

**A Report**  
**on**  
**2011 JDS Fieldtrip in Hokkaido**

June 26-28, 2011



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## **Preface**

MATSUI, Kenichi

This fieldtrip aimed to explore environmental policy related issues in Hokkaido, especially Ainu traditional knowledge and environmental conservation. In planning this trip, I meant to provide one-of-a-kind hands-on experience for our JDS fellows to understand the indelible link between biodiversity and cultural diversity. I also hoped that this trip would help them understand the conditions the Japanese government and people face in responding to the spirit of article 8 (j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which acknowledges the importance and usefulness of indigenous and local knowledge for biodiversity conservation. Japan is not the “advanced” country in recognizing traditional knowledge, but as many of our JDS fellows would face this question in their own countries after graduation, the experience they gained in this trip will somehow enrich their insights on biodiversity and indigenous policies within an international context.

In order to achieve this purpose, I invited Mr Mitsunori Keira to assist our study trip. He represents an Ainu NGO organization, “Yay Yukar no Mori.” For more than twenty years, this organization has conducted field oriented activities in the Ainu traditional territory, including deer hunting, traditional plant harvesting, Ainu cooking, and traditional weaving and embroidery works. All these livelihood activities have traditionally catalyzed and characterized the link between culture and biodiversity in a localized context. Also, notably Yay Yukar no Mori is the first organization to revive Ainu deer hunting in the 1990s after going through pain of administrative red-tape. To note, the Japanese Imperial government banned deer hunting in the nineteenth century.

Mr Keira and his wife, Tomoko, have also been productive in the publishing world. Their books have introduced to Japanese people the rich cultural heritage of traditional Ainu

people, including traditional worldviews and actual use of local resources. They and other members of the organization, including some Japanese, invited us on June 26 to their outdoor feasting. We enjoyed sharing with them deer meat and salmon, which their hunters and fishermen had obtained in the previous winter. This feasting was held within the Shikotsu National Park. I hope that those JDS students who participated in this feasting would see this occasion as one of examples to show that the Ainu people use protected areas for their cultural activities.

Our study tour started with our visit to the Ainu Museum in the township of Shiraoi, which is located near the southern coast of Hokkaido. The traditional Ainu community here engaged mostly in fishing. JDS fellows observed some Ainu dances and songs along with museum exhibit in a traditional hut or *chise*. A young Ainu guide, Ms Tomoe Nakano, helped us understand the culture and history of the ancient Ainu people through the museum exhibit. She is one of young proud Ainu and the hope for the future rejuvenation of Ainu cultural strength. Some details we learned from her and the performance will be described in the following reports by JDS fellows.

After our museum tour, we visited the office of the Ainu Ioru project, which is located next to the Museum site and housed in the municipal administration of Shiraoi. This project was established under the national legislation of 1996, which meant to promote Ainu cultural activities. It also set aside some small areas for Ainu communities to harvest plants for traditional purposes. One of such harvesting sites is located near the Museum. A young Ainu person works for the Ioru office full time. Her job is to provide ethno-ecological education to school children in the project area. Although the Japanese government has recognized the Ainu people as indigenous people in 2008, the Ainu people still do not have land that is set aside for their communal use. This Ioru project, therefore, meant to compensate for the lack of Ainu communal land.

On June 27, we departed Sapporo early in the morning and headed for Nibutani, or

the so-called hub of Ainu culture. This small town has one of the highest concentrations of the Ainu population with several historical sites. Our main purpose was to observe Nibutani Dam, which was completed in the 1990s. Mr Koichi Kaizawa, who was one of the plaintiffs to bring suit against the Japanese and Hokkaido governments to build this dam, received us and provided a tour through the dam facility. He pointed out archaeological sites and sacred sites that were mercilessly destroyed in order to build a storage building or some other auxiliary facilities in the process of building the hydroelectric dam. Two reports below will provide more detail on this dam.

Mr Kaizawa is also known for his reforestation effort through his NPO Chikoronai project. This project was to acquire some mountain areas that were deforested. Then many university students and volunteers have responded to his call and helped plant trees. The main objective of doing so is to rejuvenate the forest with indigenous species. Since the Japanese government entered the area and began logging the forest by giving stumpage rights to private companies like Sumitomo, much of indigenous trees were replaced with more profitable trees that were introduced from the Hoshu Island. Mr Kaizawa acknowledges that his project will require the long period of time to achieve its objective, but his is the only attempt to bring back the ecological health to his own community.

On June 28, before departing Hokkaido, we visited Mrs Tomoko Keira's embroidery class in Sapporo. This traditional embroidery class started about twenty years ago. At that time, most Ainu women had forgotten much of traditional designs. Mrs Keira visited many museums in Japan, Europe, and the United States to discover traditional Ainu embroidery works. She studied the technique her ancestors used. She was one of the most active Ainu women who revived traditional patterns. Today, her students include both Ainu and Japanese women. Her philosophy is not to allow any of her students to make money from traditional designs.

Our study tour ended with this visit although our JDS fellows created some extra

curricula activities to enrich this short stay. One of notable activities they organized was the feasting in the second night at Mr Keira's house. Our JDS fellows demonstrated their superb organization skill to create several outstanding Vietnamese dishes. This effort entertained several guests from Mr Keira's organization and one university professor. Students also organized to explore some historical sites and a botanical garden in Sapporo. Their vitality and cooperation have simply amazed me.

Below, I proudly present their reports that are related to our study trip. Most reports focus on Ainu culture and their adaptation to the natural environment. Much of the description tends to be encyclopedic without academic citation, which mainly serves their learning process. What is needed next is their analytical effort to contextualize what they learned. This process may take time for some, if not all, but it is my great pleasure that someday what they experienced in this trip will help them understand the link between cultural diversity and biodiversity more deeply in their hearts and minds.

### 2011 JDS Hokkaido Fieldtrip Schedule

Date	Departure/ Arrival	Places to Visit	day	Purposes, Activities
2011.6.26	Departure: Haneda Airport ANA53 8:00  Arrival: Chitose/ Sapporo Airport 9:35	-Shiraoi Ainu Museum -Shikotsu National Park -NGO Yay Yukar -Chisan Hotel Sapporo	1	-Transportation -Museum visit -Exchange with an Ainu group
2011.6.27		-Nibutani Dam -NPO Chikoronai	1	-Visit -Exchange with an

		-Chisan Hotel Sapporo		Ainu group
2011.6.28	Departure: Chitose/ Sapporo Airport ANA68 15:30  Arrival: Haneda 17:05	-Ainu embroidery class (Yay Yukar: Tomoko Keira)	1	-Visit -Transportation

## Chapter 1

### Nibutani Dam Construction: Environmental and Social Approaches

BHUIYAN, Abu Taher Mohammad Kamrul Kabir

#### Introduction

The Nibutani Dam was constructed on the Saru River in Hokkaido. The Minister of Construction authorized the construction of this dam in March 1978, but actual construction began in 1990 and finished in March 1997. It may be the most controversial dam construction in Japan as there might have been irregularities and the breach of trust and discrimination by government agencies. These issues were eventually contested in court. The dam is more than half kilometer long and 32 meter high with its reservoir capable of holding 27,100,000 cubic meters of water from the catchment area of 1,215 square kilometers.



In the last week of June this year, we a group of JDS students from the Graduate School of Life and Environmental Sciences, the University of Tsukuba, went to visit the dam



site as a field trip to observe the social, cultural and environmental impacts of this dam mainly on the indigenous Ainu community. We surveyed the dam building and the surrounding environment. Our survey was guided by Mr Koichi Kaizawa, one of local Ainu leaders, who opposed the construction of this dam and was one of the plaintiffs of the lawsuit against the Japanese government regarding the Nibutani Dam construction. Mr Kaizawa talked about the negative impacts of the dam although he did not unilaterally dismiss the necessity of all dams. In this report, I will discuss the issues surrounding the construction of Nibutani Dam. The information and data used in the following discussion are mostly taken from conversation with Ainu people and some related articles, including the Sapporo District Court decision on the Nibutani case (1997).

