

# **The Ainu Identity and Japanese Human Rights Education: Part One.**

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## **Abstract**

This research paper will be published in two sections: Parts One and Two. Part One is intended as an introduction to the Ainu people, their direct connection to the ancient Jomon people of pre-historical Japan, and their settlement in what is now present-day Hokkaido island. By the time of the Meiji Era (1869-1912 A.D.) the government of Japan had instituted such exacting assimilation methods that the subsequent destruction of one of the oldest civilizations on Earth was achieved in a matter of decades. Presently, the historical documentation of the Ainu is left to just a footnote or two in the pages of Japanese high school history books. It is clear, albeit puzzling, that the Japanese government is intent on silencing the discussion all together. In the government's attempt to cover-up past historical transgressions, it is especially interesting to reconsider the influence of the Ainu people on the Japanese of present day. Ainu-derived place names spread throughout the Japanese archipelago that are still in use today, the discoveries over the years of the oldest found pottery that incorporate Ainu-specific design, the ritual and purification practices of the Ainu people that were incorporated into the Shinto religion, the tactics of battle and the weapons of choice of the Ainu that informed the development of the original Samurai warrior, are several examples of the extent to which the Jomon/Ainu people influenced Japan from both an historical and cultural perspective.

Keywords: Jomon, Ainu, Civilization, Culture, Japan

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*Cultural Ownership of Natural Monuments*

Upon making a winter's trek to Mount Fuji at the end of the seventeenth century A.D., the Japanese Haiku poetry master Matsuo Basho wrote:

<i>Kiri-shugure</i>	A day when Fuji is unseen
<i>Fuji wo minu hi zo</i>	Veiled in misty winter shower-
<i>Omoshiroki</i>	That day, too, is a joy.

For some time anticipation had been building around Japan for the expected official designation of the majestic Mount Fuji, or affectionately known in Japanese as *Fujisan*, as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage monument. On June 22, 2013, Mountain Fuji was indeed selected as a UNESCO World Heritage of profound importance to the nation of Japan for its inherent “cultural” significance. Interestingly, Mount Fuji was not placed in the usual category of a “natural” heritage site, as the observer might assume being that it is a monument of nature, in this case, an active volcano having last erupted in the years 1707-1708 A.D. (UNESCO, 2014).

The “cultural” designation was considered appropriate as Mount Fuji's role over the centuries “runs like a golden thread through [Japan's] literature and art, and through the ordinary life of the people” (Maraini, 112). From the prose of the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. *Manyoushuu*, or *Collection of the Ten Thousand Leaves*, through the art of Kano Tsunenobu and Maruyama Okyo in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, on to the world renowned wood block prints of the artists Hokusai and Hiroshige, both dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Maraini, 1960). Mount Fuji would also become something of a spiritual center for both esoteric Buddhist elements and those of Shinto, the de-facto native religion of the Japanese, beginning as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

Eastern thought, so different from that of the west, dislikes subtle distinctions that kill the

life and aura of sacred things. Sometimes the mountain (Fujisan) is a god (*kami* in Shinto thought), sometimes the seat of a god, or rather goddess, Konohana-Sakuya-Hime, the daughter of the god of the mountains (from Shinto thought), to whom many (Shinto) shrines are dedicated, not only on Fuji, but elsewhere in Japan as well (Maraini, 111).

Whether looking at Mount Fuji from a natural, scientific, or cultural point, the viewpoints are all impressively wrapped together, ready and waiting to explode forth in a display of fervent devotion to the idea of Japan, symbolized by Fuji's strong, wide base supporting its cylindrical head-- sharp and tight.

The physical aspects of Mount Fuji have undoubtedly taken shape over the millennia as time, and the elements have had and will continue to have their way. What is perhaps more uncertain is to whom Mount Fuji belongs, that is, from a spiritual, if not historical standpoint. It is without question the property of the nation of Japan, as it rests within its borders and has, as shown, been so a part of Japanese verse from the beginning of the nation till present day. And by now, having received the "cultural" stamp of ownership, is there really any need to question it or even try and bring it up?

