

Deconstructing and Reconstructing Ainu identity
From assimilation to recognition
1868-2008

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This paper is a presentation given on August 25, 2011 in the Contemporary Population(s) of Japan panel, during the 13th International EAJIS (European Association for Japanese Studies) Conference (24-27 August 2011).

The aim of this presentation is to introduce the outline of a work in progress elaborated within the “Japanese Populations” research group. It should be considered preliminary research regarding contemporary Ainu identity. In order to try to unveil elements of this identity today, it is crucial to look back at its evolution.

From Meiji, the Ainu, Japan’s indigenous ethnic minority, were subjected to forced assimilation and cultural suppression by Japan before being coined “a vanishing people”. Their distinct ethnic identity was negated by political discourse, while, paradoxically, their culture was reshaped and commoditized through ethnic tourism. All the while, the Ainu fought to preserve and reinvent elements of their culture and struggled to achieve international and domestic recognition.

These two movements, - Japanese deconstruction of the Ainu identity through assimilation and ethnic negation-, and Ainu reconstruction of their identity via cultural reinvention and discursive re-appropriation -, are intimately linked. In other words, Ainu resistance grew together with and as a part of the very hegemony that tried to silence and deny them¹. This presentation will outline the evolution of these two movements during these 140 years separating Meiji assimilation from the 2008 recognition of the Ainu as an indigenous people of Japan.

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Pre-Meiji precedents: the road from Ainu “barbarian” to Japanese “primitive”

Aboriginal state Ainu

The Ainu people in their aboriginal state relied mostly on hunting, fishing, gathering, limited agriculture and barter economy. They inhabited the islands now known as Hokkaidô, the Kuril, Sakhalin, Southern Kamchatka and the Amur River estuary region.

¹ Scott Harrison, *The Indigenous Ainu of Japan and the « Northern Territories » Dispute*, M.A. dissertation thesis, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2007

Ainu-Japanese relations

Contacts between the Ainu and the Japanese date back to at least the 14th century, and were heavily influenced by the Chinese scheme of world-order (*ka.i chitsujo* 華夷秩序). In this sense, Ainu and Japanese relations could be understood in spatial terms as an insider vs. outsider/ civilized centre vs. barbaric fringe relationship².

Emphasizing Ainu “foreignness”

Hence, during most of the Tokugawa period, Ainu assimilation was forbidden, and their ethnic distinction and barbaric identity used as a justification of their subjugation and as a way for Japan to display power³.

Deconstructing Ainu identity: Meiji Japan’s assimilation of “former aborigines”

In 1869, Hokkaidô is officially annexed by Meiji Japan⁴. For the first time, Japan is faced with the delicate, yet crucial task of integrating a foreign population amid its own. The Meiji government will choose assimilation and the dismantling of pre-existing Ainu identity. Many reasons motivate this choice.

Protection against Russia: the need for a northern defence

Construction of the Meiji nation-state: the need for loyal imperial subjects

The construction of the Meiji nation-state is based on the concept of “Nation as a family state” (家族国家 *kazoku kokka*) with the emperor at its head as both ruler and father-figure. This requires an ethnically homogenous people⁵.

² The relationship between the Ainu and the Japanese during this period and at the turn of Meiji can be theorized by David Day’s concept of “supplanting societies”, or that of “internal colonialism” by which a national center exploits and subjugates people at its periphery, while making its claim superior to the pre-existing people, -in this case the Ainu-, as well as being superior to any other society that might challenge it, -in this case the Russians especially.

³ Demarcation of an “ethnic boundary” (Frederick Barth’s term) between the Ainu and Japanese was a critical element in determining the political boundaries of the early modern Japanese state. During these audiences, called *uimam*, Ainu leaders in full traditional attire would be paraded in the streets before paying tribute to the lord of the Matsumae clan. For more on these « barbarians audiences », see Howell D. 1994 « Ainu Ethnicity and the boundaries of the Early Modern Japanese State », *Past and Present* 142 (February 1994) , MORRIS-SUZUKI T. 1994 “Creating the Frontier: Border, Identity, and History in Japan’s Far North”, *East Asian History* 7, 1994, pp.1-24 and Inagaki Reiko, « 近世蝦夷地における儀礼支配の特質 ウイマム・オムシャの変遷を当して », 『民衆生活と信仰・思想』民衆史研究会, 1985, pp.111-3

⁴ The island is declared *terra nullius* 「無主の地」 in 1872 by the Land Regulation Law (*Hokkaidô tochi urikashi kisoku chijokisoku* 「北海道土地売貸規則・地所規則」). The following land laws are the 1877 Hokkaidô Land Deed Issuance Regulation (*Hokkaidô Chiken hakkô Jôrei* 北海道地券発行条例) –whose article 16 grants all traditional lands of the Ainu to be given to the government, the 1886 Hokkaidô Regulation for Transferring Government Land to Private Ownership (*Hokkaidô Tochi Haraikudari Kisoku* 「北海道土地払下規則」) and the 1897 Undeveloped Hokkaido National Lands Disposal Act (*Hokkaidô Kokuyû Mikaichi Shobunhō* 「北海道国有未開地処分法」). Colonization enterprise is intrinsic to the institution of the nation-state and in the creation and reinforcement of its ideology. Plus Hokkaidô is a buffer zone against Russia, a new territory to exploit, somewhere to send now unemployed *bushi*, and Japan gains 22% of its territory.

⁵ Howell, David L., “Making “useful citizens” of the Ainu”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 63, n°1, February 2004, pp.5-29 (6 et 18)

Recognition from foreign powers: the need for subjugated primitives

Furthermore, as social Darwinism is introduced in Japan at the beginning of Meiji, Ainu subjugation and “civilization through assimilation” helped Japan petition Western powers for recognition as a “civilized” state⁶. In this sense, Japanese-Ainu relations shifted from a spatial insider vs. outsider to a temporal modern vs. primitive relationship.

