adopted totally different value systems regarding whales and whaling. It will be argued, further, that these value systems are culturally constructed. The implications of such an argument are that many of those participating in the debate over whaling – particularly the conservationists – put forward as a ‘universal’ ethos what is no more than a culturally relativist opinion.

For non-whaling (or anti-whaling) groups, the value system is predicated upon a notion that whale stocks should be conserved, and that people should not be allowed either to kill whales, or to make money out of killing whales (which is one reason, perhaps, why permission has been granted to aboriginal people to harvest a limited number of an endangered species ‘at levels appropriate to their cultural and nutritional requirements’ [IWC 1981:10]). On the other hand, most whalers themselves adhere to a value system which stresses that they should be allowed to make a certain amount of money out of killing whales, because otherwise they (as opposed to the whales) will not survive, and that whales form an integral part of their culture. The idea of ‘subsistence’ thus appears to have been brought in as a kind of liminal stage between outright commercial capitalism, on the one hand, and outright environmentalism, on the other.

The *advantage* of the arguments about ‘subsistence’ whaling is that those making decisions about *technological* processes of whaling in general find themselves obliged, albeit reluctantly, to take into account the importance of local *cultures*, although not necessarily of local *whaling* cultures as such (Takahashi et al. 1989; Kalland & Moeran 1990:136-59). The *disadvantage* is that those arguing for the adoption of a ‘subsistence’ type of whaling have tended to separate local (indigenous) culture from other, overarching, national cultural forms and ideals.

In the case of Japan, this has meant arguing that although the Japanese in general may be, or may have been, involved in profit-making commercialism, small-type coastal whalers in particular are not. Three points need to be made here. Firstly, the generalist-particularist distinction has tended to weaken Japan’s case for small-type whaling as a form of ‘subsistence’ whaling. After all, if Japan really does consist of such a homogeneous people and culture as is usually made out by those politicians, businessmen, scholars and journalists who like to indulge in the promotion of that genre of works known as ‘*nihonjinron*’ (or ‘what it means to be Japanese’), then surely – the critics can justifiably argue – both large scale pelagic and small-type coastal whalers are ultimately operating within the same set of cultural suppositions and constraints? The counter-argument (put forward by sociologists, anthropologists and political scientists in particular) denies that there is, in fact, the kind of homogeneity claimed and that there are major cultural differences between ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ in Japan, as elsewhere.

This leads to the second point, that although such cultural differences may exist – such as, for example, those between peripheral whaling communities and central government organs concerned with the administration of whaling – we cannot ignore the fact that those inhabiting and working in the ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ of any one culture also *share* many assumptions with which those working in other cultural centres (government organs in – say – the United States, India, the Seychelles, Norway, the United Kingdom, Japan, and so on) will disagree. At the same time, thirdly, we must recognize that assumptions are shared between those inhabiting and working in widely dispersed cultural ‘centres,’ and that these assumptions are not shared by those living in any of the ‘peripheries’ attached to each of those ‘centres.’ The problem then hinges

upon precisely what these assumptions are and how they are interpreted within and between ‘local,’ ‘national’ and ‘global’ cultures.

### Commodity Exchange

As mentioned above, the International Whaling Commission has recognized that there is a qualitative difference between commercial and subsistence forms of whaling. This difference appears to hinge upon the Commission’s distinction between ‘local’ and other forms of *consumption*. What is *ignored* in the argument over the nature of ‘subsistence’ and ‘commerciality’ in whaling is the indisputable fact that, whether carried out as ‘subsistence’ or as a ‘commercial’ venture, both whaling as an occupation and the whale as product deriving from that occupation are *forms of exchange* – in that people work together to hunt, harvest and flense whales which they then share with others, either through consumption in ritual events or as commodities on the market. Regardless of whether whaling is for ‘subsistence’ or for ‘commerciality,’ then, the end products that emerge (whale meat, oil, fertilizer, and so on) constitute *commodities*.