### **Reasons of Construction of Nibutani Dam:**

The Nibutani dam was constructed as a multipurpose dam, including the following public benefits (Levin, 1999):

- Flood Control
- Maintenance of the Correct Functioning of the River Flow
- Irrigation and Municipal Water Services
- Industrial Use Water Services
- Electrical Power Generation

According to the ruling on the *Kayano et.al. v. Hokkaido Expropriation Committee* case by the Sapporo District Court, the expected benefits from the dam was quite appropriate. Even the Ainu community expressed the need for flood control, river maintenance and industrial use water services. The Japanese government also argued that some public benefit could be achieved without constructing the dam.



### **The Costs and Losing Interests because of the Dam Construction**

Because of the construction of Nibutani dam the local Ainu people lost their land as the dam was built on the Ainu land. The reservoir of the dam inundated the lands owned by Mr Kaizawa and a few other Ainu people.

When Nibutani Dam was planned to be constructed near Ainu villages and Japanese farming areas, it could have been naturally expected that the dam would affect people and the environment in many ways. The dam construction has both positive and negative impacts on the environment and society. Whereas the dam obstructed the regular course of the Saru River to obtain multiple benefits, it has caused the loss or reduction of biodiversity in the catchment basin by submerging lands and reducing the flow of minerals in sediments to downstream areas. The reservoir also has given some social impacts, including the loss of lands. Nobody lived on the shore as people knew that the shore was often affected by the flood. There were some archaeological sites that were destroyed by the construction of dam and its related facilities.

If a trade-off is needed to optimize benefits from dam construction in general, the cost of construction and maintenance must be minimized. In case of Nibutani dam

construction, the construction authorities of the government tended to focus on their own self-serving benefits and did not take into account the economic and cultural needs of the local Ainu community. The Sapporo District Court recognized this neglect and declared the expropriation of Ainu land for the purpose of dam construction “illegal.” It also rendered its opinion that Ainu people and their cultural needs could have been considered by government authorities before constructing the dam.



### **My Opinion and Conclusion:**

According to many Ainu people, the dam project is a total failure as one of its aims to supply water to industries was not achieved. Mr Kaizawa was of opinion that the dam is now used only to supply water for some agricultural purposes. It produces relatively little amount of electricity as the dam lacks sufficient height for a large-scale hydroelectric generation. Mr Kaizawa also told that several archaeological sites and one sacred site were destroyed to build the dam and related facilities. He said that the government largely ignored Ainu claims. His claim may be one-sided and the government side of stories needs to be taken into account for more equitable account of this issue.

If I evaluate the usefulness of Nibutani Dam from the light of materialism, the dam

construction was fine and necessary. As far as I gather information about the construction of the dam, all the economic and engineering considerations are fulfilled. But the dam must address negative environmental effects. And the government should have been more cautious about promising industrial water use as this option is no longer viable and poses its major drawback. Even having some problems, hydroelectricity is one of the most environmentally friendly energy sources so far. But it is also true that producing hydroelectricity by constructing dam has a tremendous social impact including involuntary resettlement and change of land using pattern among local people. We can consider the dam good for the country, especially if this energy will benefit local people. However, the question as to why the dam cannot fully operate must be addressed.

The environmental, social, archeological, historical and traditional values sometimes cannot be converted to monetary value. However, even if the Japanese government authority now decides to give back all lands and decommission the dam, it is impossible to restore the original condition. Just across the dam, there is a mountain, where, in Ainu belief, their Gods played. Many traditional beliefs among Ainu people may not have any justification to modern people but they do not bring any harm if they remain intact. However, the value of traditional knowledge is increasing even among top scientists. We learned that the Ainu people are collecting money and purchasing their own land from the government to become Ainu again by reviving their tradition and informing their children about the way their ancestors lived. We should help them, as now we are thinking about environmental conservation and Ainu traditional knowledge holders know their local environment well.

In Bangladesh, in the 1960s a hydro-electric dam was constructed and inundated a large area. As a result, thousands of minority ethnic people lost their lands and home including their king`s palace. Even today, when the water level of reservoir becomes low in summer the roofs of the palace become visible. The ruin has become a tourist spot. The generated electricity from the dam is sent to cities. Those who lost the land have moved

further into the mountains. Although the hydroelectric dam has supplied electricity which is what many city dwellers desire, it has damaged fish and plant species as well as other species that contribute to regional biodiversity. This dam construction also compelled the minority people to think that the government was not cautious about their livelihood, culture, lands, so they became hostile to the majority portion of the country. If the government authority were serious they could handle it in better ways. The same thing can be said about the Nibutani dam case.

## **REFERENCES**

Levin, Mark. A. *Kayano et al. v. Hokkaido Expropriation Committee (The Nibutani Dam Decision)*. 38 International Legal Materials 394, 1999.

## **WEBSITE**

[www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nibutani\\_Dam](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nibutani_Dam)

## **Chapter 2**

### **Why Do We Need to Keep Every Distinctive Traditional Culture and Custom?**

GONCHIG, Gantulga

A long history of human development has established different kinds of culture under specific environmental conditions. Cultures and customs have developed in relation to nature. Today, however, we are losing many cultures and lifestyles throughout the world. I think this trend debilitates human development. Ainu people developed distinctive culture, but much of it has been changed by Japanese assimilation policies. Why do we have to destroy cultural heritage? Throughout our Hokkaido study trip I had two questions to investigate. Why are culture and custom important? Is it necessary to keep every distinctive traditional culture and custom? I will discuss what I found about these questions in this report.

Many years ago, I said to my supervisor: “Mongolia historically was very interesting country.” He replied that I felt so because I was born in Mongolia. I did not understand completely what he meant. Now I say that not only Mongolian history but also whole human history are interesting. In Hokkaido, I was surprised to know how Ainu people were isolated until the eighteenth century. In the late nineteenth century, English explorer and painter Henry Savage Landor [IRISH 2009] visited Ainu villages and surmised that the Ainu were an ancient race of human development similar to Australian Aborigines. In the mid-nineteenth century, American mining engineer Raphael Pumpelly visited Hokkaido and argued that the Ainu ancestors came to Hokkaido less than one thousand years ago (many studies, however, posit that their ancestors arrived in Hokkaido about 10,000 years ago). Another early traveler to Hokkaido, H. C. St. John, noted that “The Ainu are good-natured, kind, and obliging.” [IRISH 2009]

When these travelers and explorers visited Ainu villages, they lived by hunting, fishing, and gathering with occasional farming by women. The Ainu used to live near river to get fish (salmon). Ainu women collected wild plants such as garlic, grapes, skunk cabbage, lily bulbs, berries, nuts and chestnuts. They practiced cultivation on a small scale, raising small crops of grain, including barley, millet and wheat. Ainu also believed that everything has a life or divine spirit. Some gods were good and some were evil. They conducted a religious ceremony when a natural disaster happens [IRISH 2009]. Ainu farming practice was more sustainable than today's intensive farming in Hokkaido.

Unfortunately, today Ainu culture and custom are not so visible in Hokkaido. I find the history of Ainu and American Indians similar. These indigenous peoples lost much of their own land to immigrating people. At that time, homestead land policy boomed in many places in the world. The Meiji government also depended on this policy. In the late nineteenth century, this government attempted to change the lifestyle of Ainu people. Because the government was afraid of losing Hokkaido to Russia, it engaged in assimilation policies for the Ainu. Throughout the world, colonization changed original people's lifestyles. The colonization was one of human history's big mistakes.

Everybody can say that development is good for our society. Yes, development is necessary. But we have to think about right attitude toward development. Some wrong attitudes toward development have given us difficulties today. Today Ainu people speak Japanese, watch Japanese television, dress in the ways as non-Ainu people do, eat same foods and go to the same schools with Japanese. They may live different ways of life if they do not want. Can't they?

