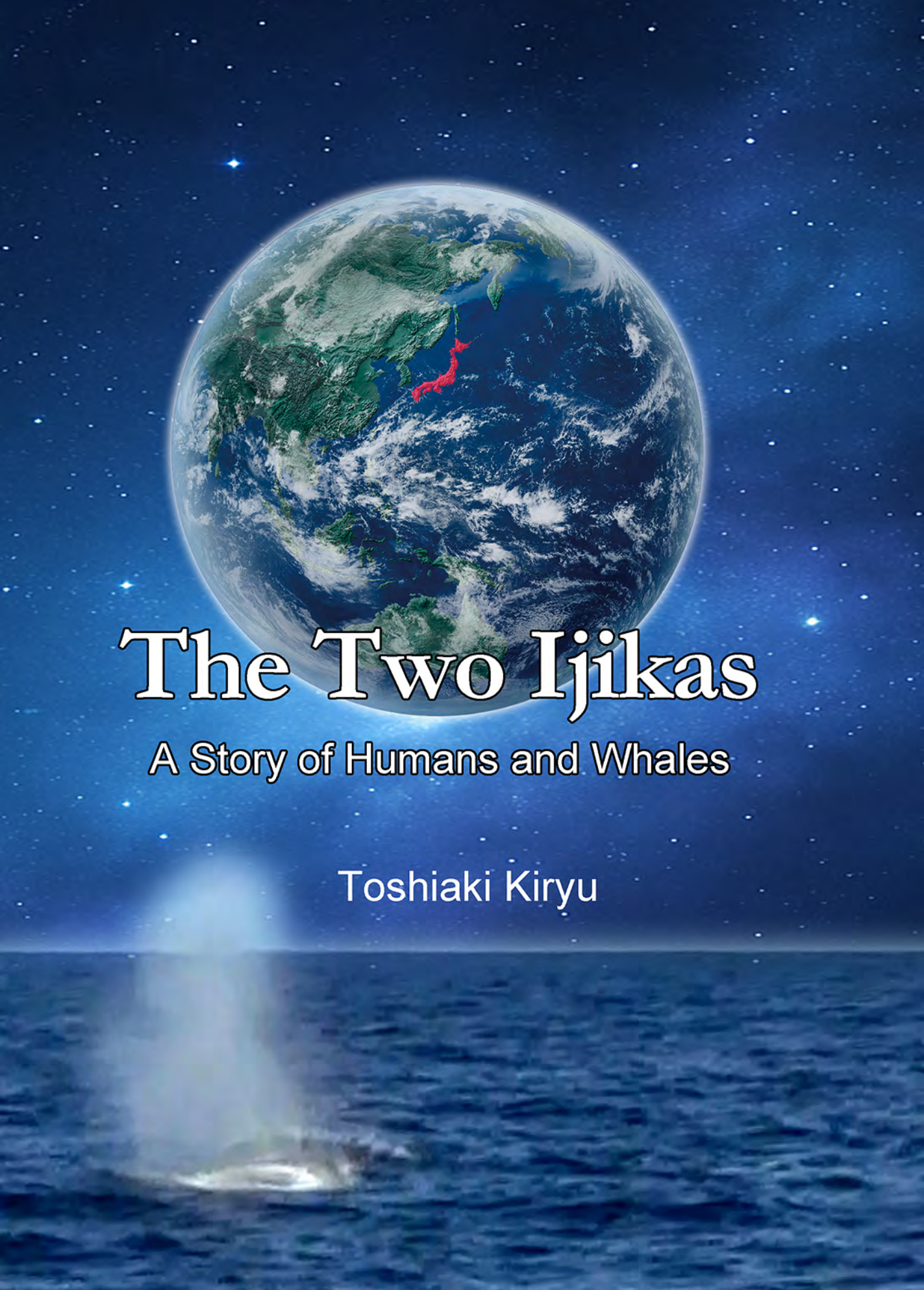




The Two Ijikas

A Story of Humans and Whales

Toshiaki Kiryu

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Written by Toshiaki Kiryu

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First English edition published in 2026 by Editing Studio DEP.

Publisher: Editing Studio DEP

4-14-7 Umami-kita, Koryo, Kitakatsuragi, Nara 635-0831, Japan

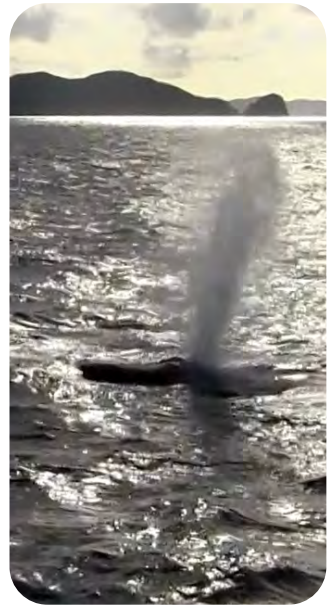
English translation assisted by ChatGPT.

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Introduction

“The Two Ijikas” has not yet become a book. For now, it exists only as a story taking shape within my imagination. The pages that follow are a travelogue tracing the landscapes in which that unwritten story unfolds.

The story opens with images of Earth captured by a satellite camera orbiting some 900 kilometers above the planet. The scene it records is not of the present day, but of the Earth in the middle of the twenty-second century. As the camera sweeps across the Pacific Ocean and slowly zooms toward the place where Japan once stood, a haunting landscape comes into view.

The Japanese archipelago is nowhere to be seen. In its place lies a scattered chain of islands, torn apart by countless fault lines—silent remnants of what had once been a single nation.

Or so it was meant to be.

Yet, quite mysteriously, the satellite reveals something entirely different.

There, unmistakably, is the Japan of former days.

As the camera draws closer to the Kii Peninsula, a lone wooden boat appears, making its way steadily westward just offshore, following the curve of the coastline.

Ahead of the little boat, a small pod of dolphins surfaces and disappears, as though guiding its journey.





A pod of dolphins (family group)

That is the opening scene of the story that has lived only in my mind.

Resting on the center plank of the boat is an infant who will become the central figure of the tale. At the stern, an exhausted fisherman rows silently with a single oar.

The man is Senkichi, a *hazashi*—a traditional harpooner of Ijika. The infant, who will one day be given the name Ijika, is the story's protagonist.

From there, the narrative unfolds through the intertwined lives of Senkichi; a young girl and a dolphin who both come to bear the name Ijika; Yae, who becomes Ijika's foster mother; Kai, the boy adopted by Senkichi and Yae; and a humpback whale named Ashura. Their destinies weave together into a story of people, whales, and dolphins.

The place where all of these lives first converge is Ijika, a small fishing village in Toba, Mie Prefecture. From there, the story extends southward to Taiji in Wakayama, a place whose long history with whales forms another thread in this unfolding tale.

1. Ijika's Whaling and the Hōei Tsunami

Before the Great Hōei Earthquake struck in October 1707—and before the devastating tsunami that followed—whaling flourished in the coastal village of Ijika, in what is now Mie Prefecture.

Yet in the late autumn of the previous year, the third year of the Hōei era (1706), something strange began to happen. Through the winter and into the following spring, humpback whales, which normally passed along these waters in great numbers, were scarcely seen at all.

Every year, humpback whales that had spent the summer feeding in the rich northern seas began their long migration south to breed. Having accumulated ample reserves of fat, they were at their strongest and healthiest, making them the most prized catch for whalers.

The whales returning north told a different story. Having given birth in the warm southern waters and traveling with their calves, they had eaten little for months. Thin and exhausted, they were rarely worth pursuing, and unless circumstances were exceptional, the fishermen of Toba generally let them pass.



Statue of a Harpooner (Taiji Whale Park, Wakayama)



Ongi Beach, now a hidden cove (Toba, Mie)

But in the spring of that year, even those northbound whales failed to appear.

Among the Toba whaling crews was a hazashi named Senkichi.

A hazashi was the man entrusted with delivering the final blow to a whale using a harpoon or a blade—the most respected and celebrated role in the entire hunt. Even among these elite hunters, Senkichi possessed an extraordinary gift. It was said that he moved as though he could see the whale beneath the waves, following its unseen course with uncanny certainty.

In those days, whaling was carried out using the traditional *amitori*, or net-driving method. From lookout posts on nearby headlands, known as *yamami*, observers watched for passing whales and directed the fleet by means of flags and signal fires. Guided by these signals, the net boats raced ahead of the whale's path, setting layer upon layer of nets until the exhausted animal could no longer escape. Only then would the hazashi, standing aboard the *sekobune*—the attacking boat—deliver the decisive strike.

The harpoon itself was not thrown directly at the whale. Instead, it was cast high into the air so that it plunged downward onto the whale's back with the force needed to penetrate its thick hide. Some harpoons measured more than four meters in length and weighed as much as seven kilograms. To wield such a weapon demanded extraordinary strength and years of relentless training, and every hazashi devoted himself to hardening not only his arms but his entire body.

The whales, however, were formidable opponents. Rather than allowing themselves to



become hopelessly entangled, they often dived deep beneath the sea, shaking free of the nets before surfacing far from where they had disappeared. Success depended upon anticipating exactly where a whale would rise to breathe.

This was where Senkichi's remarkable gift revealed itself.

Time and again, he seemed to know where a whale would surface before anyone else. To those who watched him, it was as though the sea itself had disclosed its secrets to him.

It was this extraordinary instinct that earned Senkichi the deep respect of every man in the Toba whaling crews.

But to return to our story—

Not a single whale had been taken that year.

This was no ordinary spell of poor fishing. From the autumn of the previous year until the spring now unfolding, not one whale had appeared along the coast.

Without whales, the villages could not survive. Every household depended upon the hunt, and with each passing day frustration and anxiety settled ever more heavily upon the





Whaling boats, including drive boats and net boats (Toba Sea-Folk Museum)

fishermen.

Then, at last, a pair of humpback whales appeared off the coast of Toba—a mother and her calf making their long journey north after the calf's birth in the southern seas.

There was a method sometimes employed in such desperate times.

Instead of striking the mother, the hunters would cast a light shirase-mori, or "guiding harpoon," into the calf. The wound was not intended to be fatal. Rather, the injured calf was slowly drawn toward the bay, knowing that the mother, unable to abandon her young, would faithfully follow. Once both had entered the sheltered waters, the mother could be killed.

Of all the methods used in whaling, this was the one Senkichi despised the most.

Yet desperation often silences conviction.

At that very moment, however, the chief priest of Shōfuku-ji Temple on Mount Aonimine came rushing into the whalers' hut at Ongi Beach.

The priest spoke of a dream.





The final stage of net whaling—The whale is towed ashore after being secured by a rope through its nostrils (Toba Sea-Folk Museum)

He had seen the mother whale and her calf passing offshore. In the dream, the mother pleaded with him.

"Please... spare us this once. Let me deliver my child safely to the northern sea. When I return on next year's southern migration, I will willingly offer my own life."

Her desperate voice had lingered with him even after he awoke. Unable to shake the sorrow it left in his heart, he hurried to warn the whalers.

But he had come too late.

The fleet had already sailed.

By dusk that same day, the bodies of the mother whale and her calf lay upon the shore at Ongi Beach.

Among humpback whales, the bond between mother and calf is profound. Even when death is certain, a mother will not abandon her young. She remains beside it until her final breath.

Driven into the bay and pierced by countless harpoons, the dying whale released one last tremendous cry.

As the hazashi delivered the fatal strike, her final spout burst skyward, mingled with blood, raining down upon the men who stood around her. Long afterward, many would remember not the blood upon their clothes, but the cry that tore through their hearts.

The fishermen heard it.

The villagers heard it.

And beyond the bay, another whale heard it as well.

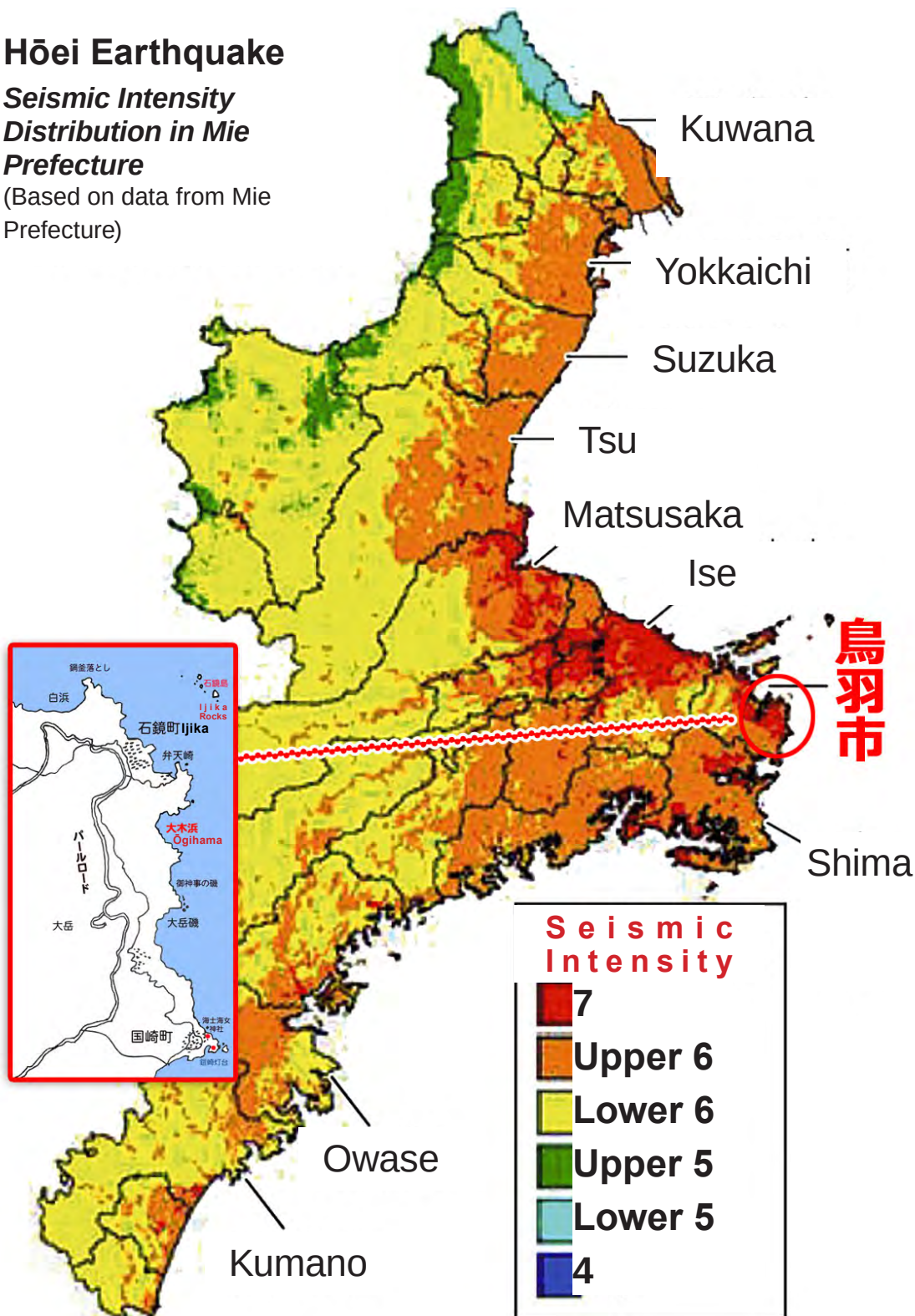
A solitary male humpback.

