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## Chronological Notes on the Commissioned Japanese Whaling Factory Ships

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### Abstract

Japanese pelagic whaling developed rapidly from 1934 to the operation of seven whaling factory ships during its golden age in the 1960's. There have been considerable changes in the whaling factories through the last half-century due to socioeconomical changes and World War II. All commissioned whaling factory ships and their activities are chronologically described.

### Introduction

Pelagic whaling using various mother ships along with accompanying catcher boats is one of the most highly developed high sea fishery systems from both ship and human management point of view. Among the many fishery mother ships, the whaling factory's characteristic huge aft slipway must be undoubtedly a symbol of the whaling industry. Historically, the large scaled whaling system yielding considerable amounts of products within a severely limited harvestable season was supported and maintained by rich stocks of whales and the socioeconomical conditions of the times.

Due to gradual but unavoidable changes concerning maintenance of mother ship whaling activities during the last half-century, many famous and/or memorable whaling factories have been scrapped or sold for other purposes. To see the historical movements around whaling factories, it seems to be worth describing the past and present status of Japanese whaling factories since they have undoubtedly been a symbol of the whaling fleets and whaling men, about which thousands and thousands of stories of man and the mighty monarchs continue to exist even if the factory ships themselves are no longer in use. The history of the Japanese whaling factory ships is considerably varied and some of it will be forgotten from people's memory as the years pass by. It is therefore worth briefly mentioning this history of Japanese whaling while one of these honourable factories is actually operating in the southern oceans. Since the tonnage of the mother ships changes so frequently by remodeling and refitting, the tonnage used throughout this article does not always agree with that found in the literature cited.

### Chronological results

Japanese pelagic whaling using factory ships began during the 1934/35 Antarctic season, when the whaling business was operated by the Nippon Hogeï

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K.K. (presently Nippon Suisan K.K.). The whaling factory ship engaged during the 1934/35 season was the "Antarctic" (9,838 tons) purchased from Norway along with five accompanying catcher boats.<sup>1)2)3)</sup> The "Antarctic" was built in England as a freezer in 1906 but she was refitted as a whaling factory in Norway in 1928. The "Antarctic" was later renamed "Tonan Maru" (9,866 tons) in 1935. During her circumnavigation from Norway to Japan, the "Antarctic" and three out of the five catcher boats entered the Antarctic waters where they engaged in experimental and exploratory whaling. It has been reported that the "Antarctic" fleet caught 125 blue, 83 fin, 4 humpback and 1 sperm, and yielded 2,159 tons of whale oil during December 24-February 17, i.e., a 57 day operation<sup>1)</sup>. The business was so successful in general that it encouraged the growth of Antarctic whaling (Fig. 1).

Prior to this, Toyo Hogei K.K., later incorporated with Nippon Hogei K.K., had promoted the purchase of a 14,000 ton freezer "Beltana" from England for use as a whaling factory ship in 1930. However, the general plan was abandoned two years later due to both the heavy fall in price of whale oil as a result of over