If you were to pose this question to most Japanese, they would find it to be either utterly absurd or at least puzzling- as to where the questioner's mind may be? But, if a question of similar value were presented to a Navajo Native American making life amongst the red rock sandstone monoliths of Monument Valley, or *Tse Bii Ndzigaii* ("Valley of the Rocks") in the Navajo language, in the "four corners" area of the American Southwest, their answer about ownership over Monument Valley may indeed surprise. They would inform you correctly that Monument Valley, as a part of a total of 27,425 square miles of some of the most awe-inspiring natural landscapes on planet Earth, is indeed the property of the great nation of the Navajo people. And furthermore, that for those outside of the Navajo Nation who come to visit are required to do so under the auspices as a guest of the Navajo Nation. While the Navajo Nation has been incorporated into the United States of America stretching back from the June 1<sup>st</sup> 1868 Treaty signed by each, and though the federal government still exercises plenary control of all land within its borders, this land is and will always remain the sacred land of the Navajo people.

Depending largely on how one looks at the idea of ownership over natural monuments, it is important to acknowledge that different groups of people, having had different histories throughout time, may view ownership, or rather, spiritual inheritance, in completely different terms. It is thus a grave mistake to assume that we can simply ignore the past in order to serve our own present intentions.

Just over a hundred miles to the immediate west of Monument Valley, exists perhaps the most significant example of a “natural monument” on our planet Earth-- the Grand Canyon-- covering the greater part of the northwestern area of present-day Arizona State. While the Canyon represents the expressiveness and the expansiveness of the nation of the United States from many angles, the Canyon itself, is also the spiritual portal, or *Sipapu* in the Navajo language, to the spiritual, or fourth world, as a part of the creation story of the ancestors of the Navajo people, the ancient Pueblo peoples. For the Navajo Nation and the various smaller Native American tribes, all of whom trace their origins to the ancient Pueblo people, and inhabit the four corners area of the great American Southwest, the Canyon symbolizes something entirely different for them, as it indeed may for us (Trimble, 1989).

This brings us back to Japan and again to this point of ownership over sacred natural monuments, specifically in this sense of “cultural” ownership over them. If it is indeed a fact of Japan’s history, concluded from vast archeological, cultural, written and oral sources, that the archipelago of Japan has been populated over the ages by different peoples coexisting along side these same natural monuments of present day, then could it not also be highly possible that these peoples also revere such places and thus, hold them dear to their own cultural roots and personal histories.

Two major sources of evidence, place names and pottery, provide us today with the knowledge that not only did the archipelago of Japan sustain life for many millennium before the ancestors of the modern Japanese, *the Yayoi people*, appeared, but that these ancient peoples, *the Jomon people* and for certain their direct descendent, *the Ainu people*, made these lands their home and revered the same natural monument of Mount Fuji, as do the modern Japanese. This can be seen in the name of this sacred mountain-- Fuji:

In the Japanese archipelago the former realm of the Ainu is testified to by a large number of place-names which have no meaning in Japanese, but a very definite meaning, and one often in perfect harmony with the nature of the site, in the aboriginal language (Maraini, 111,112).

In Japanese the two characters that are written for Fuji are “treasure” or *fu*, and “samurai” or *ji*, but this is known in the Japanese language as *ateji*, or having a false substitute character(s) (Maraini, 1960). In other words, the Japanese ascribed characters based on similar sounds to mimic the original sounding word(s), in order to make it pronounceable in their own language. At the same time these *ateji* show little regard for original meaning. While considered an issue of little or no relevance from a modern Japanese standpoint, the etymology of the present-day name of Fuji strongly suggests that it comes from the language of the Ainu people, as their word Huchi, or Fuchi, for Mount Fuji was most likely derived from their name for their sacred goddess of fire, *Fuuchi-Kamuy*. The Italian, Fosco Maraini, a Japan scholar, pointed out that the foremost foreign scholar of Japan, the British born Basil Hall Chamberlin (b.1850-1935) had a slightly different take on the evolution of the name for Mount Fuji:

(Basil Hall) Chamberlin points out that from the phonetic point of view it would be more logical to think of the Ainu word **push**, meaning ‘to rise violently’, referring not to the mountain, but to the river Fujisawa, a swift and dangerous stream which rises from the volcano, cuts across the *Tokaido*, and in ancient times constituted a formidable obstacle to travellers. The Ainu in fact used to give names to rivers rather than mountains, and the transformation from **push** to *fuzi*, as Fuji seems to have been pronounced in ancient times in Japanese, would agree better with the phonetic mutations usual between the two languages. The question is not yet settled, but most scholars at any rate agree that the name Fuji is of Ainu origin (Maraini, 1960).

