

“Ainu hajimeta bakkari”

Just started being Ainu

Young Ainu and their perspective of their own identity



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Abstract

The topic of this Master Thesis is about Ainu - a group of indigenous people from the northern part of Japan. The focus is on Ainu aged in their late 20's and early 30's and how and to what extent their people's dismal history still effects the perception they have on their Ainu identity and heritage. Based on previous research and stories of three young Ainu living in the Kanto area this thesis discusses how the situation is for young Ainu living in Japan today.

Preface

Before starting on my bachelor degree in Japanese at Bergen University in 2002, my knowledge about Japan was at a minimum and I was under the impression that Japan was a homogeneous society and the people living there all considered themselves as Japanese and “children of the Emperor”. I was therefore surprised to discover that, in addition to the Japanese (*wajin*), there are several groups of minorities¹ residing in Japan and amongst them, the Ainu people.

My interest in the Ainu people derives from the fact that I am Sami², and being part of the indigenous peoples in Norway, who - like the Ainu, used to live and survive close to nature, triggered my curiosity for finding out more about the minority group from northern Japan. The reason why I chose to concentrate on the younger generation of Ainu is that I am curious to find out how they relate to their own identity as part of an indigenous people living in a modern society.

¹ Such as Burakumin, Okinawan, Ainu, Koreans and Chinese.

² Group of indigenous people residing in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The topic of this Master Thesis is about Ainu- the group of indigenous people from the northern part of Japan. Throughout history numerous scholars and researchers have been conducting fieldwork and done research on this topic. Thus, there are several books and articles written about the Ainu people referring to their traditional livelihood, assimilation into Japanese society, their political situation, their culture, their language and so forth. However, when searching for knowledge about the younger Ainu generations in present-day Japan there are fewer articles to be found. This thesis will therefore focus on illuminating the stories of Ainu in their late 20's and early 30's and the perception they have on their Ainu identity and inheritance.

Their ancestors fell victims to an expanding Japanese nation. Thus, were deprived of their land and livelihood, pride and language, suffered through years of exploitation and have been targets for assimilation policies, discrimination and so forth for centuries. Furthermore, Japan has often, even after entering the 21th century, been referred to as a homogenous nation, (*tanitsu minzoku kokka*). As late as in 2001 a Japanese politician went as far as to claim, "Japan is one state, one language, one nation (*minzoku*). The Ainu are now completely assimilated."³ Taking this into consideration, this thesis will examine how the younger generation of Ainu living in Japan today identify themselves and relate to their inheritance. It will focus on how and to what extent their people's dismal history still effects the younger population's perception of their indigenous identity.

Organization of the thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters followed by a conclusion. Following current section, this chapter will contain a presentation of the thesis statement and the supplementary research questions. In chapter two, relevant theory and methodology with a description of the fieldwork and research will be presented. Chapter three will contain an overview of the Ainu's historical background starting from the first written accounts of Ainu and up until today. I argue that including a historical background is crucial in order to understand how and reasons

³ (Suzuki Muneo a politician from the House of Representatives in Hokkaido) Siddle, R. (2002). An epoch-making event? The 1997 Ainu cultural promotion Act and its impact. *Japan forum volume 18*. p.417

why they have been, and still are, discriminated against. Chapter four will focus on definitions of indigenous people, identification of Ainu and, using material from my fieldwork, examples on how young Ainu relates to their own identity. This will be discussed according to other research and theories on ethnic minority and identity. Chapter five will examine why and to what kind of discrimination Ainu in Japan are subject to. In addition it will also include a section called ‘general knowledge’, illuminating how the lack of knowledge might be an underlying factor for discrimination and misunderstanding. Concentrating on one of the most prominent movements for and by young Ainu, the ‘Ainu Rebels’, chapter six will discuss the occurrence of cultural revitalization movements. Chapter seven is called “changes and future outlook” and will explore reactions and changes among the Ainu that occurred in the wake of being granted indigenous recognition. Ultimately there will be a concluding chapter summing up my analyses.

Thesis statement

“My Grandmother was not so good at Japanese. So, she often spoke in the Ainu language, but she did not try to teach the Ainu language to us.”⁴

Mutsuko Nakamoto (72)

Previous research shows that from around the beginning of the Meiji Period in 1868, due to the social stigma of being Ainu, many parents and grandparents believed that not passing down Ainu language and culture was in the best interest for their children. Many saw the quick assimilation into Japanese society as the only way out of persecution and misery. Consequently, some children of Ainu descent were not aware of their inheritance. ‘I found out [that I was Ainu] when the children at around me kept calling me ‘Ainu’. Even though they called me Ainu, I still had no idea what it meant. I didn’t even know that my own grandmothers had Ainu names, so it didn’t dawn on me ... Since we were very poor, I figured that poor people were called Ainu’⁵, says an Ainu woman recalling her time at elementary school in the 1950’s.

⁴ Nakamoto, M. ,(2000). Rediscovering an Appreciation for Ainu Culture. In: Irimoto. T. and Yamada T. eds. 2004. *Circumpolar Ethnicity and Identity*. Osaka: Yubunsha Co. Ltd. p.3

⁵ Motani, Y. (2002). Towards a More Just Educational Policy for Minorities in Japan: The Case of Korean Ethinc Schools. *Comparative Education*. Vol. 38. No 2. (May 2002) p. 227

Since the 1960's several liberal democratic societies around the globe have attained a widespread acceptance of cultural diversity and many indigenous people around the world are now standing up for their rights. This is also affecting Japan, which is a country that often has been referred to as an ethnically homogeneous country (*tanitsu minzoku kokka*). The minority groups have gradually been stepping out of the social stigma and claiming their rights to continue living there in minority communities.⁶ After the enactment of the Ainu Shinpo in 1997, the Ainu have finally been recognized as a distinctive ethnic group. The Director of the Ainu Association said "At least some of our people have got to the point where they can say with pride – I am Ainu. But it took years to reach even this point. The next step is to preserve our culture."⁷

Eleven years passed before the Ainu population were finally acknowledged as the indigenous population of Japan by the Japanese government. The Ainu language, culture and history's survival now depend on the younger generations passing it on. This has led to the following thesis statement, which is guiding my thesis:

How does Japan's younger Ainu population relate to their own Ainu identity?

