

Ainu Success: the Political and Cultural Achievements of Japan's Indigenous Minority アイヌの成果—日本先住少数民族の政治的文化的業績

Simon Cotterill

Ainu Success: the Political and Cultural Achievements of Japan's Indigenous Minority

Simon Cotterill

Discourse on indigenous peoples tends to be a discourse of unhappiness. Most groups have experienced distressing cruelty, and narrative accounts of their struggles tend to be elegiac in tone. Japan's Ainu people have undergone suppression of their culture and livelihood, and subsequent denial of their existence. However, this article critically re-evaluates the Ainu's recent history in terms of their considerable achievements, such as international recognition and the Japanese government's 2008 declaration recognising their indigenous status. In spite of and often in reaction to continuing obstacles, the Ainu have successfully used international fora to advance towards their domestic goals. Simultaneously, they have often reshaped their culture to successfully engage with contemporary demands.



Ainu women pose in traditionally

Japanese, western, and Ainu clothing. Postcard, date unknown. From [Picture Postcard Museum](#)

Ainu achievements have usually been ambiguous. None of their 'successes' should be considered unqualified. However, they need to be considered in relation both to the Ainu's relatively insignificant numbers and the government's historical attempts to comprehensively eradicate Ainu culture. Cultural self-denial and assimilation brought on by years of prejudice have made exact population figures impossible to obtain. A living conditions survey of 2006 found the Ainu population on Hokkaido to be just 23,782¹; while 2699 Ainu were officially found in Tokyo in 1988.² Noting that many self-identifying Ainu have never been taken into account by official surveys,³ some activists claim total numbers across Japan in excess of 300,000.⁴ But even at its highest estimate the Ainu population is very small both in relation to the total Japanese populace and in relation to the demographic profiles of other indigenous peoples within their respective nations.

This article doesn't use the concept of 'success' in an attempt to ignore or deny the problems confronting the Ainu. Few Ainu 'successes' have been unqualified and there is still much discontent among the Ainu, which will be discussed. But it is the view here that in order to fully understand the Ainu's contemporary situation, as well as consider the problems that endure today, attention needs to be given to the ways in which they have been able to

successfully overcome certain problems in the past. After briefly outlining the Japanese state's historical subjugation of the Ainu, the first part of this article will introduce a 'broken triangle' model of the relational influence between the state, the Ainu, and international bodies. It will illustrate how the Ainu have successfully mobilised international pressure to escape the restrictions that their low numbers place on them, and achieve national recognition⁵ from a government that would have preferred to ignore them. After considering the processes of tri-lateral negotiation that preceded the 2008 declaration, the article will re-evaluate occasions when Ainu movements seemed to have failed. It will argue that the Ainu have actually drawn significant collective strength from such times of perceived failure. The second part of the article will explore the Ainu's representation within prevailing discourses on Japan. Like 'Japanese-ness', Ainu identity is a vague and usefully flexible term, which the Ainu have at times been able to control and successfully deploy within the public sphere. Self-reinvention has been crucial to their survival and, after considering their changing position within discourse, the article will look at ways Ainu culture has evolved alongside political initiatives. It will then conclude by considering the future of the Ainu, looking at the ways in which political and cultural movements may develop, and discussing obstacles that the Ainu will continue to encounter.

Background

Ainu inhabited the islands now known as Hokkaido, the Kuriles, and Sakhalin long before they were incorporated within any nation state. Contact between them and the Japanese dates back to at least the 14th century, at which time Japan did not stretch further north than Honshu. Japanese settlers gradually encroached more and more on Ainu territory and encounters became increasingly belligerent.⁶ Japanese settlement and

subjugation of the Ainu increased in more systematic ways after the Meiji Restoration, and Hokkaido was officially annexed. After declaring it to be "terra nullius" in 1872, the government redistributed the Ainu's homeland amongst Japanese farmers.⁷ The Ainu language was banned. Ainu people were forced to take Japanese names. Then, under the guise of speeding up doka seisaku, the assimilationist policies by which Japan sought to make lifestyles, language and customs of people in its colonies as well as in Hokkaido and Okinawa similar to its own, the "Hokkaido Former Aborigines Act" of 1899 prohibited the Ainu from performing traditional and distinctive activities, which were economically necessary for their survival.⁸

官報

第四百六百九十七號

明治三十一年三月二日

木曜日

○法律

朕帝國議會ノ協賛ヲ經タル北海道舊土人保護法ヲ裁可シ茲
ニ之ヲ公布セシム

御名 御璽

明治三十一年三月一日

内閣總理大臣 侯爵山縣有朋
内務大臣 侯爵西鄉從道

法律第二十七號

北海道舊土人保護法

第一條 北海道舊土人ニシテ農業ニ従事スル者又ハ他ノ事業ヲ営ムル者ニハ
第一戸ニ付土地一萬五千坪以下ノ限リ無償ニ付スルコトヲ得
第二條 前條ニ依リ下付シタル土地ノ所有權ハ左ノ制限ニ従フヘキモノトス

第三條 年々額ハ其額額ニシテ其部分ハ
第四條 北海道舊土人ニシテ其額
第五條 北海道舊土人ニシテ其額
第六條 北海道舊土人ニシテ其額
第七條 北海道舊土人ニシテ其額
第八條 北海道舊土人ニシテ其額
第九條 北海道舊土人ニシテ其額
第十條 北海道舊土人ニシテ其額
第十一條 北海道舊土人ニシテ其額
第十二條 北海道舊土人ニシテ其額
第十三條 北海道舊土人ニシテ其額

Announcement of the Hokkaido Former Aborigines Act

The state's attempts to assimilate or bury Ainu identity within Japan occurred alongside contradictory and degrading displays of the

Ainu abroad. At the 1904 St. Louis World Fair's Anthropology Days and the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition in London, groups of Ainu were displayed by the Japanese state as a way of marking their own cultural and racial superiority.⁹ The Ainu were considered "characteristic of the lowest culture"¹⁰ and as symbolising, by contrast, Japan's power and modernity.¹¹ There were negative stereotypes of the Ainu and even legal prohibitions against them concerning physical appearance and customs.¹² The racially and culturally exclusionist Japanese bureaucrats of the 1930s took an interesting angle on eugenics by promoting mixed marriages, and arguing that hybrids would be "born almost as Japanese" and that "mixed blood children take after the superior race."¹³ Many Ainu left their homes and found solace in the anonymity of Honshu's cities, while those who stayed on Hokkaido could usually only find work as labourers and continued to face discrimination.¹⁴



Ainu compete in archery contest at 1904 Anthropology Days, *from Celebrating the Louisiana Purchase*

After 1945, the government used Hokkaido to relocate Japanese coming back from the colonies¹⁵ and, as a consequence, the Ainu's demographic profile within northern Japan and the country as a whole became even smaller. Newspaper headlines branded the Ainu a dying race - "Five Ainu left in Hokkaido" (1956), "Now only Four Ainu" (1958), "Only One Ainu in Japan" (1964).¹⁶ The publicity led to a growth

of interest in ethnic tourism and visitors came to Hokkaido looking for the last of the Ainu.¹⁷ Then, in 1986, Prime Minister Nakasone famously remarked that there were "no minorities" in Japan.

In 1997, the Japanese government did pass an act to promote Ainu culture, but failed to address issues of political participation, land rights, and the Ainu's indigeneity.¹⁸ In 2008 the government officially acknowledged the Ainu as indigenous. However, arguably, this still failed to lay the foundations for proper anti-discrimination legislation.¹⁹

Indigenous peoples are usually dealt with as the objects of history more than they are considered subjects who have had an active role in their past and who retain a voice in their present and future.²⁰ The above summary of the background to the Ainu's contemporary situation runs along similar lines to many popular accounts. However, this article will show that Ainu groups have played significant roles in shaping their history. It will illustrate the ways in which they have done this, and propose a way to re-evaluate Ainu history; a way that may be appropriate to re-evaluation of many indigenous peoples who have been considered passive within their own histories.