Building national prosperity: the need for farmers and “useful citizens”

The space and natural resources that the newly acquired Hokkaidô offered must be exploited; this task will fall upon settlers from the mainland, but also redeployed Ainu. This assimilation will be achieved through the suppression⁷ of the Ainu identity and culture, agricultural redeployment and ethnic negation, leading to their subsequent acculturation⁸

Legal assimilation (アイヌから「旧土人」へ) – turning the Ainu into “former aborigines”

Though officially and legally integrated into the common people in 1871⁹, from 1878, their official legal denomination is “former aborigine”¹⁰ (*kyûdojin*, 旧土人)¹¹. At this time, the state stopped keeping separate tallies of them in population registers, making it impossible from then on and until today to keep a precise estimate of the Ainu population at any given time.

⁶ “There are no “races” and therefore no “race relations”. There is only a belief that there are such things, a belief that is used by some social groups to construct an Other (and therefore the Self) in thought as a prelude to exclusion and domination, and by other social groups to define self (and so to construct an Other) as a means of resisting exclusion.” (Robert Miles, *Race after “Race relations”*, London, Routledge, 1993, p.42). Furthermore, it was Japan’s “duty”. The first history of Hokkaidô, printed in 1918, states that the “responsibility of colonization of Hokkaidô” was placed upon the Japanese because “no other superior race was in contact with Ezo” (Michael Weiner, “The Invention of Identity; Race and Nation in Pre-war Japan”, Dikötter, p.113)

⁷ “Suppression”, as in forcibly subdue/to curtail or prohibit/ to keep from being revealed/ to inhibit the expression of and not “eradication”, which would entail addressing the roots of Ainu identity, an neigh-impossible task.

⁸ The definition of the concept of acculturation revealed by this study can be summarized as follows “the modification of the culture of a group as a result of contact with a different culture”. In this case, the “contact” in question is materialized by the will of the newly established Meiji government to stake its territorial claim on Hokkaidô, and by an active pursuit of the assimilation of its indigenous people, the Ainu.

⁹ by the Family registration Law (*kôsekihô*, 戸籍法)

¹⁰ Social theorist Robert Ackerman remarks: “The ‘citizen’ is not only defined against those who would be aliens or traitors and work against national goals; the citizen is also presented as a national ideal, a move that generates latent logic of internal racism with every national formation”. (*Heterogeneities: Race, Gender, Class, Nation and State*, Amherst University of Massachusetts Press, 1996, p.125-6)

¹¹ If the Japanese nation-state was the modern form of a culturally and racially homogenous race, then what was the status of the Ainu in the nation? The Ainu had become Japanese, just ones that were mired in an earlier stage of national history. This denomination will persist until 1937. As part of Japan’s first modern population census in 1872 (*jinshinkoseki* 壬申戸籍), an Ainu population census also takes place. In parallel, they are randomly given Japanese surnames and names. These family ties were of course of great importance to the Ainu. Up until that point, their lineage had been symbolized by the passing down of a sacred family symbol, called *ekashi shiroshi*. They were revealed only within the family circle and adorned arrows to determine which family had made the catch during hunting parties, and men’s ceremonial headdress. Similarly, the Ainu women wore “bosom girdles” (*upsor kut*) under their clothing, whose design was passed on by the mother, and that must be kept secret from Ainu men, as a way to prevent misfortune on the family and as a symbol of the matrilineal lineage. Both these girdles and the *ekashi shiroshi* were believed to be used as safe-conducts by the deceased to be rejoined with his ancestors in the Land of the Dead. These symbols were rendered useless by the random attribution of surnames to the Ainu, and very few have made it back to us.

Plus, taboo regarding people who have similar name in a same region.

Cultural assimilation (アイヌ同化政策) – making the Ainu “less Ainu and more Japanese”

Many cultural assimilation measures aimed at suppressing visual markers of ethnic difference, such as the outlawing of earrings for the men, ritual face and hand tattoos for the women¹².

*Agricultural redeployment – turning the Ainu into farmers and “useful citizens” (優位なる国民 *yûi naru kokumin*)*

Assimilation measures such as the outlawing of traditional hunting and fishing techniques¹³, necessary to the Ainu’s survival, also aimed at forcing agricultural redeployment upon them¹⁴, hence turning them into a cheap and docile labor force. In 1899, the Hokkaidô Former Aborigines Protection Act’s main focus is also facilitating agricultural redeployment while preventing too deep a pauperization of the Ainu¹⁵. Furthermore, it gives the Ainu the means to support themselves and make their way into modern society¹⁶.

¹² The Ainu women were tattooed around their mouth and on their arms. The tattoo around their mouth is initiated at age three and completed by the time they get married. This tradition is believed to have been brought to Earth by the ancestral Mother, and younger sister of the Creator God. For the Ainu, the tattoo completed at betrothal, was a symbol that any word coming out of a woman’s mouth would now belong to her husband, while preventing evil spirits to speak, or to enter through a woman’s mouth. Similarly, the Ainu motifs (*moreu*) on their clothing (*attush*) were also believed to keep the evil spirits and misfortune out of their body. Where the Japanese were concerned, according to their own cultural system, tattooing was associated with crime and punishment whereas the practice itself was regarded as a form of body mutilation, which, in case of voluntary infliction, was completely averse to the prevalent notions of Confucian filial conduct. It is attested by foreign visitors’ travel logs, such as that of Isabella Bird, that the Ainu were very distraught after these bans were put in place, worrying about the anger of their gods, and the incapacity for Ainu women to find a husband.

¹³ In 1876, the traditional Ainu bow and poison arrows were outlawed. At the same time, the drastic decline of animal populations due to overhunting by the Japanese, armed with rifles, led the Agency to enact other laws, to try and regulate these populations, such as the 1875 胆振日高両州方面鹿狩規則 *Iburi Hidaka ryôshûhoumen shikakari kisoku*, restricts the hunting periods the number of rifles in circulation and the number of authorized hunters. In the same way, Ainu traditional fishnets were also outlawed, and in 1878, fishing salmon or trout followed the same fate.