During the migration, a mother and calf are often accompanied by a powerful male who guards them from danger. He is not the calf's father, but the victor of fierce contests for

Hōei Earthquake

Seismic Intensity Distribution in Mie Prefecture

(Based on data from Mie
Prefecture)



breeding rights—a guardian entrusted, for a time, with their protection.

This bull whale, however, seemed unlike any humpback the fishermen had ever seen.

He was enormous.

Nearly eighteen meters in length, his massive body trembled with rage.

As the mother uttered her final cries, he answered her with violent blows of his great tail against the sea, each strike sending thunder across the water. From deep within his vast body came an unbroken, low-frequency rumble that seemed to shake the ocean itself.

His voice carried both fury and grief.

Together with the mother's dying cries, it settled over the village like an unseen weight, leaving no heart untouched.

Senkichi stood silently upon the shore, unable to turn away.

The image before him burned itself into his memory.

Nearby, the priest of Shōfuku-ji continued to chant the Heart Sutra.

Listening to the steady rhythm of the sacred words, Senkichi spoke almost to himself.

"He is like... an Asura."

From that moment on, the great whale bore a name.

Ashura.

Several days passed after that haunting encounter.

Then, before dawn one morning, Senkichi awoke to the urgent ringing of the village alarm bell.



The Pacific Ocean viewed from Toba Observatory

A whale had been sighted.

Not just any whale.

It was the great bull whale Senkichi himself had named Ashura.

Once again, the mighty humpback had appeared off the coast.

The whaling fleet immediately put to sea in pursuit.

Yet instead of mastering the whale, they found themselves led wherever Ashura chose to go, as though the hunter and the hunted had exchanged places.

Then, in the midst of the chase, the earth began to tremble.

The Great Hōei Earthquake had begun.

Moments later, the sea itself rose in fury.

Whale and whalers alike were swallowed by the great tsunami.

The sekobune carrying Senkichi was lifted high upon a towering wave more than ten meters in height. Before the men could recover, another surge crashed into the vessel from the direction of Ōnoura Bay, striking it broadside with overwhelming force.

The boat shattered.

When Senkichi regained consciousness, he found himself clinging desperately to a broken plank. He had no idea how far he had drifted, only that the sea had carried him to the village of Ōsatsu.



Chidorigahama Beach, Ōsatsu

Everything had changed.

Where people had lived only the day before, there now lay nothing but endless fields of shattered timber and broken stone.

Ignoring the wounds that covered his body, Senkichi wandered aimlessly through the ruins, scarcely aware of where his feet carried him.

A single thought rose from the emptiness within him.

Was this our punishment...?

Had this calamity come because we had shown no mercy to the mother whale and her calf?

"No..."

He shook his head.

"That cannot be. It has nothing to do with that."

Yet even as he denied it, the mother's dying cry returned to him.

So did the terrible gaze of the great bull whale.

The spray of blood.

The thunderous roar that marked her final breath.

The deep, mournful vibration of the bull whale's voice.

These memories echoed through him like waves that refused to break.

Then another sound drifted into that sea of grief.

Soft.

Fragile.

Almost too faint to hear.

The cry of a newborn child.



"Please... take care of this little girl..."

Before him, pale arms reached forward, offering him an infant.

Without thinking, Senkichi reached out and accepted the child.

But in the next instant, his arms were empty.

Had he imagined it?

Had it been nothing more than a dream?

Yet the baby's weak cries still lingered in the air.

Looking down, he saw the body of a woman lying beside the ruins of a collapsed house, her arms wrapped tightly around an infant as though she had given her own life to shield the child.

Without hesitation, Senkichi knelt and gently lifted the baby into his arms.

Cradling the tiny, fragile life against his chest, he made his way at last to Chidorigahama Beach.

The landward roads were buried beneath mountains of debris.

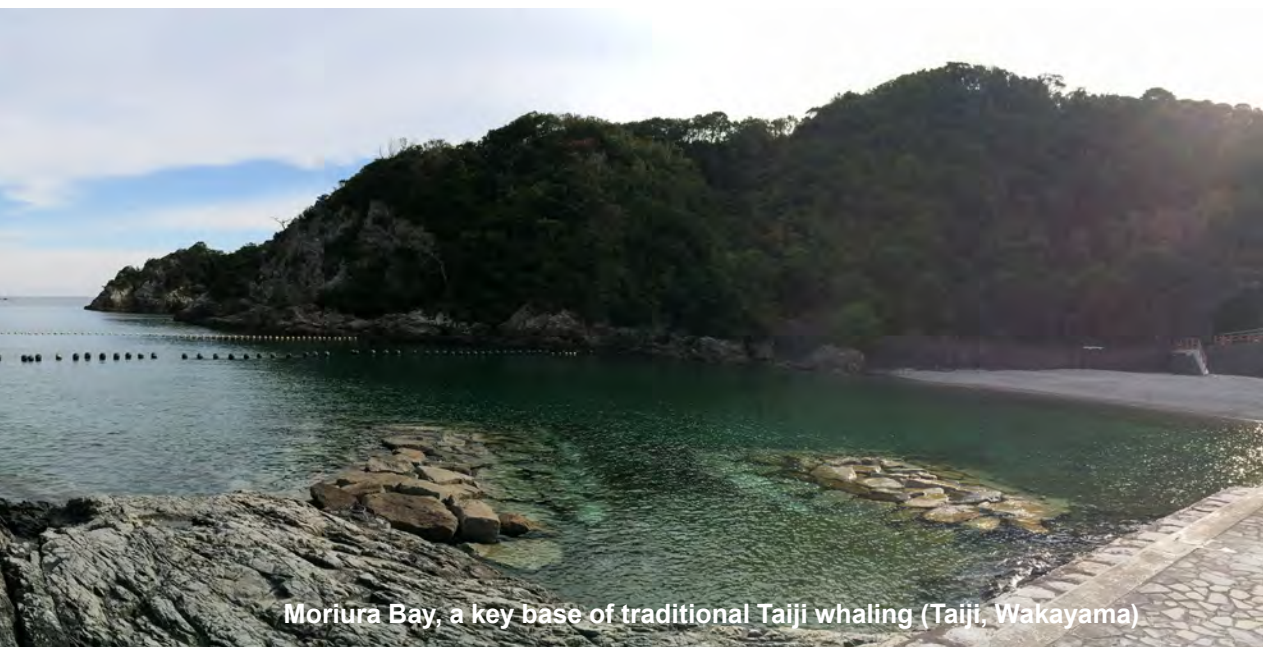
Only the sea seemed to offer any path toward life.

Among the wreckage along the shore, he found a small fishing boat that had somehow survived.

There, he entrusted both his own fate and that of the child to the sea.

After all, the sea—despite everything—had spared their lives.

Slowly, leaning his battered body against the oar, Senkichi pushed the little boat away from the shore.



Moriura Bay, a key base of traditional Taiji whaling (Taiji, Wakayama)

The satellite image began to move once more.
The fisherman was now holding the infant in his arms.
Then, without hesitation, he stepped from the boat and disappeared beneath the sea.
Had he abandoned all hope of living?
Had he chosen death for himself and the child?
No one watching from nine hundred kilometers above the Earth could know.
For beneath the surface of the sea, beyond the reach of the satellite's eye, something utterly unexpected was unfolding.

Perhaps it was the baby's faint cries that called them.
One by one, dolphins gathered around the drifting boat.
A single dolphin lifted its head above the gunwale, gazing intently at Senkichi, as though trying to tell him something.
He could not understand.
Thinking the animal was merely in his way, he waved it off.
At that instant, another dolphin struck him from the side, knocking him into the sea.
As he struggled beneath the surface, he found himself face to face with a mother dolphin and her calf.
The calf pressed its beak gently against the mother's mammary slit, drawing milk from the teat hidden within her body. When it released its grip, a thick white stream flowed into the surrounding water.
Unlike the milk of land animals, dolphin milk is exceptionally rich in fat—almost like liquid cheese—and does not dissolve readily into the sea.
Then the mother dolphin looked directly into Senkichi's eyes.
In that silent moment, he understood.
Climbing back into the boat, he gathered the infant into his arms once more.
Without a word, he slipped into the sea again.
Holding the baby securely with both hands, he slowly extended the tiny body beneath the dolphin's belly.
There, beside the small slit that marked her reproductive opening, a white ribbon of milk flowed from one of her mammary glands.
It was a sight beyond explanation.
A sight that could never be forgotten.
As the child drank, tears welled in Senkichi's eyes.
They mingled quietly with the seawater...
...and disappeared into the ocean.

2. Toward Taiji

Dolphin society is a matriarchal one.

As young males mature, they eventually leave the pod in which they were born. They form small groups with other males of similar age, roaming the sea in search of mates. Once they have reproduced, they move on again, leaving only their genes behind.

The pod itself remains centered on the females. At its heart is an elderly matriarch, surrounded by her daughters, granddaughters, and succeeding generations. Together they form a close-knit family, raising each newborn not only by its mother, but by aunts, sisters, and the pod as a whole.

The dolphins who had rescued Senkichi and the infant belonged to just such a family.

At the direction of the old matriarch, a young granddaughter who had only recently given birth shared her milk with the starving human child.

Nor did the dolphins stop there.

Swimming alongside Senkichi's little boat, the pod seemed to escort him across the sea, gently guiding him toward one of the waters they called home—the coast of Taiji.

Yet the devastation left by the Great Hōei Tsunami reached far beyond Ijika.

The disaster had ravaged coastlines from Ise Bay to the shores of the Kii Peninsula, sweeping through Osaka Bay and the Kitan Strait before striking the coast of Tosa with particular ferocity. Its destruction extended eastward as far as the Izu and Bōsō Peninsulas,



Site of Taikoya Matabei's residence (Naniwa Tamahime Park, Osaka)

and even to the distant island of Hachijō-jima.

Taiji was no exception.

The village's once-thriving whaling industry had been brought to the brink of ruin.

In Taiji alone, 217 houses were destroyed or swept away. Countless fishing boats and whaling vessels were lost, along with the tools upon which the community depended. Many whalers were claimed by the sea itself, leaving families without providers and an entire village struggling simply to survive.

Nor did the suffering end when the waves receded.

The earthquake had caused the land around Taiji to subside. Even after the tsunami withdrew, seawater no longer drained as it once had, leaving much of the coastline flooded and making recovery painfully slow.

Without large-scale assistance, recovery would have been nearly impossible.

Like the whaling communities of Toba and Ijika, Taiji's whaling industry might well have disappeared altogether.

(Ijika, in fact, survived by gradually turning to bonito fishing.)

Taiji, however, was different.

There was a group that provided not only financial support but also an extraordinary amount of labor, making the village's recovery possible.

In later years, the Kishu Domain recognized whaling as an industry of strategic importance. It placed the enterprise under official protection as the Ote-gumi, bringing it under direct domain administration.

At the time of the Hōei Tsunami, however, that system did not yet exist.



Site of the lookout on Tomoyozaki (Taiji, Wakayama)

Whaling was still a private enterprise led by the Wada family. The domain itself had suffered catastrophic damage from the earthquake and tsunami and was in no position to provide either financial aid or manpower.

There was, however, another community closely connected to the whaling industry.

Whenever a whale was landed, a skilled group arrived to assist with its butchering and processing. They were craftsmen under Taikoya Matabei, a leather merchant based in Watanabe Village in Osaka.

In those days they were members of a community that faced severe social discrimination. Branded with the derogatory label eta, they possessed highly specialized skills in removing, tanning, and processing animal hides into products such as drums, shamisen, and other traditional instruments.

Among them appears to have been an especially skilled group devoted to the butchering of whales.

Evidence suggests that they eventually settled in one part of Taiji, where they became responsible for processing the whales brought ashore.

My own impression is that, before the Hōei Tsunami, these craftsmen probably traveled seasonally from Osaka during the whaling season.

After the disaster, however, the situation changed dramatically.

The funds needed to rebuild Taiji's devastated whaling industry seem to have been borrowed from Taikoya Matabei, whose business dominated the leather trade in Osaka.

The arrangement made practical sense.

Whale meat was only one part of the animal's value. Bones, baleen, hides, and many



Site of the East Residence at Sekimon-izato (Taiji, Wakayama)

other materials that might otherwise have been discarded could all be purchased by Taikoya Matabei, processed into useful goods, and distributed throughout Japan.

Financial support alone, however, would not have been enough.

Large numbers of these craftsmen also appear to have moved to Taiji to help rebuild the shattered village. What had once been seasonal work during the whaling months may well have become permanent residence, as they remained to support both the recovery of the community and the processing of whales in the years that followed.

This, at least, is how I believe the story may have unfolded.

Let us return to the story.

At Cape Tōmyō stood one of Taiji's yamami lookout stations.

From this high promontory, rising some sixty meters above the sea, watchmen kept constant vigil for migrating whales. When one was sighted, they directed the whaling fleet below by means of signal flags and columns of smoke.

Because of its elevation, Cape Tōmyō was one of the few places left untouched by the Great Hōei Tsunami.

On that lonely headland stood a woman, gazing silently out across the sea.

Her name was Yae.

Her husband, a hazashi, and their baby daughter—not yet a year old—had both been swept away by the tsunami as they fled for higher ground.

Since that day, she had climbed the mountain path to Cape Tōmyō almost every morning, walking nearly two kilometers in the hope that one day her husband and child might



Mukoyama overlooking the inlet (Taiji, Wakayama)

somehow return.

Then something caught her eye.

Far below, a small boat was entering the inlet.

Around it swam a pod of dolphins.

It almost seemed as though they were leading the little vessel safely toward the shore.

Color returned to Yae's face.

Light returned to her eyes.

Without another thought, she began running down the winding path toward the inlet.

"My child... my child is coming home...!"

It was here that Senkichi met Yae.

And it was here that they first met the infant who would one day be given the name Ijika.

Cape Tōmyō, however, was only one of Taiji's lookout stations.