According to the Ainu themselves many Ainu still choose to hide or reject their Ainu identity. This thesis will focus on examining the reasons why some of the younger generation of Ainu still find it difficult to acknowledge and be proud of their indigenous identity, and in what ways this identity affects their lives. In addition it will also concentrate on how, who and by what means young Ainu activists and artists are working to promote their culture and turn the self-denial into pride. Thus, in order to obtain more thorough answers the thesis statement is followed by these research questions:

- * In what way does the history of persecution and discrimination towards their ancestors influence the perception young Ainu in contemporary Japan have on their own in heritage?

⁶ Motani, Y. (2002). Towards a More Just Educational Policy for Minorities in Japan: The Case of Korean Ethnic Schools. In: *Comparative Education*. Vol. 38. No 2. (May 2002) p. 226

⁷ Coates, K.S. (2004). A Global History of Indigenous Peoples struggle and survival. New York: Pallgrave Macmillan p.256

⁸S. (2009), Being Ainu for Mina Sakai, Leader of the "Ainu Rebels". *Hawehe-Ainu voices*, [wordpress.com] February 8. Available at: <http://hawehe.wordpress.com/2009/02/08/being-ainu-for-mina-sakai-leader-of-the-%E2%80%9Cainu-rebels%E2%80%9D/> [Accessed March 8 2011]

Chapter 1: Introduction

- * In what way do young Ainu in Japan display their cultural and ethnic background in the modern society?
- * What do they think about the Japanese population's general knowledge about Ainu?
- * How has the situation changed after the Ainu got acknowledged as indigenous people by the Japanese government in 2008?
- * What do they think about the outlook for the future?

Using the above-mentioned thesis statement and the research question as base for research and fieldwork this thesis will examine the different perspective members of the younger generation of Ainu have on their own Ainu identity.

Chapter 2: Theory and methodology

This chapter will contain a presentation on the different theories and methodology used throughout this thesis. Due to the thesis statement questioning the perception of identity among a group of people within an ethnic minority, the theories used revolve around the definition of identity among ethnic minorities and how there are different ways in which indigenous people relate to their ethnic identity. The methodology part of this thesis will contain a description of my fieldwork, information about the participants and a presentation of additional sources used in the research.

Identity and ethnic minorities

According to Takashi Irimoto, professor in Cultural anthropology at Hokkaido University in Japan, both ethnicity and identity are often strongly influenced by the subjective interpretation of history and the accompanying beliefs, thus it is difficult to regard either one as rational and simple functions. Nevertheless, he presents the following definition: "Identity is etic or emic recognition that certain attributes possessed by individuals belong to certain categories. Ethnicity is the wholeness of cultural characteristics that are recognized to be in common in a group, and different from other groups."⁸ He also states that "ethnicity and identity are associated with the relationships between nature and humans, categories of human groups, inter-group relationships and the process of changes in population and its culture"⁹ The latter, "process of changes in population and culture" refers to how groups and their traditional culture alter through interaction and contact with other groups and cultures. In this process minority cultures and especially their languages are endangered. Members of the ethnic minority might be subject to a language shift and in some cases the original language may disappear completely. However, Irimoto claims that believing that the culture and ethnicity could be in danger of extinction may trigger initiative and a reviving awareness, which concerns identity and ethnicity among the members of the minority group. Cultural revitalization movements thereby occur, although these movements focus on reviving traditions to reverse the negative changing process they cannot bring back the past and "traditional systems may be changed and sometimes destroyed, and subsequently, fragments

⁸ Irimoto, T. (2003). Anthropology of Ethnicity and Identity. In: Irimoto, T. and Yamada T. eds. 2004. *Circumpolar Ethnicity and Identity*. Osaka: Yubunsha Co. Ltd. p.401

⁹ Irimoto, T. (2003). Anthropology of Ethnicity and Identity. In: Irimoto, T. and Yamada T. eds. 2004. *Circumpolar Ethnicity and Identity*. Osaka: Yubunsha Co. Ltd. p. 403

of culture and language, which have lost their conventional functions, become ethnic symbols as the basis of people's identity in a new system".¹⁰ Norwegian social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen writes in his book 'ethnicity and nationalism' that the cultural self-consciousness or reflexivity originated in the modernization process have inspired the establishment of ethnic identities promoting their distinctive culture. "While one's grandparents may have lived as traditional Inuit (or Sami, or Scots ...) without giving it any thought, and ones parent took great pains to escape from their stigmatised and shameful minority position and to become assimilate and modern, today's generation does everything in its power to revive the customs and traditions that their grandparents followed without knowing it, and which their parents tried so hard to forget."¹¹

Relating this specifically to the Ainu culture, in her research from 1993, Katarina Sjöberg proposes that to the Ainu an "ethnic group is a concept that derives from or relates to a human group having racial (anthropomorphic), religious, linguistic and historical traits in common, people sharing these basic features also share a common identity, something which people are born into."¹² She continues to state that in a society dominated by a national majority, the Japanese, the Ainu have different strategies when it comes to using their ethnicity to accomplish their aims. According to Sjöberg their strategies range from, those who consider themselves Ainu and are recognized as Ainu by the Japanese majority on the one end, and those who are recognized as Japanese by themselves and the authorities, but as Ainu by the Japanese majority. The former group emphasizes on the specific features in their distinctive culture, whilst the latter emphasizes on their situation where they are recognized as Japanese. In between there are those who identify themselves as 'Japanese of Ainu descent'. One might say that these people have 'double identities'.¹³ Ken S. Coats seems to be of the same opinion where he states in his book 'a global history of indigenous peoples' from 2004, "the Ainu have not shared a common approach to their relationship with Japan." Like Sjöberg he proposes that the Ainu use different strategies when relating to their ethnic identity. Coates present three groups of Ainu whereas the first are those "who favour integration through the development of a "double identity" as an Ainu and Japanese". The second are those who

¹⁰ Irimoto, T. (2003). Anthropology of Ethnicity and Identity. In: Irimoto. T. and Yamada T. eds. 2004. *Circumpolar Ethnicity and Identity*. Osaka: Yubunsha Co. Ltd. p. 402-403

¹¹ Hylland Eriksen, T. (2010), *Ethnicity and Nationalism* 3rd ed. United Kingdom: Pluto Press p.156

¹² Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwook Academic Publishers. p.44

¹³ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwook Academic Publishers. p.44-45

“favor retaining a distinctive Ainu identity but working with the Japanese to improve living conditions” and the third are the most radical group of Ainu who call for greater activism among the Ainu and refuse to cooperate with the government.¹⁴

Using the theories above this thesis will examine how the younger generation of Ainu living in Japan today relate to their indigenous identity.