¹⁴ Turning Ainu into farmers also reflected the officials’ conviction that farming was an occupation uniquely suited to genuine Japanese subjects: they pulled their Ainu charges out of relatively stable livelihoods as fishers, lumberjacks, and construction workers in an attempt to turn them into marginal cultivators of onions, radishes, and potatoes. The government assumed that once the Ainu became “useful citizens” they would disappear from statistics and hence cease to exist as a distinct ethnic group, as well as help build national prosperity as a cheap and docile labour force. Howell, David L., “Making “useful citizens” of the Ainu”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 63, n°1, February 2004, pp.5-29 (6)

¹⁵ As expected, the practical results of this act were disappointing. About one fifth of the land granted under the protection law was repossessed for non-cultivation. In 1909, most of the 9 656 hectares given to the Ainu had been abandoned or rented to Japanese tenant farmers. In 1916, only half of the Ainu population practices agriculture, and a vast majority of these farmers survive without actually profiting off of their land. By 1923, only 45 percent of land grants were actually in Ainu hands, and only 19 percent of these were being cultivated by Ainu households. The land policy was upgraded in 1923 because it was not as successful as expected. Government experts were sent to instruct the Ainu farmers in methods of cultivation, and, in 1924, a Mutual Aid Association (*Gojo Kumiai*) was set up to deal with rented land. If the Ainu farmer wished to rent out his land, it would first be turned over to the Chief of the association (the Japanese mayor of each respective district or county), who would then rent it himself. Rent would go to the Association, not the farmer. When the farmer decided he wanted to cultivate the land himself, it would be returned to him. This aimed at discouraging renting land out and aiding destitute Ainu farmers, unable to help themselves. As a consequence, utilized land increased to 60,7% and self-cultivated land to 36%. About ¾ of the Hokkaidô Ainu received some land under the Protection Act in 1899, but of these only about one half were successful at farming. Parts of the Protection Act were renewed periodically until 1947, but these dealt with welfare for disabled persons, medical insurance and education. It was not until after 1947 that the Ainu actually became owners of their land. (Peng Fred C.C., Robert Ricketts, Nario Imamura, “The Socioeconomic status of the Ainu: the Past in the Present”, *American*

Even though Ainu activists concurred and argued that becoming “useful citizens” was the only way for Ainu to survive as a community, this law will constitute a stumbling block between the Japanese government and Ainu activists. Albeit revised, this law will remain the sole official act concerning the Ainu for almost a century.

Assimilation through adapted education (kôminka 皇民化) – turning the Ainu into imperial subjects and “good Japanese” (良き日本人 yokinijonjin)

From 1877, Ainu children are sent to “former aborigine schools” (*kyûdojin gakkô*, 旧土人学校)¹⁷, where they are forbidden to speak Ainu, and instead taught Japanese, counting, health education and agricultural techniques¹⁸. As a final touch to the assimilation measures, Ainu military conscription (*Ainu chôheirei* アイヌ徴兵令) is carried out throughout Hokkaidô from 1898¹⁹.

Going against assimilation: contradictory images of the Ainu as “living exhibits” and “heroic former aborigines”

The Meiji state’s attempts to assimilate and suppress Ainu identity within Japan occurred alongside contradictory and degrading displays of Ainu abroad, as groups of Ainu are shown as “living exhibits” during domestic and international fairs²⁰. This is a way of marking Japan’s own racial and cultural superiority, and, by contrast, its own modernity and power²¹.

Ethnologist, Volume 1, number 4, November 1974, pp. 731-750) In 1987, only 1 360 hectares, 15 per cent, of the land remained in Ainu hands.

¹⁶ By ostensibly being given the means to support themselves without further government assistance, the Ainu were endowed with a measure of agency. From the state’s standpoint, the success or failure of individual Ainu households after 1899 was less a product of government policy than of the will of the Ainu themselves to make their own way in modern society. Howell, David L., “Making “useful citizens” of the Ainu”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 63, n°1, February 2004, pp.5-29 (8)

¹⁷ An adapted education for Ainu children made it possible to achieve two purposes at the same time: turning the Ainu into farmers and imperial subjects. In 1872, the Temporary Development School 開拓使仮学校 was opened in the Zôjôji Temple in Tôkyô and welcomed 35 Ainu students. They were taught reading, writing, agriculture and livestock farming. This first experience was a failure, as the Ainu students, far away from their homes and families, were sent back to Hokkaidô in the end. In 1873, the Ryôtoku School of Otaru welcomes a few Ainu students amongst its Japanese students, but this experience is the only one of its kind, and Ainu children will not be accepted to Japanese schools until 1937. Instead, they will be sent to special schools, called “aborigine schools” (*kyûdojin gakkô*). The first one opens in 1877 in Tsuikari. From 1879, such schools open in all of Hokkaidô. In 1891, the Hokkaidô Education Association is established to oversee the Ainu children’s education in these schools, and 10 years later, the Former Aborigine Elementary Education Regulation (*Kyûdojin jidôkyûiku kitei* 旧土人児童教育規定) formalizes the separation between Japanese and Ainu students, the construction of the schools and the subjects that are taught.

¹⁸ In 1891, the Hokkaidô Education Association (*Hokkaidô Kyôiku Kyôkai* 北海道教育協会) is established to oversee the Ainu children’s education in these schools, and 10 years later, the Former Aborigine Elementary Education Regulation (*Kyûdojin jidôkyûiku kitei* 旧土人児童教育規定) formalizes the separation between Japanese and Ainu students, the construction of the schools and the subjects that are taught. School enrolment among Ainu children rose from under 45 percent in 1901 to 89 percent in 1907, and continued to rise thereafter, topping 99 in 1927. Of course, not every child attended regularly.