While responding to state subjugation, forced assimilation, and subsequent identity crises, the Ainu have frequently achieved successful modes of resistance. They did not "die out" and they were never entirely underground. From the Meiji period onwards, small settlements continually operated in Hokkaido and an umbrella organisation called Utari Kyoukai, the Ainu Association of Hokkaido (AAH) was established in 1946.²¹ In the 1950s and 1960s, interest in ethnic tourism actually revealed that many Ainu did still exist, and actually continued to thrive.²² In the 1970s some of them aggressively clashed with academics promoting the "dying race" myth.²³ The AAH drafted a proposed new law in 1984 (Ainu Shinpo) which

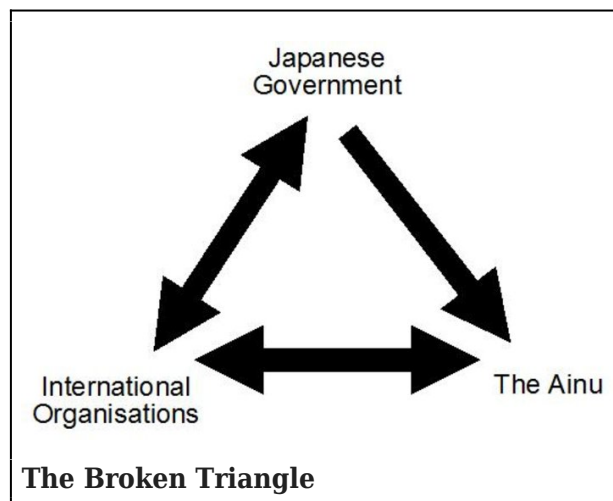
provided for Ainu rights to political participation and to land, and called on the government to acknowledge their existence and the history of their forced assimilation. Nakasone's 1986 comments provoked outrage which led to an activists' march on Tokyo²⁴ and a new AAH movement immediately followed.²⁵

While 1997's Ainu Cultural Promotion Act (ACPA) and the government's 2008 proclamation should not be viewed as unqualified or climactic successes, the two events do represent very significant success for the Ainu as steps along paths of political and cultural resistance. The ACPA superseded the 1899 Former Aborigines Act and created a foundation to promote Ainu culture. The "Resolution calling for the Recognition of the Ainu People as an Indigenous People of Japan" on 6th June 2008, was passed unanimously by both house of the Japanese Diet, and represented the attainment of a goal, long sought by Ainu people across Japan.²⁶ Neither event would have been possible without Ainu agency, working in domestic and international political arenas and developing a flexible profile of their own culture and identity.



An Ainu protest, one month before the government's June 2008 proclamation, says "Establish the Rights of the Ainu People." From *IMADR*

Part 1: The Ainu Political Achievement



Since their subsumption into Japan, Ainu have frequently been dissatisfied with the amount of power they have been able to exert within or upon the Japanese state. In my 'broken triangle' model of relational influence between the state, the Ainu, and international bodies, clearly it is the Ainu à Japanese government side that is broken. For around 150 years the government has greatly influenced the lives of Ainu but, the Ainu have had little representation or even voice within government or influence upon it. In recent years, the Ainu have mobilised along international diplomatic channels which have allowed them to indirectly influence the Japanese government through organisations such as the UN. This section will address the processes by which Ainu involvement with these organisations has made it possible to reduce domestic oppression. The establishment of international resolutions, protocols, and norms has forcefully encouraged the Ainu and influenced the directions that their political movements take, leading them along a route via international bodies and circumventing failed bi-lateral relationships with the Japanese government. Simultaneously, international organisations and new bodies of knowledge have imported definitions of indigeneity into Japan and have pressured the globally-minded Japanese state to change its stance towards the Ainu or risk weakening its all-important relationship with the international community.

Kearney has remarked that any indigenous people locked in confrontation with agencies of its own state is likely to be empowered by consolidating specific local issues within a broader context. To present a group's situation as involving a systematic violation of human rights is to take issues out of the areas where the state and traditional powerbrokers hold all the cards, and to re-conceive them afresh in the trans-national field of NGOs and public opinion.²⁷ In a 1989 speech, AAH leader Nomura Giichi declared that "if the Japanese government does nothing, even while saying they are internationalising, we will confront them at the UN. Pressure from the outside world has the strongest potential."²⁸

The AAH had, in 1984, approached the Japanese government with proposals for its Ainu Shinpo, setting out six sections including rights to education, fishing rights, cultural rights, and, crucially, rights to political participation.²⁹ The proposal's most explicit objective was "to recognise the existence of the Ainu people."³⁰ However, their request for a new law met little response from the government. Nakasone's comments two years later highlighted just how willing it was to ignore the Ainu. In 1984, the UN had established a Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP) within a Human Rights committee, and in 1987, a year after Nakasone's comments, the Ainu sent their first delegation to the working group.

After the Ainu visit to the UN working group, the Japanese Government admitted to their existence within its report to the UN of the same year. Though the 1987 report only acknowledged the Ainu in Japan to be "individuals and not members of an ethnic group,"³¹ it clearly reflected the influence Ainu involvement within the international sphere could have at home. Then, in a further move to influence international opinion, Ainu delegations participated in the ILO General Conference's revisions of Convention 107

between 1988-1989,³² which produced the ILO 169 Convention for Indigenous Peoples. Aware of the Ainu involvement with the UN and ILO, the Japanese government established, later in the same year, a committee to consider proposals for an Ainu Shinpo.

In 1991, responding to an Ainu request, the chairwoman of the UNWGIP, Erica-Irene Daes, visited Japan to investigate their current situation. Her publicised visit led the government to quickly recognise the Ainu as a "minority group" that December.³³ The government did not, however, straightforwardly submit to all international pressure on the Ainu issue. Despite a definition of "indigenous people" existing within ILO 169,³⁴ the Japanese government avoided using the word "indigenous", which it held did not have an acceptable international definition.³⁵

In November 1992 the UN did recognise the Ainu as Japan's indigenous people by officially inviting AAH President Nomura to address the General Assembly. He spoke on 10 December at the opening ceremony of the International Year of Indigenous Peoples,³⁶ and his speech was followed, in 1993, by the Japanese government's establishment of a round-table committee to negotiate Ainu demands. By 1997 it had produced the ACPA.³⁷



Nomura Giichi addressing the UN General Assembly in 1992

Meanwhile, in 1996, the ILO launched PRO 169, a project to promote existing policy on indigenous and tribal peoples, focusing principally on Africa and Asia. Their 169 Convention of 1989 had stipulated that indigenous peoples included "those who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the population that inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural or political institutions."³⁸ But the Japanese government continued to maintain that there was no fixed international definition of the term "indigenous people."³⁹ Within official responses to observations by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in 2000, the government did however draw attention, with some self-congratulation, to its schemes relating to the Ainu people, and to its having raised awareness of the Ainu among the Japanese public since passing the ACPA.⁴⁰ Again, this illustrated the importance of international opinion to the Japanese state. But, at home the "raised awareness of the Ainu" did not even seem to stretch across government. In July 2001 two influential members of the LDP stated publicly that Japan was "an ethnically homogeneous nation",⁴¹ and in a March 2001 report by the Commission for Elimination of Racial Discrimination the Japanese government were found to be violating Article 4 (c) of the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD); an article which prohibited discriminatory statements by government officials.⁴²

The violation highlighted the need for laws in Japan that guarantee protection from ethnic and racial discrimination and denial. An important precondition for such legislation had already been laid down internationally as early as 1993, with the initial draft of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), by UNWGIP. The final drafting process was very drawn-out and faced

many problems involving the difficulties of providing definitions of "indigeneity" and, within those, definitions of "colonisation" that recognised the diverse historical experiences of peoples in America, Africa and Asia. During debates, a Japanese representative had complained that the proposed articles could give indigenous people collective political power that would be distinct from other Japanese citizens.⁴³ It was not until a final discussion period of 2006 and 2007 that the Working Group finally agreed on the wording of UNDRIP. The eventual declaration only received four votes against (USA, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia). The 143 votes in favour, which included that of Japan, passed the declaration, but by this stage it contained significant limitations to its potential legal impact.⁴⁴

The passage of UNDRIP did, though, push the government towards 2008 recognition of the Ainu's indigeneity, while other forms of international pressure preceded the declaration. UN Special Rapporteur Doudou Diene officially visited Japan in 2005 as part of a study on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and he concluded that "in Japan... there are no instruments that enforce the general principle of equality or offer sanctions against discriminatory acts committed by individuals, business, or NGOs". The Japanese government, obviously embarrassed by his conclusions, complained to the Commission on Human Rights in 2006 that Diene had made "many statements which were beyond the Special Rapporteur's mandate."⁴⁵



Doudou Diene in Japan. From FCCJ

Following the General Assembly's acceptance of UNDRIP, the Ainu called for recognition "as an indigenous people... with their own unique language, religion, and culture", and invited the government to "seize the opportunity presented by adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples... to work towards establishing a comprehensive Ainu policy."⁴⁶ An Indigenous Peoples' Summit was strategically timed for July 1st to 4th 2008 to precede the 34th G8 summit also scheduled for Hokkaido, from July 7th. Aware of these arrangements, and fearful of the criticism further delay would bring, the government declared the Ainu to be Japan's indigenous people on June 6th; marking a clear success for the Ainu and their mobilisation of international pressure to further their domestic aims. The resolution refers directly to UNDRIP, the convening of the G8 summit in Hokkaido, and the growing trend of international society to enable indigenous peoples "to maintain honour and dignity and transmit their culture" to the next generation.⁴⁷



**2008 Indigenous Peoples Summit, Hokkaido.
From Powless**

The Ainu's successful relationships with international bodies and the creation of international pressure upon the Japanese government clearly had a strong bearing on the government's declaration of indigeneity. However, other factors may also have influenced the gradual process of official recognition.

