

Japan's Whale Food Culture: A Culinary Heritage at a Crossroads



Source: Pixabay (2020)

Background

Once an important source of protein—contributing to about 45% of the country's total meat consumption in the post-WWII years—whale meat still holds great significance in Japanese food culture today, especially in areas where whaling has traditionally been conducted (ICR, 2007).

The origins of Japan's commercial whaling can be traced back to the Meiji Restoration, about 400 years ago (ICR, 2007). It was not until the late 1950s, when Japan joined the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and other proteins such as beef and chicken became more widely available, that hunting activities and demand for whale meat finally declined (Reuters, 2019). Despite pledging to cease all commercial whaling activities under a moratorium signed by IWC members, Japan never fully stopped hunting. In 2018, following a scandal that exposed the country for evading IWC regulations and hunting whales for the past 30 years under the guise of scientific research, Japan declared its exit from the IWC and resumed commercial whaling activities in its own waters (BBC, 2018).

Although domestic demand for whale meat has significantly decreased over the years—with consumption dropping from 233,000 tonnes in 1962 to less than 3,000 tonnes in recent years—the Japanese government insists that the hunt must go on, citing its significance in Japan's culinary history and culture (SCMP, 2024). In an effort to safeguard the survival of the whaling industry, the Japanese government has not only generously subsidized local whaling businesses, but also added fin whales—the second-largest animal on Earth—to its commercial hunting list (The Standard, 2024).

On the other hand, in hopes of driving up demand and normalizing its consumption among younger generations, whale meat has been served at public exhibitions, in school lunchboxes, and through vending machines across the country (SCMP, 2024). Furthermore, in collaboration with the whaling industry, the Japan Travel Bureau is targeting tourists by inviting social media influencers to promote the unique culinary experience as part of Japan's cultural heritage,

aiming to reshape perceptions and encourage both locals and foreigners to embrace it (The Guardian, 2023).

Challenges

In its attempt to preserve whale food culture, Japan is facing overwhelming international criticism, particularly over its violation of IWC regulations and the expansion of its commercial catch list. Japan should remain vigilant in the face of potential political or economic repercussions in the future. At the same time, journals have highlighted the difficulty of promoting something so strongly opposed almost everywhere except in commercial whaling countries (The Japan Times, 2024). Moreover, the promotion of whale food culture outside of Japan becomes even more difficult when demand and consumption within the domestic market remain at low levels (The Guardian, 2023).

Discussion Questions

1. What were the main reasons for Japan's exit from the International Whaling Commission?
2. What political or economic consequences could Japan face for continuing commercial whaling?
3. What ethical considerations are involved in the debate over whaling?
4. How might Japan balance cultural preservation with international environmental concerns?

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Keywords

- Food and Beverage
- Whale consumption
- Japanese food culture
- Cultural significance
- Market demand
- Preservation

日本的鲸鱼食物文化：处于十字路口的烹饪遗产



Source: Pixabay (2020)

背景

鲸鱼肉曾是一种重要的蛋白质来源——在二战后年代贡献了全国约 45% 的肉类消费——如今在日本饮食文化中仍然具有重大意义，尤其是在传统上进行捕鲸活动的地区 (ICR, 2007)。

日本商业捕鲸的起源可追溯至约 400 年前的明治维新时期 (ICR, 2007)。直到 20 世纪 50 年代末，随着日本加入国际捕鲸委员会 (IWC) 以及牛肉和鸡肉等其他蛋白质来源变得更为普及，捕鲸活动和对鲸鱼肉的需求才最终开始下降 (Reuters, 2019)。尽管根据 IWC 成员国签署的暂停令承诺停止所有商业捕鲸活动，但日本从未完全停止捕猎。2018 年，在一项揭露该国在过去 30 年里以科学研究为名规避 IWC 法规、持续捕鲸的丑闻之后，日本宣布退出 IWC，并在其本国水域恢复了商业捕鲸活动 (BBC, 2018)。

尽管多年来国内对鲸鱼肉的需求已显著下降——消费量从 1962 年的 23.3 万吨降至近年来的不到 3000 吨——但日本政府仍坚持认为捕鲸必须继续下去，理由是其在日本烹饪历史和文化中的重要性 (SCMP, 2024)。为了维护捕鲸业的生存，日本政府不仅慷慨补贴当地的捕鲸企业，还将地球上第二大动物——长须鲸——也列入了其商业捕猎名单 (The Standard, 2024)。