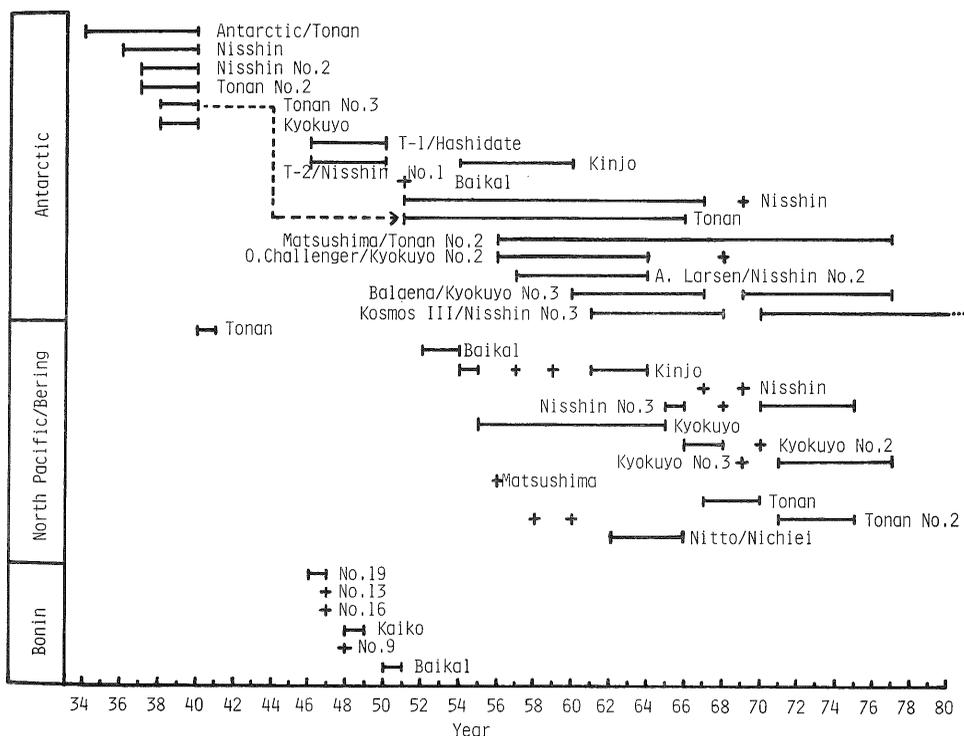


Fig. 1. Japanese whaling factories ever commissioned and their activities as the mother ship in the Bonin Islands, North Pacific, Bering Sea, and Antarctic whaling grounds. Calendar year shown as 34 in the figure indicates 1934/1935 whaling season for Antarctic operation and/or the year 1934 for the North Pacific/Bering Sea and Bonin whaling.

production in the 1930/31 season and also to the 1930 world wide financial panic. The "Beltana" was scrapped after a long mooring.

Following earlier activities by Japan to extend its whaling business on the high seas, a purely Japanese made whaling factory ship was built and commissioned in 1936. The ship was the "Nisshin Maru" (16,764 tons)<sup>4)</sup> of Taiyo Gyogyo K.K. "Nisshin Maru" was built by purchasing a blueprint of the Norwegian factory "Sir James Clark Ross".<sup>1)</sup> The construction begun in February 26 and the ship was launched on August 1. A record in ship building was that the "Nisshin Maru" was launched after 156 days and was totally completed within only 9 months from beginning construction.<sup>4)5)</sup> In 1937, two additional floating factories were fitted out: the "Nisshin Maru No. 2" (17,579 tons) of Taiyo Gyogyo K.K. and the "Tonan Maru No. 2" (19,263 tons) of Nippon Suisan K.K. Japan operated four factories in all during the 1937/38 season.<sup>1)</sup> It was only three years since the "Antarctic" entered Antarctic waters under the Japanese flag. Subsequently, both the "Tonan Maru No. 3" (19,209 tons) and the "Kyokuyo Maru" (17,548 tons) of Kyokuyo Hogeï K.K. (presently K.K. Kyokuyo) were fitted out by the fall of 1938. The "Kyokuyo Maru" was the same type of factory as "Nisshin Maru" and the "Tonan Maru No. 3" was constructed by conforming to the general arrangements of the British factory "Svend Foyn".<sup>6)</sup> These old and newly built six whaling factories all continued their Antarctic whaling operations up to the 1940/41 season. Of these six factories, only the "Tonan Maru" along with four catcher boats ever engaged in exploratory whaling in the North Pacific and Bering Sea; during the two summer seasons of 1940 (80 days) and 1941 (70 days), 681 and 590 whales respectively were caught<sup>4)</sup>. Shibuya,<sup>1)</sup> however, describes the number of whales as 673 and 579 respectively. North Pacific whaling, however, was promoted by the establishment of the consolidated agent, Hokuyo Hogeï K.K., and a similar but more complicated management system with joint control by three companies was introduced in this field after World War II.

During World War II the six floating factories were forced to suspend their whaling activities. They were drafted during 1941-42,<sup>2)6)</sup> and operated as oil tankers under the Imperial Navy. Several years before the end of World War II, they were sunk by torpedo in the Southwestern Pacific or its environs (Table 1).<sup>2)7)</sup> Japan lost its entire whaling factory ship during the war. Similar results occurred to the European whaling factories; it is reported that of 34 factories before the war only 7 were left in 1945.<sup>6)</sup> It was the end of an epoch for Japan's early but rapid growing activities in the pelagic whaling business.

After the end of World War II from 1945 onward, there were strong movements to re-establish the Japanese whaling fleet, and this gradually began to be realized. Courtesy of General Headquarters (G.H.Q.) of the Allied Forces in order to solve rationing problems supported this although the business was hardly comparable to that of pre-war days. In the spring of 1946, Japan was not able to send out any pelagic whaling fleets due to both financial weakness and the allied occupation policy banning any kind of pelagic fisheries<sup>2)7)</sup>. But whaling was released from this on August 6, 1946.<sup>6)</sup> But Okamoto<sup>7)</sup> indicates that it was on August 16. Prior to the re-opening of the ordinal pelagic whaling, the G.H.Q. permitted the harvesting of whales in the waters around Bonin Islands on November 30, 1945.<sup>8)</sup>