Methodology

The research for this thesis involved conducting interviews with members of the, now dissolved, performance group the ‘Ainu Rebels’. I have also researched numerous articles on the Ainu Rebels, both in English and Japanese, as well as other articles regarding events and gatherings produced for and by younger members of Ainu society. Furthermore, I have studied books and articles on the subjects of Ainu history, cultural revival, ethnicity and identity. In addition I have watched documentaries and interviews with young Ainu that are available online. A description of my fieldwork and selection of sources will follow below.

Fieldwork

Originally the plan was to conduct qualitative interviews in Japanese with members of the Ainu Rebels, a performance group from the Kanto area which consists of young Ainu musicians and dancers. Being part of the first performance group mixing traditional Ainu song and dance with modern culture, they were clearly open about it and would have first hand knowledge about being young Ainu in Japan today. In addition, since they were travelling around Japan performing they had encountered other young Ainu giving them some insight on how other members of the younger generation Ainu too relates to their Ainu origin. The idea was to interview both male and female members in their 20’s and early 30’s. However, I found getting a hold of many interviewees to be a difficult task. Thus, I ended up being able to conduct interviews with three of the female members two aged 26 and one 32 years old. This meant that the numbers of participants were few and the age range was not significantly large. Nevertheless since they all were members of the Ainu Rebels group, and all three had participated and even organized events for and by Ainu all over Japan, they were all more than qualified to provide me with very interesting stories and knowledge that proved to be invaluable to this thesis.

¹⁴ Coates, K.S. (2004). *A Global History of Indigenous Peoples struggle and survival*. p.256-257

My fieldwork was conducted in Japan while being an exchange student at Waseda University in Tokyo 2008/2009 and during a visit to Japan in February and March 2010. Through the Ainu Rebels Facebook page I managed to send a message to the leader of group, Mina Sakai, introducing my myself and the project. Fortunately she agreed to meet me and through her I was able to meet the two other female members of the group, Sayuri (26) and Utae (32). According to Mina Sakai, the members of the Ainu Rebels were at first reluctant to give interviews in connection to my research and Master Thesis, so I consider myself very fortunate that they agreed. In addition to these interviews I also attended a lecture by Mina Sakai at the foundation of Research and Promotion of Ainu culture centre in Tokyo and, in March 2009, I saw the Ainu Rebels perform at an Ainu event called "Ainu Night Rhythm"¹⁵ in Sapporo.

Sources

In addition to my fieldwork I have used Japanese newspapers, both paper- and online editions, to find articles about the younger generation of Ainu. Furthermore, I have also found useful information online such as; documentaries about the Ainu people, blogs written by Ainu, interviews with members of the Ainu Rebels on YouTube and articles from Japanese newspapers. As for other theoretical sources I have, together with books and articles on the subjects of Ainu history and cultural revival, studied books and articles with theories concerning ethnicity and identity among Ainu as well as other indigenous groups all over the world.

¹⁵ Website with for the event: <http://www.sapporolife.com/topics/hokkaisha/index2.asp> [accessed January 25th 2011]

Chapter 3: Historical background

“The Ainu way of life, like that of all native peoples, was characterised by an inseparable and complex spiritual relationship with the land and phenomena of the natural world”¹⁶

Early years

The exact origin of the Ainu is still subject for debate. Sanders writes in his article, Japan: The Ainu as indigenous people, from 1984 that the first written accounts of Ainu are those referring to warfare between Ainu and Japanese in northern Honshu in year 658, 789 and 811¹⁷. While Siddle writes in his book, race, resistance and the Ainu of Japan from 1996 that the current Ainu culture developed around the thirteenth century from the Satsumon culture. The Satsumon culture were one of two distinctive cultures on Hokkaido and while the bearers of the other culture, called Okhotsk, resided in the north and northeast coastlines, the bearers of the Satsumon culture occupied the rest of Hokkaido and possibly the northernmost part of Honshu.¹⁸

In 1987 a statement written to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations the executive Director of the Ainu Association of Hokkaido, Giichi Nomura stated: “Our ancestors are said to have come to live in these regions during the Jomon Age, 3000-4000 years ago.”¹⁹ This would mean that the Ainu consider themselves some of the first settlers in Japan.²⁰ They settled on the northern island of the Japanese archipelago, Hokkaido, known as Ezo, Ezochi or Ezogashima before 1868, the southern part of Sakhalin and the Kuriles.²¹

Originally a total of around 40,000 Ainu lived in egalitarian societies and sustained their way of livelihood by hunting, fishing and gathering.²² They would hunt animals such as bears and

¹⁶ Siddle, R. (1997) The Ainu. Indigenous people of Japan. In: Weiner, M. (ed.) (2009), *Japan's Minorities the illusion of homogeneity*, p.21-39 United Kingdom: Routledge p.23

¹⁷ Sanders D. (1986) Ainu as an indigenous people., *IWGIA Newsletter volume 45*, p.122

¹⁸ Siddle, R. (1996), *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan*. Routledge p.26

¹⁹ Nomura, G. (1987), “Ainu address the UN for the first time” , *IWGIA Newsletter volume 51-52*. p.61

²⁰ Sjöberg, K. (1990), “Mr. Ainu” in the Japanese Culture, *IWGIA Newsletter volume. 79*, p.79

²¹ Nomura, G. (1987), “Ainu address the UN for the first time” , *IWGIA Newsletter volume 51-52*. p.61

²² Siddle, R. (1997) The Ainu. Indigenous people of Japan. In: Weiner, M. (ed.) (2009), *Japan's Minorities the illusion of homogeneity*, p.21-39 United Kingdom: Routledge p.23

deer, catch fish in the rivers as well as in salt-water along with seals in the northern seas. To make clothing and shoes they used the hide from the animals and fish and weaved shreds of elm bark. The Ainu followed an animistic religion with the *iyomante* rite, a ceremony symbolizing the return of the slaughtered bear's soul to the sky world where the bear Gods reside, a key element of the religion.²³ They also developed a rich oral culture, which consisted of heroic legends (*yukar*) and folktales (*wepeker*).

