



Miyuki Muraki

The Ainu museum was opened in 1984, the same year that Ainu art was recognized as a significant intangible folk cultural asset. It marks the first museum in Japan dedicated to the Ainu culture and was founded mainly by people of Ainu heritage. At the time, there was careful debate about whether to use the word Ainu in the name of the museum due to its use as a derogatory term through history.

In recent years, circumstances surrounding the Ainu people both inside and outside Japan have changed significantly. I hope that this museum will continue to serve as a facility to contribute towards the renaissance of the Ainu culture as a place for future generations of Ainu people and others to learn more about the Ainu culture. (Miyuki Muraki)



Masahiro Nomoto

The Ainu, as the indigenous population of Japan, has come to hold significant social implications. The Ainu population has also gained an increased awareness of their own stature as an indigenous people. The opening and increased development of Hokkaido resulted in a loss of land and the destruction of traditional Ainu culture. Despite this history, spiritual traditions of the Ainu continue to survive today. Circumstances surrounding the Ainu today are diverse, resulting in the adoption of various lifestyles. Problems currently faced by the Ainu population stem from a failure of the Japanese population to come to terms with this continued existence of the Ainu people. The role of this museum is to preserve and pass on the Ainu culture, and management of the facility is spearheaded by the local Ainu people. (Masahiro Nomoto)



Ikkuo Yamamaru

yakun kamui-ko-onkami-an na (Let us pray to the gods)

These are words spoken before offering prayers to the gods. Kamuinomi is Ainu for "pray to the gods". The Ainu people prayed to and performed various ceremonies for the gods.

It is my hope to study the unique religious faith and ceremonies of the Ainu people and communicate the traditional cultures of the Ainu people to younger generations in a way that is easy to understand.

The Ainu Museum holds such ceremonies approximately 20 times throughout the year. These ceremonies are open to the public and I invite you to come and pray with us.

(Ikkuo Yamamaru)



Mitsuharu Nomoto

irankarapte (hello).

Mitsuharu Nomoto ari kurcha an (my name is Mitsuharu Nomoto).

Porotokotan (village by a large lake) is a place name in the Ainu language. Poro – large, to – lake or pond, kotan – village. The Ainu generally lived on the banks of lakes and rivers and it is my role at the museum is to explain this history, culture and the geographical names of the Ainu people to the many Japanese and overseas visitors to the museum. I am waiting for those interested in what I have to say in the chise (house) located inside the museum. iyairaikere (thank you).



Mayumi Yamada

irankarapte, my name is Mayumi Yamada.

I am involved with activities at the museum to ensure the survival of Ainu traditions such as traditional Ainu dance. In 2009, traditional Ainu dance was included on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. I believe it is a massive privilege that the culture passed down by our ancestors has been recognized as a form of shared cultural heritage of humanity.

In the limited time we have with visitors at the museum, we put on performances of traditional songs, dances and musical instruments that have been passed down by our ancestors in traditional Ainu dress sewn by hand by the performers. I hope to continue to communicate this wonderful traditional culture we have inherited from our ancestors to visitors to the museum. iyairaikere.



Tomoe Nakano

irankarapte, my name is Tomoe Nakano.

I am currently studying manual tasks traditionally performed by female members of the Ainu people. I hope to preserve and carry on this tradition of collecting and preparing natural materials used in the daily lives of our ancestors. Visitors are able to experience these manual tasks being performed in the ponchise (small house) towards the very back of the museum. The museum also currently runs educational workshops where participants can experience folk instruments such as mukkuiri (mouth harp) and tonkori (5-stringed harp), traditional Ainu embroidery, sculpting and cooking. Each of these activities is supervised by the friendly staff. iyairaikere.

Japan is not only inhabited by the Japanese (various ethnic groups that comprise the Japanese race). The Ainu people have also long inhabited the islands of Japan. However, there is still much that is not understood about the Ainu. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce activities that we are undertaking in order to increase understanding of the Ainu people and restore the language and traditions that are our source of pride.

Training and education of human resources

We believe the key to restoring the traditions of the Ainu is "people". At present, the Ainu language and traditions are not taught in the home or in schools in Japan. The training and education of human resources is an important mission of the Ainu Museum.