## **Reference**

Ann B. Irish, *Hokkaido: A History of Ethnic Transition and Development on Japan's Northern Island*. McFarland, 2009.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Transition of Ainu Culture: Adapting to Changes in the Social and Natural Environment**

Hoang Thanh Tung

The Ainu people have unique cultural identity that cannot be found in other places. Although they have faced a lot of changes in the natural and social environment, their adaptation skills have helped them keep their culture for centuries. There are now 23,700 registered Ainu people living in Hokkaido and about 7,000 Ainu people in other parts of Japan. The original territories of the Ainu people include Sakhalin Island near the mouth of the Amur River, Hokkaido Island, the Kurile Islands, and northern part of main island of Japan. They made their livelihood by fishing and hunting, including for bear and sea mammals. Ainu culture is often associated with the bear ceremony, an important part of their religious rituals. These religious ceremonies and philosophies behind them reveal their remarkable skills of adaption to the natural environment by paying respect to nature and enriching their own material and ritual life. In this report, I will explore some important aspects of these adaptation skills of the Ainu people.



**Figure 1: The Ainu's material and ritual life**



For the Ainu, deities are indispensable part of their lives. Most of flora and fauna that are important to Ainu livelihood have been considered good deities, whereas pandemics and natural disasters have been regarded as bad deities. The photo above (Figure 1), which was taken in the Ainu Museum in Shiraoi, Hokkaido, describes material and ritual life of the Ainu. This picture shows their strong belief that deities for natural objects may protect humans. This cosmology has created a sense of safety among them in confronting with changes in the natural environment. The Ainu did not unnecessarily uprooted wild plants. Seasonal wild plants, game and seafood could be stored for the long winter and in preparation for difficult times.

The philosophy of adaption to the natural environment was expressed through oral traditions. From the Ainu's point of view, an animal was a spiritual visitor or messenger who bridged human society and the supernatural world; therefore, their visit in the form of animals to the Ainu's world actually denoted the gift giving between man and the supernatural world. Many tools were extracted or made from natural materials and helped the Ainu communicate with the other world.

**Figure 2: Music performance and dance**



Ainu traditional clothes reveal how they were adapted to cold winter. The Ainu produced clothes themselves by using furs, leather, plant fibers that were readily available in the surrounding environment. They also traded for cotton from Japanese people and silk from Chinese merchants.

The designs on Ainu's clothes allowed people to identify social positions and geographical origins of those who wore the clothes. The designs demonstrate diversify of Ainu cultural expressions and their in situ adaption to the natural environment. Ainu cultural expressions have recently been consolidated largely because of advocacy from the Japanese government and indigenous organizations that made their efforts to promote textbook Ainu culture.

Historically, the culture, identify and daily life of the Ainu have faced a lot of difficulties. For example, in the late nineteenth century, the Japanese government annexed Hokkaido and banned to practice traditional subsistence activities such as deer hunting and salmon fishing. It also forced the Ainu to cultivate rice as part of assimilation policies. The Japanese law prohibited the practice of ancient Ainu customs and language. As they did not have the writing system of their own, these assimilation policies contributed to cultural

destruction. In addition, a high rate of inter-marriage between Ainu and Japanese has contributed further to the erosion of Ainu language and culture. Traditional Ainu society had been largely destroyed by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Since the 1970s, Ainu and Japanese grassroots movements grew and gained strength. They began to demand that the Japanese government recognize Ainu indigenous rights. For example, there were protests against the Japanese Society of Ethnology in the late 1960s. A group of protesters bombed a sculpture in Asahikawa in 1972. An Ainu woman brought suit against Japanese violation of portrait rights in 1985.

Since 1997, however, Ainu people have seen some positive changes. They saw an increase in financial support for various kinds of cultural activities as the new Ainu law of 1997 established the foundation to promote Ainu traditional culture. The foundation has funded various conferences, exhibitions, and cultural exchanges with indigenous groups in other countries. These increasing cultural promotion activities have provided the Ainu with opportunities to enhance their 'indigenous' status in Japan, and to build contacts and share information with indigenous peoples around the world. In June 2008, the Japanese government officially recognized the Ainu people as the indigenous people of Japan.

In conclusion, the Ainu people have faced many difficulties, but they still exist as culturally distinctive people. Their knowledge of adaptation to the natural environment in Hokkaido is still in use among some of the descendants. The younger generations still keep Ainu cultural identity, and their efforts are now supported by the Japanese government and many Japanese people. Government programs also have aimed to reduce discrimination against Ainu people in Japanese society.

## Chapter 4

### How did Ainu People Adapt to Japanese Culture?

HOSSAIN, Fakir Muhammad Munawar

#### Introduction

The Ainu are the indigenous people of Hokkaido, Japan. Their ancestors also lived in Russia (the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin). In the nineteenth century, Japanese people called the Island of Hokkaido “*Ezochi*,” which means the “*Land of the Ainu*”.

From the fifteenth century, waves of Japanese settlers began reaching the Ainu land on northern Honshu Island and Hokkaido. A number of Japanese military expeditions eventually pushed them northwards. The settlers also brought infectious diseases that caused the Ainu population to fall. Ainu land was redistributed to Japanese farmers. According to Mr. Mitsunori Keira, Administrative Board Chairman of Yay Yukar No Mori, the present registered Ainu population is 23,000, but the total number of Ainu People is probably more than 150,000.

Until the eighteenth century the Ainu had offered staunch military resistance to the better armed and more numerous Japanese. Wars were engaged in 1457, 1669, and 1789, in which the Ainu ultimately lost. Japanese policies became increasingly aimed at reforming the Ainu in the Meiji period, outlawing their language and restricting them to farming on government provided plots. Ainu were also used in near-slavery conditions in the Japanese fishing industry.

During the first decades of 1900, some Ainu managed to organize resistance and tried to keep the Ainu language and culture alive. In 1930 the first Ainu organization was founded and called “*The Hokkaido Ainu Association*.” However, the association has suffered from the lack of active Ainu members. Social welfare programs, including better housing and

education, became the most important issues for the Ainu Association to negotiate with the Hokkaido government. Supported by humanitarian organizations and missionaries, many Ainu people have chosen a path of *assimilation* to build a new and better life within Japanese society.

### **Ainu—an ethnic minority group in Japan**

Although some have argued that Japan is a typical homogeneous country, recent immigration and internationalization may have made Japan increasingly multilingual and multicultural. Also, the fact that the Ainu people are native to Hokkaido, Sakhalin and Kurile Islands is the testimony to the country's multicultural past and present. Scholars have debated over how long the Ainu have occupied present-day Japan.

The terms, “*Race*” and “*Nation*,” have been popularly used to distinguish people. The former differentiates human beings by physical features like skin color. The latter distinguishes people by social and cultural traits such as language and religion. Ethnic group or *ethnicity*, however, is different from race and nation. It emphasizes less on racial origin and nationality. It includes not only biological features but also cultural elements such as language, religion, identity and lifestyle. In Japan, ethnicity is mostly determined by biological criteria. The Ainu Association now seems to determine membership by both objective and subjective criteria. Objective criteria mean biological family relations, language, religion and culture. Subjective criteria include ethnic consciousness, feeling of belonging, marriage and adoption.

Traditional Ainu culture was quite different from Japanese culture. Never shaving after a certain age, men had full beards and moustaches. Men and women alike cut their hair above shoulders and trimmed it semi circularly. The women tattooed around their mouths, arms, and sometimes their foreheads, using for color the smut deposited on a pot hung over a fire of birch bark. Their traditional dress was a robe spun from the bark of the elm tree with

long sleeves. It almost reached feet, and the end was folded round the body, and tied with a girdle of the same material. Women also wore an undergarment of Japanese cotton cloth. In winter the skins of animals are worn, with deerskin leggings and dog or salmon skin boots. Both sexes are fond of earrings, which are said to have been made of grapevine in former times, but were later purchased from the Japanese. There were also bead necklaces called *tamasay*, which the women prized highly.



**Fig.- Traditional Ainu house**

Their residential building was also quite different from Japanese people. Instead of using chairs or tables, they sat on the floor, which was covered with two layers of mats with rush and flax; and for beds they spread planks, hanging mats around them on poles, and employing skins for coverlets. The men used chop-sticks and moustache-lifters when eating; the women used wooden spoons.