*“The Ainu were here a hundred thousand years before the children of the sun came.”*

There is a famous Ainu legend that proclaims: *The Ainu lived in this place a hundred thousand years before the children of the sun came*. At this moment in time, tracing a peoples history back one hundred thousand years is about as close to fantasy as one can get. It is closer to the truth to say that the modern Ainu people can reasonably claim an historical connection to their ancient line (the ancient Jomon people) from archeological records dating some ten thousand years or more: “Pieces of the world’s oldest known pottery, dating from around ten thousand years ago, have been found in Japan as well as China” (Reischauer, 1981).

This ancient earthenware pottery, noted for its cord-pattern design or *Jomon-doki*, has been unearthed throughout the main island of Honshu, including in and around the area of Mount Fuji (Maraini, 1960), as far north as the island of Hokkaido, and also on the most southern island of Kyushu-- which perhaps indicates that these people crossed into the archipelago of Japan during the last ice age when Kyushu was connected by a land bridge to what is present-day South Korea (Reischauer, 1981).

What is most evident about the Jomon people was that they did not subsist on wet-rice farming as their cultural predecessors, the Yayoi people would do. The Jomon culture was clearly a hunting and gathering society that moved as the seasons changed and demanded appropriate adaptations. Clearly in line with most, if not all native or indigenous societies, the ancient Jomon peoples also engaged in a type of primitive religion, or animism, as is strongly suggested in their earthenware figurines called *Jomon-dogu*. These figurines comprised of half-human and half-animal and/or beast like designs, were perhaps used in any number of ways for worship: from rites, sacrifices and primitive magic, to treating or curing medical ailments (Varley, 1977).

For some ten millennia, beginning from the end of the last ice age until the Christian epoch, the ancient Jomon peoples inhabited much of the land of what is now the nation of Japan. The historical origination of place-names that are still in use today, give us some interesting clues as to the thinking

and behavior of these ancient peoples, as do the remnants of the earthenware pottery they created. The hunting of wild game and fish and a semi-nomadic lifestyle in spirit with nature and the seasons also suggests that they were very different from the culture that would effectively replace them-- that of the Yayoi people. Furthermore, the descendants of the ancient Jomon people, a proto-Caucasoid ethnic race of hunters and gathers and craftsmen known collectively as the Ainu, who populated much of northeastern Honshu island, the far northern island of Hokkaido and the Kuril island chain, not only provides a crucial link to these ancient peoples of Japan, but also helps to substantiate the historical evidence of a clear ethnic and cultural division between themselves and their predecessors- the Yayoi people.

#### *The Wet-Rice Civilization*

The ancestors of the modern Japanese people, the *Yayoi*, are of Mongoloid racial stock originating from the Yangtze River basin of mid-eastern China. These peoples, having simultaneously invented and mastered the production and cultivation of large scale wet-rice growing first migrated into the islands of Japan, through Korea, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. These vast movements of people arose most likely as a consequence of China coming under one dynastic empire for the very first time in its history during the same era (Reischauer, 1981).

Upon populating the northern region of the southern island of Kyushu in Japan (the land closest to the Korean Peninsula), the Yayoi people began to move over a period of several hundreds of years on to the main island of Honshu, populating and developing areas up into at least the Kanto area of the Tokyo region of today. It is not clear as to what happened to the original inhabitants, *the Jomon people*, but it appears most likely that the groups who migrated away from the advancement of the Yayoi people and into the most northern areas of the main island of Honshu and on into the northern island of present-day Hokkaido are the likely descendants of these original Jomon peoples- the Ainu people:

Although Jomon culture lingered on until comparatively modern times in the extreme north,

it was being displaced or absorbed by a more advanced agricultural society by the third century B.C. This new culture, called Yayoi, is identified by its relatively simple, thin, wheel-shaped pottery, but its outstanding feature was its irrigated rice cultivation, much like that in use today. It also possessed bronze and iron; bronze artifacts, including obvious imitations of Chinese bronze mirrors, were used primarily for ceremonial purposes (Reischauer, 10).

The Yayoi people were seemingly destined to establish themselves on these new lands as their advancement suggests that small tribal clans, which were centered upon the cyclical cultivation and production of wet rice farming, steadily consolidated themselves into larger farming communities. It was the most powerful community of this time, *the Yamato* that solidified control of these various tribal communities, and then divided them into 'local hereditary units' or *uji*. Establishing itself from central Honshu on the Yamato plain, *the Yamato* began to create the underpinnings of a large, more complex society that in time would develop into what we know as the nation of Japan:

The *uji* were ranked in hierarchical order under the ruling Yamato group, which also had certain *uji* under its control to perform various functions, such as military service, the manufacture of various goods, ritualistic divining, and supervision of the Yamato group's lands, which were scattered throughout Japan (Reischauer, 1981).