¹⁹ The Meiji Military conscription Law in Japan dates back to 1873 (1898 for Hokkaidô, the Bonin Islands and the Ryû-Kyû). In 1877, military conscription is carried out in Hakodate, Fukuyama (present day Matsumae chô) and Esatsu. In 1896, it spreads to Oshima, Kunashir, Iburi, Ishikari, in 1898 to Hokkaidô as a whole. The first official Ainu army recruit was in 1896. Until 1910, 136 Ainu were recruited in the active service and 382 served as reservists.

²⁰ At the at the 1903 Ôsaka Industrial Exposition, controversial anthropological exhibit, organized by Tsuboi Shôgôrô, where Fushine Kôzô (a.k.a Yasutarô or Hotene) (1874-1938) spoke out in support of temperance and

On the other hand, Ainu participation in the Russo-Japanese War is used to promote patriotism and a significant number of “former aborigines” receive military decorations²², praised as “brave former aborigines” (*yûkan naru kyûdojin*, 勇敢なる旧土人)²³. Nothing is said, however, of the discrimination that they may have suffered within their respective battalions.

Conclusion

After nearly four decades of assimilation, at the end of Meiji, who was considered “Ainu”²⁴? In 1900, government officials tried to come up with a legal definition of Ainu ethnicity, but ultimately fell back on superficial physical characteristics as the key criterion²⁵. By that time, many, if not most, people who identified as Ainu were in fact of mixed ancestry²⁶ and albeit legal integration and assimilation, they were still not considered to be Japanese²⁷.

End of Meiji to WWII: Two opposing forces, ethnic negation vs. growing agency

education, going as far as to exhibit himself willingly to raise funding for an Ainu school. At the 1904 Saint Louis World Fair’s Anthropology Days A significant anecdote is that of the 1904 World Expo in Saint Louis. The Ainu have been integrated to the Japanese officially for more than 30 years, and yet 9 Ainu are sent to represent Hokkaidô natives as “living exhibits”. The participation of the Ainu group in St. Louis was supported by Japanese officials as a way to separate and distinguish indigenous natives from the culturally (and racially) superior Japanese delegation sent to the fair. Indeed, a famous front-piece of an official fair publication illustrated the racialized nature of such an imagined “evolutionary ladder” by depicting the Japanese as seven levels above the “hairy Ainu.” This event is symbolic of the discrimination the Ainu suffered at that time, but also shows concretely the limits set by the Japanese themselves into assimilating the Ainu in their midst. At the 1910 British-Japan Exhibition in London.

²¹ Takakura Shin.ichirô notes that according to the criteria laid out in Lewis Henry Morgan’s then-influential *Ancient Society* (1877), the Ainu belong to on a very low rung of the ladder of human development—the Lower Status of Barbarism, perhaps, or even a step down, on the Upper Status of Savagery. (*Ancient Society*; or, *Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, through Barbarism to Civilization*, New York H. Holt and Company, 1877)

²² 63 Ainu soldiers were sent to war. 54 of them received a military decoration, 3 of them the Order of the Golden Kite, including Chiri Takakichi 知里高吉.

²³ Their heroic acts are even praised by the media Kitakaze Isokichi 北風磯吉 participated on the Battle of Mukden (the “Sekigahara of the Russo-Japanese War”) from February 20th to March 10th of 1905, which totaled more than 250 000 casualties on each side, and during which he volunteered to be a liaison officer, facing certain death.

²⁴ Unanswerable because of the way in which records were kept. In 1871, when the state applied the household registration law to the Ainu, it stopped keeping separate tallies of them in population registers. With regard to the progeny of mixed marriages, persons of one-fourth Ainu ancestry would be eligible for assistance under the protection law only if they were physically recognizable as Ainu. Plus, Ainu families adopting majority Japanese (Kôno Tsunekichi, *北海道旧土人概要*, Sapporo, Hokkaidô chô, 1911, Peng 1977, pp.146-150), such examples as Poet Moritake Takeichi’s elder sister, Tsuru, adopted by his father while he was working in a herring fishery in Atsuta, or Nikishio Shirusu who adopted Iizuka Nagamasa, the son of Iizuka Shinzô, a leader of the Chichibu Rebellion who lived underground in Hokkaidô (>still land of felons and escape?) after escaping the aftermath of the rebellion.

²⁵ That is, individuals whom “anyone could recognize as an aborigine” (*darebito demo dojin to mitomu beki mono* 誰人でも土人と見とむべき者) were Ainu.

²⁶ With regard to the progeny of mixed marriages, persons of one-fourth Ainu ancestry would be eligible for assistance under the protection law only if they were physically recognizable as Ainu. (Howell, David L., “Making “Useful Citizens” of Ainu subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan”, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no.1, February 2004, p.12)

²⁷ In the 1880s, progressive Japanese social commentators such as Kita Masa.aka remarked that the synonymity between “Ainu” and preconceptions of “primitive, hairy, simpleton dying race” aggressively worked against Ainu assimilation into mainstream Japanese society (Siddle 111-2).

Denying Ainu identity: the “vanishing people” myth

From Meiji, the state was more concerned with negating Ainu ethnicity than in promoting assimilation *per se*.

As the Ainu’s demographic profile within Hokkaidô becomes increasingly small due to growing Japanese settlement, poverty²⁸, alcoholism and disease, they are more and more widely perceived as “a vanishing people” (*horobiyuku minzoku* 滅び行く民族), doomed to extinction²⁹.

In 1937, “former aborigine schools” are closed and the denomination “former aborigine” disappears. In the eye of the Japanese government, the Ainu have been completely assimilated and have, in fact, vanished as a people. This line of thought will be perpetrated by the successive governments for the next six decades.

A growing Ainu agency: protection of Ainu identity via assimilation

The Taishô and beginning of Shôwa coincide with the emergence of the first generations of Ainu activists, educated in former aborigine schools. They advocate education, hygiene, self-help, and various degrees of assimilation. Most activists accepted assimilation as a goal, if for no other reason than it seemed to be the most realistic route to bettering the Ainu’s lives³⁰. On top of this, Ainu ability to participate in the betterment of the nation aimed at undermining discrimination³¹.