Traditionally, the Ainu people harvested local wildlife such as deer, bear and salmon for food. They also utilized various wild plants for food, medicine, cloths and other household purposes. Ainu culture was thus distinct from Japanese agricultural society not only in its language, but by livelihood. For hunting, men used bow and envenomed arrows and a type of crossbow similar to the Medieval one used in Europe. Dogs were used for hunting deer and bears. Traps were used for catching birds and hares. Ainu people were

expert in fishing, both in the sea and freshwater as Ainu economy was mostly based on fishing. On the beach, they collected crabs, lobsters, scallops, mussels, oysters and even turtles. During the winter, fishing was made through holes in the frozen rivers or lakes. During the summer, fishing was made using nets, rods, hooks and harpoons. Salmon fishing was especially important.

Ainu religion was animist: all beings and many natural objects (e.g., rivers, volcanoes, fire, lightning, trees) were endowed with a spirit. When a living being died, only the material part was gone, and the spirit was freed. The released spirit could be good or evil. It might harm living beings, including people. To avoid the harmful actions of the evil spirits, Ainu used to work on wooded representations of the spirits, with a human form, called inaos. Today, inaos are simple sticks scraped by knife.



**Fig.- God's dancing place (on the top of the hill)**

### **Integration of Japanese culture by Ainu people**

The earliest written records that mentioned the Ainu appeared in the twelfth century. At that time there was no Japanese living in the land of Ezo, and the Ainu were the only people to live and govern in the area. Gradually trades in furs and sea products developed and flourished in exchange for textiles, rice, metals and foreign technology. The Ainu incorporated foreign products into their livelihood and they became dependent on regular

supplies of products and technology from Japan and China.

Before the Edo period (1603-1868), the Ainu seems to have lived a peaceful and happy life in the land of Ezo. The population was small, and the land was rich with easy access to food in the forests, rivers and the ocean. Except winter, the climate was moderate. They also had easy access to the materials they needed for making houses, clothes, tools and other equipments. Several ensuing centuries of increasing economic control over Hokkaido by the Japanese along with assimilation of the Ainu into Japanese society in the late nineteenth century gave rise to a century of suppression of Ainu ethnicity.

In the Edo period, the Tokugawa state developed a strict class society with four distinct social classes: warriors, farmers, craftsmen and merchants. However, below this four social classes there also were groups of peoples, the Senmin (humbled people), who consisted of the eta and himin. The hinin were outcasts from the society and even regarded as non-human or impure, dojin. As not being really Japanese, the Ainu became part of this fifth class who had hardly any human or social rights. Therefore, both exploitation as well as discrimination of the Ainu became legal and normal.

The Meiji restoration of 1868 turned the situation of the Ainu people even worse. An emancipation edict that came into effect in 1871 to abolish the class status did not affect the Ainu status. Instead, the land of Ezo was nationalized and renamed as Hokkaido. By inviting advisors from the U.S., this new colony developed policies that were similar to the American Indian ones. There were no talks with the Ainu and there was no compensation for the land they lost. Though the Ainu were forced to change their names with Japanese names, they were still classified as “former aborigines” in the census register. In this way they were formally identified as part of the fifth class, the outcasts. Their language and religion were banned as well as all other cultural identities like clothes, ornaments, stories, songs and dances. Basically all these factors forced the Ainu people to adopt Japanese culture.

In modern Japan, assimilation was also strongly encouraged by a segregated primary



education system that did not allow the Ainu language to be spoken or any Ainu identities like Ainu arts, cloths, songs or dances to be expressed in any way. History and Geography were also left out in the segregated Ainu schools. The basic idea was that the Ainu people were not intelligent enough to follow standardized education of Japan. Educating the Ainu people was also strategically important as the Japanese government wanted to prevent the spread of Russian influence in Hokkaido.

### **Conclusion**

In history, Ainu people and their traditional culture were never appreciated in Japan. The legacy of heavy assimilation policies by Japanese still affects the existence and survival of Ainu culture. By the increasing influence of Japanese culture and policy, Ainu members now seem to be Japanese. Some Ainu organizations have attempted to revive their culture but the effort is not yet wide-spread. So it is the high time for us to take necessary actions to save/conservate Ainu culture.

## **Chapter 5**

### **How Did the Ainu people Adapt to the Natural Environment of Hokkaido Island?**

NATSAGDORJ, Natsagsuren

#### **Introduction**

Long before the Japanese settled in Hokkaido, another ethnic people had inhabited the island. Those original inhabitants are called the Ainu. Their culture is now an important part of Hokkaido. In this short report, I will examine the question as to how the Ainu people in the past and present have adapted to the surrounding environment in Hokkaido.

#### **Adaptation in Traditional Livelihood**

The traditional Ainu people lived by hunting and fishing. Women also engaged in farming some garden crops. They developed their own language but not the writing system. In old paintings, traditional Ainu people look different from Japanese. The former had thick black and curly hairs (for me they look similar to Russians). Ainu culture has much deeper relationships to the land.

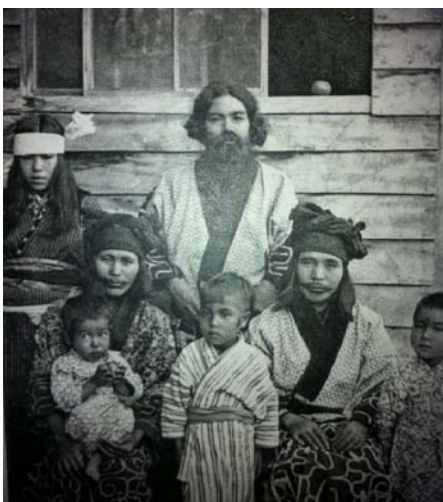
However, at the beginning of the Meiji period, Ainu people were integrated into the Japanese territory. Following this annexation, Ainu people lost their basic sources of livelihood such as land and natural resources. The Ainu language or their traditional culture was not accepted by Japanese and much of it was lost. Today, Ainu people do not live separately from Japanese people. The current number of registered Ainu people by the Japanese government is 23,000. On top of this, an additional number of people live in Tokyo and other parts of the country. A lot of Ainu descendants are making a continuous effort to achieve a society where different cultures can live together as good neighbors.

The Ainu cosmology reveals how their ancestors became adapted to their surrounding natural environment. Important economic activities and things hold divine power. For example, the Ainu had fire god and hunting god. These gods or divine spirits ruled the earth. This type of belief sounds quite similar to what Mongolian people believe about the sun and moon. Their intimate relationship with nature based on these beliefs created many ceremonies.

The livelihood of the Ainu was largely derived from the use of the river valley, including clothes from animal skins, salmon skin or seal skin shoes to protect them from cold winter.



Ainu people lived in small villages located near rivers where men fished. Each community



had rights to fishing, hunting and gathering in a specific area. Each village had a headman who would supervise religious ceremonies. Also, he would make sure that all families in his village have food to eat by sharing.

Men went hunting and fishing as well as crafting tools. When hunting in winter, men built temporary camps where they could stay up to a month.

Bear was the most important animal to them along with deer and rabbit. They used bows and arrows to hunt. They would put



some poison from aconite (monkshood) roots on arrow heads. Men also trained dogs to help hunting. For river fishing men killed salmon with specially designed clubs covered with spiritual carvings. At night people fished with torchlight on canoes. They also made nets, fish traps, and even dogs caught salmon. Salmon came late in autumn from the ocean to spawn upstream.

Women's works were very different from men. From morning till night they collected foods, sew clothes, and cared children. Making clothes meant hard work. Bark of the proper quality would be peeled in strips from tree.

### **Ainu Today**

The daily lifestyle of the Ainu people today are now not so different from Japanese one. Once the Ainu were considered a dying ethnic group. The Ainu, however, have never succumbed to social prejudice and strove to protect their culture and handed it down to the next generation.



We visited Nibutani dam. The Japanese government built it partly for generating electricity. It has affected water quality and the ecosystem. It has damaged salmon habitat and agricultural fields in downstream areas.

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Ainu in Hokkaido: History and Culture**

NGUYEN, Thanh Nga

The Ainu, who are the indigenous people of Japan, have their own language and rich culture. Ainu culture arguably matured around the twelfth or thirteenth century, but the earliest known historical records that mention the Ainu date from the fifteenth century. At that time, the Ainu primarily made their livelihood in close relationship to the natural environment. Through the interesting and meaningful trip to Hokkaido between June 26 and 28, 2011, I had a good opportunity to have an in-depth understanding about the Ainu people, their origin and culture, which made me so excited. In this report, I will discuss what I learned about Ainu history and culture from the trip.