Around the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D., the Yamato began to show signs of a primitive empire, one that was marked by the construction of enormous burial chambers for dead leaders, known as *kofun*, in and around the central region of Honshu island on the Yamato plain where they had concentrated their power. These burial chambers, the largest measuring some 2,700 feet in circumference, were also found to have included any number of earthenware pottery and figurines, some depicting warriors on horseback. These archaeological records also provide a connection with the people of this time to that of Chinese culture through the discovery of long iron swords, bronze mirrors, and small curved-shaped jewels, all three of which serve as the three Imperial Regalia of the Japanese ruling family (Reischauer,



1981).

In 710 A.D., the Yamato established a capital city for the very first time in its existence. The city originally called *Heijo*, known today as Nara, became the first real seat of power and governance for the Yamato. The capital of Nara, although vastly inferior to the size and influence of China's own Tang Dynasty capital of Ch'ang-an, was in fact built as a small replica of this grand Chinese domain (Reischauer, 1981). With the first introduction of Buddhism into Japan in 552 A.D., and a little more than fifty years later in 607 A.D. with the development of the very first extensive Buddhist temple complex called *Ho-ryu-ji* temple just to the southwest of Nara, the beginnings of a cohesive and complex society was taking shape.

*The 'Record of Ancient Matters' and the 'Chronicles of Japan.'*

It was with the first written historical records of Japan, called the *Kojiki* (Record of Historical Matters) in 712 A.D. and soon thereafter in 720 A.D. with the *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicles of Japan), that Japan could indeed mark the true beginnings of this land of the rising sun, or *Nihon*. It is interesting to note though that both of these texts were written using the Chinese language or variants thereof. The *Kojiki*, consisting of the account of Japan's mythological origins up to around 500 A.D., was written entirely in the Chinese language. The *Nihon Shoki*, mainly chronicling the accounts of Japan's mythological formation, was written in a primitive Japanese language that was for the most part unreadable until painstakingly transcribed in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Varley, 1977).

The major problem was that either in an attempt to catch up to the length of history and record of China, or perhaps to lay to rest any discussion about indigenous peoples and / or historical claims, these two major historical records state as fact that the nation of Japan was established on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 660 B.C. Not only does this predate the Yamato's own ancestors' migration to Japan by nearly four hundred years, but the records go on to claim that it was *Ningi--* the grandson of the mythological Sun Goddess *Amaterasu--* who was sent from heaven to bestow these powers of rule upon *Jimmu--* who would thus

became the very first emperor of Japan and live for one hundred and twenty-six years:

In the Japanese tradition, it is solely on the basis of this mandate that members of the imperial family have legitimately reigned from the founding of the empire in 660 B.C. The reigning emperor, Hirohito, is regarded as the 124<sup>th</sup> sovereign descended in an unbroken line from Jimmu (Varley, 9). [Having succeeded his father Hirohito, current emperor Akihito is the 125<sup>th</sup>].

As unreliable as these two original chronicles of Japanese history are, the formation of Japan was by all accounts a long, complex and multi-step process (Varley, 1977). Whether the empire of Japan was born on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 660 B.C. as these texts claim, or first brought to fruition with the establishment of its first capital in Nara in 710 A.D. as would tend toward the logical assumption, the reality is that what suits the nation from a psychological standpoint is what takes precedence.

Mythological stories aside, the deeply held belief by the Japanese that this land was and is the rightful home of the Yamato, the descendants of the Yayoi, based upon a mandate from the Sun Goddess, is entrenched in the ideology of what it means to be Japanese. How incredible it is that they have what constitutes the longest unbroken line of imperial leadership of any society of people on our planet Earth.

#### *West of Seki / East of Seki*

The single greatest act symbolizing the brilliant youth of the Japanese civilization was the completion of the world's largest wooden building-- that of *Todai-ji* or 'The Great East Temple' of Nara city in the year 749 A.D. and the subsequent completion of the great Buddha statue housed inside it in 751 A.D. The figure of the great Buddha or *Daibutsu*, cast in bronze and measuring nearly 53 feet in height from its seated position atop an enormous lotus flower, was officially "given life" at the great Buddha's eye-opening ceremony the following year in 752 A.D. "According to an ancient eastern belief, when the pupils are added to the eyes of a statue or a picture the latter in some magic fashion comes to

life” (Maraini, 199). With some 20,000 monks, dignitaries and the whole royal court, including the Empress Koken, in attendance, perhaps no more magnificent occasion would come to mark the “opening of the eyes” of this budding civilization (Maraini, 1960).