Now precisely what is meant by the word ‘commodity’ needs clarification. The narrow economic meaning historically attributed to the term ‘commodity’ is that of a special kind of manufactured good (or service) associated only with a capitalist mode of production, and therefore found only in those societies penetrated by capitalism. Recent research by anthropologists, however, suggests that this definition is unnecessarily limiting and that we should rather see a commodity as ‘*any thing intended for exchange*’ (Appadurai 1986:9). This approach rightly shifts the emphasis from the commodity *per se*, to commodity *exchange*, and has led anthropologists to argue that commodities are not essentially different from other forms of exchange such as barter and gift exchange – both of which have been brought into arguments about subsistence whaling (see, for example, Akimichi et al. 1988). The theoretical premise here is that both barter and gift exchange do *not* form a different category of exchange, but share much in common with commodities, and that all economic objects circulate in different ‘*regimes of value*’ which exist both in space and in time (Appadurai 1989:4).

In the light of this reconsideration of the meaning of ‘commodity,’ we can see that the category of ‘local consumption’ defined by the IWC is based on the false premise that a distinction *can* be made between ‘sale,’ ‘barter’ and ‘gift exchange.’ My argument, instead, is that, by accepting Appadurai’s discussion of the ‘social life of things,’ which he sees as passing through a commodity *phase*, being imbued with commodity *candidacy*, and found in a commodity *context* (ibid.:13-16), we need to reconsider the work of those who have argued that social life is constituted by various systems of communication (in the case of Lévi-Strauss [1966], those of goods, women, and words). Although never properly synthesized, these systems together can be seen to form part of a theory of consumption in which ‘the meanings conveyed along the goods channel are part and parcel of the meanings in the kinship and mythology channels, and all three are part of the general concern to control information’ (Douglas & Isherwood 1979:87-88).

I would argue, therefore, that whaling (of whatever kind) should be seen as part of an *overall system of consumption*, in which whale products as commodities, whalers’ kinship (and neighbourhood) systems, and whaling communities’ myths and folk tales

about whales are all inextricably inter-related (see, for example, Kalland and Moeran 1992). To illustrate this proposition, let us look at a particular cultural example, whalemeat. At various times in Japan's long history of whaling, whalemeat and other whale products have moved both in and out of commodity phases at a local and/or national level (the two not necessarily being identical). Thus we find that in one local community raw pilot whale has been preferred, while in another it is dried, marinated slices of Baird's beaked whale that have been seen as a delicacy. When right whale is no longer available in yet another community, people will shift to the salted blubber of fin whale (ibid.:148). In major cities such as Ōsaka or Tōkyō, on the other hand, totally different methods may be preferred, and these, too, may vary over the decades or centuries.

Nevertheless, the various kinds of whalemeat consumed, together with the methods of preparation used, and the associated forms of social and ritual communication involved, constitute a total system in which each part plays a cultural role. Change one of these parts and there is usually a knock-on effect of some kind or another among the other parts in the system. For example, the world-wide moratorium on whaling has led to some Japanese turning to dolphin meat for the first time. This is possible, firstly, because dolphin meat has already formed part of other people's (occasional) diet and, secondly, because dolphins are cetaceans and therefore can be categorized as 'whalemeat.'

At the same time, the moratorium should be seen merely as one more stage in the commodity phase of whales. For example, it may now be improper to *kill* whales and consume their carcasses, but it is clearly not improper to *watch* whales swimming about in the oceans (as profiteering tour operations – and a recent advertisement for Japan Tobacco's *Merit* cigarettes – will testify). Whether dead or alive, therefore, whales are – and probably always will be – commodities which, in the process of being 'consumed,' will bring people profit. In this respect, conservationist groups are guilty of the same 'commercialism' of which they accuse whalers throughout the world (cf. Kalland 1991).

### The Cultural Construction of Value

It is clear from the above that the cultural construction of value is extremely important to our understanding of world issues. At the same time, we have to realize that values are always in the process of changing for one reason or another. Do whales exist to be eaten, or to be watched? Should they be killed or loved? Why is it 'right' for some, but not others, to kill whales? Why are members of a nation like the United Kingdom so vociferous in their condemnation of whaling, when their parents happily ate whale steaks during the Second World War and fed whalemeat-based pet food to their cats during the decades that followed? There are no easy answers to such questions, of course, but it must be recognized that *all* things have their social histories and cultural biographies, by means of which we should be able to trace the cultural construction of value.