Characteristics

Throughout history, 'extreme hairiness' has been frequently used when describing an Ainu's appearance. Both Ainu men and women have significantly more body hair than their Japanese counterparts (*wajin*), with the men traditionally growing long beards. In addition, most Ainu have double eyelids and pronounced cheekbones.²⁴

Immigrants encroaching Ezo

According to the Japanese (*wajin*), inhabitants of the northern regions (Ezogashima), were merely "little more than a variety of demon". However, these "barbarians" were in control of natural resources that the Japanese desired and therefore during the 15th century several Japanese trading settlements were established on Oshima, located in the southern peninsula of Ezogashima. This developed a thriving furs and sea products trading post.²⁵ The possession of Japanese goods that were imported became symbolic of wealth and power in the Ainu culture. These included rice, iron and other Japanese artefacts that were exchanged for natural goods such as fur and fish from the area that the Ainu harvested and traded.

As the population in Japan increased during the beginning of the 16th century the Ainu population became victims to an expanding capitalistic economy and civilization. These resulted in numerous, and sometimes bloody, disputes surrounding fishing rights and other matters agricultural uses of their territory. In the beginning the Japanese immigrants were the minority and un-confrontational, but as their numbers increased their influence grew and the

²³ Taguchi K. Y. (1980) The Ainu People of Japan, *IWGIA Newsletter volume 24*, p.82

²⁴ Taguchi K. Y. (1980) The Ainu People of Japan, *IWGIA Newsletter volume 24*, p.81

²⁵ Siddle, R. (1997) The Ainu. Indigenous people of Japan. In: Weiner, M. (ed.) (2009), *Japan's Minorities the illusion of homogeneity*, p.21-39 United Kingdom: Routledge p.23

power balance began to shift. Eventually, in larger populated areas, the Japanese began to subjugate the native populous of the Ainu.²⁶

From 1604 the Matsumae clan ruled Ezo for 250 years²⁷ and during this period the Ainu developed even more extensive trading relations with the Japanese immigrants. In exchange for rice, sugar, tobacco, sake, lacquer ware and cloth they provided goods such as fish, seaweed, hawks, bear liver, seal skin and eagle feathers. Since the Ainu were denied education and forbidden from learning Japanese, all the business was conducted through interpreters. This subsequently made the later exploitation of the Ainu easier.²⁸

When gold was discovered in 1631 on Ezo Japanese miners were added to the already large number of immigrants on the island. This led an increase in people infiltrating the Ainu's hunting and fishing grounds, which lead to destruction of the ecological balance in Ezo. As a consequence many Ainu could no longer survive by means of their old traditional livelihood, which forced them into working for the Japanese immigrants. The working conditions were harsh and gave little or no pay, which eventually led to frustration and revolting by the Ainu. However, Japanese immigrants were more disciplined and armed so were easily able to defeat the dissidents.²⁹

Bakufu control and destruction of Ainu society

A riot in 1789 that coincided with the Russian expansions from the north and down the Kurile Island chain, made, for the first time, the central government focus on organizing a better and more effective policy towards their "Ainu problem". The Russian presence could no longer be ignored and the arguments for total annexation of Ezogashima increased. Thus, despite Matsumae's objections, by 1807, all of Ezo was annexed and controlled by the bakufu. However, the land was too vast to control in the same way as the rest of the country so the only noticeable change, except from units stationed around the coast to manage the trade, was the policy aiming to "civilise" the Ainu. This was to be done by converting them into becoming Japanese, often forcing Japanese costumes and lifestyles upon them.³⁰

²⁶ Taguchi K. Y. (1980) *The Ainu People of Japan, IWGIA Newsletter volume 24*, p.82-83

²⁷ the Matsumae clan ruled Ezo for 250 years from 1604 only interrupted when the central government of Japan assumed direct control of the island for 22 years from 1799 to 1821.

²⁸ Taguchi K. Y. (1980) *The Ainu People of Japan, IWGIA Newsletter volume 24*, p.83-85

²⁹ Taguchi K. Y. (1980) *The Ainu People of Japan, IWGIA Newsletter volume 24*, p.82

³⁰ Taguchi K. Y. (1980) *The Ainu People of Japan, IWGIA Newsletter volume 24*, p.83-84

By 1821 the Russian treat had receded and the Matsumae merchants regained control of Ezo. This meant that the assimilation policy towards the Ainu was abandoned and instead they were forcibly recruited and exploited as labour, building roads, transporting and servicing the fisheries. Sexual abuse of Ainu women also became common. In addition, diseases brought to Ezochi by the migrant workers had a disastrous outcome in the Ainu society.

The number of immigrants continued to increase and by the 1850s the distinction between the land of the immigrants and the land of the Ainu people began to disappear. In 1855, after the Russo-Japanese border on The Kuril Islands had been established, the central government (*bakufu*) reasserted control over the region.³¹

Meiji period

In 1869 Ezo was renamed Hokkaido and turned into an internal colony in the new Japanese state. This new colony was considered “a strategic ‘empty land’ to be settled by immigration and developed along capitalist lines.”³² According to the Kaitakushi, (colonisation commission), Ainu land was considered *terra nullius*, or no man’s land. Thus, the Ainu were dispossessed of their resources and relocated into ‘reservations’. In other words, forced into impoverishment to make way for the immigrant’s agriculture.³³ In the 1870’s they were given Japanese last names³⁴ and entered into the family register (*koseki*). Being enrolled in the *koseki* meant they were basically considered Japanese. However, until 1946³⁵, their registration papers were distinguished from the Japanese (*wajin*) by a stamp classifying them as ‘former native’ (*kyūdojin*).³⁶

The Japanese state’s expansion and development on Hokkaido was seen as evidence of the Japanese race’s superiority. Thus, justifying the subordination of the ‘inferior’ race, the Ainu minority, which was seen as ‘a dying race’ on the edge of loosing ‘the battle for survival’.

There were various opinions in how to approach the ‘Ainu Problem (*Ainu mondai*). An

³¹ Siddle, R. (1997) The Ainu. Indigenous people of Japan. In: Weiner, M. (ed.) (2009), *Japan’s Minorities the illusion of homogeneity*, p.21-39 United Kingdom: Routledge p.23-28

³² Siddle, R. (1997) The Ainu. Indigenous people of Japan. In: Weiner, M. (ed.) (2009), *Japan’s Minorities the illusion of homogeneity*, p.21-39 United Kingdom: Routledge p.28

³³ Siddle, R. (1997) The Ainu. Indigenous people of Japan. In: Weiner, M. (ed.) (2009), *Japan’s Minorities the illusion of homogeneity*, p.21-39 United Kingdom: Routledge p.28

³⁴ Sjöberg, K. (1986), The Ainu - A Fourth World Population, *IWGIA Newsletter volume 48*, p. 51

³⁵ The new constitution forbade this practice, however instead of removing the stamps they were simply crossed out, which means that only Ainu born after 1946 have got a “clean” record.