An issue related to, but frequently sidelined in, discussion of Ainu-Japanese relations is that of the Kurile islands. In the dispute between Japan and Russia over their sovereignty, members of the Japanese government may have felt that the logic of Japan's claim requires the Ainu to be understood as having always been Japanese. Delay over acknowledging their indigeneity may have been motivated by fear that admitting to a preceding non-Japanese Ainu past would weaken the stance on the Kuriles. Not all politicians shared such fear (see Suzuki's comments in Lewallen⁴⁸), but Siddle believes deliberate "historical amnesia" has affected the government's 20th-century stance towards the Ainu ever since the Cairo Declaration of 27 November 1943. This called for "Japan to be expelled from all territories taken by violence and greed"⁴⁹ and Siddle's interpretation is that the government has long feared losing land by recognising Ainu indigeneity. Provisos in the final draft of

UNDRIP stating that indigenous rights could not legitimate activity "which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity of sovereign states"⁵⁰ must have offered reassurance to the government that recognition of the indigenous Ainu would not affect Japan's territorial borders.

Kono Motomichi has suggested that another reason for the timing of the 2008 declaration was political electioneering. His article in *Hoppou Janaru* called *seisou no gu ni sareru genjūmin ronji* ("Aboriginal Debate from Political Strife") claimed that, as well as looking towards the G8 Summit in Hokkaido, the LDP government's fear of losing Hokkaido voters strongly coloured the decision to proclaim the Ainu's indigeneity.⁵¹

A final, general but very important factor lies in the field of education and memory, and relates as much to the government delaying as to its final declaration of the Ainu's indigeneity. It has been suggested that "hesitation to recognise the Ainu stems from failure of the government to consider history regarding policies since the Meiji era."⁵² In 2005 the Ainu highlighted to Doudou Diene the importance of educating Japanese politicians,⁵³ which Diene subsequently did in his report (further showing the salience of the "broken-triangle" model). In relation to this and other issues on educating the Japanese people it is worth considering that many in modern Japanese government have grown up with textbooks and teachers, and under political leaders, that denied the Ainu's existence. A generation of denial can create a vacuum of knowledge, and modern Japan's stance on various historical issues should perhaps be read, not as attempts to deny the facts concerning events, but instead as ignorance about the past. Ainu involvement in international bodies, and subsequent pressure on the government, probably taught many politicians things they just did not know.

Success drawn from perceived failure

According to Foucault, power is "a relational, reflexive, dynamic, capillary phenomenon intimately tied to the flow of knowledge relations and inherently embodying resistance as much as it does authority. It is not a static instrument of oppression, but rather a set of contentions where every display of power ignites its own oppositions and where even the most seemingly 'marginal' people and groups are far from impotent."⁵⁴ The earlier account of Ainu involvement within international fora has already illustrated ways they have successfully exerted power through their marginalised status. But there have, of course, also been many occasions when Ainu seemed to fail in negotiation with the Japanese state. Focusing on the Nibutani Dam court case of the mid-1990s,⁵⁵ this section will argue, however, that even in times of perceived failure the Ainu have generated a "flow of knowledge relations" which has ultimately increased their collective power.

Harrison states, "Ainu resistance was not a separate reaction to the hegemonic Japanese government... but their movements grew together with and as a part of the very hegemony that... relentlessly tried to silence them."⁵⁶ This understanding encourages one to consider Ainu-Japanese relations not in terms of a zero-sum game where Ainu objectives, without modification, are either defeated by, or celebrate victory over, a similarly impervious Japanese state. Instead, it highlights a conception of "knowledge" as something increased and multiplied through the discursive and relational processes of negotiation, for the benefit of all negotiating participants.

A helpful and more detailed model for such multiply-beneficial processes of negotiation is suggested by M-G Manea.⁵⁷ Manea is concerned not with the Ainu but with the interregional dialogue between Asia (mainly South-East Asia) and Europe over human rights

issues. In her interpretation, tensions over human rights between ASEAN and the European Union have productively stimulated the formation of regional identities in South-East Asia. This positive conception is developed through an elaborate model of the developing stances adopted in negotiations. Initial direct confrontation between two "sides", which may be conceived by those sides themselves in terms of a zero-sum game, may nonetheless encourage, at a second stage, the development of regional spaces, on either side of the divide, for communication concerning the issues at stake. This will be particularly true in so far as within either side some individuals and groups will perceive themselves as losers on particular issues, more than others. This may also lead to fears of disunity, again on both sides, but simultaneously may allow a more flexible sense of collective identity to each of the negotiating partners, encouraging each to view not merely a single and hostile other, but a counterpart, sharing processes concerned with the establishment of normative values and practices, and open to approaches along multiple lines of negotiations. Through negotiation, norms develop relating to the styles and possibilities of communication. Critical diagnosis of such exchanges can promote the difficult but important acceptance of the idea that seemingly neutral terms may actually support the power position of one side more than another. Moreover, the difficulty and the confrontational nature of such diagnosis may require an increase in the number of meetings required between negotiating agents. Even "agreements to disagree" may involve reference of contested matters to further arenas for discussion and negotiation.

This scheme of interpretation offers fruitful perspectives on the whole set of confrontations and negotiations described in section one. On a smaller scale, the well publicised Nibutani Dam case usefully exemplifies how, in keeping with Manea's analysis, no single apparent setback, or victory, for either side within Ainu-Japanese

relationships need be understood as definitive. The plaintiffs were two Ainu residents, Kayano Shigeru and Kaizawa Tadashi. They asked the court to rescind the national government's appropriation of their land for a new dam. But the court refused.⁵⁸ This 'failure' was reported nationally and has been discussed in many academic journals. The Ainu nevertheless extracted many advantages from the government's appropriation of their land and their own perceived failure in the Nibutani court case.

The first advantage relates to internal diversity amongst the Ainu - an issue that will be more deeply discussed later in this article. Like the Japanese, the Ainu are not one homogenous group and their needs, wants, and ideologies are often very diverse. Internal dispute within minority communities is often viewed as a weakness preventing effective communal action, but it can also be a source of strength. As the Nibutani Dam situation illustrates, internal diversity can allow some members of a group to find advantage at times when others feel they have failed. Before the court case, many Ainu in the area had in fact been happy to be required to sell their land to the government.⁵⁹ Over-cutting in the region's forests had led to flooding and erosion, which forced many of them to abandon their traditional agricultural endeavours, such as harvesting millet and vegetables,⁶⁰ and opt for wet-rice agriculture from which it was difficult to make a living.⁶¹ Many indebted farmers were therefore relieved to unburden themselves of poverty.

While the court refused to accede to Kayano and Kaizawa's demands, it acknowledged that the expropriation had been illegal and affirmed the validity of many of the plaintiffs' arguments. The most significant success to come out of the failed case was the effective discursive recognition of the Ainu people as an indigenous minority given by the court when it noted that "the Ainu people had inhabited

mainly Hokkaido and maintained their distinctive culture and identity before Japan extended its rule over them, and they still form a social group with a distinct culture and identity even after suffering social and economic damage caused by policies carried out by the majority Japanese who incorporated the Ainu into Japan."⁶²

Other aspects of the case also invite consideration in terms of Manea's model, particularly with regard to the formation of collective Ainu identity. Kayano rose to widespread national recognition through the court battle. Shortly after initiating the case, and during its hearing, he became the first Ainu member of the Japanese Diet. His and Kaizawa's failure to win the case may have increased the level of public sympathy within Japan for the Ainu cause. Amongst a cluster of characteristics suitable for the definition of indigenous people, Kingsbury has suggested that "a current status of non-dominance with regard to the recognised, contemporary nation state" is an important criterion.⁶³ Although success for the plaintiffs would have highlighted the Ainu's national status of "non-dominance" in a different way, their public failure to win the case introduced the Ainu, for the first time to some global observers, as a defeated rather than a victorious group; thereby strengthening their claims to indigeneity and raising international interest and anxiety about the Ainu's position in Japan.

Part 2: The Ainu's Cultural Achievement

Success in discourse

This section shifts attention from Ainu political mobilisation to a consideration of their position within prevailing discourse on Japan. It begins by looking at problems concerning a monolithic Japanese identity and the equal problems of vague multi-culturalism. It will then focus on successful Ainu deployments of "strategic

essentialism", and conclude with reference to Ainu adoption of different discursive techniques when speaking to different perceived audiences.

Many differing concepts of ethnic and national identity exist within the field of "Ainu-Japanese" relations. The scare-quotes are necessary because questions of identity involve issues of relative homogeneity, degrees of differentiation within identity, and critiques of essentialist inflexibility and/or endlessly proliferating multi-ethnicity. Thus to speak of "Ainu-Japanese" relations privileges a claim that the Ainu are, or have at some points been, clearly distinguishable from the Japanese and definable by negative reference to them. It also entails, less obviously, a Japanese identity exclusive of any Ainu traits. Meanwhile, assumptions that a multi-cultural state identity is preferable also run the risk of submerging separate and distinct past histories and ignoring the present and future desires of previously exploited groups to negotiate their own terms of partial inclusion within state identity.

