

The following passage appeared as the Speaking Out column in the Opinion and Commentary section of the Christian Science Monitor. It was written by a Japanese journalist named Osamu Nakashima.

## **"Why the West Should Let Japanese Eat Whale"**

Whale songs enchanted a Boston audience recently as an orchestra performed a piece entitled "And God Created Great Whales."

A listener might almost have heard the scream of the whale in the songs, imploring, "Don't kill us, please." As a Japanese, I also enjoyed it, but I was reminded of a different matter: the Western anti-whaling movement aimed at the Japanese whaling industry.

Last year the International Whaling Commission (IWC) ordered an experimental whaling moratorium starting in 1985, running for as long as five years. The purpose of this proposal is clear: a total and permanent ban.

"Why can't we eat whales?" most Japanese ask. For us, eating whale is a deep cultural tradition.

The tragedy is that antiwhaling activists don't know this. Generally they are very innocent and good-hearted people. They believe in their righteous goals based on Western values, not knowing--even hardly imagining, I am afraid--that they are cultural imperialists.

It reminds me of an old joke.

An American lady once heard about the Japanese dish sashimi and remarked: "Eat fish raw? Oh, poor Japanese, we must teach them how to cook."

Just before leaving my country, I went to Kujira-ya (a famous whale restaurant in Tokyo) because I knew I would not be able to eat whale in the United States. Moreover, I was not quite sure if I would be able to eat whale when I returned to Japan after a couple of years.

I like whale meat. Many Japanese do. How did we come to appreciate it? The history is simple: we have been eating whale, as well as fish and shellfish, for thousands of years. It was almost a necessary dish since Japan's rulers did not allow the people to eat four-legged animals from the 7th to the 19th century.

Part of the history is wrapped up in the word sukiyaki, a popular Japanese meat dish. "Suki" means plow and "yaki" means cook, in this case. The name came from the fact that some Japanese violated the prohibition against eating fourlegged animals by cooking on a plow blade in a field so as not to contaminate their homes with the smell.

Hindus don't eat beef because Hinduism says cows are holy. Jews and Muslims don't eat pork since both Judaism and Islam consider pigs unclean. How would Christians feel if these religious sects tried to forbid the eating of beef or pork?

In the same way, the Japanese feel imposed upon. What makes it difficult is that we do not debate the issue in international society, unlike Americans, since that would go against our nature.

Western values are not the only ones that should be accepted on this planet. People with different histories and cultures have different values. No one can judge another's value based on his own, even when he doesn't like it.

Americans may have forgotten an ironic historical fact. In 1852, Commodore Matthew Perry visited Japan in his famous black ships. His gun-ship diplomacy scared the Shogun's government into opening several ports, giving up a two-century isolation. Why did America demand that Japan open its door? One main reason was to get water, food, and fuel for American whalers!

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Write on one of the following:

1. Nakashima argues that the Japanese should be allowed to continue eating whale. How strong a case does he make? Are his arguments entirely persuasive, or is his position subject to some degree of reasoned criticism? (Do not merely repeat or summarize Nakashima's arguments.)
2. To what extent should a nation or group of nations seek (or be allowed) to impose standards, laws, or values on another nation? Support your position with specific examples and reasoned arguments.