Table 1. *Loss of Japanese whaling factories during World War II.*

| Factory            | Tonnage | Place of sinking       | Date               |
|--------------------|---------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Nisshin Maru       | 16,765  | Balabac Str., Borneo   | May 16, 1944       |
| Nisshin Maru No. 2 | 17,679  | South of Ishigaki Is.* | April 16, 1943     |
| Tonan Maru         | 9,866   | off Indo-China         | November 28, 1943  |
| Tonan Maru No. 2   | 19,263  | South China Sea        | August 22, 1944    |
| Tonan Maru No. 3** | 19,201  | Truck Is.              | February 20, 1944  |
| Kyokuyo Maru       | 17,549  | Naze, Amami Is.        | September 19, 1943 |

\* after towing to Keelung, Taiwan, the ship was scrapped on November 30, 1943.

\*\* "Tonan Maru No. 3" was made afloat and towed 3,700 km back to Japan in April, 1951. Her fitting as whaling factory was completed and commissioned before the beginning of 1951/52 antarctic season under the resuscitated name "Tonan Maru".

and whaling was opened between December 1945 and March 1946,<sup>6)</sup> and this was extended later until 1951. Luckily, there were left undamaged several freighter-like battle ships specially built during the war under a simplified mass construction system similar to the Liberty Ship or CI cargo of the USN. One such ship called the "No. 19" (1,946 tons)<sup>2)8)</sup> was fitted out as a whaling mother ship by Taiyo Gyogyo K.K. in the spring of 1946. Mother ship whaling using a battle ship was quite unprecedented throughout whaling history. The "No. 19" was sent to the waters around the Bonin Islands to harvest blue, humpback, sei (Bryde's) and sperm whales.<sup>2)</sup> The "No. 19" was the first Japanese ship to cross the Mac Arthur Line.<sup>7)</sup> During the 1947 season two more similar ships of 1,500 tonnage, the "No. 13" and "No. 16" were fitted out by Nippon Suisan K.K. and Kyokuyo Hogeï K.K. The latter two worked for only one season. In the next season, 1948, both "No. 9" (1,300 tons) and a freezer "Kaiko Maru" (2,980 tons) were active in the Bonin grounds, but only the latter continued working the following season. In 1950 only one, a newly fitted mother ship, the "Baikal Maru" (4,744 tons) of Kyokuyo Hogeï K.K. was sent for Bonin whaling, where she caught sei and sperm whales for a couple of summer seasons.

Apart from these unusual ships somewhat like the coastal floating factory whaling in earlier days, two much larger whaling factories began activity, and were commissioned in the 1946/47 Antarctic season. They were: "Hashidate Maru" (10,896 tons) of Nippon Suisan K.K. and "Nisshin Maru No. 1" (11,803 tons) of Taiyo Gyogyo K.K.<sup>5)6)9)10)</sup> Both of them were factories reconstructed from wartime standard oil tankers of type STL and called "T-1" (=Hashidate Maru) and "T-2" (=Nisshin Maru) respectively. "Nisshin Maru No. 1" was commissioned until the 1950/51 season. After mooring for three seasons, she reemerged as the factory "Kinjo Maru" (11,051 tons), and worked from the 1954/55-1960/61 seasons, then turned to North Pacific whaling. In August 1948 the "Hashidate Maru" once commissioned as oil tanker under the control of Civilian Marchant Marine Committee (CMMC), and cruised to the Persian Gulf.<sup>11)</sup> In the 1951/52 season another factory, the "Baikal Maru" (4,744 tons) of Kyokuyo Hogeï K.K. was added to the Japanese fleet.<sup>2)9)</sup> As mentioned, the "Baikal Maru" formerly engaged in Bonin ground whaling. The "Baikal Maru", however, was unsuccessful in

Antarctic whaling and worked only the 1951/52 season, then was decommissioned from southern whaling. She engaged in North Pacific whaling until 1954. The "Nisshin Maru" (16,777 tons), the whaling factory newly constructed in 1951 was fitted out for the 1951/52 season to replace the "Nisshin Maru No. 1".<sup>5)</sup> During the same year the "Tonan Maru" (19,320 tons) was fitted out. She was the former "Tonan Maru No. 3" (19,201 tons) of prewar days, which had been sunk by torpedo in the vicinity of Truck Island. Since the G.H.Q. of the Allied Forces without giving a reason did not permit the building of a mother ship larger than 10,000 tons,<sup>13)</sup> the old ship was made afloat again in 1951 and commissioned as the resuscitated "Tonan Maru".<sup>2)12)</sup> In 1955 the "Kyokuyo Maru" (11,448 tons) was fitted out for use in North Pacific whaling. She was converted from the freighter "Tsuruoka Maru" of the Sanritsu Steamship K.K.<sup>13)</sup> and continued to be active until the 1967 season.