We can find the close relationship between Ainu people and the surrounding environment in Hokkaido. Hokkaido Island has many mountains, lakes, and rivers. Two major mountain ranges, Kitami in the north and Hidaka in the south, divide Hokkaido into eastern and western regions. The Saru basin in southeastern Hokkaido, which drains from the Hidaka mountains, is a hub of Ainu traditional culture. The Ainu people are very good at adapting. In the past, Ainu people selected areas by rivers and the sea where they would be safe from natural disasters. The watershed environment has provided housing materials and sustained villages in order for Ainu communities to engage in harvesting foods and collecting drinking water in a close proximity. Grasses such as reeds (bulrushes and cat tails) and dwarf bamboo, the bark of Chinese cork trees, birches and other materials were used for household items and traditional house called “chise.”

Ainu people’s livelihood depended on hunting, fishing, plant gathering and other activities by rivers or sea. Normally, men had responsibility for fishing, hunting and other

physical labor. Women and children picked wild vegetables. Fish was eaten fresh or preserved after opening and drying or after roasting, smoking and drying them in order to use in cold season. Materials for making shoes or clothes were obtained from the skin of large fish such as itou and the salmon. Early spring was for hunting Yezo deer and brown bear as well as picking wild vegetables. Ainu people also conducted simple agricultural activities beside traditional activities of fishing, hunting and plant gathering.

The Ainu at one point spoke their own language, which was different from Japanese, although most Ainu people speak Japanese today in order to harmonize with Japanese society. The Ainu language was spoken not only in Hokkaido but also in other regions, including the Kurile Islands, the northern part of Honshu, and the southern half of Sakhalin. Although typologically similar in some respects to Japanese, Ainu is thought to be linguistically isolated without relation to other languages. In all of Hokkaido, there are approximately 200 native speakers, generally not younger than 30 years old (with a couple of exceptions).

Ainu religion is pantheistic, believing in many gods. The Ainu thought that flora and fauna, tools, tsunami, earthquakes had spirit with both characteristics of good and bad. A traditional belief held that the god of mountains dwelled in the mountains, and the god of water dwelled in the river. The Ainu hunted, fished, and gathered in modest quantities in order not to disturb these gods. Animals were visitors from the other world temporarily assuming animal shapes. The bear, striped owl, and killer whale received the greatest respect as divine incarnations. The most important god at home was the female god of fire and the Ainu took every opportunity to pray to their gods. Every house had a fire pit where cooking, eating, and rituals took place. The Ainu Bear Festival is a very special traditional ceremony. The Ainu people believed that the festival is actually a chance to send the spirits of bears, who have visited Ainu's land, back to the world they belong to.

The Ainu also have their own traditional dress, distinctive style of architecture, values, and cultural traditions. In our Hokkaido trip, we had an opportunity to visit a learning

center for making traditional clothing. Traditional Ainu-made clothing includes garments woven from the inner bark of ohyo-nire, Japanese linden and other trees. Holiday attire included clothes made of natural resources such as cotton or silk. Non-clothing accessories such as browbands, covers for the back of the hands, warm caps made of cotton or fur for winter hunting in the mountains and shoes made of salmon skin and deer hide.

Entertainment of the Ainu is also very interesting. Their daily life with the surrounding environment was reflected through traditional dancing, music, and song. *Mukkuri*, an Ainu musical instrument, is made of sasa kurilenis and other materials. They always danced and sang together during ceremonies as they considered dancing as a good way to enjoy together with deities. They could express inner thoughts, such as sorrow or love by singing and such songs, which have been orally passed down by many people in each region.

In short, Japan's Ainu people developed their own traditional techniques in harvesting, fishing, and hunting, which also nourished their rich cultural lives. Although only a small group of Ainu people live in Hokkaido today and people no longer continue to live traditional Ainu lifestyle, Ainu traditional culture has timeless value. Since the enactment of the 1997 Law for the promotion of the Ainu Culture and for the Dissemination and Advocacy for the Traditions of the Ainu Culture, the Japanese government and the Ainu people have actively promoted cultural oral tradition and conservation activities through many programs and projects. Special training programs have been implemented at some schools in Hokkaido to maintain and promote Ainu culture.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere thank to Professor Kenichi Matsui for his great effort to take care of all participating students in this study trip. My great thanks to Professor Yoshiro Higano for giving me his permission to attend this study tour.

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## Chapter 7

### Ainu People and Cultural History behind Tattoo

NGUYEN, Thi Thuy Phuong

My field trip to Hokkaido in June 2011 included a visit to the Ainu Museum where I was impressed by Ainu woman's tattoos. In this report, I will examine the cultural history of distinctive Ainu tattooing process. Tattoos are normally done by inserting indelible inks into the dermis layer of the skin to change the pigment. Tattoos on humans are a type of decorative body modification, while tattoos on other animals are most commonly used for identification purposes. Tattooing has been practiced for centuries worldwide, and the Ainu, the indigenous people of Japan, traditionally had facial tattoos.

I first would like to introduce briefly about Ainu People. Ainu people belong to a different cultural group from that of the ethnic Japanese. They originally lived in regions, including Hokkaido, the northern part of Honshu, Sakhalin Island near the mouth of the Amur River, the Kurile Islands, and southern Kamchatka. Today, however, they are mainly living in Hokkaido. The Ainu people at present are the oldest ethnic group of Japan.

Regarding Ainu tattoos, until the 1920s single women wore tattoos around the mouth. The Tattoos around the mouth was called "Anci-Pini" in Ainu language. According to a historical legend, a deity descended from heaven and told all women that if a woman married a man without tattoos she would not find salvation after death. From that time tattoos have been indispensable and vital for Ainu women. Ainu women also believed that "Anci Pini" resembled the appearance of their goddess, so that the several evil demons of disease will mistake them for the goddess and flee away. It is also a popular belief that when an old Ainu woman's eyesight is failing, tattooing was administered as remedy.

Their facial tattoos were in the shape of broad blue bands that looked much like

mustaches. The young Ainu women normally underwent this tattooing between the ages of 11 and 21. The lips were washed with a boiled solution of birch bark and clear water. Tattooists, who were often grandmothers or maternal aunts, began the tattooing process by pricking with a razor sharp metal object. Then soot from the fireplace or the realm of fire goddess was rubbed into the incision to give black/ blue color. Traditional Ainu tattooing instruments called makiri were knife-like in form. Before the introduction of iron and steel, razor sharp obsidian points were used. These tools were wound with fiber allowing only the tip of the point to protrude so as to control the depth of the incisions.

As the cutting intensified, the blood was wiped away with a cloth saturated in heated antiseptic made from ash or elm wood called nire. After soot was rubbed into incisions, the tattooist would sing a yukar or portion of an epic poem that said: "Even without it, she's so beautiful. The tattoo around her lips, how brilliant it is. It can only be wondered at." Afterward, the tattooist recited a magic spell to have pigment laid more firmly into the skin: "pas ci-yay, roske, roske, pas ren-ren", meaning "soot enclosed remain, soot sink in, sink in".

While this invocation may not seem important at first glance, it was symbolically significant nonetheless. Symbolism determined the shape and location of Ainu houses. Every Ainu home was constructed with reference to the central hearth and a sacred window facing the upper stream. Within the hearth there was kindled fire, and within the fire there was the home of an important deity of fire called "Ape-Fuchi-Kamuy" (fire-elderly women-deity). The fire goddess or Ape-Fuchi Kamuy was invoked prior to all ceremonies because communication with other kamuys was impossible without her divine intervention. Ape-Fuchi Kamuy protected families from trouble and illness or gave them strength at times of birth and death. In this respect, the central hearth was a living microcosm of the Ainu mythological universe. It was also a space where Ainu and the gods grew wary of one another, especially if the fire was not burning at all times.