²⁸ This perception was also rooted in the fallacy that they were uniquely dependent on government welfare as provided through the protection law (Howell, David L., “Making “Useful Citizens” of Ainu subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan”, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no.1, February 2004, p.22)

²⁹ Concept already existent within certain remarks, especially by foreign observers from the 19th century. Miss Isabella L. Bird, a sympathetic observer writing in 1878, declared the Ainu to be “completely irreclaimable,” adding that “contact with civilization, where it exists, only debases them.” Ten years later Basil Hall Chamberlain said that the Ainu people was “almost at its last gasp.” In 1890 Romyn Hitchcock of the Smithsonian Institution declared them to be “doomed to extinction,” and judged them to be “incapable of advancement.” After centuries of contact with the Japanese, he said, “they have learned no arts, adopted no improvements.” In 1893 A. H. Savage Landor stated that the Ainu had no wish to be taught the use of anything new and unfamiliar and that their backwardness in acquiring Japanese culture was due to incapacity. They would, he said, “soon be extinct.” A year later John Batchelor who had worked among the Ainu since 1880, in an address (in Japanese) to the Sapporo Temperance Club, which he founded, said: “The last remnant of this race of men is at your very door. The people are poor, degraded and helpless. They are being driven to the wall by *sake* and immigrants and they cannot last much longer.” Visitors to Hokkaido in this century have told the same story and in *Ainu Life and Legends* (1941), an official Japanese publication, Kyôtsuke Kindaichi of Tokyo Imperial University writes: “In half a century hence people will say in the Hokkaido and Karafuto, as they do now in north-eastern Japan, ‘This district is said to have once been inhabited by the Ainu race’.” The notion of the Ainu’s inevitable disappearance was an example of the social Darwinist discourse popular throughout the industrialized world at the time Howell, David L., “Making “Useful Citizens” of Ainu subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan”, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no.1, February 2004, p.13

³⁰ Howell, David L., “Making “Useful Citizens” of Ainu subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan”, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no.1, February 2004, pp. 14-18

³¹ Some activists are conservative advocates of assimilation (Kita Shômei (Masa.aki), Yoshida Kikutarô). Other considered that greater learning would reduce the Ainu’s dependence on government welfare, and guarantee them future improvements in their standards of living (as advocated by Fushine Kôzô, Takekuma Tokusaburô). A few pre-war activists asserted the possibility of a distinct Ainu ethnicity compatible with imperial subjecthood (Iboshi Hokuto, Nukishio Kizô, Moritake Takeichi).

In short, it was crucial to embrace assimilation through education and de-empathize Ainu background in the professional sphere as a key to social mobility in Japanese society, all the while promoting survival of Ainu identity in the private sphere of household and community life³².

WWII to 1997: growing paradoxes

Even though the Ainu have supposedly “vanished”, in 1946, the 1 Protection Act is revised³³ and the Hokkaidô Ainu Association (*Hokkaidô Ainu Kyôkai* 北海道アイヌ協会) is created³⁴. On top of this, more and more voices are heard demanding the recognition of the Ainu as a distinct and indigenous people, a few going as far as to demand independence³⁵.

Throughout this period, the “vanished” Ainu and their reshaped culture are commoditized by Japanese through ethnic tourism, while they themselves reinvent their own culture and strive for discursive re-appropriation.

*Japanese reinventing of the Ainu: cultural commoditization through ethnic tourism*³⁶

³² In any case, all agree that in any case, neither Ainu nor Japanese should allow a person's Ainu background to be an excuse for discrimination or failure to succeed in life.

³³ Albeit its newly established anti-constitutionality. In fact, according to article 14 of the new Japanese Constitution, all Japanese citizens are equal in the eyes of the law. Japanese sovereignty over Hokkaidô might have also been rendered illegal by the Cairo Declaration signed December 1st, 1943, by Roosevelt, Churchill and Chiang Kai-shek, which issues the following statement "The several military missions have agreed upon future military operations against Japan. The Three Great Allies expressed their resolve to bring unrelenting pressure against their brutal enemies by sea, land, and air. This pressure is already rising. "The Three Great Allies are fighting this war to restrain and punish the aggression of Japan. They covet no gain for themselves and have no thought of territorial expansion. It is their purpose that Japan shall be stripped of all the islands in the Pacific which she has seized or occupied since the beginning of the first World War in 1914, and that all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa, and The Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China. *Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed.* The aforesaid three great powers, mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent. "With these objects in view the three Allies, in harmony with those of the United Nations at war with Japan, will continue to persevere in the serious and prolonged operations necessary to procure the unconditional surrender of Japan."

³⁴ It will be renamed Hokkaidô Utari Association from 1961 to 2009.

³⁵ Takahashi Makoto called for the creation of an independent Ainu state after WW2, through a short-lived newspaper, the *Ainu shinbun*, which he published monthly in 1946. In the spring of 1947, a meeting takes place between Commanding General Joseph M. Swing and four Ainu representatives, during which Ainu independence is briefly discussed. The GHQ is worried about domestic tensions harmful to Japan's delicate position amidst mounting communism. Independence is refused by the Ainu present (This was revealed by the daily newspaper Asahi January 13th 1989, in an article entitled 「独立するなら今ですよ アイヌ代表にGHQが打診」 椎木堅市 Shiiki Ken.ichi was present as one of the four Ainu representatives at the time. His testimony was taped in 1982 by the President of the Ainu Association of Akan-ko 豊岡征則 Toyooka. アイヌ代表・「独立する考えは、毛頭ありません。アイヌ民族は日本国民の一員として、祖国の再建と繁栄に尽くします」、スイング・「今、独立しないで、後で日本人と喧嘩するようなことは絶対にしないように」.) and the incident stays secret until 1982. In parallel, the newly established “Ainu Newspaper” (『アイヌ新聞』 first appears April 1st 1946.)