The Ainu Museum is one that has been founded primarily by people of Ainu heritage. Since its establishment, the museum has taken in a large number of Ainu children who have studied the Ainu language, ceremonies, how to construct chise (houses) and traditional handcrafts and arts under their elders who then pass on this knowledge to the next generation to ensure the survival of the Ainu culture. The museum has also worked to nurture museum curators armed with specialist knowledge in the area of Ainu cultural assets who can also provide assistance in Ainu research and cultural exhibitions in museums both in and outside Japan.

Preservation of the Ainu language and storytelling culture

In 2009, of the approximate 6000 languages spoken today, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) ranked the Ainu language at the top of its list of languages in severe danger of extinction.



At the time the museum opened its doors, the small number of people still speaking the Ainu language were relatively old, and preserving records of the language was one of our more urgent missions. Stories from elders were recorded on tape recorder and translated, and in honor of their last wishes, the museum continues to edit and publish a series of traditional documentaries. Ainu stories and legends have also been compiled into digital picture books and are released over the Internet (photo).

The museum also continues to hold Ainu language classes as a means to spread the Ainu language.

Preservation of traditional Ainu ceremonies and festivals

Regardless of ethnic background, festivals and ceremonial occasions are a place for relatives and people from the community to come together, wear festive dress, and depending on the occasion, to perform songs and dances, even for people who live life in accordance with modern-day social norms. These events hold significant meaning for the succession of cultural traditions. The museum continues to



perform a variety of traditional ceremonies including the most important ceremony to the Ainu people, iyomante, (sending back the spirit of the bears) and

kotannomi, (a large village festival held in spring and autumn) as part of its efforts to contribute to the revival of the traditional ceremonies of each area.

Promoting further understanding of the Ainu people

Since its opening, the museum has been visited by over 17 million people. In recent years, the museum has expanded its programs to include cultural workshops, and lectures based on the theme of the history, culture and social issues of the Ainu people in an effort to promote further understanding.



The intended role of the Ainu Museum is not to hoard the traditions of the Ainu people in libraries or warehouses. Our aim is to embrace these traditions and preserve them for future generations.

Ainu Museum POROTO KOTAN



Greetings

irankarapte (hello) was formerly a greeting reserved for formal occasions such as ceremonies however today is used in all situations. There is a greeting commonly used in ceremonies. Males rub both palms together in front of their chest (photo) then turn their palms upwards and raise and lower their arms 2-3 times. Females bring the index finger of their right hand up and rub the underside of their nose once. (This photo and photo to the right have been sourced from the documentary "Life of the Ainu in the Shiraai kotan of Hokkaido" filmed in 1925.)



Marriage ceremonies

When a man proposed to a woman, the family of the groom will visit the home of the bride and present to her a sword or necklace in the form of a betrothal gift. Similarly, the bride will present the groom with an article of embroidered clothing. This is a very old Ainu tradition however in more recent years younger Ainu generations can be seen following these traditions. Ainu weddings were held at the museum in 2005 and 2006 for museum staff (right photo).



Grandfather

The word for grandfather in the Ainu language is ekashi, and the word for grandmother is huchi. The person in the photo on the left is ekashi, Sankekur Yamamaru and is an ancestor of museum staff, Ikuo Yamamaru (right photo).



History

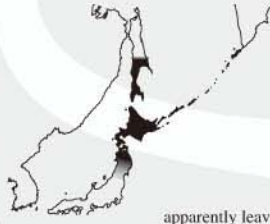
The Ainu are one of the indigenous people of Japan who throughout history have inhabited areas including the northern part of the Tohoku region, Hokkaido, the Chishima Islands (Kuril Islands and islands to the north) and Karafuto (now Sakhalin). At the start of the Meiji era, colonization of Hokkaido by the ethnic Japanese progressed and resulted in the Ainu living side-by-side with the ethnic Japanese. It was at this time the term "aborigine" was used in reference to their status of being the native inhabitants of the area.