³⁶ Taguchi K. Y. (1980) The Ainu People of Japan, *IWGIA Newsletter volume 24*, p.85

example is a former governor in southern Sakhalin who wanted to keep them separated and argued, “[...] If interbreeding with Ainu introduces Ainu blood into Japanese it will violate the movement to preserve our national essence (*kokusui*).” However, the aim of the policy towards the natives ended up being to quickly and forcibly assimilate them into the Japanese society. This was to be executed by establishing a system of segregated and inferior ‘native education’.³⁷ Implicating Ainu children between age 6 and 9 getting compulsory education in Japanese.³⁸ In addition, Ainu customs and traditions, such as the bear-sending ceremony (*Iyomante*), tattooing of married women and use of their oral ceremonial hymns (*yukar*) were banned. The Ainu were described as a Stone Age population and in 1887 one of the foremost British Japan experts, Basil Hall Chamberlain, stated that “...so little have they (Ainu) profited from the opportunities offered to them during the last one thousand years or two thousand years that there is no longer room for them in the world.”³⁹

By the second decade of the Meiji restoration, due to the immigrant’s exploitation of Japan’s natural resources, most of the Ainu had lost their basis of livelihood and fallen into poverty. This soon escalated into a social problem and the National Diet declared that,

“The Ainu are an unenlightened people. They are ignorant, and their profits are being taken away by immigrants so that they are gradually losing their means of survival. Therefore we, the Japanese, full of chivalry, have to protect them by all means.”⁴⁰

Consequently a movement to help and protect the Ainu was enacted in 1899.

The Hokkaido Former Indigenous Protection Act (Hokkaido kyūdōjin hogohō)

“The Meiji state’s policy toward the Ainu culminated in the 1899 enactment of the “Law for the Protection of Former Hokkaido Aborigines” (*Hokkaidō Kyū dojin hogohō*), which “protected” the Ainu by forcing them to become petty farmers on marginal land.”⁴¹

³⁷ Siddle, R. (1997) The Ainu. Indigenous people of Japan. In: Weiner, M. (ed.) (2009), *Japan’s Minorities the illusion of homogeneity*, p.21-39 United Kingdom: Routledge p. 29

³⁸ Sjöberg, K. (1986), The Ainu - A Fourth World Population, *IWGIA Newsletter* volume 48, p.53

³⁹ Weiner, M. (2009), ‘Self’ and ‘other’ in imperial Japan. In: Weiner, M. (ed.) (2009), *Japan’s Minorities the illusion of homogeneity*, p.1-20. United Kingdom: Routledge p.17

⁴⁰ Ainu address the UN for the first time (1987), *IWGIA Newsletter* volume 51-52. p.62

⁴¹ Howell, D. (1994) Ainu Ethnicity and the Boundaries of the Early Modern Japanese State. *Past & Present*, no. 142 (Feb.1994) p.91

The, rather inappropriately named, 'Protection Act' encouraged the Ainu to take up agriculture, thus all Ainu households became eligible to be granted up to 15,000 *tsubo* or 12,25 acres of land. The land was free of taxes for the first 30 years, however, if the land was not cultivated within the first 15 years, it was to be returned to the government.⁴² Furthermore, it could not be transferred to others than an heir or be mortgaged. The Protection Act guaranteed to provide welfare for those who couldn't afford agricultural equipment, medical care, funeral expenses, and their children's education. It also provided money from central-government funds to establish schools and hospitals in Ainu communities.⁴³ In theory this law might seem like a step in the right direction to improve the Ainu population's living conditions, but the reality was quite different. The Act did little to improve the situation for the Ainu society as a whole, and because wage labour was in fact more rewarding than farming it even left many worse off than before. Besides, Ainu who were reluctant to give up other pursuits such as fishing and hunting in favour of agriculture did not receive any assistance at all.⁴⁴ Furthermore, since giving away fertile farmland in huge quantities could have jeopardized the possibility of immigrants from the mainland moving to Hokkaido and helping with the development, land granted to the Ainu according to this Act were mostly wastelands, slopes, forestland, marshland and other infertile land which was reversed back to the state after fifteen years because it was unsuitable for farming.⁴⁵ Even an experienced Japanese farmer would have struggled to survive under the terms of the Protection Act, but then again the purpose was to only provide a minimum that the Ainu themselves could develop according to their own ambitions and capabilities. Success or failure of individual Ainu households after the enactment of the Protection Act was considered to rely on the will of the Ainu themselves to make their way in modern society rather than being a result of government policy.⁴⁶ Although it was reformed numerous times, the Hokkaido Former Natives Protection Act was not completely abolished until the 'Ainu Cultural Promotion Act' replaced it in 1997.

⁴² Howell, D. (1994) Ainu Ethnicity and the Boundaries of the Early Modern Japanese State. *Past & Present*, no. 142 (Feb.1994) p.7

⁴³ Howell, D. L. (2004). Making "Useful Citizens" of Ainu Subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Association for Asian Studies p 7

⁴⁴ Hudson, M. and Morris-Suzuki, T. *Multicultural Japan : Palaeolithic to postmodern*. (p.287-292) Cambridge : Cambridge University Press p 120

⁴⁵ Howell, D. L. (2004). Making "Useful Citizens" of Ainu Subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Association for Asian Studies p 7-8

⁴⁶ Howell, D. L. (2004). Making "Useful Citizens" of Ainu Subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Association for Asian Studies p 8

From Dying Race to cultural revival

Interaction with the Japanese together with years of assimilation made it difficult to define Ainu ethnicity and the state's policy was that if the Ainu population became undistinguishable from the majority they would cease to exist. Thus, individual actions could interfere with the political interpretation of Ainu ethnicity. For example, young people who left their community in order to work in the city "ceased functionally to be Ainu and were therefore no longer a concern for policymakers"⁴⁷ Consequently, the Ainu came to be considered as a 'dying race' (*horobiyuku minzoku*), doomed to extinction. Officials thought that by eradicating the most significant differences between the livelihoods of Ainu and those of the Japanese, the Ainu would cease to exist as a distinctive identifiable population and the so-called 'Ainu problem' would be solved.⁴⁸