³⁶ Ethnic tourism is a form of tourism in which the cultural exoticism of the host population and its « products », such as clothing, music and dance, are the main attractions for the tourist. Ethnic tourism leads to the formation of three main roles: (1) the *tourist*, who travels to seek an experience that cannot be duplicated in ordinary life, (2) the *tournee*, the performer who modifies his or her behaviour to suit the tastes of the tourists for gain, and (3) the *middleman* who mediates the two groups and profits by their interaction (as cited in Hiwasaki Lisa, “Ethnic Tourism in Hokkaidô and the Shaping of Ainu Identity”, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.73, n°3, Autumn 2000, p.395)

In the 1950s and 1960s, tourism in Japan is encouraged by economic development, and as Japanese newspaper headlines at the time still brand the Ainu as a dying race³⁷, this publicity contributes to an already growing touristic interest in the Ainu³⁸, which many discover *do* still in fact exist³⁹.

Ainu traditions and culture are reshaped to fit the fabricated stereotypical image sought by the visitors⁴⁰. By satisfying the ethnic tourist's thirst for a credible illusion of authenticity⁴¹, Ainu participants, as well as their traditions and culture, are commoditized and objectified⁴². Yet this has paradoxically helped maintain certain core aspects of Ainu culture⁴³, and has participated to some extent in the Ainu people's empowerment over the years.

Ainu Reinventing the Ainu: unification and empowerment through ethnic tourism

In other words, since the production of the "Ainu" through tourism is co-authored by Ainu and Japanese, ethnic tourism invigorated Ainu culture, and facilitated its preservation⁴⁴ and transmission, while providing employment⁴⁵. Furthermore, tourist villages fostered an awareness of a distinct ethnic Ainu identity and served a unifying social function, central to the reconstruction of Ainu identity⁴⁶. Taking more ownership in their own cultural expressions⁴⁷ led the Ainu to interaction with other indigenous people. Participation in global

³⁷ « Five Ainu left in Hokkaidô » (1956), "Now only Four Ainu" (1958), "Only One Ainu un Japan" (1964).

³⁸ *Whistle of the Kotan* (*Kotan no kuchibue* 1957), a novel by Nobuo Ishimori (a writer of children's books) about an Ainu boy and his sister was praised as one of the best children books in the post-war period. "Night of Iomante", "Iomante no yoru" is a 1960s hit by Itô Kunio about a beautiful Ainu girl. This leads to the creation of Ainu festivals in tourist centers. In the 1950s and 1960s, creation of festivals in tourist centres in order to attract more tourists, such as the Marimo Festival, as seen in Hiwasaki Lisa, "Ethnic Tourism in Hokkaidô and the Shaping of Ainu Identity", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.73, n°3, Autumn 2000, p.404 and For more information, see Irimoto, Takashi. 2004. "Creation of the Marimo Festival: Ainu Identity and Ethnic Symbiosis". *Senri Ethnological Studies* 66:11-38.

³⁹ Some of their representatives clash with academics still promoting the "dying race" myth in the 1970s. In 1972, protestors interrupted a panel at a national anthropology conference, accusing many Japanese scholars who studied the Ainu of complicity in invasion and genocide directed against them, and of depicting the Ainu as already extinct. In 1977, professor Hayashi Yoshihige was forced to « apologize to the whole Ainu population » for what was claimed to be « a twenty-year-long history of insults against the Ainu ».

⁴⁰ As late as 1981, an ad by the Japanese Travel Bureau (JTB) in the English language newspaper the *Japan Times* (July 22nd, 1981) promotes 4-day trips to Hokkaidô, that include a "fascinating visit to a real Ainu village [at Shiraoi] to see the ancient customs and culture of the famed Hairy Ainu."

⁴¹ On this, see Van den Berghe and Keyes, « Tourism and re-created ethnicity », pp.343-7 in Hiwasaki Lisa, "Ethnic Tourism in Hokkaidô and the Shaping of Ainu Identity", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.73, n°3, Autumn 2000, pp.393-412 (397)

⁴² The Ainu participants all favoured a ban on the ritual practice of *iyomante* which encouraged the tendency of majority Japanese to see the Ainu as tourist attractions. Murai Yamao, a prominent Christian, complained that Ainu children were being pulled out of school to participate in the bear ceremony every time a dignitary passed through the village, while adults had turned to practicing the ritual for money, with the result that many Ainu communities had effectively turned into tourist attractions.

⁴³ Hiwasaki Lisa, "Ethnic Tourism in Hokkaidô and the Shaping of Ainu Identity", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.73, n°3, Autumn 2000, pp.393-412 (403)

⁴⁴ One can question the concept of « culture » and "preservation" here, since the « culture » the Ainu in tourist villages share and "preserve" is a reshaped and fabricated one, plus one they do not necessarily share with Ainu who do not live or work in such places.

⁴⁵ Hiwasaki Lisa, "Ethnic Tourism in Hokkaidô and the Shaping of Ainu Identity", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.73, n°3, Autumn 2000, pp.393-412 (403)

⁴⁶ The first annual Hokkaidô Ainu Festival in 1963 in Asahikawa gathered 200 Ainu, as did making a traditional house, clothing, dishes, and weavings for the exhibits at the National Museum of Ethnology.

⁴⁷ In 1962, a group of Ainu in Nibutani who were interested in preserving Ainu culture got together with other Ainu from the Shizunai region, established the Hidaka Cultural Institute (*Hidaka Bunka Kenkyûjo*). The year

forums have further consolidated Ainu cultural and political identity⁴⁸, as well as served as a turning-point in their fight for recognition on the national level.

Re-appropriation of the Ainu identity: the Ainu's fight for recognition

The return of the Ainu: unification and political involvement

Subsequently, from the 1980s, political involvement among the Ainu is on the rise, bringing on increasing demands for recognition. Ainu activists wish to put an end to the ongoing political and social contradiction between ethnic negation and the Ainu's centennial legal discrimination.⁴⁹ But in spite of the rising protests⁵⁰ and legal actions⁵¹, the official governmental discourse denying the existence of minority groups in Japan is conveyed by important politicians⁵².