In the case of Japanese whaling, the 'social life' of whales has been thus examined in some detail by Kalland and Moeran (1992), thereby making it unnecessary to reiterate that material here. What should be emphasized, however, is that it has been effectively

shown that there is an intricate relationship between a technology-based work organization, recruitment, kinship patterns, gift-giving, food preferences, beliefs, rituals and so on – all of which can be said to make up a total whaling culture. This allows me to propose here that the cultural role of commodities in general is intrinsically related to questions of technology, production and trade, together with the sets of knowledge and beliefs that surround such questions. Thus changes in any one (the development of refrigeration techniques, for example) can lead to changes in the others (long-term pelagic whaling and international trading in whale meat).

The inter-relational, relative approach to the cultural role of commodities proposed here means that we should recognize that goods themselves are neutral; it is their uses which are social and which allow them to be used as 'fences or bridges' (Douglas and Isherwood 1979:12). It is *we* who imbue things with values of one sort or another – values which are *not* inherent in the objects concerned. In other words, 'value is never a "quality" of the objects, but a judgment upon them which remains inherent in the *subject*' (Simmel 1990:63, my italics). From this Simmel has argued that at the centre of the relation of value to an object is 'desire,' so that we call 'valuable' those objects which resist our desire to acquire them. In the context of arguments about whaling, we find that both whalers and conservationists desire to 'possess' whales, although for very different reasons. Hence, whales become imbued with different values, depending on the kind of desire that different people feel towards them.

In a way, this difference is similar to that made by Simmel between the 'aesthetic' and 'sensual' enjoyment of female beauty. In the first instance – that, in the context of this paper, adopted by conservationists – we surrender ourselves to the object; in the second – that of the whalers – the object surrenders itself to us. Interestingly, in discussing the role of the 'aesthetic' in valuation, Simmel has pointed out that 'our appreciation of the object is not specifically aesthetic, but practical; it becomes aesthetic only as a result of increasing distance, abstraction and sublimation' (1990:74). Precisely because conservationists are *not* close to whales (in spite of their idealistic protestations to the contrary), they are able to appreciate their 'aesthetic' qualities. Similarly, because whalers *are* so close to the objects of their livelihood, they remain extremely practical. Thus the development of objects proceeds through objectification from utility value to aesthetic value. Or, in simpler terms perhaps, by calling something 'beautiful,' we immediately imbue it with a quality and meaning that somehow become independent of the practical arrangements that surround its everyday use. Not only this, but 'the more remote for the species is the utility of the object that first created an interest and a value and is now forgotten, the purer is the aesthetic satisfaction derived from the mere form and appearance of the object' (ibid.:75). This explains why conservationists can display sensuous photographs of humpback whales 'in flight,' put on whale watching tours in which it is possible to have one's life 'enriched' through 'positive interaction,' and generally believe that whales can 'educate' man (Barstow 1989; Kalland 1991).

It is in this *exchange* of values, as well as in the exchange of *values*, that we should perhaps place this discussion of whales, whaling and the cultural construction of value. After all, over the past decade and more, the argument has been shifted from human behaviour (whaling) to animal or mammal behaviour (whales) – an exchange of values which prompts me to propose an adaptation of Marx's notion of 'use' and 'exchange' values. My argument is that the distinction is not binary, but that there are always *four*

*variables* which need to be taken into account in the cultural construction of value. These I shall call *technical*, *conceptual*, *social*, and *commodity* values. Although I have discussed this idea in slightly different form in the context of the Japanese art market (Moeran 1990:131-36), I will outline them briefly here:

1. *Technical Values.* These are the values held by those who are closely involved in the technical production of any occupation (whether it be whaling, art, craft, advertising, or whatever). They are concerned with particular problems of how to achieve certain effects to do with the technology used in that occupation – such as a gunner ensuring that he hits a whale cleanly so that not too much meat is destroyed; an advertising designer removing unwanted parts of a photograph in order to heighten the effect of an image; or a potter using a particular type of material to obtain a particular glaze effect in his kiln.
2. *Conceptual Values.* These are values which stem from the ways in which an object is perceived and symbolized. In whaling, they focus around the beliefs (myths, ideals, folklore, rituals, symbols) held by whalers, on the one hand, and around other sets of beliefs held by conservationist groups, on the other, as well as by people who do not themselves whale but who have no objection to the (limited) harvesting of whales, on the other. In occupations such as art and advertising, conceptual values focus primarily on notions of ‘quality’ (however that word may be defined by those concerned), and are used for the most part by those involved in production (copywriters, designers, photographers, artists or potters) and by those who, for some reason or other, feel that they have a right to comment on the quality of their work (critics, journalists, museum curators, and so on). For the most part, they will develop a conceptual vocabulary that will be more or less specific to each field of production. These conceptual values will be shared to some degree by those consumers of specific products who will be ‘educated’ to appreciate their ‘qualities’ (cf. Bourdieu 1984).
3. *Social Values.* These values do not immediately appear in the appreciation of a product, but they are extremely important to its definition as a commodity that has a market value. Social values can be seen, for example, in the prestige that may accrue to someone who can afford to own an offshore whaling vessel or particular kind of fishing boat, as well as to an advertising agency that can secure a particular corporation’s account. More importantly, they derive from the social networks that are created between producers, marketers, ‘critics,’ media, and others involved in a commodity’s production and consumption. In a small-type coastal whaling community, we can see the operation of such values in the exchange of gifts, which enhance the prestige of a boat operator, as well as the value given to the commodity being exchanged (Akimichi et al. 1988:41-51). In the art world, we find that the price of a New York artist’s work may go up just because the curator of one of the major museums in that city *attended his party!* This has nothing to do with the artist’s work *per se*, but with the social connections between artist and important personages in his network.

4. *Commodity Values.* If the first three values outlined above are concerned primarily with *use*, commodity values are concerned with *exchange*. They are the price that will be fixed to objects on the market because of the combination of technical, conceptual and commercial values found therein.

It is, in my opinion, a combination of these four variables in the cultural construction of value that can be said to constitute what might be called a *whaling world* (or *art world*, *fashion world*, *advertising world*, and so on). It is this whaling world which constitutes a ‘*culture*’ which is partly of its own *internal* fabrication (specific ways of seeing, or modes of interaction, together with codes of ethics and etiquette), and partly *externally* influenced by the cultures of other worlds (for example, those of particular marketing institutions, and of business in general, together with all *their* modes of interaction, ethics, use of symbols, and so on, all within a particular ‘national’ culture, *as well as* those of ‘international’ cultures where other technical, conceptual, social and commodity values may be adhered to). Thus, these ‘cultures’ should *not* necessarily be seen as equivalent to ‘societies’ or ‘nations,’ even though it is likely that those sharing a ‘national’ culture may also share a number of conceptual and social values. Similarly, those from different national cultures but involved in the same occupation may well disagree about certain aspects of social value, but share much in common at the technical and conceptual levels.

### Protestant, Confucian and Capitalist Ethics

The argument, then, is that all commodities consist of greater and lesser degrees of each of the values outlined above. As far as the debate over whaling is concerned, it would seem to be technical and social values, on the one hand, and conceptual values, on the other, which ultimately differentiate whalers from conservationists, and whaling from non-whaling nations respectively. Whalers unashamedly treat the whale as a ‘commodity,’ which they have seen in terms of technical and social levels of production (harvesting) and marketing. Conservationists, on the other hand, have brought the term ‘commodity’ into ideological contention by creating a whole new set of conceptual values regarding the ‘exploitation’ of whales. The whale is ultimately still a commodity, but it has been transformed into a ‘symbolic,’ rather than materially-based ‘physical,’ commodity. In this respect, conservationists have been involved in what Baudrillard has referred to as ‘a systematic act of the manipulation of signs’ (in Poster 1988:21-2), whereby not objects, but human relations, end up by being consumed.

We should recognize here that the ideological discourse on whales and whaling is not simply about what might be deemed to constitute ‘proper’ relations between humanity and various forms of wildlife. It also concerns, among other things, the relation between capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production, on the one hand, and cultural differences between those advanced industrialized nations that have, until recently at least, been involved in various forms of whaling, on the other. In the context of the latter two sets of relations, and of the fact that Japan is still (just) the world’s only non-Western advanced industrialized nation, it might be advisable to examine the way in which

slightly different sets of values have come to permeate the capitalisms (I use the plural form advisedly) of Japan and the West.