A self-appointed spokesman for the Ainu, Kita Shōmei who spent much of his time working with Ainu affairs supported assimilation and intermarriage, but because the Ainu blood in the body could only become diluted and never disappear entirely he stated that the Ainu would continue to live within the Japanese nation.⁴⁹ Another activist, Kawamura Kaneto, was of the same opinion, claiming that the Ainu would disappear from census records but "survive as fully assimilated Japanese."⁵⁰ However, in the late 1960's, inspired by domestic radical waves and the movements of other indigenous groups overseas, members of the young generation of Ainu started initiating new Ainu politics. They refused to accept the term 'dying race' and instead of running away from their Ainu identity, young men and women started searching for their Ainu roots by learning and conducting interviews from elder Ainu, creating new ceremonies to celebrate the new heroes in Ainu history and reviving traditional crafts and rituals. This generation of Ainu rejected the assimilation policy and struggled to create a new and modern Ainu cultural identity.⁵¹ These efforts did not only lead to a cultural revival, but also to a reaffirmation of 'Ainuness' and demands for specific rights to the Ainu regarding

⁴⁷ Howell, D. L. (2004). Making "Useful Citizens" of Ainu Subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Association for Asian Studies p 13

⁴⁸ Howell, D. L. (2004). Making "Useful Citizens" of Ainu Subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Association for Asian Studies p 24

⁴⁹ Howell, D. L. (2004). Making "Useful Citizens" of Ainu Subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Association for Asian Studies p 14

⁵⁰ Howell, D. L. (2004). Making "Useful Citizens" of Ainu Subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Association for Asian Studies p 19

⁵¹ Siddle, R. (1997) The Ainu. Indigenous people of Japan. In: Weiner, M. (ed.) (2009), *Japan's Minorities the illusion of homogeneity*, p.21-39 United Kingdom: Routledge p.30

them as a distinctive people (*minzoku*) with a separate cultural identity. However, many years were to pass before the Japanese government met any of these demands.

Ainu Culture Promotion Act of May 8th 1997

In a report to the UN's Human Rights Committee in 1980, following the ratification of The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Japanese government stated, "Every citizen has the right to enjoy his culture, practice his religion and use his language guaranteed under the Japanese Constitution. However ethnic minority groups, as defined in this Covenant, do not exist in Japan."⁵² Nevertheless, Nomura Giichi, executive director of the Ainu Association of Hokkaido, an association founded in the 1930's to protect Ainu interests, argued that 'the Hokkaido Former Indigenous Protection Act', enacted in 1899, was in fact presented as a policy towards indigenous people and ethnic minority groups, thus showing that the Japanese government domestically recognized the existence of such groups.⁵³ In 1984 the Ainu Association adopted a draft for a new legislation known as Ainu New Law (*Ainu Shinpo*) to replace The Hokkaido Former Natives Protection Act. The draft demanded among other things, guaranteed political participation, a fund for economic self-reliance as compensation for a history of discrimination and marginalization and protection of human rights. To respond to this draft the governor of Hokkaido at that time, Yokomichi Takahiro organized a Round Table to discuss the "Ainu problem". Consequently, in the following report submitted to the UN from the Japanese government in 1987 the government recognized the presence of Ainu persons, not as members of an ethnic group, but as individuals.⁵⁴ Two years later, in 1989, they finally announced that 'we will deal with the Ainu question as an ethnic problem,'⁵⁵ and in 1991 the Ainu were granted status as an ethnic minority. However, they were not acknowledged as an indigenous group, justified by the Japanese government referring to the fact that there is no international definition of the term, meaning the government cannot be sure if the Ainu are indigenous.⁵⁶ As for the draft for an Ainu New Law (*Ainu Shinpo*), regardless of the appeals put forward by the Ainu Association, there were years with no progress at all until 1993. This year LDP had to step down for the first time in

⁵² Ainu address the UN for the first time (1987), *IWGIA Newsletter volume 51-52*. p.63

⁵³ Ainu address the UN for the first time (1987), *IWGIA Newsletter volume 51-52*. p.63

⁵⁴ Siddle, R.(1996), *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan*.p.185

⁵⁵ Hanazaki, K. (1996) Ainu Moshir and Yaponesia, Ainu and Okinawan identities in contemporary Japan. In: Weiner, M. (ed.) (2004) *Race, Ethnicity and Migration in modern Japan, Imagined and Imaginary minorities vol.3* p.213-226 United Kingdom: RoutledgeCurzon p.223

⁵⁶ Hanazaki, K. (1996) Ainu Moshir and Yaponesia, Ainu and Okinawan identities in contemporary Japan. In: Hudson, M. and Morris-Suzuki, T. *Multicultural Japan : Palaeolithic to postmodern*. (p.287-292) Cambridge : Cambridge University Press p 127

decades, an Ainu was elected to the national Diet and the new Chief Cabinet Secretary defied bureaucratic opposition and formed a project team for making progress on the Ainu New Law. This Project team was established in 1994 and in 1996, based on sessions, expert hearings and a fieldtrip to Hokkaido, they presented a short report that later developed into the “Law concerning Protection of Ainu Culture and Dissemination and Establishment of Knowledge about Ainu Traditions”, abbreviated to “Ainu Cultural Promotion Act” or CPA, which was enacted on July 1st 1997. This Act was considered “epoch making” and showed that even legislations on behalf of minority interest groups could pass through the Japanese bureaucratic system.⁵⁷ Contrary, justified by the statement; “this kind of consultative body is not a forum for the balancing of interest, so it is customary to exclude concerned parties”⁵⁸, no members of the Ainu society were invited to participate in the drafting and only one among the consulted experts was Ainu. In other words, in the process of drafting a major law that would have a great impact on their future almost no Ainu were consulted or invited to participate.⁵⁹

Although it was claimed to be an “epoch making” law, at the time when the final report was made public in 1996, many Ainu activists were extremely disappointed. The draft contained a brief history background with no apology from the state or mentioning of forced assimilation, colonization or dispossession. Furthermore, despite that Ainu was referred to as indigenous people this was not seen as a reason for compensation or the establishing of any special rights. A member of the Council later explained that to recognize Ainu as indigenous people and grant them indigenous rights would imply a change in the constitution which would be unrealistic to try to accomplish. Thus, in order to form a report that would have a reasonable chance to pass in the Diet, the new Ainu policy focused on the promotion of Ainu culture “and for the realization of a national society with a rich and diverse culture which we can be proud of in the world”.⁶⁰ Despite that their claim for indigenous rights was not granted and there being many other unsatisfactory aspects, the Ainu Association decided to approve the report and look at it as a step in the right direction. Secretary of the Society for preservation of Ainu Culture in Biratori, Koichi Kaizawa stated the following in a presentation in 2000,