Representative and discursive re-appropriation: achieving international recognition

Faced with domestic immobilism, the Ainu turn to international organizations and trilateral discussions to achieve recognition from an increasingly globally-minded Japan⁵³. On December 10th 1992, the UN officially recognizes the Ainu as Japan's indigenous people⁵⁴. In

1976 sees the opening of the Shiraoui Institute for the Preservation of Ainu Culture. This institution, along with the Ainu Cultural Museum in Nibutani, are the only two museums that present the Ainu from their own point of view.

⁴⁸ In 1973, Ainu artist Sunazawa Bikky designs the Ainu flag (Bikky Sunazawa (Tsuneo) (6 mars 1931-25 janvier 1989): Né de Beramonkoro et Toa Kanno dans la ville de Asahikawa, Bikky a consacré toute sa vie à la sculpture et à la défense de la culture ainu. C'est en 1953 lors d'un séjour au lac Akan qu'il a décidé de faire de l'artisanat ainou alors en plein essor son métier et, quelques années plus tard, de le désenclaver totalement en le transcendant en art total et en l'émancipant de toute économie de subsistance. Son atelier "Sun more" créé en 1979 est toujours visible à Otoineppu-mura, près de la rivière Teshio. Il reste l'un des plus grands leaders ainu aujourd'hui. Il fut l'un des premiers à tisser de nombreuses connections avec des tribus amérindiennes du Canada, et certaines de ses sculptures sont encore visibles en Colombie Britannique. Son fils Oki quant à lui, s'illustre avec talent dans l'art musical ancestral du tonkori, instrument traditionnel des Ainu de Sakhalin. For more, see Chisato O. Dubreuil, *From the Playground of the Gods: The Life and Art of Bikky Sunazawa*, Washington D.C. Smithsonian Institute Press, 2004. 128 p.)

⁴⁹ In 1968, the state-led celebrations for the Century of the Opening of Hokkaidô, which coincide with the 5th revision of the Former Aborigine Protection Act, spark political involvement among the Ainu as well as subsequent increasing demands for recognition.

⁵⁰ In 1984, the Ainu Association of Hokkaidô adopts the "Draft Law concerning the Ainu people", set to replace the 1899 Protection Act.

⁵¹ In 1989, two Ainu land owners are illegally expropriated following the decision to construct a dam in the Nibutani region (The expropriation of land for dam violated their rights as Ainu for the protection of their cultural heritage as the fact that the dam construction would destroy sacred sites and ritual grounds had not been adequately considered in the forced taking of their lands.) This will spur an 8-year long legal battle that will not cease to attract media attention.

⁵² 「本規約に規定するいみでの少数民族はわが国に存在しない」 1980年 日本の外務省
「(日本には)単一民族という非常にいい、誇るべき長所がある」 1986年 中曽根首相
「日本国籍を持つ方々で差別を受けている少数民族はいない」 1986年 中曽根首相

⁵³ In 1987, the Ainu send their first delegation to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP), within the Human Rights' committee. This leads the Japanese government to admit their existence within its report to the UN that same year, though as "individuals, but not members of an ethnic group".

⁵⁴ Ainu Association of Hokkaidô President, Nomura Giichi is invited to address the General Assembly at the opening ceremony of the International Year of Indigenous Peoples. In this speech, he declared: «I did not come to dwell on 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

1994, Kayano Shigeru becomes the first Ainu politician in the Japanese Diet⁵⁵. During his 4 years of service, one of the most famous Ainu activists will support and encourage domestic and international media coverage of the Ainu cause.

The road to recognition

The first decisive domestic breakthrough is achieved on March 27, 1997, when the Sapporo District Court issues a decision in the Nibutani Dam case. Although the expropriated Ainu plaintiffs are denied substantive relief, it breaks new ground by recognizing the Ainu people as a distinct ethnic group⁵⁶. This leads to the adoption, in May 1997, of the “Law for the Promotion of Ainu Culture and the Dissemination and Advocacy of Knowledge in respect of Ainu Traditions“, superseding the almost century-old Hokkaidô Former Aborigine Protection Act. It is the first law officially recognizing the existence of an ethnic minority in Japan⁵⁷.

The ultimate goal being their recognition as an indigenous people, the trilateral dialogue ensues⁵⁸. In 2007, the UN General Assembly, including Japan, adopts the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The next year, a 3-day International Indigenous People’s Summit strategically precedes the G8 Summit taking place in Hokkaidô. This motivates the Japanese Diet to unanimously pass a resolution that recognizes the Ainu as indigenous people of Japan on June 6th, 2008⁵⁹.

Conclusion

Elements to define contemporary Ainu identity

peoples can live together in dignity. » The AAH stresses that they only want a « high degree of autonomy » and to act « in consideration of the nation’s territorial integrity ».

⁵⁵ He takes over a seat vacated by the Social Democrat Party of Japan in the Upper House

⁵⁶ Although the plaintiffs are denied substantive relief, the heart of the decision includes extensive historical fact-finding detailing the history of the inequitable deprivations suffered by the Ainu people. The decision ultimately binds the Japanese government under Article 13 of its constitution and the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights to consider the rights of the Ainu people as an indigenous minority in the nation. See Marc Levin, « Kayano et al. v. Hokkaido Expropriation Committee: ‘The Nibutani Dam Decision’ », William S. Richardson School of Law, International Legal Material, Volume 38, 1999, p.394

⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the ACPA might be partially to blame, as it may have reinforced, rather than dismantled, the “dying race” myth.

⁵⁸ In 1999, the “Fundamental Plan Regarding the Re-creation of Traditional Living Spaces” is drawn up and submitted to the national government as a proposal for the early stages of *iwor* (traditional living spaces) development. It is finally implemented by the Japanese government in 2006.