It would be tempting to approach Ainu-Japanese relations in terms of a comprehensive model of boundaries and frontiers, at once ethnic, geographic and conceptual. It has been observed that any "natural classification" (such as might be located within a comprehensive model) results from a single agent's claim to enforce its own definition of differences.⁶⁴ A maxim from Foucault is pertinent here: "Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it... but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance, and a starting point for an opposing strategy."⁶⁵ Definitions of difference need not serve a position of dominance, nor be treated as neutral or essentialist; but they can be used effectively in oppositional strategy. As Siddle remarks, "the history of the Ainu people has been in part a struggle over their discursive representation."⁶⁶

Even if it contained no Ainu population, Japan should, for many objective reasons, be considered diverse. The same can be said of the Ainu, who were historically dispersed across different parts of what is now Japanese and Russian territory and today continue to inhabit many different regions. There has always been a large degree of cultural diversity amongst them and this has only been increased in recent generations by varying degrees of cultural assimilation. Yet ethnic classification can be used as an effective tool. Self-classification, even or precisely in essentialist terms, may be at least tactically valuable for a group which is, like the Ainu, to some extent self-defining. Chakravorty Spivak would consider this a strategic use of positive essentialism, "from within but against the grain."⁶⁷ These considerations acquire specific force in the context of what has become a notorious debate concerning *nihonjinron*. At one level *nihonjinron*, as a general term referring to specific elements of content, can be understood as "a coherent set of national traits" of a kind that, as Burgess remarks, any modern nation state needs to construct.⁶⁸ Thus it is ironic that *nihonjinron* was defined in terms of processes supposedly unique to Japan. Since all versions of *nihonjinron* stressed "homogeneity", the Japanese discourse of "Japaneseness" offered a somewhat aggravated case of what remains a general, modern discursive process.

Burgess' main point, however, is that *nihonjinron* is no longer a majority academic discourse about Japan, but has "come to represent a straw man par excellence",⁶⁹ which has "been trampled on at length by a whole generation of scholars."⁷⁰ His analysis indicates two trends in recent work directed against such discourse - an over-emphasis on internal diversity and conflict, and a balancing over-emphasis on processes shared by Japanese ideology with discursive formations in any modern nation state. He comments that "just as in the past the stress on supposed Japanese homogeneity has been used to conceal or deny

the existence of current unassimilated Ainu, so in the present the critique of this former instance can be used to conceal ... specific facts of current relations between Ainu and the Japanese."⁷¹ To argue that Japan has always been a multi-ethnic nation might risk suppressing the details, and even the fact, of a distinct Ainu history and the process by which Ainu groups became subsumed into the expanding Japanese state. Furthermore, a stress on the sheer diversity of Japanese identity might reinforce former geographical boundaries, possibly coinciding with perceived ethnic distinctions, which might then become the basis for continued exclusion.

Morris-Suzuki refers to "cosmetic multiculturalism" in which diversity is celebrated on condition it remains essentially an exterior decoration, without demanding major structural changes, in terms of access power to services for minority groups.⁷² Recent negotiations between the Japanese state and Ainu groups have from time to time involved, on the one hand, essentialist claims by Ainu to a distinct identity, on the other hand Ainu critiques of inflexible but self-contradictory discourse by the Japanese government. As previously stated, in July 2001 leading members of the LDP referred to Japan as an "ethnically homogeneous nation". According to Hasegawa, one of these statements, by Suzuki Muneo, was particularly offensive as he had been director of the government's Hokkaido-Okinawa development agency.⁷³ Hasegawa's indictment of Suzuki's self-contradiction led her to the further claims "that Ainu are a distinct people" and that Suzuki should be aware of this. Here, stress on Ainu identity and difference illustrates Spivak's notion of "strategic essentialism" serving an interim political goal - the maintenance of an edge within active discursive negotiation.

This interpretation offers a framework for consideration of past Ainu interventions within what they thereby framed as "Japanese

representations" of them. In 1972 protestors interrupted a panel at a national anthropology conference, accusing many Japanese scholars who study the Ainu of complicity in invasion and genocide directed against them, and of depicting the Ainu as "already extinct". This denunciation technique proved effective again in 1977 when Professor Hayashi Yoshishige was forced to "apologise to the whole Ainu population" for what was claimed to be a "twenty-year-long history of insults directed against the Ainu."⁷⁴ The expropriation of Ainu skulls and the display of a statue presenting Ainu as inferior to Japanese also provoked public protest campaigns.⁷⁵

The considerable justification for such Ainu protests should not obscure their mechanism - a discursive re-appropriation involving strategic essentialism. This mechanism was effective. Within the oppressive context of "Ainu-Japanese" relations, it maximised the short-term audibility of Ainu claims to self-definition. The international arena, then, offered the Ainu a far wider sphere of recognition and resonance in discourse, while also allowing them more flexible ways to negotiate more nuanced claims of an identity. Thus the Nibutani Declaration of the 2008 Indigenous Peoples Summit at Ainu Mosir, presented to the G8, affirmed "our profound concern over the state of the planet." Maintaining the first-person plural, the statement spoke of "our values of reciprocity, mutual respect, regard for the earth as our mother and all creation as our relatives, collectivity and solidarity... our traditional livelihoods and sustainable consumption practices."⁷⁶ Several features of this deserve attention. The plural forms imply, with fruitful ambiguity, both "we Ainu" and "we indigenous peoples", thus carrying a desirable linkage. Moreover, the references to mutual respect, collectivity and solidarity embody a move appropriating, beyond the strategic essentialism of an indigenous identity, a more wide-ranging discourse, at once universal and

inter-subjective.



2008 Indigenous Peoples Summit. From Powless

Like other indigenous peoples the Ainu have appropriated an essentialist representation of place partly because of, what Watson rightly sees as, "an otherwise limited arsenal of resistance against governments."⁷⁷ Such an emphasis on place does not preclude further valid emphasis on the increasing geographical dissemination and urbanisation of individuals and groups who may identify themselves as Ainu. The claim by an indigenous people of closeness to "the land" in fact often goes together with the modern social development of urbanisation.⁷⁸ Indigenous discourse, in its complexity, may claim to represent the true tensions of modern historical identity and socio-political negotiation more adequately than can a discourse rooted in the monolithic claims of a single nation state.

In his 1992 speech Nomura Giichi declared "I did not come here to dwell upon the past... we do not seek to create new states with which to confront those already in existence. We aim to achieve, through our traditional values, the development and realisation of a society in which all peoples can live together in dignity."⁷⁹ The international context of the speech was matched by the discourse of internationalism evident here. Equally, his remarks show appropriateness to a new stage of Ainu

negotiation, in an arena whose membership and whose norms were open to debate. In a similar spirit, the AAH stressed that they only wanted a "high degree of autonomy" and were willing to act "in consideration of the preservation of the nation's territorial integrity."⁸⁰ They employed a rhetoric of a new start, indicating it should be based on both national integrity and relations of partnership.

More recent examples of Ainu discursive techniques suggest an interesting combination of rhetorics based on gratitude and demand. At a traditional ceremony held to mark the Diet's 2008 resolution Aku Sawai, chairman of the AAH's international division, was reported in *Mainichi*, a national daily newspaper, as saying "the Diet resolution was a landmark event in our history" and then, poignantly, "thank you."⁸¹ Little more than eighteen months later, he was asked by John Legendre, a western blogger based in Japan; if he could ask Prime Minister Hatoyama for one thing, what would it be?⁸² Sawai's stance was now more combative. He demanded territorial rights and "other things [presumably rights] connected to the Ainu language". Earlier in his interview, he had already suggested that political representation comparable to that of the Maori within New Zealand was another Ainu goal.



Aku Sawai in prayer to hearth god

The two stances of gratitude and demand are

not necessarily contradictory. They embody and respond to opportunities of discursive negotiation, and show Sawai's awareness of important differences between his respective audiences. The gratitude expressed in the Japanese newspaper report indicates that he felt a conciliatory stance was most advantageous within public exchanges with the Japanese government. While, the second, more confrontational stance for the ears of a foreign reporter may show a belief that appeals to rights and global norms can create optimally beneficial international discourse. Once again, a broken triangle model seems applicable.

Wielding Culture



Ainu girl holding tonkari, a five-string zither.