The Ainu have inhabited ainumoshir (land of the Ainu people) since before literal records were possible, and the remains of stone artifacts from approximately 20,000 years ago and human remains from 10,000 years ago have been discovered in the area. These bones appear to be the skeletal remains of an ancestor of the present day Ainu and are evidence that the Ainu had inhabited Hokkaido around this time.

Just like other cultures around the world, the history of the Ainu has been formed around their interaction with other ethnic groups. Ethnic groups including the Nivkh, Uilta, Ulchsky, Nanai, Mongols, Han Chinese and Manchu all inhabited areas to the north of Karafuto. The area around the Kamchatka Peninsula, north of the Chishima Islands, was also inhabited by the Itelmen, Koryak and the Chukchi and later by the Russians. Of course, there is also a long history of interaction with the ethnic Japanese.

The Ainu were very much in tune with the surrounding environment and used fish, sea grasses, animal flesh and skin and eagle feathers to barter with other ethnic groups. They also obtained wares from China through various ethnic groups and engaged in what was called intermediary trading, selling goods to the ethnic Japanese on Honshu (main island of Japan). This may be seen as simple bartering however it is no different to present day trade and international relations. Organic matter made from fish from Hokkaido was used to fertilize cotton crops in the Kinki region (southern central region of Honshu) which was converted into cotton products and supplied to the Ainu. This means of trade and exchange triggered significant changes to the lifestyles of both parties.

Initially, this trade was conducted unchecked. The Ainu would use boats to cross to Hakodate and the Tohoku region and could choose who they wanted to barter with. However, the ethnic Japanese held great influence and following the formation of the Matsumae Clan under the Tokugawa Shogunate, various restrictions were placed on trade. Travel to the Tohoku region was prohibited and in time, Hakodate was also made off limits to the Ainu. Japanese were sent forth into the Ainu territories to trade, effectively restricting who the Ainu could trade with and resulted in fraudulent trade practices. It was during this time that the terms "Ainu Kanjo" (Ainu Calculation) and "menoko Kanjo" (menoko meaning



female) were formed. This is common folklore among the people of Hokkaido and was an unfair method of counting based on the belief that the Ainu could not count. When trading items, the counting would start with 'begin' , 1,2,3 all the way to 10, 'end' and was used to gain the buyers 12 items when they were only paying for 10. There is also a record of a story told by a woman who was subjected to Ainu Kanjo during the Meiji era. Even though she knew they were cheating her, they would stare her down and ignore her protests apparently leaving her emotionally defeated.

It was events such as these that ultimately led to the end of an era of happy trade as told in stories of the Ainu people. In areas closer to China and Russia, there were also people among the Ainu who developed closer relations to ethnic groups in those areas than the Japanese.

During the Meiji era, an area formerly known as Ezochi by the Japanese government became Hokkaido which was followed by rapid colonization. Although the Ainu were looked upon as Japanese, regulations were and continue to be today unfair and prejudiced.

Ownership of the Chishima Islands and Karafuto was contested by Japan and Russia and as a result, the borders have changed several times throughout history. This change to national borders and the resulting relocation of the Ainu forced them to change where they live, their work and their language.

Removed from the traditional ways of their ancestors, the Ainu were named and made to live together with other ethnic groups, were forced to use other languages and worship other gods. We cannot even begin to imagine the resolve required by the Ainu people to overcome this oppression.

Even in their new way of life, there were members of the Ainu population who continued to pass on the Ainu language, stories and songs to future generations.

The Ainu today

I am sometimes asked if there are still Ainu living in Hokkaido. While there are still a lot of Ainu living in Hokkaido, there is also a large number, who as a result of work or marriage, have moved to the mainland. It is reported that several thousands of Ainu live in the Kanto region with others living as far south as Shikoku, Kyushu and Okinawa. There are also Ainu living overseas in the US and Australia.

On the other hand, it is now thought that very few Ainu still remain in the Chishima Islands and Karafuto. When Japan was defeated in 1945, Chishima and Karafuto were occupied by the Soviet Union (Russia) and this was a primary reason for the relocation of the Ainu to Hokkaido. As

a result, even today there are Ainu who cannot travel freely to the resting place of their ancestors. In saying so much, you may think things may have been different if not for the occupation by the Soviet Union. However, whether by the Japanese or the Soviets, occupation by force of another's land is inexcusable.