⁵⁷ Siddle, R. (2002). An epoch-making event? The 1997 Ainu cultural promotion Act and its impact. *Japan forum volume 18* p. 406-407

⁵⁸ Siddle, R. (2002). An epoch-making event? The 1997 Ainu cultural promotion Act and its impact. *Japan forum volume 18* p 407

⁵⁹ Siddle, R. (2002). An epoch-making event? The 1997 Ainu cultural promotion Act and its impact. *Japan forum volume 18* p 407

⁶⁰ Siddle, R. (2002). An epoch-making event? The 1997 Ainu cultural promotion Act and its impact. *Japan forum volume 18* p 409

“This is a law preserving culture. But, we are a living people. We are not a culture only. It is no use if only our culture is preserved. We would like to recover our rights as human beings.”⁶¹

Getting acknowledged as indigenous people

By officially inviting president of the Ainu Association of Hokkaido, Nomura Giichi, to address the General Assembly and speak at the opening ceremony of the Year of Indigenous Peoples, the UN did recognize the Ainu as the indigenous people of Japan already in 1992. Domestically, Nomura’s speech did contribute to the establishment of a committee resulting in the enactment of the Ainu Cultural Promotion Act⁶², however, justified by the Japanese government referring to the fact that there is no international definition of the term, meaning the government cannot be sure if the Ainu are indigenous, another 16 years would pass before they finally got acknowledged as an indigenous group.⁶³ Even after voting “yes” and thus approving the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, the Japanese government continued to refer to the missing standard of the term ‘indigenous peoples’ and deny the Ainu recognition as an indigenous group.

In an interview conducted before performing at an event called ‘shake forward’ in Osaka in May 2008 the leader of the performance group Ainu Rebels, Mina Sakai, stated that “From an international point of view, we are way behind. We are not yet recognized as indigenous people and they haven’t apologized for what they did to us in the past. But I believe that they can’t ignore our existence for much longer.”⁶⁴ Approximately one month later, on June 6th 2008, both Houses of the Diet unanimously passed a bill granting the Ainu recognition as indigenous people.⁶⁵ Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura said: “Recognizing that

⁶¹ Kaizawa, K. (2004). Inheriting Ainu Ethnicity. In: Irimoto, T. and Yamada T. eds. 2004. *Circumpolar Ethnicity and Identity*. Osaka: Yubunsha Co. Ltd. P.7-10

⁶² Cotterill, S. (2011) Ainu Success: The political and Cultural Achievements of Japan’s Indigenous Minority. Downloaded from: <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Simon-Cotterill/3500> [Accessed 24/03/2011] p.5

⁶³ Hanazaki, K. (1996) Ainu Moshir and Yaponesia, Ainu and Okinawan identities in contemporary Japan. In: Hudson, M. and Morris-Suzuki, T. *Multicultural Japan : Palaeolithic to postmodern*. (p.287-292) Cambridge : Cambridge University Press p 127

⁶⁴ CTV News British Columbia. (2009) First story, Japan's first inhabitants. Available from: http://www.ctvbc.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20090309/bc_firststory_japan_inhabitants_090309/20090309/?hub=BritishColumbiaSpecialEvent3 [Accessed 26 January 2011]

⁶⁵ Lewallen, A.E (2008), Indigenous at last! Ainu Grassroots Organizing and the Indigenous Peoples Summit in Ainu Mosir. *Japan Focus* 30.11.2008 Available at: http://www.japanfocus.org/-ann_elise-lewallen/2971 [Accessed 12 November 2010] p.1

the Ainu is an indigenous people with own and unique language, religion and culture, who inhabited the northern periphery first, in particular Hokkaido, of the Japanese Archipelago, we will continue to promote the Ainu and establish a comprehensive policy according to the relevant provisions in the UN declaration.”⁶⁶

One might argue that this somewhat quick decision was pushed forward due to the global attention following the G8 summit meeting that was scheduled to be held in Hokkaido a month later, 7-9 July 2008.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the Indigenous Summit in Ainu Mosir, which will be discussed later on in this thesis, held just days before the G8 meeting, 1-4 July 2008, was also a contributing factor to the hastily decision.

Summary

This chapter has presented a historical overview describing how the Ainu went from being a separate group of people living in harmony with nature on Hokkaido in order to obtain a better understanding of the situation of the Ainu populous in Japan. - Being dispossessed and forced to assimilate into the Japanese society, the Ainu culture and people were doomed to extinction. However, they were able revive this and stand up for their rights as a population of indigenous people in a nation known for being extremely “homogenous”.

⁶⁶ 朝日新聞 Asahi Shinbun (2008), アイヌの人々先住民族、国会決議受け官房長が所信
06.06.2008

⁶⁷ G8 Hokkaido Tokyako Summit homepage
<http://g8summit.town.toyako.hokkaido.jp/eng/summit/about/index.html> [accessed 5 May 2011]

Chapter 4: Identification and Relating to Ainu identity

Are the Ainu Japanese?

“[...] Our nationality (*kokuseki*) is Japanese, but we are a different ethnic group (*minzoku*). Throughout a long history we have ended up Japanese, but we are different on the inside” (*nagai rekishi no naka de nihonjin ni natthcatta kedo naka wa chigau*)⁶⁸
(Member of the performance group Ainu Rebels)

After a presentation concerning the different definitions of indigenous peoples which follow both official and individual identifications of Ainu, this chapter will continue with illuminating the different strategies, experiences and opinions that the younger generation of Ainu in modern Japan have towards growing up with and relating to their Ainu inheritance. This will be based on various stories from three different women who are in their late 20's and early 30's. They will talk about their experiences and the different perspectives they have concerning their Ainu identity. The stories will be presented and later discussed according to previous research on the topic and theories on identity and ethnic minorities.