Given that the 'spirit' of modern capitalism has been defined as wanting to make money as long as one can (Jacob Fugger, in Weber 1930:51), and that both Japan and most Western nations have capitalist economies, can there really be such a difference between them? The answer is both 'no' and 'yes.' On the one hand, it has been argued that Protestantism (specifically Puritanism derived from Calvinism) encouraged a spirit of capitalism, which itself gave rise to a break with what might be termed 'traditionalism' in a number of European societies (Weber 1930). On the other, the suggestion is that in Japan Confucianism acted as a functional analogue to the Protestant ethic by providing a meaningful set of ultimate values upon which the morality of Japanese society as a whole was traditionally based and could continue to be so during its modernization process (Bellah 1957). In other words, Confucianism allowed Japan to develop into a modern capitalist state, while at the same time providing it with a continuous central value system. In this respect, Japan differed from most European industrializing societies in that it developed without a shift in its basic values, so that it did *not* have the same spirit of capitalism as did most European societies.

Where, then, did Protestantism and Confucianism differ? At the general level, one can say that Confucianism emphasized: firstly, the polity over the economy *per se*, and with it a combination of particularism and performance as means towards attaining the goals that society set itself; and secondly, cultural values which included an emphasis on learning, study and scholarship, on the one hand, and aesthetic-emotional values, on the other (Bellah 1957:13-7).

If we examine such differences at a more detailed level, we can see, firstly, that both Protestantism and Confucianism emphasized the ideal of work or occupation as a 'calling.' However, while Calvinists and Puritans argued that one should work for the divine glory of *God*, neo-Confucianists said that people should do so on behalf of *society* (Weber 1930:160-62; Bellah 1957:36). Such a difference in attitude may partially explain why Westerners now tend to see whaling as an abstract conceptual issue (concerning environmental protection), and why Japanese focus on it as a more pragmatic social issue. It certainly helps us understand why small-type whalers in communities like Ayukawa and Taiji have devoted much of their time to bewailing their loss of work, skills and traditions. By being deprived of their traditional occupation, whalers regard themselves as no longer able to contribute to society as a whole, and therefore as being no longer part of society as such. In this respect they conform to the Confucian concept of occupation (*shokubun*) as 'not merely an end in itself but a part of society. One's occupation in the fulfillment of what one owes to society, it is the part one plays which justifies one's receiving the benefits of society' (Bellah 1957:115).

Secondly, according to Puritan belief, 'man is only a trustee of the goods which have come to him through God's grace' (Weber 1930:170). This idea appears on the surface to be similar to that attitude adopted by most Japanese who regard their present wealth and well-being as being directly a result of the efforts of their ancestors, and who – in the context of the traditional household system – act as trustees of property and possessions that have come down to them through the hard work of their ancestors. Once again, however, the difference between the Puritan and Confucian attitudes can be seen in the fact that, while the former emphasizes a 'spiritual' entity, the latter is

concerned with an on-going set of social relationships. In the context of Japanese whaling, this sense of indebtedness to the ancestors has been carried across to one of indebtedness to the souls of whales which, by 'allowing' themselves to be killed, have helped whalers to survive from one generation to the next (Kalland and Moeran 1992:151-57).

Thirdly, Protestant asceticism regarded wealth as acceptable if used for God's purpose in the community, although the pursuit of riches as an end in itself was highly reprehensible (Weber 1930:172). Similarly, both Confucianist and *Jodo Shinshu* Buddhist doctrines emphasized that 'profit' should be neither dishonest nor excessive. Rather, man obtained profit by working and the basis of such profit depended on profiting *others* (Bellah 1957:120). Once again, therefore, we find that same distinction between abstract divine good and pragmatic social good made by Protestantism, on the one hand, and by Confucianism, on the other. Not surprisingly perhaps, arguments over the accumulation of wealth and what has been seen to be 'profiteering' have plagued discussions of Japanese whaling in an international context. Unless the differences in cultural attitudes towards such notions of capital accumulation and profit-making can be accepted, or at least taken into account, the debate over the ethics of whaling will continue to create apprehension and fears of cultural imperialism (and possibly racism) among many Japanese (Kalland and Moeran 1992:197-99).