From Kizeme

This section will explore cultural negotiations by Ainu groups with their past inheritance and with their present options - negotiations which, in line with the arguments of previous sections, involve appeals to imagined reception by both global and specifically Japanese consumers of Ainu culture. Ainu cultural participants have needed, and have shown, readiness to flexibly reshape their cultural identity in order to successfully respond to the demands of their contemporary situations. Flexibility is arguably itself a traditional feature of Ainu identity, and of many other indigenous peoples forced to

adapt to environmental changes as well as those brought on by colonisers and societal shifts. Fitzhugh writes, "the Ainu practice of incorporating foreign elements - be they foods, materials, styles, symbols, or words and concepts - into the social and spiritual part of its culture and making them Ainu by redefining them in an Ainu way, is both a striking and a curious feature of Ainu culture."⁸³ There would be a good case for the claim that Ainu culture in its most publicised modes is a relatively sophisticated creation of recent centuries. Scholars including Sasaki Toshikazu argue that *iyomante* (a bear ceremony discussed in detail later) "in its familiar historical form was itself a product of Ainu interaction with Japanese officials and merchants in the late 18th century.



Iyomante

Its development can be seen as evidence of vitality in the face of outside pressure."⁸⁴ Comparably, Dubreuil has emphasised that the images of bears, salmon, and other forms of wild life, widely associated with Ainu culture by tourists and academics, played no part in truly traditional Ainu design, which was not figurative but repetitive with subtle variation.⁸⁵ She claims that the shift to figurative design involved a breach with Ainu religious dogma in the interests of commercial necessity, at a time when the means for sheer survival had been

drastically reduced by Meiji government policy.



Ainu construct and engrave bear figures. Postcard, date unknown. From [Picture Postcard Museum](#)

Pressures on Ainu survival and recognisable cultural identity have led them in a number of interesting cases to update, reconfigure, or even invent cultural practices which may allow them to respond to perceived demands and expectations of non-Ainu contemporaries. One example would be the *marimo matsuri* (Marimo Festival), which has been held every October at Lake Akan in Hokkaido for nearly 60 years. *Marimo* are spherical algae which grow in the lake and were recognised as an important natural heritage in the 1920s. By the 1940s their stock was depleted, partly through environmental change and partly because increasing tourism led to their removal as souvenirs.⁸⁶ It was at this time that local Ainu people initiated celebrations around the *marimo* to symbolise a ritual of return, by which the supposed original harmony between humans and nature could be re-enacted and maintained. Cheung's study of the festival credits the Ainu with conscious agency and control regarding the relation between modern social and ecological phenomena and "traditional Ainu cosmology".⁸⁷ He notes, however, that "outsiders" have seen this *marimo matsuri* as merely an invented tradition. This example highlights issues which have recurred in connection with the promotion

of "Ainu tourism".



School children with Marimo Shrine.
From Sally Wright

Tourism in Hokkaido developed rapidly from the 1960s and '70s. In response, 1971 saw an Ainu museum set up in Nibutani.⁸⁸ In 1976 an Association for the Maintenance of Ainu Intangible Culture was formed. Then in 1988 an Ainu cultural festival was held in Sapporo. Within this time frame it would be arbitrary to distinguish a "history of tourism" from a process of growing Ainu self-awareness and self-education in the spheres of tangible and intangible culture. But the complex process of cultural self-promotion has left room for sharply differing attitudes towards it. The idea of indigenous tourism as involving the secularisation and impoverishment of culture is familiar. On the other hand, some young Ainu today view Ainu traditionalism very negatively.⁸⁹ It can be argued that many Ainu willingly chose assimilation to "Japaneseness".⁹⁰

Also, Hokkaido's development into one of Japan's leading destinations for domestic tourism made tourism an important economic component of Ainu survival.

Visitors to Ainu museums and heritage sites were recorded as having asked the Ainu whom they met questions such as "do you go to the mountain to chase bears in your free time?" and "do you pay taxes?"⁹¹ These enquiries could be paraphrased as: "are you part of Japan?", "are you human?", "is your culture authentic?" Such implied questions, however naïve, suggest serious interest and perhaps even anxiety around the interface of Ainu-Japanese relations within the field of tourism. Ainu tourism has also made the Ainu visible to themselves in new ways. In some cases these have involved active participation in the recreating of rituals, in the context of museums and in the Ainu Culture Cluster Project.⁹² In other cases more basic self-education has been involved. Yamada argues of Ainu relations to their own culture that, "not knowing about it allows them to feel moved or inspired through studying."⁹³ Many features of Ainu tourism may seem artificial to the point of being tacky - such as wooden Ainu phone charms; nonetheless it has been plausibly maintained that "the rise of tourism and the commercialisation of various aspects of Ainu life have ultimately helped protect them from an even worse erosion of their identity."⁹⁴

The *iyomante* bear ritual has been often presented as the core of traditional Ainu religious and cultural practice. By the early 20th century it was a tourist magnet which excited people, leading to procedural disruption. The Ainu response to this included stage presentations in which simplified and semi-parodic shows, purporting to embody traditional ritual, were offered for the edification of tourists.⁹⁵ This created a large degree of uncertainty concerning the authenticity of *iyomante* celebration. Howell has noted that "from the 1930s onward *iyomante* were often described as being in the

"old" or "classic" style, with the strong suggestion that each such performance was likely to be the last truly authentic one";⁹⁶ for his part, Nakamura felt able to claim that the last actual *iyomante* of a long historical sequence took place in 1977 after a post-war period when celebrations were reduced from annual to decennial events.⁹⁷ Nakamura describes a project for the recreation of the celebration developed in the Ainu Culture Cluster Project since 2002. Some participants feared the attempt would lead to misfortune if repetitions were not exact. General practical difficulties, of killing a bear and of manufacturing all the utensils that the ritual required, were felt to be too great. So, instead, a stage play was devised. Nakamura's description is highly plausible given the tensions and ambiguities involved in any act of cultural recreation, but he may have exaggerated the uniqueness of the particular occasion he describes.⁹⁸ The Ainu may indeed have a precarious relationship with the "authenticity" of their own history; but such a relationship, precarious as it may be, has created and sustained that history at all points where it can be traced.

Ritual survives to the extent that it is more or less recognisably performed. Material culture, if it survives at all, can be preserved without such repeated human agency. Ainu material culture featured on a large scale in a 1999 exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution, *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*. Chisato Dubreuil, the co-curator of the exhibition, insisted that it contain contemporary art in addition to "artefacts". Her comments are pertinent to large questions of Ainu cultural reinvention. "The Japanese art establishment has been steadfast in thinking that Ainu art cannot be viewed as fine art, not even as simple art. There's even a phrase for it, "craft Ainu". I can't believe that anyone who looks at the beautiful, traditional abstract designs of Ainu women fashion artists can say it's not fine art. The rejection of contemporary Ainu art is even

more mysterious... it's my belief that if Ainu art is not allowed to naturally evolve, it supports the Japanese discriminatory position that the Ainu are a backward people incapable of fine art."⁹⁹ These remarks illustrate the difficulty of finding terminology for a situation where the "contemporary" is being vindicated in terms of what is said to be at once "traditional" and "abstract". Dubreuil's defence of Ainu fashion artists leads her to accept a familiar downgrading of the notion of craft; a different line of thought would argue for abandoning such a clear-cut, and prejudicial, distinction. Neither pre-modern nor 20th-century practices of visual art support any categorical distinction or differentiation of the kind Dubreuil assumes. But the 1999 exhibition undoubtedly played a major role in creating public awareness of Ainu culture in very many of its forms both pre-20th-century and modern. It also represented an outstanding example of success through what was initially considered failure; the Ainu had not been featured in a 1988 Smithsonian exhibition devoted to peoples of the North Pacific, due to contemporary political uncertainties. The rectification of this absence greatly enhanced focus on the Ainu.

Many forms of Ainu contemporary art have received publicity recently.

In the *Wall Street Journal*, Birmingham reports an interview with an Ainu hanga woodblock artist: "Hanga is not part of the Ainu traditional arts but woodcarving is, so I asked my favourite Japanese hanga artists to teach me. I might be the only artist doing this professionally."¹⁰⁰ The Mother Forest gallery recently opened in Hokkaido, displaying both traditional Ainu patterns and colourful figurative depictions of deities in animal form.¹⁰¹ Ogasawa Sayo, an illustrator and manga artist who has exhibited there, considers herself to be "showing the magnificence of Ainu culture in her work... having searched for and found her own personal Ainu roots." She and other artists exemplify the range of options available within a practice of consciously hybrid modern

culture.



Mina Sakai (left) and AINU Rebels

Comparable possibilities for hybrid creativity lie in music. AINU Rebels were a group that played Ainu traditional instruments such as the mukuri, sang Ainu poems in the native language, rapped in Japanese about the harsh experiences of being Ainu and arranged traditional dance steps to rock and hip-hop beats. Sakai Mina, their leader, claimed; "we think that culture is something that constantly changes. We are confident that we have the spirit... to express something about the Ainu."¹⁰² Predictably for encounters between new and older styles of performance anywhere in the world, mixed reactions among older Ainu are reported. Sakai sees herself interacting with at least two audiences - those who need to learn about the Ainu, and the Ainu themselves, "It's important that I spread Ainu culture and create pride among the Ainu so there is no more prejudice and discrimination against us. But this means that I am not totally free as an artist."