In all, five yamami overlooked the surrounding sea. Working together, they formed an intricate network for locating migrating whales and directing the movements of the whaling fleet. Messages passed rapidly from one lookout to another before being relayed to the sekobune and the net boats waiting offshore.

These lookout stations were, in many respects, the command centers of Taiji's whaling industry.

Because they occupied high ground overlooking the sea, they also almost certainly served as places of refuge when the Hōei Tsunami struck.



Benzaiten Shrine on Mukoyama (relocated after the 1707 Hoei tsunami)



Locations of the two lookout stations, Tomyozaki and Kajitorizaki, and the Takatsuka relay station





Beacon site on Tomyozaki



Lookout station on Kajitorizaki



Takatsuka relay station

Today, four of these lookout sites have been identified with reasonable certainty.

The most important were Cape Tōmyō, standing approximately sixty meters above sea level, and Kajitori Cape, whose elevation ranges between twenty and thirty meters.

Another site, known as Takatsukadai, appears to have functioned less as a lookout than as a relay station, passing information between the various yamami.

The fourth confirmed site is Mukōjima, a low-lying island only about three meters above sea level.

There stood the Ōnaya, the great whaling warehouse, where boats were stored and repaired, nets and equipment maintained, and visiting hazashi from distant regions found lodging during the whaling season.

What follows is, admittedly, my own interpretation.

In later years, I believe that the people then known as eta—the skilled craftsmen responsible for processing whales—also came to live in this area.

Yae's home, too, was here.

Her husband was a wandering hazashi, one of the many harpooners who traveled from region to region wherever whales were hunted.

Yet this settlement stood barely three meters above sea level.

When the Great Hōei Tsunami struck, many fled toward the highest ground they could find. Among them was Yae's husband.

None escaped.

Yae herself survived only by chance.

On that particular day, she had returned to her parents' home in Iwato. From there she fled to the higher ground at Takatsukadai, where her life was spared.

According to the Kii Fudoki (Chronicles of Kii Province), Iwato was named for a place "where the mountain was cut open to form a gateway."

It was also known as the site of the eastern residence of the Wada family, the founders of Taiji's whaling tradition. Beyond that gateway stretched an estate of nearly five thousand tsubo—an expansive household that served as one of the family's principal residences.

Both of Yae's parents worked there in service to the Wada household.

Again and again, one thought tormented her.

"Why didn't I bring my daughter with me?"

"If only I had... at least she might have lived."

Haunted by that unanswered question, Yae climbed to Cape Tōmyō almost every day, waiting for the husband and child who would never return.

3. The Revival of Taiji's Whaling Community

Guarded by the pod of dolphins, Senkichi's little boat finally reached the inlet at Taiji.

The villagers who had survived the tsunami rushed to the shore and hurried to help the exhausted fisherman and the infant lying motionless in the boat.

"He's alive!"

"And there's a baby!"

The crowd suddenly parted as a breathless woman ran toward the boat.

"It's Yae! Make way for her!"

Those gathered on the shore hoped this might finally bring her back to herself.

Ever since the tsunami had taken her husband and infant daughter, Yae had wandered as though lost between hope and despair. To her eyes, it seemed as if the two of them had somehow returned aboard that little boat.

Her mind never truly recovered.

Even so, with the support of her parents and the head of the Wada family, Senkichi and Yae eventually began a life together. Senkichi remained in Taiji, where he became one of the village's hazashi.

The baby, now raised as their daughter, was given the name Ijika, after Senkichi's own homeland of Ijika.

He gave the very same name to a young bottlenose dolphin—the calf that had shared the same mother's milk with the child, becoming, in a sense, her foster sibling.



The pod that had saved them also made its home in the waters off Taiji.

For a time, they became silent partners in sustaining the lives of the village.

Until whaling could begin again, the dolphins and the fishermen worked together.

Each spring and autumn, schools of fish rode the Kuroshio Current along the coast. The dolphins drove the fish into the sheltered inlet, where the fishermen cast their nets. The fish that escaped the nets became food for the dolphins.

It was a partnership from which both species benefited.

At the center of that partnership stood Senkichi.

Whenever the fishermen set out to sea, their first task was to find the dolphins.

Once they had located the pod, Senkichi and the others struck the sides of their boats, signaling that the nets were ready.

The dolphins understood.

They scattered across the sea in search of fish.

When a school was found, the matriarch leapt high above the waves, signaling its location.

"The old mother has jumped! Let's go!"

The fishing began.

The dolphins drove the fish into the bay.

The fishermen gathered them with their nets.

The fish that slipped through became the dolphins' reward.

For a number of years, this quiet partnership between people and dolphins helped sustain the village of Taiji.

With each passing season, Senkichi's place within the community grew ever more important.



Around that same time, the head of the Wada family set out for Watanabe Village in Osaka to secure the funds needed to rebuild Taiji.

The journey proved successful.

Not only was financial support obtained, but the promise of a large workforce as well.

The craftsmen who had long been dismissed under the derogatory name eta—people who had previously come only during the whaling season to assist in processing the catch—now became indispensable partners in the village's recovery.

Taikoya Matabei purchased nearly every part of the whale beyond its meat—bones, hides, baleen, oil, and many other materials—processing them into useful goods that were distributed throughout Japan.

A large-scale reconstruction had begun.

Whenever he was not at sea, Senkichi worked shoulder to shoulder with these craftsmen, helping rebuild the village.

Although traces of social prejudice remained, the people of Taiji gradually learned to live and work together with those whom society had long kept at its margins.

Dolphins and humans.

People divided by social rank.

For a brief moment in history, Taiji seemed to become a place where such boundaries quietly dissolved.

At last, new nets were woven.

New whaling boats were built.

The tools that had been swept away by the tsunami were replaced one by one.

And little by little, Taiji prepared itself for the return of the whale hunt.



4. The Orphan at the Whaling Yard

On that day, the whalers landed a magnificent humpback whale.

Towed between two mochisō-bune (transport boats), the great animal was brought slowly into the inlet of Taiji Bay.

A signal had already reached the village from the lookout station at Takatsukadai.

Along the beach in front of Asuka Shrine, preparations for its arrival were complete.

The following scenes can still be seen today in the illustrated whaling scrolls preserved by the Taiji Whale Museum.

Entangled beneath layer upon layer of weighted nets and pierced by numerous harpoons, the whale received its final blow from the hazashi. Before life completely left its body, a rope was threaded through its nostrils in a procedure known as hana-kiri ("nose-cutting"), allowing it to be secured between the two transport boats for the journey ashore.

This had to be done before the whale died, for once dead, its immense body would sink to the bottom of the sea. (Fig. 1)



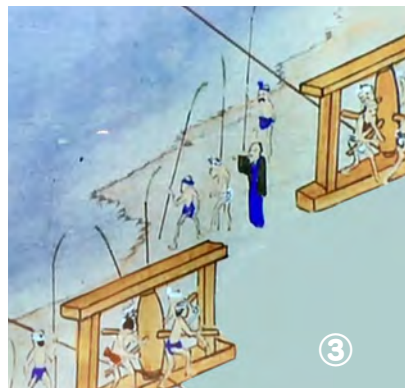
Net whaling (Whaling Picture Scroll, Taiji Whale Museum)



Waiting to haul in the whale (Whaling Picture Scroll, Taiji Whale Museum)



Hauling a captured whale ashore with a capstan (Whaling Picture Scroll, Taiji Whale Museum)



Facing the inlet stood Asuka Shrine, where the whale was brought ashore.

The butchering of the whale took place directly before the shrine, for this was regarded not merely as the processing of an animal, but as a sacred act of receiving the life the whale had offered. The entire operation carried the solemn character of a ritual. (Fig. 2)

Three large wooden winches, known locally as kagura-san, stood along the beach facing the sea.

Teams of men turned these massive mechanisms by hand.

After the whale had been divided into large sections in the shallows, each section was hauled onto the beach by means of the winches. (Figs. 3 & 4)

The same winches were also used to strip the whale's skin, as can be seen in Fig. 5.

Now turn to Fig. 6.

The enlarged detail on the right reveals a heartbreaking scene.

A small boy is being beaten with a stick while crying in pain.

Beside him lies a large piece of whale meat.

Members of the socially marginalized community then known by the derogatory name eta assisted in the butchering of whales. It was generally tolerated if they took home small scraps of meat that still clung to the bones.

Perhaps this boy belonged to one of those families.



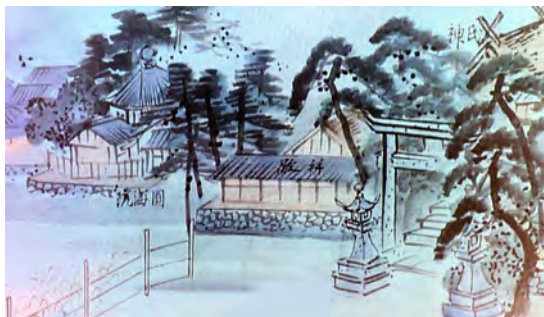
Butchering a whale (Whaling Screen of Kumano Whaling, Wakayama Prefectural Museum)



A capstan used to strip the whale's skin (Isanatori Emaki)



A whale being butchered before Asuka Shrine; a child caught stealing whale meat is being punished (Whaling Picture Scroll, Taiji Whale Museum)



Asuka Shrine in the Whaling Picture Scroll and the present-day Asuka Shrine (right)



Interior of the main whaling headquarters depicted in Illustrated History of Whaling in Goto (Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture)

Yet the piece of meat lying beside him was far too large to be dismissed as a mere scrap. Even the fishermen of Taiji could not overlook such a thing.

As Senkichi stepped ashore from the sekobune, this was the first sight that met his eyes.

Across the inlet, on Mukōjima, stood the Ōnaya, the great warehouse where whale meat was processed and whale blubber rendered into oil.

Many of the craftsmen from the eta community lived quietly on the hillside nearby.

The hazashi who had come from distant regions also lived on Mukōjima, though in a separate quarter.

Even so, Senkichi could not help hearing fragments of their daily lives.

The boy being beaten was called Kai.

His mother had been gravely injured during the reconstruction of the Ōnaya and had never recovered.

Turning to the fishermen gathered around him, Senkichi spoke firmly.

"You may call them eta, but that boy's mother helped rebuild Taiji alongside every one of us. She earned this village's gratitude. The child only tried to steal a little meat for his dying mother. Can't you let him go?"

Taking Kai by the hand, Senkichi gathered up the whale meat and walked with him toward the small hut where his mother lay.

But by the time they arrived, she was already drawing her last breath.

With all the strength she had left, she whispered only one sentence.
"Please... take care of this child."
Then she quietly passed away.
In that instant, memories flooded back.
The dying cries of the mother humpback.
The roar that had echoed across the bay.
The infant entrusted to him amid the ruins of Ijika.
Everything returned at once.
Without another word, Senkichi took Kai home.
Yae and little Ijika were waiting for him.
Seeing the boy, Yae smiled as though he had always belonged there.
"Ijika, your big brother has come home."
"Where have you been all this time? Come here now. No more tears—let me see your smile."
And so, in the village of Taiji, a most unusual family came into being.
No one among them shared the same blood.
Yet they belonged to one another all the same.



Mukojima, site of the main whaling headquarters and home to migrant harpooners and Eta workers

5. The Two Ijikas

Little by little, the scars left by the Great Hōei Tsunami faded from the village of Taiji.

As the community recovered, whaling flourished once again.

With its revival, the extraordinary partnership between dolphins and fishermen—one unlike any other in the world—gradually slipped into memory.

The same was true of the fragile fellowship that had briefly transcended the rigid boundaries of social status.

Like a dream that lasted only for a moment, that small utopia quietly disappeared as ordinary life returned.

Yet it did not vanish completely.

It lived on within Senkichi and Yae.

Within Kai and Ijika, who had grown up as brother and sister.

And within the bond between the girl named Ijika and the dolphin community that had once saved her life.

The connection between Ijika and her milk sibling, the dolphin Ijika, remained as strong as ever.

Along the shores of Taiji, stories continued to be told about the girl who had drunk a dolphin's milk. As the tale passed from one generation to another, people embellished it until she became known simply as "the girl raised by dolphins."

The truth may have become blurred.

Yet the villagers never forgot the strange family of Senkichi, nor the pod of dolphins that gathered offshore.

Both remained quietly in the hearts of the people, like memories of something they could neither fully explain nor entirely dismiss.

One day, during a whale hunt, disaster struck.

A fin whale burst upward from the depths and split one of the sekobune in two.

Then it rammed a second boat broadside.

Both vessels sank before the whale disappeared once more into the deep, slipping beneath the nets and escaping.

Most of the crew were rescued.

But one of the rowers could not be found.

Just as hope was beginning to fade, the cries of dolphins echoed across the sea.

Moments later, the missing man appeared.

A dolphin had gently grasped the knot of his topknot in its mouth and was towing him

toward the waiting boats.

The fishermen hauled him aboard with a whaling hook.

He had survived.

After that day, the people of Taiji came to see Senkichi's family differently.

They were neither feared nor shunned.

They continued to work alongside everyone else.

People relied upon them as they always had.

And yet, there remained an unspoken sense that they belonged somehow to another world.

It was not distrust.

It was something closer to reverence.

Even today, Ijika and her brother Kai can often be seen rowing their little boat toward the open sea.

Standing proudly at the bow is the dolphin Ijika.

A sharp whistle rings out across the water.

Far offshore, a dolphin answers with a joyful leap into the air—

again,

and again.



Common bottlenose dolphins playing in the inlet

6. The Battle with Ashura

Nearly ten years had passed since Senkichi and little Ijika had come to Taiji.

Kai was now fifteen years old.

With the next whale hunt, he would take his first step into the world of whaling alongside his father.

Not aboard the same boat, however.

Senkichi would serve as the hazashi aboard the third sekobune, while Kai, still an apprentice, had been assigned to a taru-bune—one of the small boats responsible for recovering the nets and floating barrels used during the hunt.

Whaling demanded far more than strength.

Following signals from the yamami lookout stations, the net boats spread great walls of netting across the whale's expected course. Countless wooden barrels served as weights, slowing the whale once it became entangled.

As soon as the whale struggled into one net, the fishermen cut it free, only to set another farther ahead. Again and again, fresh nets were laid across its path until the animal grew exhausted beneath their accumulating weight.

The whale, however, fought back with remarkable intelligence.

It plunged deep beneath the surface, attempting to shake off the nets before rising again to breathe.

Predicting where it would next appear was a battle of judgment between whale and whaler.

That was where the taru-bune played its part.

Its crew retrieved the discarded nets and floating barrels left behind during the pursuit.