### Cultural Attitudes Towards Money and Gifts

This brief comparison of some of the relevant attitudes underlying the separate 'spirits' of capitalism as found in Europe and Japan brings us full circle to what I see as a false distinction between 'subsistence' and 'commercial' and to a discussion of the notions of money and gift exchange that can be seen to underlie this distinction. The first point to make here is that money is as full of moral evaluations as is anything else in our society, including gift exchange. Both must be seen in the cultural environment into which they are incorporated in any society, and cannot therefore be attributed with the same meanings as those which we derive from our own culture (cf. Parry and Bloch 1989:1). This is not always recognized by anthropologists in their discussion of forms of exchange in 'exotic' societies. It is certainly not recognized either by Western members of the IWC who are convinced that the constituent elements of capitalism *must* be the same the world over, or by conservationists who are eager to argue their anti-capitalist view.

Money, of course, has been discussed in a number of ways by Western philosophers and economists. Some, like Adam Smith, have regarded money as having a 'benign' influence on society's happiness and prosperity. Others, however, including Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, have viewed money as 'evil.' For Simmel, money acted to promote social integration, while Marx, who linked money to production for market exchange, saw it as ultimately serving to break down *Gemeinschaft* and the bonds of personal dependence between members of a community.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of the differences of their approach, however, almost all writers have seen money as a powerful agent which profoundly transforms both society and culture. At the same time – and this is a point of direct relevance to the policy adopted by the IWC *vis-a-vis* Japanese

small-type whaling – because money *seems* capable of measuring everything by the same yardstick, it reduces differences in *quality* to those of *quantity*, and with it relations between *people* to relations between *things* (for the value of a commodity expressed in money terms is made to appear as an intrinsic quality of the commodity itself) (Parry and Bloch 1989:6-7).

The distinction needs to be made here, however, between *representations* of money and its *practice*. As Simmel points out, ideally 'money represents pure interaction in its purest form' (1990:129) and is thus 'nothing but the pure form of exchangeability' (ibid.:130). But in practice we find that neither interaction nor exchange is ever 'pure' – if only because the values referred to earlier will always differ, both between cultures and within a single culture. This is one of the problems facing small-type whalers in countries such as Norway, Iceland and Japan who are faced with representations of money (in the guise of such terms as 'subsistence' and 'commercial') which in practice mean very little to them.<sup>3</sup> As we shall see below, all interaction and exchange in whaling communities are subject to whole sets of morals that are totally different from those underlying similar social transactions in, for example, the management and organization of the IWC, on the one hand, or of conservation groups, on the other.

Interestingly, Simmel posits the development of money as 'an element in a profound cultural trend. The different levels of culture may be distinguished by the extent to which, and at what points, they have a direct relationship with the objects that concern them, and on the other hand by the extent to which they use symbols' (ibid.:148). Simmel here touches on a crucial issue differentiating whalers from conservationists, for while the former are directly and practically involved with the hunting, harvesting and distribution of whales, the latter use them primarily as symbols to support their ideological viewpoint. Similarly with money, which for whalers is part and parcel of the morality – and thus quality – of their everyday lives. For conservationists and IWC members, however, money is seen as a symbolic representation of an abstract value (in the singular) that can be quantified, measured and compared.

A word of warning is in order here. Any tendency to equate 'primitive' or 'aboriginal' with 'non-monetary' societies is clearly wrong. Money is most certainly to be found in pre-capitalist societies. At the same time, we should note that Western ideology tends to oppose money (market exchange) to gift exchange. Is this really acceptable? Do money and gifts form discrete spheres of exchange? Most anthropologists would argue against the idea. Although gifts may seem to be voluntary, in fact they are given and repaid under obligation. They are thus not 'discrete,' since all social phenomena contain the threads of which the social fabric is woven, and it is *groups* rather than individuals which carry on exchanges of all kinds – of which 'the market is but one element and the circulation of wealth but one part of a wide and enduring contract' (Mauss 1966:3). This has been precisely the argument put forward in studies of Japanese whaling communities (Akimichi et al. 1988:43-51; Kalland and Moeran 1992:139-47), where, too, we find that every gift is separated into two parts – object and spirit – so that 'a bond created by things is in fact a bond between *persons*, since the thing itself is a person or pertains to a person. Hence it follows that to give something is to give a part of oneself' (Mauss 1966:10).