另一方面，为了推动需求并在年轻一代中使其消费正常化，鲸鱼肉已被供应于公共展览、学校午餐盒饭以及遍布全国的自动售货机中 (SCMP, 2024)。此外，与捕鲸业合作，日本旅行局正以游客为目标，邀请社交媒体影响者来推广这一作为日本文化遗产一部分的独特烹饪体验，旨在重塑观念，鼓励日本人和外国人都接受它 (The Guardian, 2023)。

挑战

在试图保护鲸鱼食文化的过程中，日本正面临巨大的国际批评，尤其是针对其违反 IWC 规定和扩大商业捕捞名单的行为。日本应对未来潜在的政治或经济影响保持警惕。同时，期刊文章也指出，推广一种除了商业捕鲸国家外几乎处处都遭到强烈反对的事物困难重重 (The Japan Times, 2024)。此外，当国内市场对其需求和消费水平仍然很低时，在日本境外推广鲸鱼食文化就变得更加困难 (The Guardian, 2023)。

讨论问题

1. 日本退出国际捕鲸委员会的主要原因是什么？
2. 日本继续商业捕鲸可能会面临哪些政治或经济后果？
3. 关于捕鲸的辩论涉及哪些伦理考量？
4. 日本如何在文化保护与国际环境关切之间取得平衡？

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关键词

- 餐饮
- 鲸鱼肉消费
- 日本饮食文化
- 文化意义
- 市场需求
- 保护

日本的鯨魚食物文化：處於十字路口的烹飪遺產



Source: Pixabay (2020)

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鯨魚肉曾是一種重要的蛋白質來源——在二戰後年代貢獻了全國約 45%的肉類消費——如今在日本飲食文化中仍然具有重大意義，尤其是在傳統上進行捕鯨活動的地區 (ICR, 2007)。

日本商業捕鯨的起源可追溯至約 400 年前的明治維新時期 (ICR, 2007)。直到 20 世紀 50 年代末，隨著日本加入國際捕鯨委員會 (IWC) 以及牛肉和雞肉等其他蛋白質來源變得更為普及，捕鯨活動和對鯨魚肉的需求才最終開始下降 (Reuters, 2019)。儘管根據 IWC 成員國簽署的暫停令承諾停止所有商業捕鯨活動，但日本從未完全停止捕獵。2018 年，在一項揭露該國在過去 30 年裡以科學研究為名規避 IWC 法規、持續捕鯨的醜聞之後，日本宣布退出 IWC，並在其本國水域恢復了商業捕鯨活動 (BBC, 2018)。

儘管多年來國內對鯨魚肉的需求已顯著下降——消費量從 1962 年的 23.3 萬噸降至近年來的不到 3000 噸——但日本政府仍堅持認為捕鯨必須繼續下去，理由是其在日本烹飪歷史和文化中的重要性 (SCMP, 2024)。為了維護捕鯨業的生存，日本政府不僅慷慨補貼當地的捕鯨企業，還將地球上第二大動物——長須鯨——也列入了其商業捕獵名單 (The Standard, 2024)。

另一方面，為了推動需求並在年輕一代中使其消費正常化，鯨魚肉已被供應於公共展覽、學校午餐盒飯以及遍佈全國的自動售貨機中 (SCMP, 2024)。此外，與捕鯨業合作，日本旅行局正以遊客為目標，邀請社群媒體影響者來推廣這一作為日本文化遺產一部分的獨特烹飪體驗，旨在重塑觀念，鼓勵日本人和外國人都接受它 (The Guardian, 2023)。

挑戰

在試圖保護鯨魚食文化的過程中，日本正面臨巨大的國際批評，尤其是針對其違反 IWC 規定和擴大商業捕撈名單的行為。日本應對未來潛在的政治或經濟影響保持警惕。同時，期刊文章也指出，推廣一種除了商業捕鯨國家外幾乎處處都遭到強烈反對的事物困難重重 (The Japan Times, 2024)。此外，當國內市場對其需求和消費水平仍然很低時，在日本境外推廣鯨魚食文化就變得更加困難 (The Guardian, 2023)。

討論問題

1. 日本退出國際捕鯨委員會的主要原因是什么？
2. 日本繼續商業捕鯨可能會面臨哪些政治或經濟後果？
3. 關於捕鯨的辯論涉及哪些倫理考量？
4. 日本如何在文化保護與國際環境關切之間取得平衡？

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關鍵詞

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- 鯨魚肉消費
- 日本飲食文化
- 文化意義
- 市場需求
- 保護