A taru-bune usually carried only two or three men, most of them veteran sailors whose years on the sea had earned them quieter duties.

It was also here that boys destined to inherit the whaling tradition began their apprenticeship.

At around fifteen years of age, they joined the taru-bune, learning every stage of the hunt while helping recover the equipment.

Because these boats remained at a comparatively safe distance, they offered the perfect vantage point from which young apprentices could observe the entire operation without facing its greatest dangers.

And for Senkichi's son, Kai, that day had arrived sooner than anyone had expected.

Before dawn, the great warning bell echoed through the village.

At almost the same moment, smoke rose from Cape Tōmyō.

A whale had been sighted offshore.

Standing at the relay station on Mukōjima, Senkichi looked toward the headland.

A pale blue banner fluttered in the wind—the signal for a humpback whale.

Kai, standing beside him, spoke first.

"Father... it's a humpback!"

Senkichi narrowed his eyes toward the distant sea.

"A northbound whale... and it looks like she's traveling with a calf."

"What do you think they'll do?"

The two hurried toward the beach.

The recent catches had been poor, and the decision to launch the fleet had already been made.

Preparations were well underway.

Ordinarily, a northbound humpback accompanied by her calf would be left alone.

Such whales were fiercely protective, dangerously aggressive, and often too lean to be worth the risk.

But today would be different.

A chill passed through Senkichi.



勢子壱番船

First Sekobune (Whale-Driving Boat)



勢子参番船

Third Sekobune



勢子貳番船

Second Sekobune



網船

Amibune (Net Boat)



樽船

Tarubune (Barrel Boat)



持左右船 (もっそうぶね)

Mossō Boat



横網船

Yokoamibune (Cross-Net Boat)

Without warning, memories of Toba came rushing back.

A mother's desperate cries.

The great bull whale.

Ashura.

He turned sharply toward Kai.

"Stay behind this time."

Kai shook his head.

"No. I'm going."

For a long moment, Senkichi said nothing.

Then he placed a hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Very well. But don't let your guard down just because you're aboard a taru-bune."

"Listen to everything Old Roku tells you."

One by one, the sekobune were lifted onto the shoulders of the crews and carried down to the sea.

To make them as swift as possible, their hulls had been coated with paulownia oil and whale oil.

Each boat was also painted with distinctive patterns so that it could be recognized even from a great distance. The lacquered finish served another purpose as well, reducing friction against the water and allowing the boats to move with remarkable speed.

For that reason, they were never dragged across the beach.

They were carried.

The fleet set out in order.

First went the net boats.



Blow of a humpback whale

Behind them came the sekobune, followed by the transport boats.
Finally, bringing up the rear, came the taru-bune.
Altogether, nearly twenty boats headed out toward the open sea.
One of the taru-bune was commanded by the veteran sailor Rokubei.
Kai had been assigned to his boat as an apprentice.
From its comparatively safe position behind the fleet, he would witness an entire whale hunt for the very first time.
As the shoreline gradually receded, Rokubei glanced toward Kai with a grin.
"Kai... what's become of Ijika? Didn't she insist on coming with us?"
Rokubei had always had a soft spot for her.
Whenever she saw him around the harbor, she would pester him endlessly, begging to be allowed aboard the taru-bune.
Strangely enough, that morning she had caused no trouble at all.
That, more than anything, had made him suspicious.
Then—
"Old Roku! I'm here! Right here!"
The straw mat covering the stern suddenly flew upward.
Out popped Ijika's head.
She had been hiding there all along.
Rokubei burst into laughter.
"Well, I'll be..."
"You've certainly given me a fright."
He scratched his head and looked toward the shore, now far behind them.



Site of the beacon on Tomyozaki

"At this point, I can't exactly send you back."

She must have slipped into the water while the fleet passed Mukōjima and quietly climbed aboard during all the commotion of departure.

Kai could only sigh.

"Honestly... you're impossible."

Yet there was more affection than annoyance in his voice.

Rokubei chuckled.

"Kai, you'd better keep an eye on your little sister."

Senkichi, watching from another boat farther ahead, could only shake his head with a helpless smile.

"Old Roku... I'm sorry."

Far offshore, the fleet had already begun surrounding the mother humpback and her calf with its great walls of netting.

Then suddenly—

"Old Roku! Another humpback!"

Ijika pointed—not toward the trapped whales, but beyond the outer ring of nets.

Everyone turned.

The sea outside the encirclement erupted into white water.

An enormous humpback burst from the waves.

Without hesitation, it charged straight toward the outermost net boat.

Rokubei snatched up the sasayaki-zutsu, the speaking horn, and shouted with all his strength.

"Humpback charging Number Seven!"



A humpback whale mother and calf

The carefully arranged formation, fixed upon driving the mother and calf into the nets, shuddered as panic swept through the fleet.

The crew of Net Boat Number Seven threw themselves into the sea.

An instant later, the whale struck.

The boat split cleanly in two.

Watching from Sekobune Number Three, Senkichi felt the blood drain from his face.

"...Ashura."

His whisper was almost swallowed by the roar of the sea.

Then he shouted.

"He's heading for Number One!"

Ashura sliced through the waves like a living mountain.

The men aboard Net Boat Number One had no time to escape.

The tremendous impact hurled both boat and crew into the sea.

Wrapped in layer upon layer of netting, Ashura plunged deep beneath the surface, tearing free as he disappeared into the darkness below.

Senkichi followed every movement.

He knew the whale would have to rise again.

Lifting the speaking horn to his lips, he cried out,

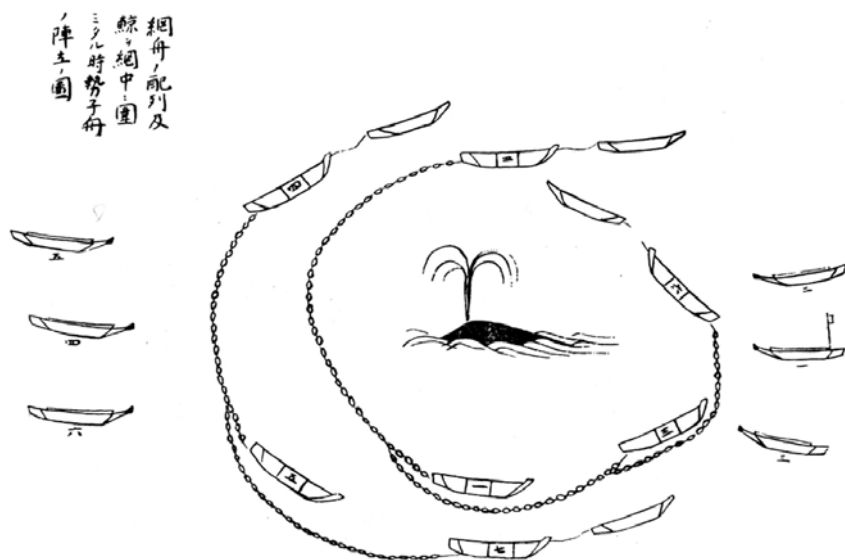
"Number Two! He's coming up beneath Number Two!"

The warning came only a heartbeat too late.

The second net boat erupted upward, lifted high into the air before crashing back onto the sea.

The gap was enough.

The mother whale and her calf now had an open path to freedom.



Arrangement of net boats and drive boats in traditional whaling (Taiji Whale Museum)

For a moment it seemed that Ashura would simply lead them away.
But he turned back.
He was not finished.
He veered toward the right flank, where Sekobune Four, Five, and Six held formation.
Then, without warning, he vanished beneath the sea once more.
A terrible realization struck Senkichi.
"No... he's coming this way!"
Ashura had changed direction underwater.
His true target was the left flank—
Sekobune One.
Two.
Three.
Senkichi had read Ashura's intentions correctly.
But Ashura was faster.
The third sekobune, positioned near the center of the line, suddenly rose into the air upon the whale's immense back.
For a brief instant, boat and men seemed suspended against the sky.
Then they crashed violently back into the sea.
The first boat was smashed.
The second followed.
Within moments, the ocean had become a scene of utter devastation.
"Father!"
"Father's been hit!"
Carrying Kai and Ijika, the taru-bune raced desperately toward the wreckage.
At the same time, every surviving sekobune, transport boat, and taru-bune rushed to rescue the men struggling in the water.
But even then, Ashura's relentless assault did not cease.
The whale struck again...
and again.
Thrown into the sea, Ijika caught one last glimpse of the great whale.
Ashura.
Without haste...
without looking back...
he disappeared into the endless ocean.

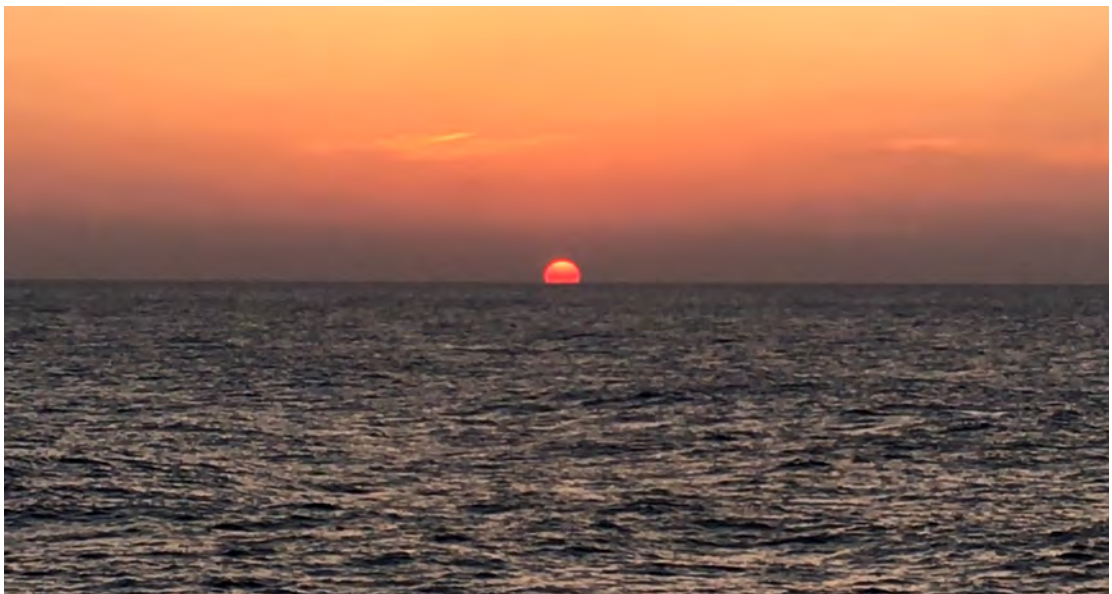
7. Adrift

A violent jolt hurled Ijika into the sea.
A hand reached for her.
It was Kai.
Old Rokubei was nowhere to be seen.
Alone aboard the taru-bune, Kai stood frozen, his face drained of color.
Yet somehow he found the strength to seize Ijika's hand and pull her aboard.
The moment she was safe, the two of them collapsed together on the deck.
For a long while, neither spoke.
At last, Ijika whispered,
"Father... we have to find Father."
She slowly rose to her feet, stood at the bow, and gave a long, piercing whistle.
Before long, familiar cries echoed across the sea.
Leading the pod was Ijika, her dolphin milk sibling.
One by one, the dolphins gathered around the little boat.
Together, they began searching for Senkichi.
Once before, when a rower had been lost at sea after a fin whale attacked the fleet, the dolphins had found him and brought him safely home.
Remembering that miracle, Ijika repeated the same words to herself again and again.



A humpback whale swimming away into the distance

We'll find him.
We have to.
But the sun sank below the horizon.
Darkness spread across the sea.
When she looked around, every other boat had vanished.
The cries of the rescue crews were gone.
Only then did they realize the terrible truth.
Without noticing, they had been caught by the mighty current of the Kuroshio.
Days drifted past.
Senkichi was never found.
Exhaustion finally overcame both children, and they slept whenever sleep claimed them.
How many days they drifted, neither of them could tell.
Time itself seemed to dissolve into the endless rhythm of wind and waves.
Only one hope remained.
Father must have survived.
He'll come looking for us.
That single thought carried them onward.
Their drinking water was gone.
Their emergency provisions had long since run out.
Only the dolphins remained beside them, swimming faithfully alongside the drifting boat.
One night, Ijika awoke.
Perhaps it was the sound of the waves.



Sunset over the endless Pacific Ocean (from the Ogasawara Maru)

Or perhaps she was still dreaming.
Above her stretched the Milky Way, brighter than she had ever imagined.
Countless stars filled the heavens.
I've never seen so many stars...
Then one star began to fall.
No—
it was coming toward her.
It entered her.
Then another.
And another.
Soon the stars seemed to pour from the heavens, one after another, flowing gently into
her heart.
Each star became someone she loved.
Senkichi.
Yae.
Kai's mother.
Old Rokubei.
The people of Taiji.
The countless dolphins.
Even the mother she had never known.
Each smiled at her with quiet tenderness...
then disappeared within her.
She felt herself embraced by a warmth beyond words—



a gentleness...

a peace...

a sense of belonging unlike anything she had ever known.

The little taru-bune, carrying Ijika and Kai, eventually drifted into Sagami Bay.

Guided by the pod of dolphins, it finally reached a beach on the southern coast of Izu—perhaps today's Yumigahama.

Fishermen who witnessed its arrival later said that it looked as though the dolphins themselves were towing the boat ashore.

Part of a whale net remained tangled around the bow.

The dolphins appeared to take turns pulling it.

What became of Ijika and Kai after that is unknown.

Yet local tradition suggests that, for a time, people along this coast fished in partnership with dolphins.

Schools of fish riding the Kuroshio Current were driven into sheltered bays by the dolphins.

The fishermen cast their nets.

The fish that escaped became the dolphins' reward.

Remarkably, similar forms of cooperative fishing can still be found today in places such as Santa Catarina in Brazil and among river dolphins and fishermen in the Amazon.

In Japan, however, that tradition has long since disappeared.

Only a curious saying remains.

In Taiji, people have long said,

"One whale brings prosperity to seven villages."

Yet along this coast of Izu, an entirely different saying survives.

"One whale brings ruin to seven villages."

Two neighboring traditions.

Two completely opposite memories.

Perhaps both preserve echoes of a forgotten past.

Epilogue

The satellite image now lingered over a cape on the southern coast of Izu.

The camera continued to zoom in.

There, looking up toward the sky, stood an elderly woman.

She smiled gently.

Ijika.

Then, without warning, the image vanished.

Only the endless surface of the Pacific Ocean remained.

"Mira... is something wrong?"

"Nothing."

She hesitated.

"I just thought... for a moment... I saw Japan."

"And there was an old woman named Ijika."