Ironically, it was the Empress Koken, who nearly caused the severing of some 1400 years of unbroken lineage through her romantic involvement with a common man, turned “faith-healing priest”, by the name of Dokyo around this same time. After Empress Koken’s death in 770 A.D., the attempt by Dokyo to assume the imperial throne was thwarted by the royal court. Although Dokyo was ultimately unsuccessful, the threat of a commoner upsetting the imperial line would have enormous repercussions on the Yamato imperial court and the direction of young Japan. In response, the imperial court issued an edict that changed the rules from allowing a female member of the royal family the right to rule to allowing for only male heirs of the family to ascend the imperial throne. Upon recognizing the emerging influence of the Buddhist religion and its offshoots on the secular affairs of the state, the imperial court decided to move the capital of Japan and the Yamato people from Nara city to the area of Heian, later to be known as Kyoto city, some 28 miles to the immediate north of Nara. Kyoto city would also serve one last meaningful purpose as it provided a more suitable launching pad for incursions into the great eastern and northeastern lands as yet unsettled by the Yamato court and its people- the original Japanese (Varley, 1977).

During the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. in early Japanese history, as the rise of the new capital city of Kyoto surpassed that of the formal capital Nara, barrier outposts called *Seki-sho* 関所 were constructed and outfitted including three major sites built along the strategic areas of the mountain ranges that had long separated the plains of Yamato, from those of the frontier of the east and northeast. The Kansai 関西 region, or the area west of the *Seki-sho* barrier outposts, was that of the Yamato civilization, encompassing both Nara and Kyoto. The Kanto 関東 region, or the area to the east of the *Seki-sho* barrier outposts, were sporadically populated with the remnants of an entirely foreign civilization, that of the Ainu-- direct descendants of the ancient Jomon people-- and those of the *Emishi*.

*The Emishi of the Kanto Region*

Since the first migrations of the Yayoi people into the archipelago of Japan, unknown numbers of Yayoi had steadily entered and settled in these areas, mixing with the people there, eventually coming to be known as the *Emishi*, or barbarians, half-breeds, or simply “the hairy people” (Varley, 1977 & Maraini, 1960). And when the Japanese of the Yamato plains began making their expansionist incursions into these as yet unconquered areas of Kanto they found that they were far from welcome:

The two peoples lived for centuries in a more or less permanent state of war, which can be said to be ending now with the total extinction of the strange and mysterious aborigines of white race. Gradually the Japanese pushed the *emishi* or *ebisu*, as the Ainu were then called, northwards (Maraini, 111).

There is a seemingly forgotten debate surrounding the origins of these “mysterious aborigines of white race”, the *Emishi*, or *Ebisu*, as they are also known in Japanese, who populated the eastern and far northeastern regions of Japan, and whether they had actually occupied the whole of Japan once long ago. Furthermore, the idea that these people were in fact the Ainu people of the northern island of Hokkaido is also not entirely clear. What seems to make some sense is that slowly over time, the ancestors of the modern Japanese, the Yayoi people, having dispersed throughout the Japanese archipelago had moved into these areas where the Jomon people still lived, and begun to mix together with these people. This mixture of blood and culture is just what may have produced this sworn enemy of the Yamato, the *Emishi*, these “hairy barbarians” that would for some one thousand years engage in ongoing battle with the Yamato civilization (Varley, 1977). What is far more certain is that a large number of the original descendants of the Jomon people broke off and migrated further away from the whole of Japan and into the far northern, heavily forested areas, or *michi-no-oku*, of Honshu island in what today is comprised of Yamagata, Fukushima, Akita, Iwate and Aomori prefectures. Eventually these groups of people crossed the Tsugaru straights, the treacherous sea straits that separate the northern point of Honshu island with that of the modern day island of Hokkaido, once known as Ezo, the country of the modern Ainu, referred

to in the Ainu language as *Ainu Mosir* or “a peaceful land for humans” (Kayano, 1994).

During the nearly four hundred years of history beginning from the establishment of Kyoto city as the capital of the Yamato civilization in 794 A.D. until the creation of its military capital at Kamakura near present day Tokyo city in 1185 A.D., the Japanese and the Emishi engaged in fierce confrontations over control of this land that lay directly between the old center and the new center of power of imperial Japan (Maraini, 1960).