Again, exhibiting a broken, triangular relationship between the Ainu, Japan, and international agents, Sakai recalls a childhood in Japan when she was ashamed of her Ainu identity. But on a high school trip to Canada and a visit to an indigenous community there, she discovered a sense of indigenous pride when she encountered a 16-year-old indigenous

boy who wore a tattoo of his tribe.¹⁰³

AINU Rebels in Nov 1, 2009 concert and interview

Sakai's ebullient promotion of an Ainu fusion culture may be compared with the prominent activity of Yuki Koji and his Ainu Art Project. Yuki's history of encounter with Ainu identity echoes Sakai's: "I left home early for Tokyo hoping to have nothing to do with the Ainu. However, I could not escape from a burning question of who I am. When I heard that the Ainu people were building "itaomacip", Ainu's traditional ocean-going canoe, I came back to Hokkaido... but the ship was sent to a museum...the ship was dead not alive...I asked myself "who am I?" My response was "I am Ainu, not dead. I am living in this modern society."¹⁰⁴ Yuki's remarks and his and Sakai's work movingly embody cultural re-appropriation, the intentional revalorisation of formally negative symbolic capital.



Yuki Koji, performs in Tokyo

Koji Yuki's movements between Hokkaido and Tokyo also exemplify the geographical dispersion of Ainu identity which has made

estimates for Ainu numbers hypothetical and/or politically motivated. A soon to be released film, "Tokyo Ainu",¹⁰⁵ will highlight an important aspect of indigenous modernity. Watson has pointed out that, for indigenous peoples, insistence on traditional and specific territorial location may reflect and ratify destructive colonial exploitation.¹⁰⁶ Against such processes, indigenous people in cities have the power to transform local urban geography in their own interests. A Tokyo café-restaurant, Rera Cise, has offered Ainu cuisine and beer, and a chance for the Japanese public and Ainu people to experience their own cultural identity. Many of its users may not have publicly or even privately identified themselves as Ainu; for them Rera Cise could offer a safe place to encounter Ainu culture and some of its ceremonies, without requiring of them a totalised Ainu identity or an abandonment of their urban way of life. John Pocock's sentiment is relevant here. He said that an indigenous people stressing its closeness to ancestral lands is not necessarily contradicting itself when also pointing out that it is becoming increasingly urbanised. The claim and the modern social development may support and reinforce each other.¹⁰⁷

George Yudice has said that in our era of waning political participation, "culture is increasingly wielded as a resource for both sociopolitical and economic amelioration... The immaterialisation characteristic of many new sources of economic growth,...has given the cultural sphere greater importance than at any other moment in the history of modernity."¹⁰⁸ Ainu culture has been successfully reshaped and wielded in different ways over many years. How then will it continue to develop, alongside Ainu political movements?

Conclusion - The Future

This final section considers several likely directions of Ainu development. In terms of

self-representation, Ainu culture and identity will remain hybrid. The Ainu will draw upon the rich resources offered by international organisations, in terms of rights which may be claimed and arguments supporting such rights. Their range of available negotiating points will enable them to engage more fully with the organs of the Japanese state. Failures, or partial successes, in any given area, will be used to shift negotiations to other areas where further support is available from global norms. No end to these processes need be foreseen. However, as Kibe has argued, indigenous status is all very well; the Ainu feel entitled to claim it, but theirs and everybody's interests would be better advanced by the acceptance of a whole range of categories of definition with regard to the nation state between the extremes of national and non-national, and a recognition of multiculturalism and legal provisions for it.¹⁰⁹ Younger Ainu such as Sakai and Yuki will likely introduce new categories.

Nakagawa Hiroshi, an experienced teacher and researcher in the Ainu language, has reported change in the age-composition of his class; more students in their twenties and thirties attend regularly. He stresses: "We must create a situation where using the Ainu language seems as cool as using English to the majority of Japanese people."¹¹⁰ To an extent this seems already to be happening. Nakagawa reflects: "From experience, my feelings are that, in the last five years there seems to have been an obvious change to how the Ainu people themselves feel about study of the Ainu language." However, Nakagawa goes on to say that much more needs to be done to improve the status of the Ainu language within the education system.¹¹¹

There are, of course, massive problems that will face future development of Ainu identity and rights. The Rera Cise restaurant website explains that its name means "House of Wind" in the Ainu language and that the owners have hoped to spread Ainu culture "like the wind."¹¹²

Sadly though, Rera Cise closed in 2009. At the time the only prominently Ainu restaurant in Tokyo, its inability to survive in a city full of diners with cosmopolitan tastes highlights the fact that recognition, or acceptance, of Ainu within Japan is still very limited. Dubreuil has criticised the state education system, arguing that Japan's 2006 set of history textbooks amounts to an insult to the Ainu and thus a major disservice to the Japanese people in general. "The entire history of the Ainu in the book consists of a footnote to a discussion on the Okinawans" - a footnote which is entirely silent on Ainu-Japanese relations since the 18th century.¹¹³ The Japanese government has historically proved very resistant to criticism of itself within the education system. Therefore Ainu protests over the issue of textbooks may be wise to focus on the demand for positive recognition. A good example would be pressing for acknowledgement of the Ainu contribution to the already nationally famous Japanese Antarctic expedition of 1912. "Shirase's group depended on the dog-sledding skills of two Ainu he had brought along from the indigenous community of the northern Island of Hokkaido. With the guidance - not always acknowledged - of these experts the Dash Patrol in fact managed to set a sledging speed record during their brief foray South."¹¹⁴

A 2009 study has noted that teachers in small schools in Hokkaido have successfully acquired knowledge of Ainu cultural practices from local inhabitants and assimilated them into their curricula in a bottom-up manner.¹¹⁵ The field of education offers space for a range of Ainu negotiating positions in relation to government practices. Diene criticised the lack of a quota system to encourage Ainu entry into Japanese universities,¹¹⁶ and with rates of Ainu entry to higher education low,¹¹⁷ this is likely to be a direction in which Ainu activism moves.



School children learn about the Ainu in Kushiro, Hokkaido



Shirase Nobuo and the Antarctic Expedition of 1912

The issue of land rights, important for any indigenous people, might seem to leave little room for manoeuvre in Ainu-Japanese negotiations, with UNDRIP stipulating that indigenous rights should not damage the territorial integrity of existing states. But the Ainu are one of few indigenous peoples in developed countries without their own land, and this is clearly a direction in which Ainu activism will push further. Shimin Gaikou Sentô, a Japanese NGO, has produced a guide to help Ainu fully understand and exercise their rights. The guide, "An Explanation and Usage Guide to the UN's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, for the Ainu", includes

references to land rights and has been distributed free among the Ainu.¹¹⁸ Already in 2004, Ainu activism achieved a measure of success in relation to land claims. Japan's government had nominated the Shiretoko National Park as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Although the park area had long historical associations with Ainu communities, the government failed to involve the Ainu in the preparation of its case. In keeping with the broken triangle model, the Ainu avoided initial confrontation with the Japanese government,¹¹⁹ instead complaining directly to the UN. Shiretoko was awarded World Heritage status, but with a recommendation for joint management by the Ainu and the Japanese government. However, the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) has been slow to respond and interviews with MOE officials indicate little awareness of this recommendation.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, this is an important possible opening for Ainu activism.

Two years after the 2008 resolution, the broken triangle model continues to illuminate the deployment of human rights issues in Japan. On the 14th May 2010, Navi Pillay, the UN human rights high commissioner, referred to "fruitful discussions with the Japanese government on a range of domestic and international human rights issues"¹²¹ - discussions with a view to Japan's adopting an anti-discrimination law whose scope would include both migrants and longer-term minority groups such as the Ainu. This agenda echoes that of the ICERD (International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination) in its consideration of Japanese minorities in February 2010, where stress was laid on "the need for human rights education and education of the general population", particularly "the education of officials including those in most regular contact with non-Japanese."¹²² As international bodies urge the Japanese government to observe their protocols, so Ainu will continue to press for participation on Japanese government bodies with responsibility

for Ainu affairs. Recently the ruling DPJ (Democratic Party) has shown greater sympathy towards the Ainu's right to political participation. The "expert meeting panel on Ainu policy", which under the LDP existed for a year from June 2008, contained only one Ainu out of 12 members. But since December 2009 this panel has been followed, under the DPJ government, by the creation of a new Ainu Policy Promotion Panel, which has 5 Ainu members.¹²³ As shown earlier, the Ainu in fact negotiate not only with international bodies and the Japanese government, but with each other. Thus, the reshaping of Ainu identities is another area in which progression is certain even if its direction cannot be fully anticipated.