Her colleague laughed.

"Come on, Mira. I know Japan is your homeland, but that's impossible."

"Japan sank beneath the Pacific fifty years ago."



"I know."

Mira lowered her eyes.

She had been reviewing the latest images transmitted by the observation satellite.

Yet she could not bring herself to tell anyone about the strange vision she had just witnessed.

Even if she did, no one would believe her.

Not even she could fully believe it herself.

She tried to dismiss it as nothing more than an illusion.

And yet...

Why does it all feel so familiar?

With that, The Story of Ijika comes to an end.

For me, it also marks the conclusion—at least in this lifetime—of my long journey exploring the relationship between people and whales.

The rest of the journey will have to wait until the next life.

Perhaps it will continue somewhere along the west coast of North America.

Perhaps in Canada.

Or perhaps in Australia.

There is no way to know.

But wherever that next journey begins, I like to think that I will once again be talking with whales and dolphins about our Earth...

and about the universe.

These quiet words were written in the early summer of 2026, from Kōryō, a small town in Nara Prefecture, located near the heart of Japan's Kii Peninsula—

34°32' North, 135°45' East.

いじか物語

人とクジラのものがたり



はじめに

「いじか物語」は、まだ「本」という形になっていない、僕の頭の中にだけある「物語」です。

その「頭の中にある物語」を、実際の風景の中に追いかけた紀行文がこの文章になります。

物語の初めは、900 キロメートル上空の衛星カメラがとらえた地球の映像から始まります。そこに映し出される映像は、22 世紀半ばの地球の姿。カメラが太平洋上空を捉え、かつて日本があった辺りへとズームインしていきます。

そこには日本列島の姿はなく、断層帯で無数に引き裂かれた島嶼とうしょの一群がその名残なごりをとどめている——そこには、そんな風景が広がっているはずでした。

しかし、不思議なことに、衛星カメラが映し出したのは、まぎれもなく在りし日の日本列島そのものだったのです。

カメラがさらに、その紀伊半島のあたりへと近づいていくと、その沖合を海岸線に添うように一艘の小舟が西へ西へと向かっています。

その小舟を牽引けんいんように、小さなイルカの群れが見え隠れしています。

これが、僕の頭の中にある「いじか物語」の出だしの部分です。





イルカのポッド（家族）

小舟のなかいた中板には、この物語の主人公になる赤子が置かれ、^{とも} 舳では漁師風の男が疲れ果てた様子で^ろ 櫓を漕いでいます。

男は^{いじか} 石鏡のクジラ取り、^{はざ} 刃刺しの^{せんきち} 銚吉、赤子は、これから「いじか」と名付けられる予定の、この物語の主人公です。

物語は、「刃刺しの銚吉」、「いじか」という同じ名を与えられる一人の娘と一頭のイルカ、いじかの育ての母となる^{やえ} 「八重」、銚吉と八重の養子となる「カイ」という少年、ザトウクジラの「アシュラ」と……、人とクジラ、そしてイルカの物語が^{ふくそう} 輻輳し進んでいく構成になっています。

そして、彼らの物語がからみ合う、その

発端となる場所が、三重県鳥羽市の石鏡であり、更に和歌山の^{たいじ} 太地へとつながってまいります。

1. 石鏡のクジラ漁と^{ほうえいつなみ} 宝永津波

宝永大地震（1707年10月）と、それに伴う大津波が起こるまでは、この三重の石鏡でも捕鯨業が盛んに行われていました。

それが地震の起こる前年、宝永3年の晩秋から翌年にかけて、どうしたわけかザトウクジラの回遊がほとんど見られないという状態が続きました。

この時期、北の海で盛んにエサを食べ溜め^だしたザトウクジラは繁殖のため南の海へ移動します。この時のクジラは、エサもしっかり食べ、栄養状態も良く、脂ものっておりますから、漁師にとっては格好の獲物となるわけです。

これに対し、南の海で子クジラを産み、子連れで北の海へ帰るクジラたちは、ほとんど絶食状態で、栄養状態も悪く、よほどのことがない限り、鳥羽の漁師たちもこれを狙うことはありません。

この年の春は、そんな北へ帰る上りクジラさえ姿を見せないという有様^{ありさま}でした。

ところで、この鳥羽のクジラ組に、銚^{せんきち}吉と呼ばれる刃刺^{はざ}しがおりました。

刃刺しというのは、クジラ漁の最終段階で、銚^{もり}や刀でクジラにとどめを刺す漁師のこと、いわばクジラ獲りの花形なわけです。そんな刃刺しの中でも、彼はずば抜けて勘が良いというのでしょうか、まるで海中でのクジラの動きが見えているように動くのです。

この頃のクジラ漁は、網取り法^{あみと}といって、山見^{やまみ}（岬等でクジラの動きを見張り、幡^{はた}やのろしで船団を指揮する役割）からの知らせを受け、網舟^{あみぶね}が、クジラの動きに合わせ、その行く手、行く手に網を張り、クジラに何重にも何重にも網を被せ弱らせていき、弱り切ったところで、勢子舟^{せこぶね}の刃刺しが銚を打ち込むことになります。



刃刺しの像 / 和歌山県太地町 くじら浜公園



大木（おんぎ）浜 / 今は隠れ浜になっています（三重県鳥羽市）

鉾はクジラをめがけて投げるのではなく、空中高く投げ上げ、上空からクジラの背へ落ちるようにします。こうすることで、硬いクジラの皮膚に鉾を突きさすことができるのですが、鉾は長さが大きいもので4メートルを超え、その重さといえは7キログラムにも達します。

これを自在に投げ上げられるようにするため、刃刺しは常日頃から、腕と言わず足腰の鍛錬に余念がありません。

ところでクジラも黙って網に突っ込んでいくだけではなく、被された網を振りほどくため、勢いよく海中深く潜り、網から逃れたうえで、息継ぎのため離れた水面に顔を出します。

このとき、いったん潜ったクジラが、どこへ上がってくるのか、このクジラの動きを読まなければなりません。鉾吉は、海中のクジラの動きが、まるで手に取るように分かるのです。

このため鉾吉は、鳥羽のクジラ組で一目置かれる存在になっていました。

さて、話を戻しますが、この年はクジラが一頭も獲れていません。それは、「クジラ漁が不漁のため」というような生易なまやさしいものではありませんでした。

昨年の秋口から今年の春にかけて、一頭たりともクジラが姿を見せないのです。

クジラが獲れねば浜の暮らしはなりた



ちません。そんな^{いらだ}苛立ちが漁師たちに重くのしかかっていた矢先のこと、一組の子連れのクジラの姿が鳥羽の沖合に現れたのです。

南の海で子供を産み、その子クジらを伴い北の海へ帰る親子です。

クジラの^{ほかく}捕獲の際、親を狙うのではなく、まず子クジらに「しらせ^{もり}銛」といって、殺さない程度に軽く銛を打ち、^{おとり}罠として湾内まで引いてくるやり方があります。

これによって母クジラを湾内におびき寄せ殺すというやり方です。

^{はざ}刃刺しの^{せんきち}銛吉が最も嫌うクジラ獲りのやり方ですが、背に腹は代えられません。

しかもこの時、^{あおのみねさん}青峰山・正福寺の住職が、^{おんぎのはま}大あわてで大木浜のクジラ小屋を尋ねてまいりました。

住職は、沖合を通るクジラの母子を夢に見たというのです。母クジラが必死に「今回は見逃してほしい、子を北の海へ





勢子舟、網舟等々、捕鯨のための船（鳥羽市立海の博物館・船の収蔵庫）

届け来年の下りの時期には必ずこの命を捧げます」というのです。

その必死な様子があまりにも哀れで、目が覚めても何か落ち着かず、こうして伝えに来たというのです。

しかし、この知らせは間に合わず、船団は既に出発した後で、その日の夕刻近くには、大木浜に親子クジラの死体が並べられることになりました。

ザトウクジラは母性愛が強く、子供が捕らえられれば、自分の命がなくなろうと決して子供の傍を離れようとはしません。

湾内に追い込まれ、無数の鉾を受けた母クジラの最期の咆哮は、とどめの鉾を打ち込む刃刺しに、血潮の混じった潮吹きとともに降り注ぎ、その胸をかきむしります。

この咆哮を漁師や浜の人々のほか、沖





網取り漁法の大詰め／とどめを刺されたクジラは鼻に綱を通され浜へ運ばれる（鳥羽市立海の博物館）

合で一頭のザトウクジラのオスが悲しげに聞いておりました。

ザトウクジラの母子には、これを見守りガードする雄が付き添います。

といって、この子クジラの父親ではありません。次の繁殖権^{はんしょくけん}を争いで勝ち取った雄が、この母子のガード役をするわけです。しかしこの雄クジラ、ザトウクジラというにはあまりに大きく、全長で60尺（18 m）にもなるでしょうか。

彼はその巨体を怒りに震わせ、メスクジラの断末魔^{だんまつま}の咆哮^{ほうこう}に答えるように、激しく尾びれを海面に打ち付け、鼻からは低周波^{うな}の唸り声を出し続けています。

その怒りと悲しみに満ちた鳴き声は、メスクジラの断末魔の咆哮とともに浜の人々の胸を責めさいなまずにはおきませんでした。

刃刺しの銚吉も、浜でその姿を、しっかりと目に焼き付けておりました。

横手では正福寺の住職が「般若心経^{はんによしんぎょう}」を唱え続けていますが、その声を聴きながら銚吉はつぶやくように言い放ちます。

「まるで阿修羅^{あしゅら}のようじゃ」

……

この騒動から何日かが過ぎた早朝、銚吉は突然の半鐘^{はんしょう}の音に目を覚めました。クジラの出現を知らせる半鐘です。

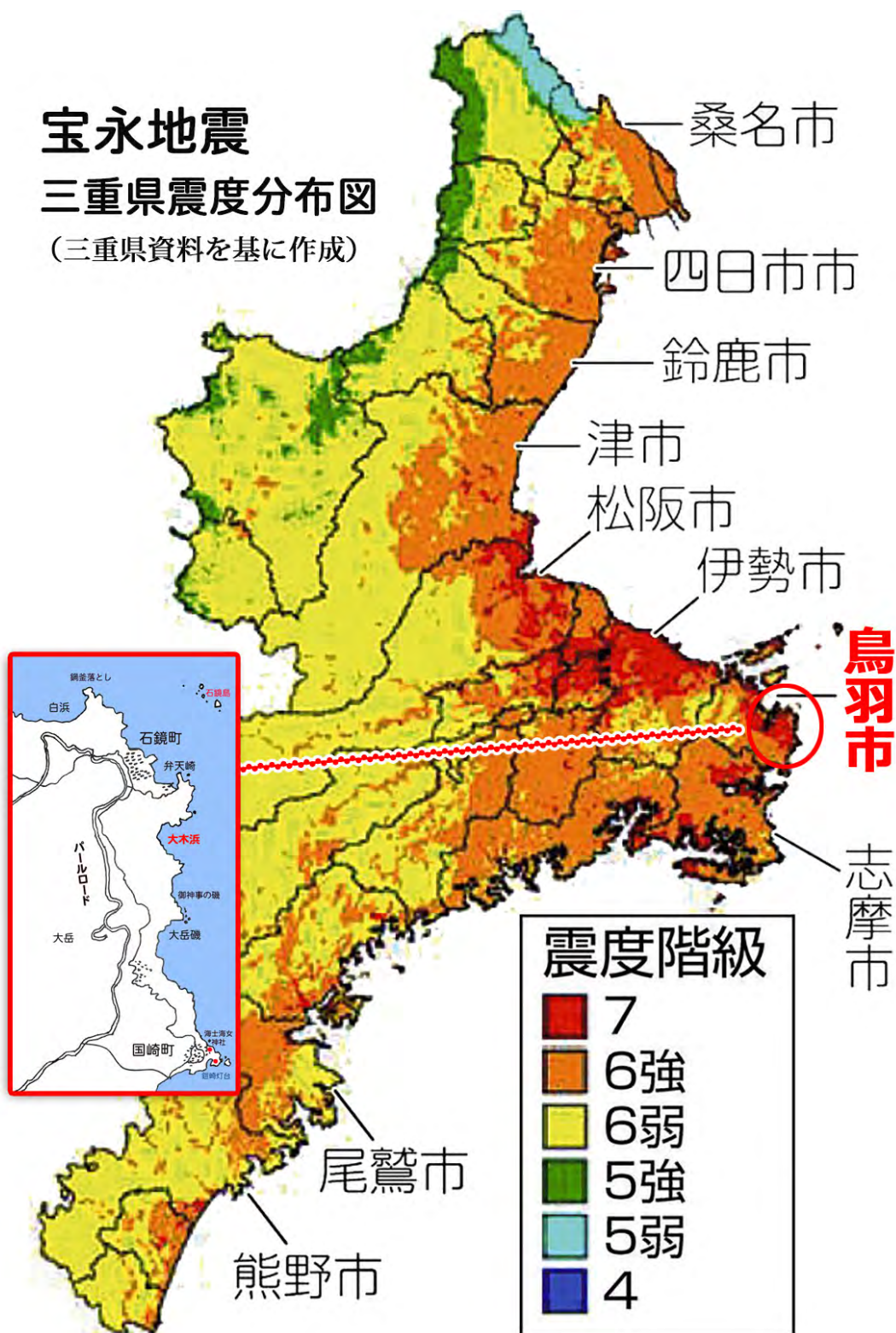
それも、ただのクジラではなく、銚吉が思わず「アシュラ」と名付けた、あの雄クジラが再び沖合に姿を現したのです。

この後、銚吉ら漁師たちは、このザトウクジラ「アシュラ」の捕獲に船団を出しますが、かえって翻弄^{ほんろう}され続け、そのさなか宝永地震が発生、クジラも船団ともに大津波に飲み込まれていきます。

宝永地震

三重県震度分布図

(三重県資料を基に作成)



銚吉を載せた勢子舟^{せこぶね}は10メートルを
超える津波に運ばれたかと思うや、さら
に右舷^{おうのうらわん}に生浦湾から押し寄せた波をま
とに受け、勢子船は無残に打ち砕かれ、
銚吉が気が付いた時は、どこをどう運ば
れたものか、舟板にしがみついた状態で
おうさつ
相差の村まで運ばれてきていました。

気が付けば、昨日まで人の生活があっ
た場所が、瓦礫^{がれき}の山と化しています。

銚吉は、身体中にできた傷や打ち身に
もかまわず、ただ呆けたように瓦礫の山
さまよ
を彷徨っていききました。

虚脱状態の思いのなかに「無慈悲にあ
の母子クジラを殺した、そのバツが当たっ
たんだろーか」、そんな思いが湧きあがっ
てきます。

「違う、そんなはずがない、あのことと
は関係ない」と思うのですが、そう思う
はな
端から、あの母クジラの咆哮^{ほうこう}が胸の中に
よみがえり、怒りのこもった雄クジラの眼
差しがよみがえってきます。