Although tattooing was banned in Japan in the seventeenth century, the people of pure

Ainu strain ignored this law and continued this traditional tattooing until the 1920s. And there is a clear proof that our tour guide , Ms Tomoe Nakano, who is working in Ainu Museum said that she would like to wear traditional tattoos when she get older.

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## **Chapter 8**

### **Nibutani Dam and Its Impact on Ainu People and the Environment**

NGUYEN, Trung Thuan

In 1990, the construction of Nibutani dam began in the middle of the Saru River, Hokkaido. The dam was completed in March 1997 despite objections from the local Ainu people. But why did Ainu people protest against the construction?

From the planning stage, the Japanese government believed that the dam would not cause severe impact on Ainu people but would provide good economic incentives in the region. However, after 15 years of operation, the dam has showed its uselessness to the economic development of Hokkaido.

Initially the main purpose of the dam was to supply water for manufacturing industries in east Tomakomai, but industries did not come to Hokkaido as the area was located in a remote region and has low potential for industrial development. Although the dam is capable of generating electricity, it is not high enough in elevation to generate the substantial amount of electricity. Its capacity is only 3,000KW/day. In addition, to maintain the dam, the Japanese government has spent about 2 billion yen per year. Because of this dam construction, three fourths of agricultural land of this area has disappeared, causing the loss of job to farmers. Obviously, from economical viewpoints, the dam is a failure.

The dam has also caused many environmental problems. It has changed the flow of the Saru River and directly affected aquatic species by blocking both surface water and sediment flow. The river bottom downstream has become lower due to the reduction of sediment that affects water quality.



### Downstream area of the dam

Meanwhile, the bottom of the reservoir area has risen with the accumulation of sediment along with the temperature changes within the reservoir, giving some aquatic species a false sense of seasons.



### Upstream area of the dam

Another very important impact of the dam is related to Ainu culture. The dam was built without considering the impact on Ainu culture. The dam site not only occupied the shore land but also broke the sacred area of Ainu people, including archaeological sites. For Ainu people, the relationships between people and nature, moderated by the presence of Kamuy, is very important culturally and spiritually. The legends of the Sarunkur Ainu Clan from this region indicate that the Saru River is a sacred place for their people. The god Okikurmikamuy was said to have been born in the Nibutani area, near the midpoint of the Saru River. Okikurmikamuy descended from heaven to the Saru region and taught the inhabitants to cultivate, weave, build, saw, fish, hunt, and worship the gods. The space within the surrounding mountains was recognized as living, hunting, and gathering area of Ainu people. Therefore, the construction of Nibutani dam has disturbed Ainu culture and beliefs.

Dissatisfied with the offering price for the compensation of construction and wanting

to protect cultural value of the dam site, Ainu people sued the Hokkaido government at the Sapporo District Court. In 1989, the plaintiffs, including Shigeru Kayano and Koichi Kaizawa, who owned the plots to be inundated and expropriated by the dam, had previously sought a review of the administrative decision on issuing the expropriation order for their plots. The Minister of Construction rejected the Ainu request in 1994.

By 1997, the dam had been substantially completed. On March 27, 1997, the Sapporo District Court rendered the Nibutani Dam decision, in which, for the first time as state organization, it recognized the Ainu people as the indigenous people of Japan. The court ruled that the administrative decision to expropriate Ainu land and approve the dam project was illegal. However, by that time, the dam had already been completed and due to large expenses of construction and destruction of the dam, it still exists there.

In conclusion, the construction of Nibutani Dam provides us important lessons. We can see that the Ministry of Construction and the Hokkaido agency remained to be inflexible in planning the dam and responding social needs. The dam is a clear evidence for wasted money. More importantly, the dam controversy revealed the necessity of protecting cultural values of Ainu people. Although many efforts have been done, many of these cultural values cannot be recovered. Damages it has caused to the belief of local people must be severe. The dam shows a typical failure of the government economic and environmental policies at the cost of cultural preservation.

## Chapter 9

### The Restoration of Ainu Traditional Culture

NGUYEN, Van Tra

The Ainu people, an indigenous group in Hokkaido and the northern part of Honshu of Japan, are different from Japanese people. In Ainu language, “Ainu” means “human.” Their origin is still a controversial issue. Some theory says that they are descendants of ancient people called Jomon. They have their own language and culture. Today, according to Ms Tomoe Nakano, our Ainu guide at the Ainu Museum in Shiraori, there are about 23,000 registered Ainu people, but in the reality, there are arguably about 150,000 Ainu people in Hokkaido and other places in Japan. The latter higher estimate includes those Ainu who hide their ethnic origins to avoid discrimination.

In the past, the traditional livelihood of Ainu was based on hunting, fishing, and plant gathering. At present, Ainu people no longer live in traditional lifestyle and the intermarriage between Japanese and Ainu has changed their custom considerably. Centuries of assimilation policies the Japanese government has enforced have contributed to the decline of Ainu tradition and culture. For example, in the Meiji period, the government forced Ainu to adopt Japanese language and customs as those in mainland. Many Ainu people, especially from southern Sakhalin Island and the Kurile islands also suffered from relocation policies, which resulted into abrupt changes in lifestyle and the outbreak of epidemic diseases such as smallpox.

However, because of the tireless efforts that called for the rights of indigenous people in Japan, the Japan government finally recognized the Ainu as the indigenous people of Japan in 2008. The government also adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People in the previous year. In 1997, the parliament also passed legislation, called

the “New Ainu Law,” that replaced the outdated Former Aboriginal Protection Act (1899) and promoted Ainu culture as part of its effort to regain cultural respect.

The Ainu people attempt to protect their culture for next generations by engaging in art performances, ceremonies, and the restoration of lifestyle and culture. Several museums have been built to preserve their unique culture including the construction of traditional houses, building of canoes, and sewing clothes with traditional patterns. In addition, a few foundations and many projects have promoted Ainu language and culture by financing Ainu language or craftwork classes, publishing information through internet or subsidizing international cultural exchanges. As a result, the traditional culture of Ainu people has been recognized gradually and promoted by many individuals and groups throughout the nation.



## **Chapter 10**

### **How did the Ainu people adapt to the natural environment of Hokkaido Island?**

NGO, Thi Lan Phuong

#### **Introduction**

The Ainu are the indigenous people of Japan. For centuries they inhabited in areas including the northern part of the Tohoku region and Hokkaido or what the Ainu call “Ainu-moshir” (the land of the Ainu people). The history of Ainu people is a long and interesting story about adaptation to the natural environment. In their effort to cope with the surrounding environment, they have developed rich and unique culture, some of which I will discuss in this report.

#### **History**

According to Ms Tomoe Nakano, our Ainu guide at the Ainu Museum in Shiraoi, Hokkaido, Ainu culture began to take shape around the twelfth or thirteenth century, and the earliest historical documents that mention the Ainu date from the fifteenth century. At the start of the Meiji era or the mid-nineteenth century, the colonization of Hokkaido by the ethnic Japanese progressed and resulted in Ainu living side-by-side with the ethnic Japanese. The areas of Japanese colony extended from Mukawa in the east to Yoichi in the west. It was at this time the term “aborigine” was used in reference to their status of being the native inhabitants of the area.

Other than the documentary evidence, the origin of the Ainu can be traced by archaeological studies. For example, the remains of stone artifacts are dated as early as 20,000 years ago and human remains are dated as early as 10,000 years ago. These bones

have similar physiological features to the present day Ainu and offer evidence that the Ainu inhabited Hokkaido as early as 10,000 years ago.

### **Cultural perspectives**

Ainu culture demonstrates strong evidence of people's adaptation to the natural environment. They created their own language, morality, and customs. Many typical materials helped them communicate, protect each other and cope with other ethnic communities.

The Ainu language is unique and still used for geographic names. Ainu geographic names exist in Hokkaido, Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands and the Tohoku regions. For example, words with "betsy" and "nay", as in Noboribetsu and Wakkanai, mean "river" or "water stream" in Ainu. This suggests that Ainu speakers lived in these areas a long time ago.