For much of the time until the middle of the ninth-century A.D. the Emishi were able to fend off the advancements into their lands by effectively employing their knowledge and skills of hunting and horsemanship, and using their geographic advantage in a counterweight offensive against the heavy infantry of the imperial Japanese army:

Japan did not possess even a properly organized central administration; the supremacy of the Yamato rulers was widely recognized, but in the provinces the heads of the big families ruled more or less at their pleasure in a kind of loose, primitive feudalism. Moreover, more than half of the biggest island was still dominated by the ebisu [the Emishi], the savage ancestors of the Ainu, who gathered like ants to attack, but scattered like birds as soon as you faced them (Maraini, 185).

As the battles raged on in the eastern front, the imperial Japanese armies, with the help of *horyo* or captured prisoners turned informants and allies, gained the upper hand by taking a page or two from the Emishi’s book of warfare, employing a counter offensive that eventually would form the nucleus for the new Japanese warrior-- the Samurai. In a cruel twist of fate, it was this burgeoning class of militant warriors, those specifically from the ruling *Taira clan* that would burn the great Todai-ji temple in Nara to the ground in the early 1180s, causing extensive damage to the grand Buddha housed inside. An entirely new state based upon strong, centralized militaristic rule had come roaring its head with the destruction of the world’s largest wooden structure, desecrating its heavenly Buddha (Varley, 1977):

The important provincial families had to be armed for the protection of their lands. This led to the creation of local armies, and finally the samurai system. The age of feudalism had begun. Minamoto Yoritomo, the final victor in the struggle, established his tents at Kamakura, far from the intrigues of the court. His government was called Bakufu (camp administration), a name retained by the de facto government until 1868. The star of Heian [Kyoto], with its aestheticism and the poetical melancholy of its princesses, had set forever (Maraini, 243).

#### *The Ainu of Ezo*

Around the time of the burning down of the grand Todai-ji temple in Nara in the 1180s, the ancestors of the Ainu people had been migrating further into the northeast, over the straits of Tsugaru and onto the island named Ezo, today called Hokkaido. It was here that the Ainu would concentrate their communities and their culture, effectively establishing a homeland, and over many centuries to come, while defending it vigorously against further imperial Japanese expansion, would see it all come to an end with their near total extinction as a culture and a people (Kayano, 1994):

The Ainu had long settled in the Saru River region, with its mild climate and rich supply of food, dotting the landscape with their communities. I believe it is to the Saru that Ainu culture can trace its origins, for the *kamuy yukar* (tales in verse about the Ainu gods) state that the river is the land of *Okikurmikamuy*. This is the god who taught folk wisdom to the Ainu: how to build houses, fish, raise millet and so forth (Kayano, 7).

In the Ainu language a house is called a *ciset*, which translates into *we sleep on the floor*. In the very center of the house was an open fire pit that provided the main source of heat for cooking and for surviving the bitter cold winters. A shelf suspended over the fire pit deflected errant sparks from

reaching the roof while allowing for the drying of millet, the grain staple of the Ainu people. The fire pit also fulfilled its central purpose as each family member sat round the open pit much like modern families do around the dining table. It was here, in this atmosphere that the Ainu family elders, in particular grandmothers and great-grandmothers, taught their children the great folk tales of times past (*uwepekere*), the great legends (*kamuy yukar*), and the simpler moral tales of life (Kayano, 1994):

There was a great variety of stories, interwoven with practical bits of wisdom for carrying out daily activities and lessons for life: One must not arbitrarily cut down trees, one must not pollute running water, even birds and beasts will remember kindnesses and return favors, and so on. One of the most often-repeated tales was about a child who was considerate of the elderly, praised by other people and the gods, and grew up to become a happy and respected adult (Kayano, 5).

It was also here around the fire pit that skills in such areas as woodworking, weaving, sewing, and preparing food were passed on from generation to generation. In particular, the Ainu were on equal footing with their spectacular surroundings, sharing the wisdom of ages lived in harmony with nature and together with the many spirits of nature.