Not later than the 1956/57 season, both the "Tonan Maru No. 2" (13,792 tons) and the "Kyokuyo Maru No. 2" (16,433 tons) were added to the Japanese whaling fleet. The former was reconstructed from the freighter "Matsushima Maru",<sup>14)</sup> and the latter was the famous floating factory, "Olympic Challenger" (13,019 tons) which had been operated by Panama.<sup>9)</sup> In 1957 Taiyo Gyogyo K.K. purchased the "Abraham Larsen" (23,326 tons) from the Republic of South Africa, and renamed her the "Nisshin Maru No. 2" (27,035 tons).<sup>9)</sup> As of the 1957/58 season, there was a total of six Japanese factories, and the situation remained unchanged until the 1959/60 season.

Before the opening of the 1960/61 season, another factory, the "Kyokuyo Maru No. 3" (23,059 tons) was added to the Japanese fleet. She had worked under the Union Jack as the floating factory "Balaena" (15,715 tons). Taiyo Gyogyo had purchased "Kosmos III" (18,047 tons) from Norway in 1961, and changed her name to the "Nisshin Maru No. 3" (23,106 tons).<sup>9)</sup> By this time the "Kinjo Maru" (=Nisshin Maru No. 1), the oldest factory, was decommissioned from Antarctic whaling and operated in the North Pacific until 1964. In North Pacific whaling, there existed another factory under two different names: "Nitto Maru" (12,933 tons) and "Nichiei Maru" (12,918 tons) of Nippon Suisan K.K. Under the former name, it was commissioned for the one season of 1962<sup>10)</sup> and then the name was changed to "Nichiei Maru",<sup>15)</sup> which operated 1963-1966.<sup>10)16)17)</sup> They may be considered, however, somewhat temporary factories subject to the international whaling measures prohibiting the use of the same factories in both Antarctic and North Pacific whaling during the same season.

Japan operated seven floating factories during the period of fullest development of the whaling business in the Antarctic until the 1964/65 season, but four out of seven ships were foreign made factories. In accordance with the decrease in harvestable quotas the "Nisshin Maru No. 2" was the first ship to be decommissioned as a whaling factory from the beginning of the 1965/66 season, and worked thereafter as the mother ship of a fishmeal factory in the North Pacific and Bering Sea. After a long mooring the "Kyokuyo Maru No. 2" made her final cruise as a whaling factory in the 1968/69 Antarctic season. However, she once again participated in North Pacific whaling in 1970 before being converted to a waste oil tanker. The "Tonan Maru" was the third ship decommissioned since 1967 and was

scrapped in 1971. "Nisshin Maru" stopped her activity as a whaling factory from the 1969/70 season. After being decommissioned from the whaling business, the "Nisshin Maru" worked as oil tanker supplying fuel oil for fishing vessels on the high seas during the years of the oil crisis, and was then sold to the People's Republic of China in April 1973.<sup>9)</sup> In 1962 and two subsequent years, Japan purchased three more floating factories, i.e., "Southern Venturer" (U.K.), "Southern Harvester" (U.K.), and "Willem Balendtz" (Dutch),\* but these three ships were never commissioned as whaling factories. As to the 1974/75 season only the factories, the "Nisshin Maru No. 3", "Tonan Maru No. 2", and "Kyokuyo Maru No. 3" remained.

From the 1971/72 Antarctic season thereafter, Taiyo Gyogyo K.K. sent two freezers to the Antarctic but they were used temporarily as mother ships for minke whaling. Consequently, they do not have an ordinary slipway on their stern but a slope hanging from the ship's side. They are the "Jinyo Maru" (1971/72) and "Chiyo Maru" (1972/73-1974/75). The freezer, "Kyokusei Maru" of K.K. Kyokuyo was also sent for minke whaling for one season (1973/74).

By the reorganization of the three traditional whaling agents into a consolidated company, Nippon Kyodo Hogeï K.K., in 1976, the three whaling factories, "Nisshin Maru No. 3", Tonan Maru No. 2" and "Kyokuyo Maru No. 3" were also transferred to the newly established whaling agent. However, both "Tonan Maru No. 2" and "Kyokuyo Maru No. 3", the well-aged floating factories of the three, were decommissioned and scrapped during 1978 due to the excess area in the ship's holds in comparison with the current harvestable quotas of whales. In 1980 there was left only the Norwegian made whaling factory, the "Nisshin Maru No.3".

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