Another typical feature of Ainu culture is that the community orally transmitted many stories from generation to generation. These stories ranged from adventures with boy or girl protagonists, to stories featuring bear, fox, and other animal deities as the central characters. Some stories revolve around historical events and the experiences of the elderly people. Ainu story tellers created original melodies, particularly for adventure and deity stories. Around charred wood fire, many people gathered together, and one selected group performed a story for the others. Many of these stories incorporated the wisdom for living in the natural environment. They transmitted various lessons and knowledge by this way.

In the religious system, Ainu people coexisted with deities. The Ainu believed that flora and fauna, tools, tsunamis, earthquakes, pandemics and the like on *ainumosir* had a *ramat*, or spirit. It was believed that these came to *ainumosir* from the realm of *ramat* and returned there when their roles were completed. According to the Ainu, deities are beyond the power of humans, but are indispensable to our lives. Flora and fauna that were important to Ainu livelihood were considered "good" deities, whereas pandemics and natural disasters were considered "bad" deities that threaten daily life.

The Ainu took every opportunity to pray for their deities. Among them, the Ainu Bear Festival is famous and spiritual. Bears were believed to play the role of delivering fur, meat, and the like to the Ainu. The festival is actually a ceremony to send the spirits of bears who have visited ainumosir back to the world they belong. The more closely related are the spirits to daily life, the grander and more solemn is the ceremony.



The Ainu customs varied in shape, pattern and meanings, depending on the weather, religion and culture. The Ainu had casual attire for everyday use and holiday attire for special ceremonies. Almost all kinds of religious materials came from natural fauna and flora. The traditional techniques for making clothes were passed down from mother to daughter. Clothes were unisex, and many of them had patterns distinctive of each regions of Hokkaido and Sakhalin. Accessories included browbands, covers for the back of the hands, gaiters and

aprons for ceremonies and work, warm caps made of cotton or fur for winter hunting in the mountains, as well as shoes made of salmon skin and deer hide. The patterns in Ainu clothes are very unique. These clothes and other articles meant to be worn. Ainu motifs were embroidered and/or made from patched cloths. The Ainu people believed that patterns on the cuffs and hems of clothes would prevent evil spirits from entering through those of clothes worn by other ethnic groups living in coastal areas and on Sakhalin. This evidence indicated influence from distant cultures.

There are some other cultural aspects related to moral life of Ainu people. Dances, songs, mukkhuri (mouth-herp), tonkori (string instrument) were typically used by Ainu people to enrich their culture in the process of adaptation to nature.

### **Ecological perspectives**

Regarding their ecological adaptation, the Ainu primarily made their livelihood by fishing, hunting and plant gathering. They also traded with people in other areas. They lived near the sea or by the river throughout the year. They worked to obtain food or make tools for everyday use. Gender roles were clear in allocating jobs in family. Men engaged in fishing, hunting and other physical activities, whereas women and children picked wild vegetables, wove fabric using looms and did other light works. Their harvesting activities were determined by seasons. Early spring was for hunting Yezo deer and brown bear as well as picking wild vegetables. Summer was for trout fishing in rivers. Autumn was for salmon fishing in river and offshore as well as wild vegetable picking. And winter was for hunting or trapping small animals such as rabbit and sable. These animals and vegetables were caught or gathered as valuable food for all time around year. The hides and skin of Yezo deer, brown bears, seals and salmon were used for clothes, shoes, bags, adorns and other purposes. They also used plants to make various tools, including bows and arrows, traps, hunting nets, digging devices, boats, and baskets. After cultivation techniques were introduced to the Ainu

by *Wajin* or the Japanese, simple agriculture was later added to traditional activities.

To take full advantage of being near the sea and having primary forests, they developed trading activities. Organic matters made from fish in Hokkaido were used to fertilize cotton crops in the Kinki region (southern central region of Honshu), which came back to Hokkaido as cotton products to be part of Ainu clothes. The Ainu enjoyed exchanging with surrounding people of other ethnicities.



## Conclusion

The development of Ainu society developed distinctively from other indigenous communities. Unique geographic and ecological characteristics helped them create a large and homogeneous community, which often faced challenges to overcome natural disasters,

destruction and violence from outsiders. Today Ainu are still important part of Hokkaido Island's history. Ainu culture that exists until today is valuable and should be preserved carefully for next generations.

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## Chapter 11

### The Ainu Culture

PHAM, Tien Dat

#### Introduction

The Ainu people are the indigenous people of northern main island of Japan, Hokkaido Island, the Kurile Islands and Sakhalin Island. They have developed rich culture that includes their own language (with regional dialects), oral literature, traditional rituals and unique Ainu fabric patterns since the fourteenth century (Ludwig, 1994; FRPAC, 2008; Simon Cotterill, 2011). Today, the vast majority of the Ainu people live in Hokkaido. According to Professor Toshihiko Hara of Sapporo City University and Mr Mitsunori Keira of an Ainu NGO, there are 23,000 registered Ainu people in Hokkaido island. In addition, there are about 5,000 live in the Kanto area (Cheung, 2003).

Ainu society and culture have undergone tremendous changes due to the assimilation policies implemented by the Japanese government since the late nineteenth century (FRPAC, 2008). Japan enforced statutes and regulations that prohibited the practice of ancient Ainu customs and language. As the result, in the last one hundred years Ainu traditional lifestyles have largely disappeared and their rights have been overlooked within Japanese society (Cheung, 2003). In the late twentieth century, as the world become more aware of the need to protect indigenous rights, Japan received many criticisms related to its neglect on Ainu indigenous rights. In 1997, the Japanese government enacted the so-called New Ainu Law, which aims to support and revitalize Ainu culture.

Throughout the past few years, the *Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture* (FRPAC) has published different types of textbooks and guidebooks for primary and high schools in Ainu, Japanese and English. FRPAC has also funded exhibitions that

introduce Ainu history and culture in different languages for Japanese and foreigners (Cheung, 2003, IRPAC, 2008).

This report examines the adaptation strategies of Ainu people to the natural environmental of Hokkaido Island from cultural and ecological perspectives and illustrates political and cultural achievements of indigenous Ainu people.

### **Characteristics of the Ainu Economy and Worldviews**

According to the Ainu people I met in Sapporo, Shiraoi, and Nibutani, deities exist beyond the power of humans, but they are indispensable part of their lives. The indigenous people believed that flora and fauna, earthquakes, pandemics in their traditional territories called *ainumosir* had a *ramat* or spirit. Most flora and fauna that are important to Ainu livelihood have been considered as ‘good’ deities while pandemics and natural disaster have ‘bad’ deities that threaten their daily lives. The Ainu take every chance to pray to their deities since they think that each phase of human life is connected to the God (FRPAC, 2008).

The Ainu people lived near the river or the sea where they would be safe from natural disasters. Their village was called *kotan* that consisted of more than several houses (Fig 1a). People in the village lived mainly by hunting, fishing and gathering plants in the mountains, rivers and seas surrounding their *kotan*. Houses built in Ainu *kotan* are called *chise*, which were made from natural materials (Fig 1b). The Ainu house is rectangular in which the roof is two-pitched. The framework of the houses contains tree-trunk uprights and pole cross-pieces; all lashed together with cords or strips of bark while the walls are of rushes and matting (Frederick, 1904). The largest house was about twenty square feet without partitions. Each house had a fireplace in the centre. There was no chimney, but only a hole at the angle of the roof. One window faced east. Instead of using chairs or tables, they sat on the floor, which consisted two layers of mats, one of rush, the other of flag; and for beds they spread planks, hanging mats around them on poles, and employing skins for coverlets. The men used



chopsticks and moustache-lifters when eating; the women have wooden spoons (Japan-101, 2002).



*a. The village - Kotan of the Ainu*

*b. The house – Cise of the Ainu*

**Fig 1: Illustration of villages and houses of the Ainu** Source: survey in Hokkaido 2011

The Ainu men were responsible for fishing and hunting as well as physical labor while women and children were responsible for collecting wild vegetables, weaving fabric, and using looms and other light works. Spring normally is the season for hunting Yezo deer and brown bear as well as collecting wild vegetables. In summer, they go fishing in rivers. Autumn is for fishing salmon in rivers and collecting wild vegetables. In winter, the Ainu hunt or trapped small animals like rabbits and sable. Those activities are a good way to coexist with natural environment (FRPAC, 2008). In addition, the Ainu people (mostly women) cultivated some crops after agriculture was introduced to the Ainu by Wajin or Japanese. At the end of the Edo period, the Ainu also started planting vegetables.