Any Ainu individual may negotiate his or her identity within an internal dialogue. Getting married in traditional Ainu clothing has recently become popular among younger Ainu; this is documented in and no doubt promoted by Ui Makiko's book *ainu tokidoki nihonjin*.¹²⁴ In April 2005 at her wedding in Tokyo, Sakai Mina went even further, using black lipstick to recreate the traditional Ainu mouth tattoo - presenting her identity as a hybrid formation between a traditional past and a culturally innovative present.¹²⁵



Sakai Mina's wedding, from *Metropolis* magazine

In line with Bayly's argument that it was

towards the end of the 19th century that indigenous peoples on a worldwide scale began to learn techniques enabling their survival despite the conditions which had hitherto limited and oppressed them,¹²⁶ the Ainu have, against all odds, successfully ensured their long term survival over the last hundred or so years. Japan's indigenous people will continue to promote themselves as simultaneously indigenous and modern, and their political and cultural movements will exist on trans-national planes.

Simon Cotterill recently graduated from the University of Oxford's Nissan Institute.

Recommended citation: Ainu Success: the Political and Cultural Achievements of Japan's Indigenous Minority, The Asia-Pacific Journal Vol 9, Issue 12 No 2, March 21, 2011.

Articles on related topics

- [Mark Winchester, On the Dawn of a New National Ainu Policy: The "'Ainu' as a Situation" Today.](#)
- [Yukie Chiri and Kyoko Selden, The Song the Owl God Himself Sang. "Silver Droplets Fall Fall All Around," an Ainu Tale](#)
- [Katsuya HIRANO, The Politics of Colonial Translation: On the Narrative of the Ainu as a "Vanishing Ethnicity"](#)
- [ann-elise lewallen, Indigenous at last! Ainu Grassroots Organizing and the Indigenous Peoples Summit in Ainu Mosir](#)
- [Chisato "Kitty" O. Dubreuil, The Ainu and Their Culture: A Critical Twenty-First Century Assessment](#)
- [David McNeill, Oda Makoto, Pak Kyongnam,](#)

[Tanaka Hiroshi, William Wetherall & Honda Katsuichi, The Diene Report on Discrimination and Racism in Japan](#)

- [Joshua Hotaka Roth, Political and Cultural Perspectives on Japan's Insider Minorities](#)

Notes

- ¹ The Ainu Association of Hokkaido (2010) *Actual Living Conditions of the Hokkaido Ainu*
- ² Watson, M. (2010) *Diasporic Indigeneity: place and the articulation of Ainu identity in Tokyo, Japan* Environment and Planning A, volume 42, p. 270.
- ³ Dubreuil, C. (2007) *The Ainu and their Culture: A Critical Twenty First Century Account* The Asia -Pacific Journal
- ⁴ Sjöberg, K. (1993) *The Return of the Ainu: Cultural Mobilisation and Practice of Ethnicity in Japan*, p. 152. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers
- ⁵ Stevens, G. (2008) *Subject, Objective and Active Participant: The Ainu, Law, and Legal Mobilisation* Indigenous Law Journal, 7: 1, p. 152.
- ⁶ Siddle, R. *Ainu Ethnicity: A History* in Fitzhugh, W.W. and Dubreuil, C. (1999) *The Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*.
- ⁷ Siddle, R. *The Ainu* in Weiner, M (2009) *Japan's Minorities (2nd edition)*, p. 23. London: Routledge
- ⁸ Rabson, S. (1996) *Assimilation Policy in Okinawa: Promotion, Resistance, and 'Reconciliation'* Japan Policy Research Institute Occasional Paper No. 8, October 1996
- ⁹ Creef, E.T. (2006) *Ainu in America: The Photographic Representation of 'Mysterious Little Japanese Primitives' at the 1904 St. Louis*

World's Fair. Paper presented at the 2006 annual meeting of the American Studies Association.

¹⁰ Carlson, L (1989) *Giant Ainu and Hairy Patagonians* The Journal of American Culture, p. 24.

¹¹ Cheung, S.C.H. (2003) *Ainu Culture in Transition*, Futures, 35:9, pp. 951-959.

¹² Wilhelm, G. (2009) *The Ainu in Japan: Ethnic Identity and Cultural Definitions*

¹³ Siddle, R. in Weiner, M (2009) op.cit. p. 28.

¹⁴ Mock, J (1999) *Culture, Community and Change in a Sapporo Neighbourhood, 1925 - 1988*, p. 83. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press

¹⁵ Mock, J (1999) *Culture, Community and Change in a Sapporo Neighbourhood, 1925 - 1988*, p. 83. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press

¹⁶ Harrison, S. (2007) *The Indigenous Ainu of Japan and the 'Northern Territories' Dispute*, p. 74.

¹⁷ Cheung, S.C.H. (2003) op.cit. p. 953.

¹⁸ Stevens, G. (2001) *The Ainu and Human Rights: Domestic and International Protections* Japanese Studies, 21: 2 , p. 197.

¹⁹ Uzawa, K (2007) *The Ainu of Japan: Political Situations and Rights Issues* Arctic Network for the Support of the Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Arctic, p. 4.

²⁰ Kearney, M. (2004) *Changing Fields of Anthropology: From Local to Global*, p. 281. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield

²¹ Siddle, R in Weiner, M (2009) op.cit. p. 27.

²² Cheung, S.C.H. (2003) op.cit. p. 953.

²³ Lewallen, A.E. (2007) *Bones of Contention: Negotiating Anthropological Ethics within the*

Field of Ainu Refusal Critical Asian Studies, 39: 4, p. 518.

²⁴ Wetherall, W. (1993) *The Ainu Nation* The Japan Times Weekly, 2nd January 1993

²⁵ Uemura, H. in Buckley, S. (2002) *The Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture*, p. 11. London: Routledge

²⁶ Lewallen, A.E. (2008) *Indigenous at last! Ainu Grassroots Organizing and the Indigenous People's Summit in Ainu Mosir*

²⁷ Kearney, M. (2004) op. cit. p. 313. Kearney, M. (2004) op. cit. p. 313.

²⁸ Harrison, S. (2007) op. cit. p. 98.

²⁹ Siddle, R. (1996) *Race, Resistance, and the Ainu of Japan*, pp. 183-4. London: Routledge

³⁰ Harrison, S (2007) op. cit. p. 96.

³¹ Siddle, R. (1996) op. cit. p. 185.

³² Siddle, R. (1996) op. cit. p. 185.

³³ Daes, E.I. (2009) *The Contribution of the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples to the Genesis and Evolution of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* in Charters, C and Stavenhagen, R (eds) *Making the Declaration Work: The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People*

³⁴ *ILO Convention 169* (1989)

³⁵ Daes, E.I. (2009) *The Contribution of the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples to the Genesis and Evolution of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* in Charters, C and Stavenhagen, R (eds) *Making the Declaration Work: The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People*

³⁶ The Ainu Association of Hokkaido (2010) *Inauguration Speech, UN General Assembly, 10th December 1992*

- ³⁷ Kennedy, M (2009) *Contemporary Tradition: Reconfiguring Ainu Culture in Modern Japan* Nagoya University of Commerce and Business, Journal of Language, Culture and Communication
- ³⁸ ILO Convention 169 (1989)
- ³⁹ MOFA (2000) *Comments of the Japanese Government on the Concluding Observations adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 20, 2000, regarding initial and second periodic report of the Japanese Government*
- ⁴⁰ MOFA (2000) *Comments of the Japanese Government on the Concluding Observations adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 20, 2000, regarding initial and second periodic report of the Japanese Government*
- ⁴¹ ILO website (2005) *International Day of the World's Indigenous People 2005 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples' Right - still a long way to go*
- ⁴² CERD (2001) *58th Session, 9th March 2001, Morning* United Nations Press Release
- ⁴³ Porter, C (2008) *After the Ainu Shinpo: The United Nations and the Indigenous People of Japan* New Voices, p. 204.
- ⁴⁴ Montes, A.R and Cisneros, G.T. (2009) *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: the Foundation of a New Relationship between Indigenous Peoples, States and Societies* in Charters, C and Stavenhagen, R (eds) *op.cit.* p. 151.
- ⁴⁵ Uzawa, K (2007) *The Ainu of Japan: Political Situations and Rights Issues* Arctic Network for the Support of the Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Arctic, pp. 6-7.
- ⁴⁶ Stevens, G. (2008) *op. cit.* pp. 164-165.
- ⁴⁷ Stevens, G. (2008) *op. cit.* pp. 164-165.
- ⁴⁸ Lewallen, A.E. (2008) *op. cit.*
- ⁴⁹ Siddle, R (1996) *op.cit.* pp. 163 and 238.
- ⁵⁰ Eide, A (2009) *The Indigenous Peoples, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the Adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in Charters, C and Stavenhagen, R (eds) *op.cit.* p. 42.
- ⁵¹ 本道河野 (2008) 政争の具にされる先住民論議、北方ジャーナル
- ⁵² Hasegawa, Y (2004) *Social Insecurity and Minority Rights in the Information Age* Asia Rights Journal, p. 1.
- ⁵³ Uzawa, K (2007) *op. cit.* p. 4.
- ⁵⁴ Harrison (2007) *op. cit.* p. 85.
- ⁵⁵ Sonohara, T (1997) *Toward a Genuine Redress for an Unjust Past: The Nibutani Dam Case* E Law: Murdoch University Electronic Journal
- ⁵⁶ Harrison, S. (2007) *op. cit.* p. 98.
- ⁵⁷ Manea, M-G (2008) *Human Rights and the International Dialogue Between Asia and Europe: ASEAN- Europe Relations and ASEM* The Pacific Review, 21:3, pp. 369 - 396.
- ⁵⁸ Sonohara, T (1997) *Toward a Genuine Redress for an Unjust Past: The Nibutani Dam Case* E Law: Murdoch University Electronic Journal
- ⁵⁹ Hasegawa, Y (2003) *Ainu People in Japan* CTC Bulletin
- ⁶⁰ Morris-Suzuki, T (1998) *Reinventing Japan: Time, Space, Nation*, p. 30 East Gate Books: USA
- ⁶¹ Hasegawa, Y (2003) *op. cit.*
- ⁶² Sonohara, T (1997) *op. cit.*