⁵⁹ 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 to indigeneity. However other factors may also have influenced the gradual process of official recognition, such as the LDP’s fear of losing votes in Hokkaidô, or “failure to consider history regarding policies since the Meiji era”. An issue related to, but frequently sidelined in, discussion of Ainu-Japanese relations is that of the Kuril Islands. 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 indigeneity may have been motivated by fear that admitting to a preceding non-Japanese Ainu past would weaken the stance over the Kuril. Some believe that deliberate “historical amnesia” has affected the government’s 20th century stance towards the Ainu ever since the Cairo Declaration at the end of 1943, calling for “Japan to be expelled from all territories taken by violence or greed”. Provisos in the final draft of the UNDRIP stating that indigenous rights could not legitimate activity “which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity of sovereign states” must have offered reassurance.

According to the Survey of the Actual living conditions of the Hokkaidô AINU in 2006 carried out by the AINU Association of Hokkaidô⁶⁰

- The AINU population in Hokkaido⁶¹ is 23,782⁶². (nothing about the rest of the country⁶³). They were estimated at around 2,700 in the Tôkyô area. But how many people ignore their AINU ancestry⁶⁴? How many choose to ignore it? AINU activists > 300,000.
- 16.8% of respondents indicated they had experienced discrimination that they could remember, while 13.8% indicated that they had not experienced discrimination themselves but knew someone who had. > Hard to put numbers on discrimination + before 2008.

Another survey, in 2008, after the recognition:

- Academic inequalities persist : around 20% of the AINU under 30 go to university, compared to more than 40% of Japanese
- Top 3 requested AINU measures: support for academic improvement, a society where human rights are respected and employment measures.

The results of a government survey, dating from June 2011, this time conducted on AINU living outside Hokkaidô reveal that 20.5 percent said they faced ethnic discrimination, many saying they were "made fun of for being AINU" or were "called out on their physical characteristics."

Re-identification as AINU: a hybrid cultural heritage and growing pop-culture

For those who proclaim their AINU heritage, in terms of self-representation, AINU culture and identity remains hybrid⁶⁵. This hybridity is reflected in recent books written by the younger generation of AINU, such as UI Makiko's 『アイヌときどき日本人』, or the Japanese lyrics to AINU pop songs, by groups such as the *AINU Rebels*, or Oki's *AINU Dub Band*. A new dynamic,

⁶⁰ Over the 34 years, those engaged primary industry decreased by more than half. On the other hand, those in tertiary industry increased by more than 2.5 times. (5.2 % of the AINU population are involved in manufacturing folk arts, while 8.2% are involved in their sales > approximately 13% of the AINU make a living out of tourism.) 3 out of 10 AINU are *dekasegi* in 1974, and belong to one of Japan's lowest socioeconomic groups (Peng Fred C.C., Robert Ricketts, Nario Imamura, "The Socioeconomic status of the AINU: the Past in the Present", *American Ethnologist*, Volume 1, number 4, November 1974, pp. 731-750, p.740). In 1980, 42.6% of university students living in Tôkyô answered "tourism" to the question "Which occupation do you think AINU people are engaged in now?" Hiwasaki Lisa, "Ethnic Tourism in Hokkaidô and the Shaping of AINU Identity", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.73, n°3, Autumn 2000, pp.393-412 (403)

⁶¹ The Hokkaido Government defined the AINU in Hokkaido as those of AINU descent as well as those living with descendants of the AINU through marriage, adoption and so forth in local communities, and counted only those who identify themselves as AINU.

⁶² In 72 municipalities (about 59.5% of these live in the sub-prefectures of Hidaka and Iburi). Nibutani, the only place in the country where the AINU are a majority.

⁶³ A nationwide actual condition survey was requested by the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, but has not been conducted. The latest figures on the AINU population outside Hokkaido are from an actual condition survey conducted in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area in 1988, in which the AINU population was estimated at 2,700.

⁶⁴ Like Kanô Oki (OKI), son of Bikki Sunazawa, renowned sculptor, who discovered as a student at the University about his AINU background and discovered the *tonkori*, a traditional Sakhalin AINU instrument, and now is a famous musician, mixing AINU melodies and dub beats.

⁶⁵ Today, only 5 out of 642 respondents to a government survey in 1993 claimed they could hold a conversation Howell, David L., "Making "Useful Citizens" of AINU subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no.1, February 2004, p.10

young and urban Ainu culture is emerging. One that is helping many find pride in their heritage. Ainu language classes are available in some universities and via podcasts, and children's books retelling Ainu folklore appear in bookstores in and outside of Japan.

A new battle: fighting ignorance?

As for Ainu culture and identity seen by Japanese, according to a report conducted in 1993, only 10 out of 20 high school textbooks mentioned the background of contact between the Ainu and mainstream Japanese⁶⁶. Furthermore, during the interviews undertaken for John Lie's 2001 book, *Multiethnic Japan*, when Japanese were asked to estimate the number of Ainu living in Japan no figure higher than 1000 was mentioned, and many claimed there were no left⁶⁷. One can hope that the 2008 recognition has improved these numbers.

As we have seen, Ainu resistance, culture and identity reconstruction, and Japanese deconstruction and denial of that same identity and culture, are intricately linked, rather than bluntly opposed. Despite assimilation, ethnic negation, discrimination and the almost complete disappearance of cultural practices during a century and a half, a distinct Ainu ethnicity has persisted. Ainu culture has been successfully reshaped and wielded in different ways over many decades. As present Ainu movements attempt to "fuse culture and politics in a new discourse of ethnicity", the Ainu's new status will no doubt enable them to engage more fully with the organs of Japanese state, but much work still remains to promote their culture as well as fight against prejudice and self-denial.

*

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⁶⁶ Hiwasaki Lisa, "Ethnic Tourism in Hokkaidô and the Shaping of Ainu Identity", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.73, n°3, Autumn 2000, pp.393-412 (395)

⁶⁷ (Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.46)

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