From this it follows that in gift exchange one gives away what is in reality a part of one's nature or substance, and receives in return a part of someone else's nature or

substance. Thus there is not simply an obligation to *repay* gifts received, but equal obligations both to *give* presents and to *receive* them (ibid.:10-1). This is precisely the philosophy underlying both the psychological relation of 'dependence' (*amae*), and the Confucian-based concepts of *giri* and *ninj*, used to describe relations of interdependence, obligation and spontaneity, and generally seen to underpin all social relations in Japanese society (Benedict 1946; Doi 1973). At the same time, the fact that Japanese whalers give thanks to local shrines for each year's harvest and make returns in kind to the sea (see Kalland and Moeran 1992:151-7) shows that, for the Japanese too, gifts are 'made to men in the sight of gods or nature' (Mauss 1966:12). It is with the gods and the spirits of the dead that man first made contracts, since *they* were the owners of the world's wealth and it was seen to be particularly dangerous not to recognize this. Gifts to gods, as to men, 'buy peace' by keeping evil spirits at bay. We thus find in all sorts of societies – from Eskimo Koryak<sup>4</sup> to Polynesian by way of Japanese – that a kind of contractual sacrifice is necessary.<sup>5</sup> People have to be generous because otherwise the gods, ancestors or spirits will take their vengeance on excessive wealth (ibid.:14-5).

As Westerners we tend to ignore the fact that there are many peoples throughout the world who work hard, becoming wealthy and creating large surpluses in the process, and who exchange vast amounts in ways with which we are not familiar and for reasons that we may not appreciate from our own cultural background. Thus we should realize that a gift is not simply a gift: it can be, in Mauss's words (1966:22), 'at the same time property and a possession, a pledge and a loan, an object sold and an object bought, a deposit, a mandate, a trust.'<sup>6</sup>

It is clear that in some respects money is *like* a gift in that neither is a depersonalized instrument of exchange. On the contrary, 'like the gift in kind [money] contains and transmits the moral qualities of those who transact it' (Parry and Bloch 1989:8). This means that, although money may seem to most Westerners to be impersonal and to signify a sphere of purely 'economic' relationships, this should not be seen as being necessarily the case for other societies (including Japan) where money can express relationships which are ideally personal (rather than impersonal), enduring (rather than transitory), moral (rather than amoral), and altruistic (rather than calculating). In other words, it is our mistake to see the 'economic' as somehow divorced from other social relationships and forming an autonomous domain.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, as a number of recent studies on Japanese whaling have been at pains to show (Akimichi et al. 1988; Kalland & Moeran 1992; Takahashi et al. 1989), the 'economic' is clearly very much 'embedded' in society as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, given the distinction that has been made above regarding the different spirits of capitalism in Japan and Europe, it would seem logical to accept Parry and Bloch's argument that it is not money as such which gives rise to a particular world view, but that a particular world view (deriving from various combinations of the four values outlined earlier) tends to give rise to specific ways of representing money. Certainly one avoids thereby an unrealistic determinism, for money does not always symbolize the same kinds of things, nor does it carry with it the same symbolic load as it does in the West. Rather, 'the meanings with which money is invested are quite as much a product of the cultural matrix into which it is incorporated as of the economic functions it performs as a means of exchange, unit of account, store of value and so on' (Parry and Bloch 1989:21). Thus, just as the opposition between money and *yaqona* drinking in

Fijian society is in fact one between kinship and morality, rather than – as a Westerner would see things – between commerce and instrumentality (Toren 1989), so, too, is the opposition between the gifting and sale of whalemeat in Japanese whaling communities like Ayukawa an opposition between kinship and community, on the one hand, and the impersonal market, on the other. Money as an 'object' of exchange is thus relegated to secondary importance behind the 'social' value placed on gift exchange. Not surprisingly, whales themselves become the idiom by which social change is expressed, for marketing, profits and incomes are closely related to changes in methods of hunting, harvesting and preparation of whalemeat, which themselves lead inevitably to the kinds of social changes discussed by Kalland and Moeran (1992).<sup>9</sup>

### Long and Short Term Transactional Systems

Any discussion of the 'commercial' or 'subsistence' nature of whaling, therefore, *must* focus on the *transactional systems* operating in whaling communities, rather than on the abstract meanings of 'money,' 'commercial' and 'subsistence' as such. Moreover, such discussion must recognize that there are *two* transactional orders to be examined. One is *short term*, conducted for the most part with outsiders, and concerned with the arena of individual competition among – in this instance – whalers. The other is *long term*, conducted within the community, and concerned with the reproduction of the social and cosmic order. Each cycle is essential to the other's existence. Individual acquisition among whalers *has* to be a laudable and legitimate activity in the long term since it contributes to the welfare of that individual's household, on the one hand, and of the community, on the other (cf. Parry and Bloch 1989:24-6). Hence Japanese whalers make money in order to allow the community as a whole to flourish, and they make ritual sacrifices to support these long term aims, as well as the moral values of 'community.' In other words, money making in the short term is made morally positive because wealth is converted to serve the reproduction of the long term cycle (although there is always the fear that grasping self-seeking individuals will hive off resources for their own short term ends).