降り注ぐ血しぶき、グォーッという凄ま
じい断末魔^{だんまつま}の咆哮^{ほうこう}、それを見守る雄クジ
ラの怒りに満ちた低周波音。

それらの怒りとも悲しみとも思える音の
波にかぶさるように、今にも消え入りそう
な、か弱い赤子の泣き声が響いてきます。

「この娘^こをお願いします……」

目の前に、青白い腕に抱きかかえられ
た赤子が差し出されました……

銚吉は、訳も分からず無造作に赤子を
受け取ったと思ったのですが、気が付けば



鳥羽展望台から眺める太平洋

抱えたつもりの腕の中には何もありませんでした。

夢か？

でも赤子の消え入りそうな泣き声は、まだ聞こえてきます。

見れば、足元の崩れた建物の傍らに、子供を守るように抱え込んだ女の骸がありました。

銚吉は後先のことも考えず、咄嗟に赤子を我が腕に抱え込んでいました。

懐にそのか弱い命を感じながら、銚吉は何とか千鳥ヶ浜へたどり着きました。

内陸へは瓦礫の山で閉ざされています。海を目指すことが唯一生へ繋がるように感じられたのです。

浜で使えそうな一艘の小舟を見つけ出

した銚吉は、自分とこの赤子の運命を「海」に委ねることとしました。

海は、少なくとも彼とこの赤子の命を奪わなかったのですから。

銚吉は、傷んだ体を艀に委ねるようにゆっくりと漕ぎ出しました。

衛星カメラの画像に動きがみられました。漁師風の男が赤子を抱えて海へ飛び込んだのです。

男は生きることをあきらめ赤子とともに死を選んだのでしょうか？

しかし、今、衛星カメラがとらえきれない海面下では、予想もしなかったことが起こっていました。



相差町の海岸・千鳥ヶ浜

赤子の消え入るような泣き声がイルカたちを呼び寄せたのでしょうか。小舟の周りにイルカの群れが集まりだしたのです。

一頭のイルカが船べりに頭を覗^{のぞ}かせ、銚^{うな}吉に何かを促すように話しかけています。

銚吉には何のことかわからず、イルカを追いかおうとするのですが、その銚吉に別の一頭が体当たりし、彼を海へ突き落としました。

そこで銚吉が見たのは、イルカの母親と幼い子供のイルカの姿でした。

子供のイルカは、母親の乳腺^{にゅうせん}に吻^{ふん}（くちばし）を突っ込み、母親の体内に収まった乳頭に吸いつきます。そして吻を抜き出すと、乳腺から勢いよく乳が海へと噴き出していきます。イルカの乳は脂肪分が強く、液体になったチーズのようで、海水にはな

かなか混じり合わないのです。

イルカの母親と銚吉の眼が合い、銚吉はすべてを理解しました。

小舟に戻った銚吉は、今度は赤子を抱えるようにして海へ飛び込み、両手でつかんだ赤子を海中で、イルカの下腹に向けて差し出したのです。

イルカの下腹に「小」の字のように刻まれた生殖腺^{せいしよくせん}、その片側の乳腺から白い筋となって乳が吹き出します。

不思議な光景でした。そして、忘れられない光景でした。

銚吉の眼からも涙が吹き出し海水に交ざりあって消えていきました。



2. 太地へ

イルカの社会はメス社会です。子供たちも、雄はある年齢に達すると群れから離れて若い雄だけで群れをつくり暮らすようになり、繁殖相手はんしよくあいてを探すようになります。繁殖相手が見つければ種だけを残し、雄は群れから離れていきます。

したがってイルカの群れは、大お婆さんが群れのリーダーとなり、その娘たちや、そのまた子供たちで一つのポッド（群れ）を形成します。新生児は、母親だけでなく、そのおばさんや群れ全体で面倒をみて育てていくわけです。

銑吉と赤子を助けたイルカの群れも、リーダーの大お婆さんの指示で、新たに母

となった孫娘の乳を、飢えた人間の赤子に与えようとしたのでした。

そればかりか、銑吉の操る小舟の周りを群れが助けるようにリードし、彼女たちの縄張りの一つである太地沖へと導いてきたのです。

しかし宝永津波ほうえいつなみの被害は、伊勢湾沿岸から、紀伊半島沿岸、大阪湾から紀淡海峽そしょうを遡上し、さらに土佐湾沿岸が最も被害が激しく、九州東部、瀬戸内海沿岸、伊豆半島から房総半島に至る沿岸、さらには八丈島まで、その被害はおよび、この太地の捕鯨業にも壊滅的な被害をもたらしていたのです。

太地の浦だけで、流失・損壊した家屋は217軒にのぼり、多くの漁船や漁具が破損・流失し、多くの捕鯨従事者が波にさ



太地の古式捕鯨で重要な拠点の一つとなった天然の良港・森浦湾（和歌山県太地町）

らわれ、生活が成り立たなくなるという状況に追い込まれていました。

津波の被害ばかりか、地震の地殻変動により、太地一帯は地盤が沈降し、津波が引いた後も潮が引きにくくなり、その後の復興もままならないという状況だったのです。

大規模な援助なくしては、復興は難しく、太地の捕鯨業も、鳥羽・石鏡いじかの捕鯨業同様に壊滅かいめつの道を歩まざるを得なかったのです。

ちなみに石鏡の捕鯨業は「かつお漁」へと移行し生き残っていきました。

しかし、この太地の捕鯨業の復興に大規模な援助、それは資金の貸付はもちろんですが、大規模な労働力の援助まで提供した集団がいたのです。

紀州藩は、後には捕鯨を重要な産業として保護し、「御手組」おてぐみとして藩の公認・直轄事業に組み込みましたが、この宝永津波のころは、捕鯨業はといえば、和田家が率いる個人的な事業であり、しかも藩自体の被害も甚大で、資金援助あるいは人的な援助ができるような状態ではありませんでした。

その頃、クジラが捕獲されると、その浜での解体作業を補助していた集団があります。彼らは大坂は渡辺村で皮革を扱う「太鼓屋又兵衛」配下の者たちです。

エタゑと蔑称され、動物の皮革はを剥ぎ、なめし、太鼓や三味線等の商品に加工する技術集団の人達です。

彼らの中でも、クジラの解体を扱う技能集団は、どうも太地の一角に定住し、ク



太鼓屋又兵衛屋敷跡（大阪市 浪速玉姫公園）

ジラの解体を担っていたようなのです。

これは僕の想像ですが、宝永津波で太地のクジラ漁が大打撃を受ける以前は、クジラ漁の時期になると、彼らが太坂から移動していたと思われます。

それが宝永津波のため、復興資金を太坂の皮革を一手に扱う「太鼓屋又兵衛」から借り受けることとなりました。そこには、鯨肉以外の骨、髭、皮等々、捨てるような部位を太坂の太鼓屋又兵衛が一手に仕入れ加工し、全国に流通させていたという背景があるようなのです。

彼らは資金援助だけでなく、復興の労働力として大挙して太地に移動し、以前は、漁獲期だけの滞在だったものが、復興後もそのまま定住し、クジラの解体の手助けをしていたのではないか、そのように僕は考

えております。

話を戻しましょう。

太地の燈明崎——そこは捕鯨の際、^{やまみ}「山見」といってクジラの動きを見張り、船団に^{はた}幟や^{のろし}狼煙でその動きを知らせ指揮する指令所の一つでした。海拔は60メートルありますから。ここは宝永津波の際も、被害を受けなかったところの一つです。

その燈明崎に、一人たずみ眼下の海を眺めている女の姿がありました。

彼女の名は八重。^{やえ}

彼女は、刃刺しである夫とまだ一歳にも満たない娘が、避難途中に波にさらわれたのです。

以来、毎日のように、半里の山道をこの燈明崎へ上ってきては、夫と娘が帰ってくるのを待っているのです。



燈明崎の山見跡（和歌山県 太地町）

その八重の目に、イルカの群れに囲まれ、まるでイルカに導かれるように、一艘の小舟が入り江へと入ってくる光景が見えたのです。

青ざめ沈み切っていた八重の顔に赤みが戻り、目にも光が戻ってきます。

八重は、半里（約2キロ）ある入り江への道を思わず走り出しました。

（あの子が、あの子が帰ってくる、あの子が帰ってくる!）

これが銚吉と八重、そして、いじかと名付けられる娘との出会いとなるわけです。

ところで、今、^{とうみょうざき}燈明崎^{やまみ}という山見の一つが登場しましたが、太地にはこの燈明崎以外に4か所の山見があり、回遊するクジラの発見と、実際のクジラ漁にあたっては、それぞれの山見が連絡し合い、海

^{せこぶね}上の勢子舟、^{あみぶね}網舟にも指示を出す、捕鯨^{かなめ}業の要となる最重要地点があります。

当然、海を見下ろす高台にありますので、宝永津波の際は、太地の人達の避難所となったことが察せられます。

ちなみに現在判明している山見を紹介しておくと、「燈明崎・海拔約60m」、それに次の「^{かんとりざき}梶取崎・海拔約20～30m」、この二つが、太地の山見のうちで最も重要な山見になります。

続いて「高塚台連絡所・海拔約30m」、ここは山見というよりも、名前通り山見間の連絡を中継する地点のようです。

最後の「向島・海拔約3m」、ここには「大納屋」が置かれ、クジラ舟の保管修理、クジラ網や漁具の保管修理が行われ、地方から流れてきた刃刺しの住まいがあり



岩門（せきもん） 和田の東屋敷跡（和歌山県 太地町）

ます。

これは僕の推測ですが、後にはクジラの解体に携わるエタといわれる人達も、この地に住んでいたのではと思われます。

そして、流れ刃刺しを夫に持つ八重の住まいも、また、この辺りにありました。

ただ一番高い頂上部分に上っても3 m程度であり、宝永津波の際、八重の夫をはじめ、この山頂を目指し逃げた人たちは、波に吞まれ助かりませんでした。

八重はといえば、たまたま実家のあるせきもん岩門に帰っており、高塚台連絡所へ逃げ一命を取り留めました。

岩門は、紀伊風土記に「山を切り開きて門をなす」と言われており、太地捕鯨の創始者和田家の東屋敷と言われたところで、その門の内側には、5000 坪に及

ぶ屋敷構えが広がっていました。

八重の両親は、この和田の東屋敷に夫婦共に奉公しておりました。

「なぜ娘を連れてこなかったのか？ 連れてきていれば、あの子だけでも助けることができたのに」……

その思いに責めさいなまれ、八重は、毎日のように燈明埼へ上り、帰らぬ二人を待つこととなったのです。



向山に祀られた弁財天（宝永津波の後に移設）



入り江に面してある向山（和歌山県 太地町）



二か所の山見「灯明崎」と「梶取崎」、そして「高塚連絡所」の位置関係





燈明崎の狼煙台



梶取崎の山見



高塚台連絡所

3. 太地捕鯨業の復活

^{せんきち}銚吉の漕ぐ小舟は、イルカの群れに守られながら、こうして太地の入り江へ到着しました。

生き残った浜の人達が入り江へ駆けつけ、舟の中に倒れ込んでいる銚吉と赤子を助けようします。

「生きちよるぞーッ」

「何ちゅうこっちゃ、ややまでおる!」

浜の漁師たちをかき分けて、息を切らせた女が小舟に駆け寄ります。

「八重さんや、みんな、どいたれ!」

浜の人達は、これで八重も正気付くのではと思いました。

主人と娘を波にさらわれた八重の目には、この小舟で、二人が自分のもとへ戻っ

てきたように思われたのです。

八重の正気は戻ることはありませんでした。それでも両親や和田の親方の計らいで、銚吉は八重と所帯を持ち、太地の刃刺しとして暮らしていくこととなったのです。

銚吉は、二人の娘となった赤子に、自分たちのルーツである石鏡^{いじか}を名前として与えました。同時に、同じイルカの乳をのんだいわば乳兄弟ともいえるバンドウイルカの子供にも同じ「いじか」の名前を与えたのです。

二人を助けたイルカの群れも太地の沖合で暮らすようになり、しばらくの間、太地の人々の生活を支えるようになっていきました。

クジラ漁が復活するまでの間、春（3月～5月頃）と秋（9月～10月頃）には、黒潮に乗って訪れる魚の群れをイルカたち



が入り江へ追い込んでいき、それを漁師たちが網で捕らえる。網からこぼれた魚たちをイルカがエサとして食べる、そんな人とイルカの共生が、この太地で実現していたのです。

その要にいたのが銚吉でした。

漁に出た銚吉たちは、まずイルカの群れを探します。イルカの群れを見つけると、船べりを叩いて漁の準備ができたことをイルカに知らせます。するとイルカたちは魚の群れを探し、発見するやリーダーが大きくジャンプして銚吉に知らせます。

「おばやんが飛んだ、行くでえ！」

漁の開始です。

イルカたちが魚の群れを入り江に追い込み、銚吉たち漁師が網で魚の群れを掬い上げます。網からこぼれた魚たちをイルカたちが食べるという寸法です。

しばらくの間、こうした人とイルカの共生が太地の浜を支えており、自然、銚吉も太地で大きな存在となっていました。

その頃、和田の親方自ら復興資金調達のため、大坂は渡辺村「太鼓屋又兵衛」のもとへと旅立ったのです。

資金の借入は順調に進み、資金ばかりか大勢の人的資源の協力が約束されました。

今迄はクジラ漁の時期にだけ解体作業を助けていた「エタ」と蔑まれていた人たちが本格的にその一翼を担うようになり、食肉以外の骨や革、髭^{ひげ}、油といったクジラの部位の大部分を太鼓屋が仕入れ全国に流通させるようになっていったのです。