The Ainu played an important role in the overseas trade. Fur and skin from Yezo deer, sable and hawk feathers as well as sea weeds and salmon were traded to Wajin and other ethnical people living in the coastal areas around Sakhalin.

## Cultural Features

The Ainu like dancing, and they dance as a group during ceremonies (Fig 2). There is a variety of dance styles: dancing in a large circle called *rimese*, *upopo* and *horippa*. Dances are also used in prayers, some of which were done in hope of bountiful hunts and catches. Other dances expressed daily works and animal movement. Some dances were done solely for fun.

Ainu had a few musical instruments such as the Tonkori (Fig 2a) and the Mukkuri (Fig 2b). The Ainu instruments were used in the ceremonies and entertainment activities.





2a. Tonkori

2b. Mukkuri

**Fig 2: Dancing activities and some musical instrument of the Ainu** Source: survey in Hokkaido 2011

The Ainu language is unique. Ainu words remain in use today for geographic names mainly in Hokkaido, Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands and the Tohoku region of the main island of Japan (FRPAC, 2008). The Ainu think that their language reflects people's mind and thoughts (Cheung, 2003). However, today the Ainu use mostly Japanese because Ainu learn with Japanese students in Japanese at school. More recently, Ainu language classes and Ainu language radio programs have been introduced. As a result, the number of people who can speak Ainu language has increased (FRPAC, 2008).

Traditional Ainu customs around the nineteenth century were quite different from Japanese ones in the same period. As Ainu men never shaved after a certain age, men had grown full beards and moustaches by the time of their adulthood whereas Japanese men normally shaved their face. Both men and women cut their hair level above shoulder, and trimmed semi circularly on the back. The women tattooed around their mouths, the back of their hands, lower arms, and sometimes their foreheads by using smut for color that had been accumulated on a pot hung over fire of birch bark.

Their traditional robe was made of the cloth that was spun from the bark fiber of the elm tree. Women also wore undergarment made of Japanese cotton cloth. In winter the skins of animals were worn with leggings of deerskin and boots made from the skin of dogs or salmon. Both sexes were fond of earrings, which are said to have been made of grapevine in former times, but are now purchased from the Japanese. Women highly prized bead necklaces called *tamasay*.

### **Political Achievement**

In 1992, following the address by President Nomura Giichi of the Ainu Association in Hokkaido to the UN General Assembly, the UN formally recognized the Ainu as Japan's indigenous people. However, the Japanese government maintained that the Ainu people were one of Japan's cultural minorities on the ground that there was no fixed international definition of the term "indigenous peoples" (Simon Cotterill, 2011).

However, throughout the drafting stage of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the UN working group persistently recognized the Ainu as one of indigenous peoples with their own language, religion and culture. In 2007, the Japanese government adopted the Declaration, and in the following year recognized the Ainu as indigenous people. The Ainu have successfully used international pressure to achieve national recognition from the government. (Simon Cotterill, 2011).

The questions of identity involve the identification of one group's relative homogeneity. Looking at the long history of "Ainu-Japanese" inter-ethnic relations, the Ainu are clearly distinguishable from the Japanese. Whereas a multi-cultural state identity is preferable for some nations, this identity still poses risk of separating the shared past by ethnicities and marginalizing the presence of the exploited groups within a nation. It is tempting to approach Ainu-Japanese relations from a model of margins and frontiers, by focusing on ethnicity, geography and cultural theories. As Richard Siddle remarks, the history

of the Ainu people has been in part a struggle over their discursive representation. In recent years, the Ainu have adopted an essentialist notion of their homogeneity. This self-reinvention of identity has been crucial to their survival. In other words, Ainu culture and politics have evolved in response to socio-political changes in the world. Flexibility is a traditional feature of Ainu people, who have adapted to environmental changes. (Simon Cotterill, 2011).

### **Conclusion**

From my observation in Hokkaido and my research, I am convinced that the Ainu people will continue to play an important role in the articulation of Japanese multicultural identity. As Ainu culture has flexibly adapted to changes, in the future, we may observe new cultural forms that will be generated from interactions between self-governed Ainu groups and the larger Japanese society.

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## Chapter 12

### The Ainu people today and their attitude toward nature

TURDUMATOVA, Nazgul

The Ainu (a word meaning "human" in the Ainu language), are indigenous people in Hokkaido, the northern part of Honshu, the Kurile Islands and the southern half of Sakhalin Island.

According to some estimate, there are more than 150,000 Ainu today, although the exact figure is not known as many Ainu hide their origins for some reason [1].

As one of indigenous peoples in the world, Ainu culture has rich oral traditions, complex religious views, beautiful art, and rituals that are intimately related to nature and natural resources that have sustained them. Historically the Ainu people were hunters. And they lived in grace and harmony with nature and strove to be in harmony with nature and their gods. In daily life, they prayed to gods by performing various ceremonies. These gods are nature gods, such as those of fire, water, wind and thunder; animal gods of bears, foxes, spotted owls and gram-puses; plant gods of aconite, mush-room and mugwort; and object gods of boats and pots. More abstract gods protect houses, mountains and lakes. For Ainu all important animals, natural phenomena and objects have spirits. The brown bear is especially sacred to the Ainu and is called the "god of the mountains." The Ainu would catch a young bear, bring him/her to the village and feed for one or two years. The village then holds a ceremony called the Sending of the Bear ceremony, in which people killed and sent the bear's spirit back to the divine world. The bear can then be reborn and sent back to the Ainu village again for food and clothing.

In the Ainu worldview, no fundamental gap exists between humans and nature. Those Ainu who respected nature and honored gods were believed to be rewarded with bountiful catches of salmon, plentiful hunts of deer and bear, and abundant crops, while those

who failed to do so were to be punished with hard times. Ainu people tried to keep nature for future generations. For example, during the autumn salmon run near their settlements, fishermen waited until the salmon had a chance to spawn before catching them [2]. They were well aware of that all species of matured Pacific salmon individuals die within a few days or weeks after spawning [3].

The Ainu used a wide variety of materials to catch fish or trap/ hunt animals. In the Ainu Museum in Shiraoi, Hokkaido, we could see the diverse use of materials like fish skin, bear hide, cherry bark for hunting and trapping. They were masters in their environment [4].

Japanese people have influenced many elements of Ainu culture. In the Meiji period Japanese policies aimed to “reform” the Ainu by outlawing the use of their language and restricting them to farming on government provided plots. Ainu were also used as laborers in near-slavery conditions in the Japanese fishing industry. In an attempt to modernize Japan, they were forced to assimilate into mainstream Japanese society. Some Ainu people successfully made the transition to farming, while others turned to full time wage laborers; still others developed new livelihood, such as handicraft production for tourism.

In 1997, the Japanese government passed new legislation to promote Ainu culture, which replaced the outdated “Former Aboriginal Protection Act” of 1899. In June 2008, a bi-partisan, non-binding resolution was approved by the [Japanese Diet](#), which recognized the Ainu people as the [indigenous people of Japan](#) with distinctive language, religion and culture. The resolution also urged to end discrimination against the Ainu [5].

The 1997 act galvanized a further movement among the Ainu and others to restore unique Ainu religion, language, music, dancing and daily ritual ceremonies in Hokkaido. There are some schools teaching children Ainu culture and traditions.

For learning Ainu language, text books often used Japanese katakana and hiragana syllables, as Ainu people originally were not familiar with alphabet. Their tales, legends,



experiences, and morals for everyday life had been orally transmitted [6]. Today, textbooks tend to use alphabet for transcribing Ainu language.

In addition Ainu people began to open small museums to perform arts and crafts for tourists. And one of the first objects that became a representative souvenir of Ainu craftworks was bear carvings because this creature was special for Ainu culture.

The Ainu Association of Hokkaido has worked to improve the social status of Ainu people. Also this Association helps find jobs and promotes education, conduct survey and, research, and collection information about Ainu people [7]. Thus, Ainu people have engaged in various activities to maintain their traditions and culture for future generations.

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