If we look at an example of these cycles at work in the Japanese whaling community of Ayukawa, we find, first of all, that when one of the whaling companies set up its flensing station in the village it made a large annual donation towards the building and maintenance of a local primary school. We find, too, that the Ayukawa Fishing Association (later Cooperative) not only provided essential services to fishermen; it also embarked upon major community projects such as the development of the village's water supply and construction of a harbour bridge. At the same time, by obliging all whaling companies to sell whalemeat through its fish market, the local cooperative was able to use the commission it received to create a system of capital loans to fishermen and small-type coastal whalers. There was thus a series of long-term exchanges between the whaling industry and community and the cooperative and community, on the one hand, and between cooperative, fishermen and the whaling industry, on the other – all based on short term money transactions. As has been proved by the imposition first of quotas and then of a moratorium on whaling, any move to restrict or promote the workings of one cycle is bound to affect those of the other.

All this means, of course, that it is quite impossible to discuss or understand the meaning of money in Japanese whaling communities without taking into account the way in which the use of money permeates the wider symbolic and social orders. The same criticism is to be made of the IWC's recourse to such blanket terms as 'commercial' and 'subsistence.' At the same time, we must note that these three terms can mean different things to different people within the *same* culture, as well as to those in *different* cultures. Within Japan itself, 'money' and 'profit' most certainly do *not* carry the same connotations for small-type whalers as they do for, say, giant automobile or electronics manufacturers. As a result, it is 'not only impossible to say what money will "mean" irrespective of cultural context, it is even misleading to presuppose that it will have any fixed and immutable meaning in a given context' (Parry and Bloch 1989:22). This is why the distinction between 'subsistence' and 'commercial' forms of whaling made by the IWC is, in my opinion, both false and wrong. What 'money,' 'subsistence' and 'commerciality' may mean are not only situationally defined; they are also constantly in the process of being renegotiated. It is for this reason that the Commission would be wise to reconsider its categorization of whaling in general, and to renegotiate its values with the unorthodox conservationists at the Whaling Wall.

### Notes

1. The document concerned arose out of discussions by an International Study Group for Small-Type Whaling during a symposium on the 'Utilization of Marine Living Resources for Subsistence' at Taji, Japan, from January 21st to 23rd, 1992, where this paper was first presented. I would like to thank fellow participants in the symposium for their comments and ideas included, but not always overtly recognized, in this reworked article.
2. It is probably precisely for this reason that political and business leaders in Japan have always emphasized the vital importance of one-to-one personal ties between superior and junior in contemporary Japanese society. See, for example, Nakane (1970).
3. For an example of differing representations of money and of how much it was 'right' to earn in the context of the Japanese folk craft movement, see Moeran (1984).
4. Mauss (1966:13) mentions, in passing, a Koryak whale festival.
5. Note, incidentally, that for Simmel the notion of 'sacrifice' or 'renunciation' produces exchange, and exchange consists of the two processes of giving and receiving, *and* of the simultaneous cause and effect generated by the processes of giving and receiving. In other words, economic life is an exchange of sacrifices (Simmel 1990:85-8).
6. In this context we might note that, although the Japanese are often disparagingly referred to by Westerners as 'economic animals,' 'it is only our Western societies that quite recently turned man into an economic animal' (Mauss 1966:74).
7. We have already pointed out how economic values have always been subordinated to political values in Japan (cf. Bellah 1957:5-6).
8. For an example of the 'legitimacy' of money when used to maintain the solidarity and class identity of a Sri Lankan fishing village, see Stirrat (1989).

9. For a similar pattern of local people's relationships to money and their local community – this time one of potters involved in the Japanese folk craft movement – see Moeran (1984, especially p. 160 and 174).

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