So, what is the Ainu population today? The way of life of the Ainu people changed dramatically in the Meiji era and as a result, the language they speak and lifestyle is no different to any other Japanese. Although there are countries where identification papers will state ethnic background, there is no such system in Japan. For this reason, there is no way, short of asking, to identify the ethnicity of people in Japan (there may be people who believe they can identify different ethnic groups just by looking at them however this is misconception). Under these circumstances, it is difficult to gain any accurate data on the populations of ethnic groups including the Ainu, ethnic Japanese and the Ryukyu in Japan.

According to a survey conducted by the Hokkaido government, the population of Ainu totaled somewhere between 23,000 and 24,000 however the survey was not conclusive and did not include Ainu living on the mainland or overseas. It is thought that the population could be as much as several times to several ten times greater than this figure.

In the past 30 years or so, there has been an increase in the number of people attempting to revive ancient customs, arts and languages. This is not simply driven by a sense of nostalgia, but has a lot to do with taking back the right to live happily, human rights.

In recent years, the culture of the Ainu people has made a reemergence in Hokkaido and on the main island of Honshu, and traditional art and craft is receiving more exposure. This is not a culture that has just simply continued to survive through history, but is the result of the efforts of people to take back their own history and culture.

Understanding the history between the Ainu people and the Japanese and the social issues today, and consideration towards mutual happiness will be the key to a happy society. (Jirota Kitahara)

Recent movement

- 1976: Establishment of the Shiraai Foundation for the Preservation of Ainu Culture (currently the Ainu Museum).
- 1984: Proposal for the "Draft Law Concerning the Ainu People (New Ainu Law) adopted at the general meeting of the Hokkaido Utari Association (currently the Hokkaido Ainu Association). The new law required the issue of a statement for respect of the rights of the Ainu People, increased activities for the protection of human rights, promotion of the Ainu culture and the creation of an ethnic self-support fund.

- Ainu traditional dance designated a significant intangible folk cultural asset.
- Ainu Museum opened.
- 1992: 18 indigenous people from 2 organizations invited to the opening ceremony of the U.N. General Assembly for the "International Year of Indigenous People" in New York. Giichi Nomura, Executive Director of the Hokkaido Utari Association makes a commemorative speech on behalf of the Ainu People.
- United Nations resolves to declare 1993 the International Year of Indigenous People and the 10 years from 1994 the International Decade of Indigenous People. This was followed by the declaration of a second International Decade of Indigenous People for the 10 years from 2005.
- 1997: Japanese parliament forms and enacts the Culture Promotion Law; a law for the promotion of Ainu culture and the dissemination and advocacy of knowledge in respect of Ainu traditions. This was the first time the Ainu were recognized as an indigenous people under Japanese law.
- 2005: Following on from 2002, the UN Human Rights Commission conducted a local study on conditions faced by Ainu. UN representatives visit the Ainu Museum.
- 2006: A survey on the living conditions of Ainu in Hokkaido reported the population of Ainu in Hokkaido to be 23,782 people.
- 2007: Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Adopted by U.S. General Assembly in New York. Japan voted in favor of the declaration, 144 for, 4 against, 11 abstentions, 33 absent.
- 2008: Diet resolution calling for the government to recognize the Ainu as an indigenous people was unanimously passed during a plenary session of the upper and lower houses.
- UN Human Rights Commission issued a report to the government of Japan recommending that Ainu and Ryukyu ethnic groups be recognized under national law as indigenous people and to establish measures to protect and promote cultural assets and the traditional way of life. The recommendation demanded that the government recognize their rights to land and that the children of Ainu and Ryukyu ethnic groups be given sufficient opportunity to study their language and culture and that subjects on Ainu, Ryukyu and Okinawa culture be included in the national curriculum.
- 2009: Of the approximate 6000 languages spoken today, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) ranked the Ainu language at the top of its list of languages in severe danger of extinction.
- Traditional Ainu dance included on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.