Unlike the Japanese people, the Ainu never ate food raw, it was either eaten grilled, stewed, boiled, or dried and preserved to be consumed at a later time. While the grain of millet and *paneemo*, or a kind of potato, provided the Ainu people with a sustained source of carbohydrates, forest mammals such as deer, weasel, fox, rabbit, and even bear provided a varied and rich source of protein, minerals and vitamins. Another important food source for the Ainu people was the salmon:

Summer in the *Kotan* (hamlet) of Nibutani (famous as the center of the Ainu of Ezo where the four great rivers of *Saru*, *Nukabira*, *Niikappu*, and *Shizunai* flow) was short, and autumn always followed close behind. Then would begin the salmon fishing that called forth the best in the Ainu. I cannot begin to imagine how many salmon in the old days

swam up the Saru River, then called the Sisirimuka (Kayano, 18).

The Ainu never took more than was necessary from the forest, the river or the sea, as they held each of these places and the nature contained within them as a *kamuy*, a spirit or god (Kayano, 1994). It is interesting to note that the word *kamuy*, used to describe a spirit or god, often in suffix form as in the example of *Okikurmi-kamuy*, the principal god of Ainu culture, is very similar to the Japanese word for god or spirit, *kami*, which derives its terminology from the Shinto religion holding that most, if not all, things in nature are spirit or god-like: “The central feature of Shinto is its animistic belief in the *kami* spirits that fill the world, inhabiting living things as well as mountains, rocks, streams, and so forth” (Varley, 6). Whether the roots of the Shinto religion were formed from the basic belief system of the ancestors of the Ainu people of Ezo, is uncertain; what is certain, though, is that the fully formed belief system of the Ainu people diverges drastically from the modern impulses of the Shinto religion that may or may not have derived from it. “Apart from such observations about worshipful clapping and ritual purification, we know little about the evolution of those religious beliefs of ancient Japan that collectively came to be called Shinto (“the way of the *kami* or gods”) to distinguish them from Buddhism...” (Varley, 6).

While animism, ritual purification and hand clapping, provides some possible evidence of a very basic link between the Shinto religion and that of the Ainu people’s own worship of nature, the Shinto religion, lacking any written or unwritten code of conduct, stands in direct contrast to the Ainu people’s responsible behavior toward all living things: “The primitive character of Shinto can be seen not only in its *kami* polytheism but also in its lack of an ethical code. Shinto does not hold man basically responsible for his misdeeds” (Varley, 6). Prior to any act regarded as crucial to sustaining life, family, and culture, be it felling a tree for wood, eating a salmon fish, or capturing a bear cub to be sacrificed in the *bear sending ceremony*, the Ainu would pray to their spirits for understanding, guidance, and forgiveness: “O god of the rabbit, thanks be to you for bringing us much fat meat” (Kayano, 64).

The rabbits were either to be eaten right away stewed, or boiled and dried for preservation.



The head was stewed whole, except the eyes. After the scanty meat on it was neatly removed, the head was prepared to look like a live rabbit's: The skull was decorated with beautiful *inaw* (whittled willow twigs with curled shavings left attached, important ritual objects), eyes of rolled *inaw* were inserted, a tongue was attached, and long ears were made to stand at pert attention. The rabbit head was hung for a while at the window near the master's seat in the main wing of the house and later taken outside to the altar, to be sent back to the land of the gods (Kayano, 64,65).

Despite having had to uproot themselves from previous lands that had been lost to hostilities, the Ainu people survived as a result of their uncanny ability to thrive in the wild of nature and live in a sustainable way. Forested areas were never cleared for farming land, building large towns or cities, and rivers were never overfished: "The Ainu treated salmon carefully, catching them only according to the providence of nature. Between September and October, when salmon migrated upstream to spawn, we caught only the amount we needed for that day's food" (Kayano, 58). And in accordance with the giving of thanks for the first salmon catch of the year, the salmon fish was prayed over in front of the open fire pit by the master of the family, "Today for the first time this year, I have brought home a salmon. Please rejoice. This salmon is not merely for us humans to eat by ourselves, but for us to eat with the gods and with my children, as tiny as insects" (Kayano, 19).

Just prior to the beginning of the fourteenth century A.D., the Japanese had turned their attention towards the final frontier, that of the heavily forested areas of the northern part of Honshu, and to the island of Ezo. In Ainu history, there are three wars fought against the imperial Japanese that stand forever etched in their memory. All three major uprising in the years 1456-1457 A.D., 1669 A.D., and 1789 A.D., were in defense of their native homeland of Ezo.