大がかりな復興計画がスタートし、銚吉も漁以外の時は、率先して「エタ」の人たちと力を合わせ働くようになっていきました。この太地では、身分制度の外に置か



れた人たちが、幾分のぎくしゃくはあったものの浜の人たちと共存することになったのです。

「イルカ」と「ヒト」、「身分制度の枠を超えたつながり」、一時のユートピアが太地に出現した感がありました。

やがて失われた漁具や網、そしてクジラ舟さえも新造され、クジラ漁が復活される体制が整っていきました。

4. 解体場の「みなし児」

その日は見事なザトウクジラ^とが獲れ、二艘^{もっそうぶね}の持左右舟に曳かれて太地湾の入り江に

入ってきました。

高塚連絡所からの知らせを受け、飛鳥神社前の浜では、すでに受け入れの準備が整っています。

その様子を、太地のクジラ博物館所蔵^{ほげいえす}「捕鯨絵図」等の図録で見てください。

重しの樽を付けた網に何重にもに絡めとられ、幾本もの銚を背に受けたクジラは、^{さしがこ}刺水夫によってとどめが刺されます。

同時にクジラには「鼻切り」が施され、移送のために縄が鼻に通され、クジラの両端に横付けられた二艘の持双舟に固定されます。

クジラは絶命すると海底に沈んでしま



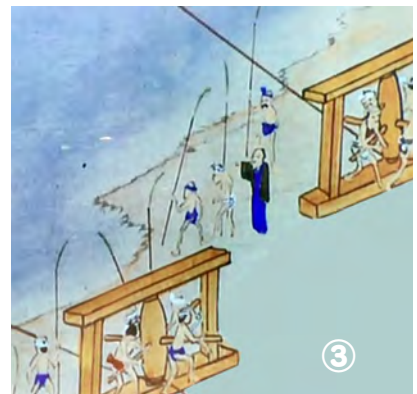
網取り法での捕鯨（捕鯨絵図／くじらの博物館）



鯨の引き上げを待つ（捕鯨絵図／くじらの博物館）



捕獲し曳航されてきた鯨を轆轤を使って浜へ引き上げる（捕鯨絵図／くじらの博物館）



うため、絶命寸前にこの作業が行われるのです(図①)。

太地浜には入り江に面して「飛鳥神社」^{あすかじんじや}が建てられています。解体作業は、この飛鳥神社の前で行われるのですが、それは、ただ単にクジラを捌く^{さば}という以上に、クジラの命をいただくという神事にもなっているためです。

太地浜には、クジラの到着を見守る浜の人達が集まっています(図②)。

浜には海に面して「かぐらさん」といわ^{ろくろ}れる轆轤が3台設置され、男たちが取りつき、この轆轤を回しています。

持双舟で運ばれたクジラは浅瀬で大きく

切り分けられ、それが轆轤で浜へ引き上げられることになります(図③④)。

轆轤は、クジラを浜へ引き上げるためだけでなく、⑤図を見ていただいて分かるように、クジラの皮を剥ぐ作業にも使われていました。

図⑥をみてください。赤マルで囲った部分を右側に拡大しています。

小さな男の子が棒で折檻^{せっかん}され泣き叫び、^{かたわ}傍には大きな肉の塊が転がっています。

クジラの解体には「エタ」と呼ばれる身分的に差別された人たちが、その作業を手伝います。その際、骨についた端肉などを勝手に持ち帰ることは黙認されていまし



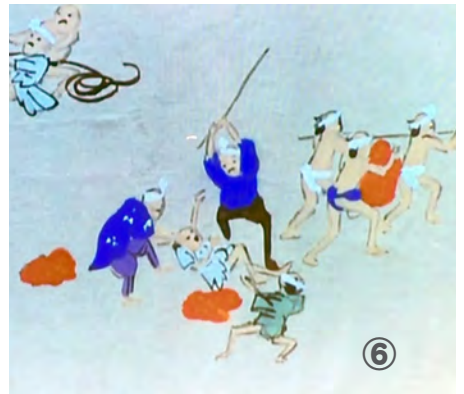
鯨の解体(紀州熊野浦捕鯨図屏風／和歌山県立博物館)



鯨の皮を剥ぐのも轆轤が使われる(勇魚取絵巻)



飛鳥神社前の浜で解体される鯨・鯨の肉を盗もうとした子供が折檻されている(捕鯨絵図／くじらの博物館)





「捕鯨絵図」に描かれた飛鳥神社と今の飛鳥神社（右の写真）



「五島における捕鯨沿革図説」（長崎文化歴史博物館蔵）に描かれた大納屋の内部

た。この子もそんな「エタ」の家族の子なのでしょうか？ それにしても、傍に転がっているのは、端肉とも言えない大きな肉の塊です。浜の漁師たちにとっても、とても黙認できるものではありませんでした。

勢子舟から降りたばかりの銚吉の目に、この光景が飛び込んできました。

入り江の対岸の向島には、大納屋があって、切り分けられた鯨肉の処理や脂肪を炊き込んで油を取り出す加工施設があります。このため、「エタ」の人達も、この向島の山の一角に細々と暮らしています。

また、地の漁師でなく地方から流れてきた刃刺したちの住まいも、この向島と定められていました。住まいする区域は隔て

られていましたが、それでも銚吉の耳には、聞くともなく、「エタ」の人達の暮らしぶりが、それとなく伝わってきます。

折檻されている子は「カイ」と呼ばれる子で、母親は、大納屋の復旧作業中に起こった事故で寝たきりになっていました。

銚吉は、この子の母親が男たちに交じって太地の復興に力を貸してくれたことを浜の男たちに話し、

「エタちゅうたって、この子の親は太地もんの者には恩のある女子おなごやぞ。その子が母親のためにくすねようとしたんや、黙って見逃したらんかい！」

銚吉はカイを助け、鯨肉とともに母親のもとへ送り届けようとしていました。

しかし、銚吉が小屋へ着いた時には、
女はもう亡くなる寸前でした。そして、
「この子をお願いします」

その一言を言い残して息を引き取って
いったのです。

銚吉の脳裏に石鏡での出来事が、ザトウ
クジラの断末魔ほうこうの咆哮とともに思い起こ
されました。

銚吉はカイを八重といじかが待つ小屋へ
連れ帰りますが、八重は、まるで今までも
自分の子供であったように、

「いじか、お兄ちゃんが帰ったよ。」

「今までどこにおったんや、泣いてんと
こっち来て、元気な顔を見せんか。」

こうして、誰も血はつながっていない、
それでいて仲の良い不思議な家族が、この
太地に誕生したのです。

5. 「いじか」と「イジカ」

宝永津波の傷跡が「太地」から拭い去ぬぐ
られつつあります。それとともに捕鯨業も
復活し、イルカと人が共働した世界でも珍
しい漁業も忘れられていこうとしています。

同様に身分差別を超えた共働も影を薄く
し、一瞬の夢のように出現したユートピア
も、これもまた捕鯨業の復活とともに消え
ていく運命にありました。

ただ銚吉と八重の夫婦の中に、いじか
とカイの兄弟の中に、そして、いじかとイ
ルカのコミュニティのなかに、そのユート
ピアは、かすかに残されていました。

「いじか」と、その乳兄弟の「イジカ」
の絆きずなは、今も健在です。



大納屋置かれ、渡り刃刺しやエタの人たちが住まいしたと思われる向島

太地の浜でも、イルカの乳を飲んだ「いじか」の話は、「イルカに育てられた娘」という尾ひれを付けはしましたが、人々に伝えられ、銚吉一家と、沖に群れをつくるイルカたちの存在は、何か不思議なものを見るように、人々の心の底に残っておりました。

あるクジラ漁の時です。^{せこぶね}勢子舟が海底から突き上がってきたナガスクジラに真っ二つにされるという事故が起こりました。

ナガスクジラは、続いて二番船の横っ腹にも突進し、二艘の勢子舟を沈めるや、再び海底深く潜り、網をかわして逃げ去っていききました。

大方の乗員は助け上げられましたが、どうしても勢子（^{せこ}漕ぎ手）の一人が見つかりません。あきらめかけたその時、イルカた

ちの鳴き声が湧きあがるとともに、その勢子が^{まげ}鬚を一頭のイルカに咥えられ引かれて来たのです。

イルカに助けられた勢子は、仲間から^{くじらかぎ}鯨鉤で舟へと引き上げられました。

このことがあって以降、銚吉一家は、向島の小屋に住みながら、太地の人たちとはどこか一線を引くような存在になっていきました。それは^{うと}疎まれたり、毛嫌いされたりするのでなく、共に働きながら、頼りにしながらも、どこか自分たちとは違うような、何か^{いふ}畏怖に近いようなものを、浜の人たちは感じていました。

今日も「いじか」と「カイ」の兄妹が小舟で沖へ漕ぎだしています。

^{へさき}舳先に立った「イジカ」の口元から、かん高い指笛の音が発せられるや、沖合では



入り江で遊ぶバンドウイルカ

一頭のイルカが、その指笛に應えるように大きなジャンプを繰り返しました。

6. アシュラとの死闘

銚吉と「いじか」が太地へ来て、既に10年が過ぎようとしています。

「カイ」も15歳になり、次の漁では父親について初のクジラ漁を体験することになります。と言っても、同じ舟に乗るわけではありません。

父親の銚吉は、^{せこぶね}勢子舟の三番船に「刃刺し」として乗り込みますが、「カイ」は、捕鯨の際に使われる網や樽を回収する^{たるぶね}樽舟

に見習いとして乗り込むことになります。

巨大なクジラを仕留めるため、山見からの指示を受けながら、^{あみぶね}網舟がクジラに行く手に網を張り巡らし、そこへクジラを追い込んでいきます。網にはクジラの動きを鈍らせるため重しとなる樽が無数につけられています。クジラがその網を被ったら、漁師たちはその網を断ち切り、更に次の進路に網を張り巡らせ、何重にも何重にも網を被せクジラの動きを鈍らせ弱らせていきます。

クジラのほうも、この網から抜けるため、素早く海中深くに潜り網を外そうとします。

海中に潜ったクジラが次にどこに息継ぎ



勢子壱番船



勢子参番船



勢子弐番船



網船



樽船



持左右船 (もっそうぶね)



横網船



のため姿を現せるか、その進路を読み網舟を配置しなければなりません。

クジラと漁師の頭脳戦になるわけですが、この使い捨てられた網や樽を回収するのが樽舟の役割になります。

樽舟には通常二、三名が乗り組みますが、その多くが一線を引いた老練な水夫^{かこ}たちです。そして捕鯨業の次世代を担う子供たちも15歳になるや、この樽舟に同乗し樽を回収する作業をしながら捕鯨のイロハを学ぶことになるのです。しかも樽舟は、捕鯨の様子を眺め渡せる安全な場所にいるため、子供たちは、安全に捕鯨の全体像を把握し学べるという寸法です。

そして、銚吉の子「カイ」にも、その機会は意外と早くやってきました。

その日の早朝、浜に半鐘が鳴り響くとともに、燈明崎に狼煙^{とうみょうざき}が上がり、沖にク

ジラの存在が知らされます。

向島の中継地で銚吉が燈明崎を見やると、そこには沖にザトウクジラが現れたことを知らせるべく浅葱色^{あさぎいろ}の幟がひらめています。

銚吉の傍に控えていた「カイ」が、「お父やん、ザトウや!」
「上りクジラやな、どうやら子連れやぞ」
「どうするんやろな？」

二人は急ぎ浜へ向かいましたが、ここしばらくの不漁のせいもあって、浜では出漁が決まり、その準備が始まっていました。

普段なら上りクジラは子連れで気も荒く、栄養状態も良くないため見逃すことが多いのですが……。

銚吉は鳥羽でのことを思い出し、嫌な予感がしました。

「カイよ、今回は見送れ」



ザトウクジラのプロウ（潮吹き）

「いやじゃ、行く!」

「……ほうか、ほたら樽舟やいうて気い
抜いたらいかんぞ。六じいの言うこと、よう
聞くんやぞ!」

^{せこぶね かこ}
勢子舟が水夫たちに担がれ海へと運ば
れていきます。

クジラ舟は船足を早めるために桐油や
^{けいゆ}
鯨油が船底に塗られています。

また船体を遠くからでも識別できるよ
う、多彩な模様が施されていますが、こ
れも漆が使われ水面との摩擦が最小限に
抑えられています。

このため舟は浜を引きずるのでなく、
担いで海へ運ばれるのです。

網舟が先行し、続いて勢子舟、持双舟^{もっそうぶね}
と続き、最後に樽舟と、総勢二十艘近い
船団が次々と沖立ちしていきます。

樽舟のうち一艘は老練な六兵衛が船頭

を務めますが、カイはその見習いとして乗
り組むことになり、船団の後方で、はじ
めて捕鯨の全体像を、その目で見るこ
とになるのです。

「カイよ、いじかはどうしちよる? 連
れていけて、ごねんかったか?」

舟が沖に出たころ、六兵衛が気になって
尋ねます。

普段から、人の好い六兵衛は、いじか
から樽舟に乗せてくれるよう、何かある度
にうるさくせがまれており、今回の沖立ち
に際し、あまりにいじかが静かなもので、
かえって気になっていたのです。