- ⁶³ Kingsbury, B. (1998) *Indigenous Peoples in International Law; a Constructivist Approach to the Asian Controversy* American Journal of International Law, vol. 92, pp. 73 - 74.
- ⁶⁴ Wilhelm, G. (2009) op. cit.
- ⁶⁵ Foucault, M. (1995) *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 101 - 102. Knopf Doubleday
- ⁶⁶ Siddle, R (2002) *An Epoch Making Event? The 1997 Ainu Cultural Promotion Act and its Impact* Japan Forum, 14:3, pp. 405-423.
- ⁶⁷ Chakravorty Spivak, G *Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography* in Guha, R and Chakravorty Spivak, G (eds) (1988) *Selected Subaltern Studies*, p. 13. New York: OUP
- ⁶⁸ Burgess, C (2010) *The 'Illusion' of Homogeneous Japan and National Character: Discourse as a Tool to Transcend the 'Myth' vs. 'Reality' Binary* The Asia-Pacific Journal
- ⁶⁹ Burgess (2010) op.cit.
- ⁷⁰ Gill, T (2001) *A Review of 'Multi-ethnic Japan' by John Lie*, Monumenta Nipponica, 56:4 in Burgess (2010) op.cit.
- ⁷¹ Burgess (2010) op. cit.
- ⁷² Morris-Suzuki, T (2002) in Maswood, J, Graham, J, and Miyajima, H (eds) *Japan - Change and Continuity*, pp. 171. London: Routledge
- ⁷³ Hasegawa (2003) op. cit.
- ⁷⁴ Lewallen, A.E. (2007) op. cit. p. 518.
- ⁷⁵ Kennedy, M (2009) op. cit. p. 40.
- ⁷⁶ [Nibutani Declaration](#) (2008)
- ⁷⁷ Watson, M (2010) op. cit. p. 272.
- ⁷⁸ Pocock, J.G.A. (2005) *The Discovery of Islands*, pp. 243. UK: Cambridge University Press
- ⁷⁹ The Ainu Association of Hokkaido (2010) op. cit.
- ⁸⁰ Harrison, S (2007) op. cit. p. 102.
- ⁸¹ Mainichi Daily News (2008) *Ainu Express Happiness over Indigenous Resolution at Traditional Ceremony*
- ⁸² Legendre, J.J (2010) *Ainu Claim Independence to Prime Minister Hatoyama* ([See Video Interview](#))
- ⁸³ Fitzhugh, W.W. *Ainu Ethnicity: A History* in Fitzhugh, W.W. and Dubreuil, C. (1999) *The Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*, p. 20.
- ⁸⁴ Howell, D. (2008) op. cit. p. 135.
- ⁸⁵ Dubreuil, C. (2007) op. cit.
- ⁸⁶ Cheung, S.C.H. (2005)
- ⁸⁷ Cheung, S.C.H. (2005)
- ⁸⁸ Yamada, T (2000) *The Revival of Rituals among the Sakha-Yakut and the Hokkaido Ainu* Acta Borealia, 17:1, p. 96.
- ⁸⁹ Lewallen, A.E. (2008) op. cit.
- ⁹⁰ Yamada, T (2001) *Gender and Cultural Revitalisation Movements among the Ainu* Senri Ethnological Series, 56, pp. 237 - 257.
- ⁹¹ Hiwasaki, L (2000) *Ethnic Tourism in Hokkaido and the Shaping of Ainu Identity* Pacific Affairs, 73:3, p. 402.
- ⁹² Nakamura, N (2007) [Managing the Cultural Promotion of Indigenous People in a Community-Based Museum: the Ainu Culture Cluster Project at the Nibutani Culture Museum, Japan](#) Museum and Society, pp. 148 - 167.
- ⁹³ Yamada, T (2000) op. cit. p. 108.

- ⁹⁴ Ohtsuka, K *Tourism, Assimilation and Ainu Survival Today* in Fitzhugh, W.W. and Dubreuil, C. (1999) *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*, p. 95. Washington University Press.
- ⁹⁵ Howell, D (2008) op. cit. p. 136.
- ⁹⁶ Howell, D. (2008) op. cit. p. 136.
- ⁹⁷ Nakamura, N. (2007) op. cit. p. 157.
- ⁹⁸ Nakamura, N. (2007) op. cit. p. 157.
- ⁹⁹ Dubreuil, C. (2007) op. cit.
- ¹⁰⁰ Birmingham, L (2010) *A Cultural Revival - the Spirit of Japan's Ainu Artists*
- ¹⁰¹ Forest Gallery (2009) 二人展 芳野省吾・小笠原小夜
- ¹⁰² Reuters (2007) *Japan's Ainu Fuse Tradition, Hip-Hop for Awareness*
- ¹⁰³ Peace Boat (2008) *Cool, Proud, Active*
- ¹⁰⁴ Kondo, S. (2007) *Interview with Koji Yuki, the leader of Ainu Art Project* Voices: a World Forum for Music Therapy
- ¹⁰⁵ Kamuy Mintara (2010) *Documentary Film: Tokyo Ainu*
- ¹⁰⁶ Watson, M. (2010) op. cit. pp. 268 - 284.
- ¹⁰⁷ レラちセ (2009)
- ¹⁰⁸ Yudice, G. (2004) *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era*, pp. 9-10. USA: Duke University Press
- ¹⁰⁹ Kibe, T. (2006) *Differentiated Citizenship and Ethnocultural Groups: A Japanese Case* Citizenship Studies, 10:4, p. 421.
- ¹¹⁰ アイヌ政策のあり方に関する有識者懇談会、第5回(2009) *アイヌ語学習の未来に向けて一考え方と提案* Nakagawa, like many Ainu, uses the word 'wajin' to distinguish non-Ainu Japanese people
- ¹¹¹ アイヌ政策のあり方に関する有識者懇談会、第5回(2009) op. cit.
- ¹¹² レラちセ (2009)
- ¹¹³ Dubreuil, C (2007) op. cit.
- ¹¹⁴ Spufford, F (ed) (2007) *The Ends of the Earth: Vol. 2 The Antarctic* London: Granta Books
- ¹¹⁵ Gayman, J (2009) *地域と文化に根ざした教育についての考察 : 二風谷小学校の取り組みを中心に*
- ¹¹⁶ Uzawa, K (2007) op. cit. p. 4.
- ¹¹⁷ The Ainu Association of Hokkaido (2010) *Actual Living Conditions of the Hokkaido Ainu*
- ¹¹⁸ 市民外交 (2009) *アイヌ民族の視点からみた「先住民族の権利に関する国際連合宣言」の解説と利用法*
- ¹¹⁹ Kennedy, M (2009) op. cit. p. 42.
- ¹²⁰ personal correspondence with Ann-Elise Lewallen (2011)
- ¹²¹ UN News Centre (2010) *UN Official Lauds Japan's Human Rights Reforms, Urges Stronger Role Globally*
- ¹²² CERD (2010) *Questions by the Rapporteur in Connection with the Consideration of the Third to Sixth Periodic Reports of Japan*
- ¹²³ 時事通信社 (2009) *アイヌ支援で新会議＝鳩山首相「政治主導で推進」*
- ¹²⁴ 宇井真紀子 (2009) *地球の力～アイヌの祈りと暮らし*, p. 2.
- ¹²⁵ Sharp, A (2009) *Going Native* Metropolis Magazine

¹²⁶ Bayly, C.A. (2004) *The Birth of the Modern Comparisons*, p. 44.
World, 1780-1914:Global Connections and