The first, lasting nearly two years from 1456 to 1457, was led by the Ainu leader, *Kosamaynu*, known in Japanese as *Koshamain*, in defense of the very southern tip of the Ezo (Hokkaido) island territory known today as the Oshima peninsula. The Japanese leader Nobuhiro Takeda having

overpowered the Ainu began to assert control of the area. In five generations time the Takeda family, with backing from the Japanese government, were granted direct rule of the area and renamed it Matsumae province (having already changed their family name from Takeda). With an established foothold in the southern region the Matsumae clan crafted new land and fishing rights that gave them a complete monopoly in the region to the utter dismay and disadvantage of the native Ainu people: “The Matsumae became notorious for their greedy purchase of a monopoly on fishing and the cruel treatment of Ainu” (Kayano, 165).

It is highly plausible that over time a great many things had been absorbed into the Yamato civilization from the ancestors of the Ainu people. The new samurai warrior of Japanese feudal society it would seem owed a large debt to the ancestors of the Ainu, as they learned to master horsemanship, archery and the hit and run tactics of warfare from engagement with their longtime adversaries, and the use of a double-bladed large sword, known as *tasiro* or *emushu*, slung under the shoulder at the waist of the Ainu hunter in a sword sash called *emusiat*, and a smaller double-bladed sword, known as *makiri*, tucked inside at the waist, may likely have given the young samurai warrior the idea for their own version of it with the *katana* and the *kogatana*, the large and small swords that helped define the power and mastery of the emerging samurai warrior.

One thing certain, though, was that without any use of fire power, in the form of guns and rifles of their own, the Ainu would find it next to impossible to slow the advances of the Japanese throughout their land of Ezo. It was just this technical disadvantage that brought the second war in 1669, led by the legendary Ainu leader called *Samkusaynu*, known in Japanese as *Shakusahin*, to an end after just two months of conflict (Kayano, 1994). Another uprising in 1789 would mark the last concentrated effort by the Ainu in defense of their native land, ultimately failing to stem the tide of the new conquerors:

During the Edo period (1603-1868 A.D.), however, the *shamo* (mainland Japanese) came into the area and, finding the Ainu living in this vast and rich landscape, forced them to labor as fishermen. Then in the Meiji era (1869-1912 A.D.) the *shamo* started taking over

on a larger scale. Ignoring the ways of the Ainu, who had formulated hunting and woodcutting practices in accordance with the cycles of nature, the *shamo* came up with arbitrary “laws” that led to the destruction of the beautiful woods of Nibutani for the profit of “the nation of Japan” and the corporate giants. With this, half of the Nibutani region ceased to be a land of natural bounty (Kayano, 9).

Beginning hundreds of years earlier with the Matsumae clan’s rules banning the fishing of salmon, the hunting of forest animals and the performing of cultural practices in their newly acquired territories of former Ainu land, so to, as the Japanese influence spread throughout the island, new laws were established that brought these old rules into a new phase. Coupled with these expanded bans on fishing, hunting and cultural practices, the Hokkaido Colonization Board set up by the Tokyo government in 1869, encouraged Japanese to move to and settle here (Onishi, 2008). The island’s name was thus changed from Ezo to Hokkaido, or North Sea Way, to reflect the new territory of the Japanese. The Former Hokkaido Aborigine Protection Act of 1899 “defined Ainu as imperial subjects and the mission of the Japanese state as civilizing them” (Kayano, 59). The Ainu communities were effectively dissolved and their culture and livelihoods destroyed. Furthermore, the Ainu language, a strictly oral language with no written form, was banned, and all Ainu had to learn Japanese in school (Kayano, 1994): “Ainu Mosir (Hokkaido) beyond a doubt was a territory indigenous to the Ainu people. Not only are the high mountains and big rivers graced with Ainu names, but so, too is every creek and marsh, no matter how small” (Kayano, 59,60).

I have no knowledge of the usual methods by which strong countries invade weaker ones. There is no denying, however, that the people belonging to the “Japanese nation” ignored the rights of the Ainu, the prior inhabitants, and—without so much as removing their soiled shoes—stormed into Ainu Mosir, the land of the Ainu. If the “Japanese people” borrowed rather than invaded the land of the Ainu, there ought to be a certificate of lease; if they bought it, there ought to be a certificate of purchase. Since, moreover, that would have meant a contract between two states, the witness of a third country would have been

desirable. Yet I have neither seen such a certificate nor heard of a witnessing country. This is perhaps a crude rendering, but in simple terms we have no recollection of selling or lending Ainu Mosir (Hokkaido) to the Japanese state (Kayano, 60).

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