「六じい、わしはここじゃ、ここにおる
ぞッ!」

船尾の筵がいきなり跳ね上げられ、そ
こに隠れていたいじかがヌーッと顔を出し
ました。



燈明崎の狼煙(のろし) 場跡

「こりゃあ、たまげたのう。ここまで来たら帰れとは言えんしのう。」

沖立ちで慌^{あわ}ただしい中、舟が向島の傍を通る際に泳ぎ着いたに違いありません。

「ほんまに、しゃあないガキやなあ」

言葉とは裏腹に、六兵衛は面白がっている風にも見えます。

「カイ、しっかり見張っとけや!」

「六じい、すまんのう」

沖合では、子連れのザトウクジラの縄張りがすでに始まっているようです。

「六じい、別のザトウや!」

いじかが、張られた網の方ではなく、その外側を指さして叫んでいます。

見れば、網で囲われた縄張りの外側の海面が思いっきり泡立ち、いきなり巨大なザトウクジラが姿を現したのです。と思う間もなく包囲網の一番外枠の網舟に向

かい^{すさ}凄まじい勢いで突き進んでいきます。

六左衛門は「ささやき筒」を口元に持って来るや、あらん限りの大声で叫びます。

「七番にザトウが突っ込むぞッ!」

母子クジラの追い込みに気がとられていた陣立てが、一斉に身震いするかのよう^うに崩れようとしています。

網舟七番船の水夫^{あみふね}たちが一^か斉に海へ飛び込むや否や、舟はザトウクジラの正面からの体当たりを受け真^こっ二つに裂けてしまいました。

勢子^{せこぶね}舟の三番船でこれを見ていた銚吉^{うめ}が呻^{うめ}くように呟^{つぶや}きます。

「アシュラや……!」

「そのまま一番に突っ込むぞーッ!」

アシュラの波を切り裂くような音に、銚吉の叫び声が被ります。

網舟一番船の乗り手たちは、逃げる間



ザトウクジラの母子

もなくアシュラの体当たりで舟と共に海へ放り出されました。

二重に網を被ったアシュラは、勢いよく海中深くに潜り網をかわします。

「二番や、二番の真下から来るぞーッ！」

アシュラの動きを読んだ銚吉が「ささき筒」を口元に当て叫びます。

次の瞬間、二番の網舟が海面から大きく持ち上げられ海面へ叩きつけられます。

ザトウの母子に逃げ道が開かれました。

アシュラは母子を先導し逃げていくかに思われました。

……が、アシュラは戻ってきたのです。

勢子舟の四番、五番、六番船が陣立てする右翼を狙っているかのようです。

アシュラが右翼に狙いをつけたかと思うや、そのまま海中へと潜ります。

「いかん、こっちへ来るぞ！」

銚吉は、アシュラが海中で方向を変え、左翼の一番、二番、三番の勢子舟を狙って来ると読んだのです。

銚吉の読みは的中しましたが、それよりもアシュラの動きが勝ちました。

陣列の中央にいた三番船は、アシュラの背に持ち上げられ空中高く上がったかと思うや、次には勢いよく海面にたたきつけられました。

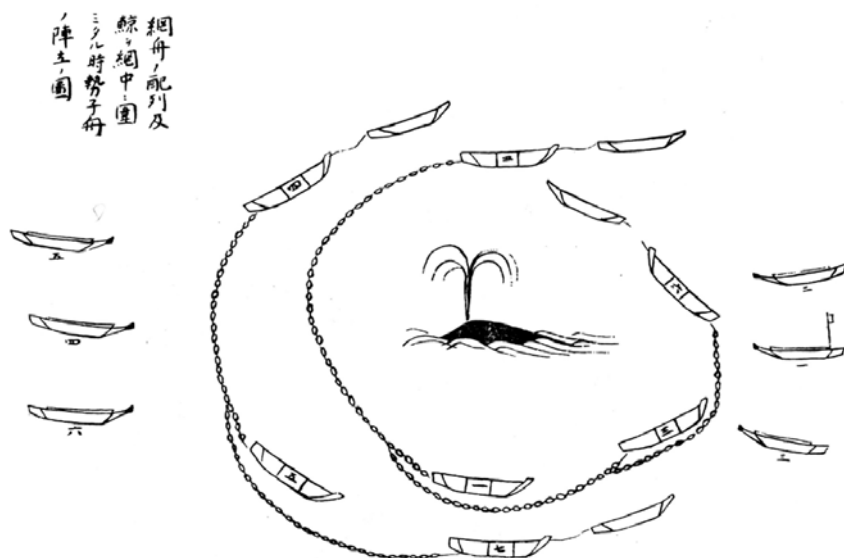
一番、二番船も打ち砕かれ、海は凄惨な修羅場と化しました。

「お父ーッ、お父がやられた！」

いじかとカイを乗せた樽舟が必死になって現場に向かいます。

同時に周りにいた勢子舟、持双舟、樽舟等、残った舟の一群が海に落ちた水夫たちの救助に向かいます。

救助に向かった舟にもアシュラの執拗



古式捕鯨における網舟の配列および勢子舟の陣立ての図（太地くじらの博物館）

な攻撃はやりません。

海に投げ出されたいじかの目に悠然と
去っていくアシュラの姿が焼き付きました。

7. 漂流

激しい揺れで海へ投げ出されたいじかに
救いの手が差し出されました。

カイです。樽舟には六じいの姿もなく、
カイがただ一人、青ざめた顔で呆然として
いますが、それでもしっかりといじかの手
を握り救い上げてくれたのです。

カイはいじかを引き上げるや、二人して
その場にへたり込んでしまいました。

.....

「お父や、お父を探さなあかん。」

気を取り直したいじかが触先に仁王立
ちになり、思いっきり指笛を鳴らします。

やがてにぎやかな鳴き声と共に、イジカ
(いじかの乳兄弟) を先頭にイルカたちが
群れになって集まってきます。

こうしてイルカの群れも加わって銚吉の
搜索が続きます。以前のナガスクジラの
事件の時も、もう駄目だと思われた水夫
をイルカたちが助けてくれました。

そう思えば、(必ず見つかる、きっと見
つかる)、そう自分に言い聞かせるので
すが、そのうち陽も落ち、気が付けば、周
りにはあの喧噪も消え去り舟の一艘すら
見つけることはできません。

どうやら気が付かないまま、黒瀬川(黒
潮)の流れに捉われてしまったようです。

ついに銚吉が見つかることもないまま、
いつしか、いじかもカイも疲れこんで寝込
んでしまっていました。

そうして何日流されたでしょうか？



悠々と離れいくザトウクジラ

いつしか時間の感覚もなくなりました。

ただ（お父はきっと無事に太地へ帰っていて探しに来てくれる）、その思いだけを頼りに流されている毎日でした。

わずかに積まれていた水も非常食も今では底をつきました。

ただイルカの群れが、舟に伴走するように付き添ってくれています。

ある夜、いじかは、波の音にふと目が覚めました。それとも夢の中なのでしょうか？ 真上には天の川を中心に無数の星々が輝いています。

（浜でも、こんなにたくさんの星は見たことがなかったなあ……）

すると流れ星でしょうか、一筋星が流れ、いえ、その星は自分に向かって進んでくるのです。そして自分の中へ吸い込まれていきます。

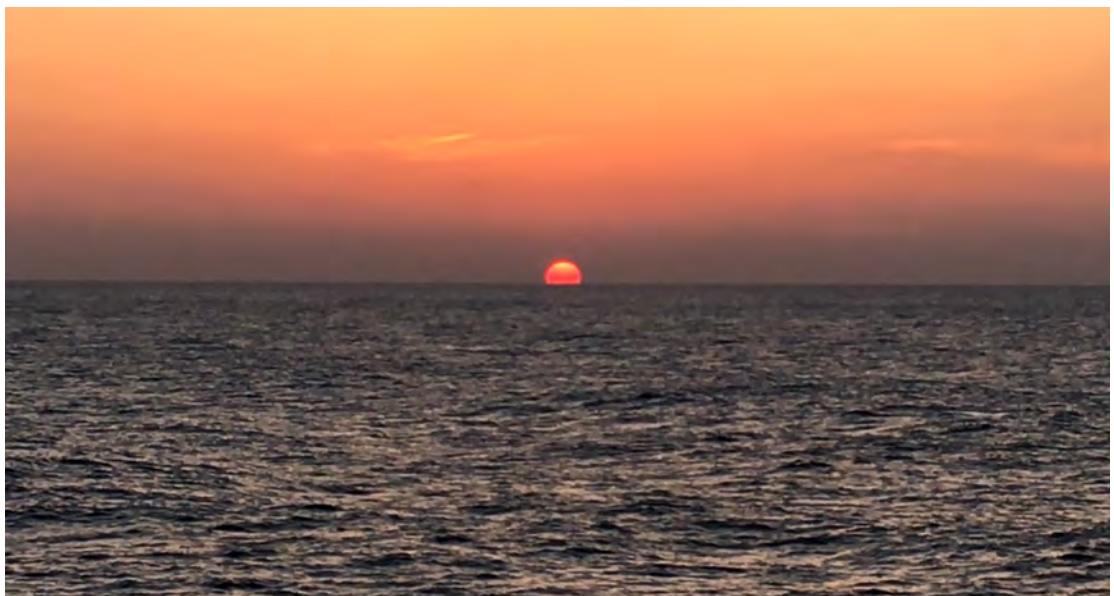
一筋、また一筋、次から次へ、星が降るように自分に向かって飛び込んできては、自分の中に吸い込まれていくのです。

星は、銑吉となり、八重となり、カイの母となり、六じいとなり、浜の人たちとなり、無数のイルカたちとなり、そしてまだ見ぬ生みの母親となって、いじかに微笑みかけては、自分の中へ消えていきます。

いじかは、例えようもない温かさというのでしょうか、やさしさというのでしょうか、今まで感じたことのないような安心感を身体中に感じていました。

いじかとカイを乗せた樽舟は、相模湾をイルカたちの群れに先導されるように南伊豆の浜辺（弓ヶ浜でしょうか？）に到着しました。

見ていた漁師の話では、まるでイルカの



果てしない太平洋の夕暮れ（小笠原丸船上から）

群れが小舟を引いてきているようだったと言います。

樽舟の舳先には、クジラ網の一部が絡まっており、それをイルカの群れが交互に引いてきたようなのです。

この後、いじかやカイがどうなったかは分かりません。

しかし、この一帯では、一時期イルカと人間が共働して漁をしていた時期があるようなのです。

黒潮に乗って移動する魚たちをイルカが湾へ追い込み、漁師たちがこれを網ですくい捕る。網からこぼれた魚たちをイルカたちがエサとする。

そんなイルカと人が共働で漁をする方法は、今でもブラジルのサンタカタリナや、アマゾンの川イルカと漁師たちとの間で見る事ができるそうです。

しかし、日本では、それも忘れられてしまいましたが、ただ不思議な言い伝えが残されています。

太地では「クジラが一頭とれば七浦栄る」という言い伝えが残されています。これに反して、この伊豆の辺り「クジラが一頭とれたら七浦枯れる」と、真逆のことが言われているのです。

おわりに

衛星からの画像は「南伊豆」の岬あたりを捉えています。

衛星カメラがどんどんズームしていくと、年老いた「いじか」が、こちらを見上げて微笑んでいます。

突然、画面は消え去り、そこに映っているのは太平洋の海面だけでした。



「ミラ、どうかしたのか？」

「なんでもない！ 衛星画像に日本が見えたような？ いじかっていう女の人を見たような！」

「バカ言うなよ！ ミラの《ふるさと》だから無理もないと思うけど、日本は50年前に太平洋の底だぜ。」

「わかってるの。」

研究室で、観測衛星から送られてくる映像をチェックしていたミラでしたが、今、自分が目にした「人とクジラの物語」を、とても伝える気にはなりませんでした。伝えても「とても信じてもらえないでしょう。

自分でも「気のせい」と打ち消そうとするのですが、

（でも、何かとても懐かしい気が……）

◇

これで、「いじか物語」の旅は終わります。それは、人とクジラの関りを追いかける僕のプロジェクトの今世での締めくくりでもありました。

この続きは「来世」へと持ち越しです。

アメリカの西海岸か、カナダか、はたまたオーストラリアか？

それを知る術はありませんが、来世も、きっと地球のどこかで、クジラやイルカたちと「地球」や「宇宙」のことを語りあっていると思います。

さて、この小さな声は、2026年の初夏、日本の、紀伊半島の中ほどにある「奈良県広陵町」という地域——北緯 34 度 32 分、東経 135 度 45 分から発信されております。





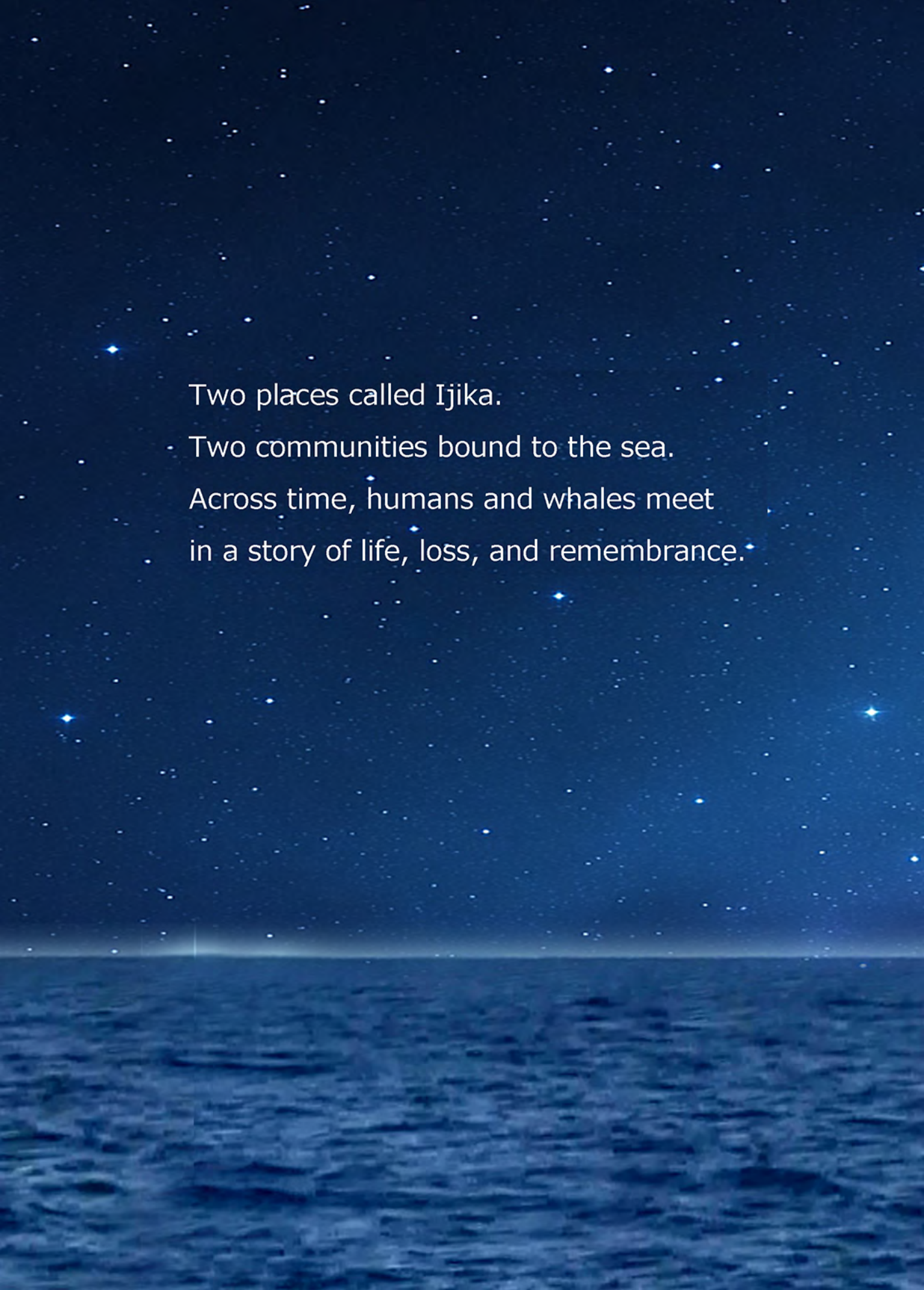
沖縄・座間味／エスコート号佐野船長提供

人とクジラのいる風景「いじか物語」

初版発行 2026 年 9 月 10 日

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		奈良県北葛城郡広陵町馬見北 4 丁目 14-7
		TEL 0745-55-8522 FAX 0745-55-8440
印刷・製本		Kindle ダイレクト・パブリッシング

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Two places called Ijika.

Two communities bound to the sea.

Across time, humans and whales meet
in a story of life, loss, and remembrance.