Definition of indigenous peoples

In order to make sure that no groups would be excluded due to technical terms, the Working Group decided on relying on self-definition.⁶⁹ Thus, as mentioned in the previous chapter the Draft of Declaration on the Rights on Indigenous Peoples, drawn up by the Working Group in the UN does not provide a definition of indigenous peoples or population. The definition presented by the Commission on Human Rights, United Nations Economic and Social Council Survival, however, is “identifying pre-existing societies that have been overrun by global capitalism, and who have previously had a long identification with a land they considerer their source for life and their birthright.⁷⁰” One of the most prominent movements for supporting tribal people, Survival International, presents the following definition of indigenous peoples: “Indigenous peoples tend to be “minorities”: fewer in number than the other (non-indigenous) peoples who are often their neighbours. Their societies are distinct from those of non-indigenous peoples- they often have a different language, customs and culture inherited form their ancestors and think of themselves as being different from neighbouring peoples. [...] “Indigenous peoples” are all the original inhabitants of a country,

⁶⁸ DieKatzeJames. (2009) You Tube - The Ainu Rebels, interview with some members of the Ainu Rebels. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwMhjY5uI9U> [Accessed 24/01/2011]

⁶⁹ Coates, K.S. (2004). A Global History of Indigenous Peoples struggle and survival. p.8

⁷⁰ Coates, K.S. (2004). A Global History of Indigenous Peoples struggle and survival. p.7 (simplified version)

but “indigenous peoples” are only those who live in distinct indigenous societies. For instance, all Aborigines in Australia are “indigenous”, but only some still live in indigenous societies and see themselves as indigenous people.⁷¹

Identification and definition of Ainu

Officially there is no legal definition of Ainu, however the welfare agencies of the Hokkaido government has ambiguously defined them as; ‘those persons thought in local society to have Ainu blood, and those [i.e Wajin] who share the same livelihood through marriage or adoption, but not ‘those thought to have Ainu blood but who deny they are Ainu’.⁷² Mixed-blood Ainu (*konketsu ainu*) however, were sometimes difficult to identify and if the ancestry was unclear ‘only those whom anyone can clearly recognise [as Ainu] are treated as Ainu, Former natives’.⁷³ In local societies, regardless how they perceived themselves, to an Ainu it was whether or not one had Ainu blood that determined if you were Ainu or not.⁷⁴ Therefore, to an Ainu the cultural definition was based on what you did for a living or where you lived, and that everyone with Ainu blood in their veins was an Ainu. Thus children of Wajin and Ainu are considered Ainu⁷⁵.

“According to the statistics there are 23,000 Ainu on Hokkaido, these are the ones who are open about their Ainu identity, the actual conditions or the actual numbers are impossible to obtain, but they say there are more. [...] But even so, if you look at the 23,000 Ainu compared to the Japanese population it’s less than 0,1percent, that is very few.”

Mina (26)

In 1999 the official number of Ainu residing on Hokkaido was 23,767.⁷⁶ A government survey conducted in 2006 stated that there were 23,782. In addition, it estimated there being somewhere between 2500-10,000 Ainu living in the Kanto area⁷⁷. (The number of Ainu officially residing in Tokyo in 1988 was 2699.) Due to the somewhat obscure definition of an Ainu and their heritage, along with many of them hiding their Ainu identity, it is nearly

⁷¹ Coates, K.S. (2004). *A Global History of Indigenous Peoples struggle and survival*. p.11

⁷² Siddle, R. (2002). An epoch-making event? The 1997 Ainu cultural promotion Act and its impact. *Japan forum volume 18*. 405-423.

⁷³ Siddle, R.(1996), *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan*. Routledge p.89

⁷⁴ Siddle, R.(1996), *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan*. Routledge

⁷⁵ Sjöberg, K. (1990), "Mr. Ainu" in the Japanese Culture, *IWGIA Newsletter volume. 79*, p.90

⁷⁶ Siddle, R. (1997) The Ainu. Indigenous people of Japan. In: Weiner, M. (ed.) (2009), *Japan's Minorities the illusion of homogeneity*, p.21-39 United Kingdom: Routledge (p.36)

⁷⁷ Sharp, A. (2009), *Tokyo's thriving Ainu community keeps traditional culture alive*, Downloaded November 26th 2010 from <http://www.japantoday.com/category/lifestyle/view/tokyo%E2%80%99s-thriving-ainu-community-keeps-traditional-culture-alive>

impossible to obtain an accurate census. Some Ainu activists claim the total number to be approximately 300,000 Ainu in total in all of Japan.⁷⁸

Considering the different definitions of indigenous peoples presented above, one might say that the Working Groups decision to rely on self-definition is the most suitable regarding the Ainu people. The definition drawn up by the Commission on Human Rights, United Nations Economic and Social Council Survival⁷⁹, on the other hand, might be historical accurate, but does not give much room for modernization and renewing of the cultural identity. The definition promoted by Survival International can be argued to be partly accurate, however, it also states “indigenous peoples are only those who live in distinct indigenous societies”. This implies that those who are not living in specific areas and executing a certain lifestyle will not be defined as indigenous peoples. If this were the case the Ainu having a carrier and living outside Hokkaido would no longer be considered Ainu, something that would put restraints on how people should live their lives to be able to maintain their indigenous identity.

Relating to Ainu identity

There are numerous ways in which Ainu people relate to their own identity. In the book, ‘The return of the Ainu’, from 1997, Katarina Sjöberg narrows it down to, in general terms, it being two major strategies that the Ainu use in order to identify themselves.

“One is used by those Ainu who put strong emphasis on themselves as a distinct cultural entity.”⁸⁰ This group includes Ainu residing in both the metropolitan and rural areas. In a national context they will proudly identify themselves as Ainu and are often dedicated organizers or participants in various Ainu activities, such as festivals, concerts, traditional ceremonies, and so forth. The second strategy is “Ainu who put strong emphasis on similarities of their own culture and that of the Wajin”.⁸¹ In a national context Ainu in this group will identify themselves as Japanese (*Nihonjin*). However, in a regional or local context they identify themselves as ‘nihonjin of Ainu descent’. Ainu who convey their identity in this

⁷⁸ Cotterill, S.(2011). Ainu Success: The political and Cultural Achievements of Japan’s Indigenous Minority, *Japan focus* 21.03.2011 <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Simon-Cotterill/3500>

⁷⁹ for full and simplified version see: Coates, K.S. (2004). A Global History of Indigenous Peoples struggle and survival. p.7

⁸⁰ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. p.45

⁸¹ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. p.45

manner are often those connected to industrial sector in the big cities or Ainu who seek a good living in the rural areas.

Hiding their Ainu identity

In a journal put out by John Batchelor, the *Utarigusu*, in the first half of the 20th century. Katahira Tomijirō writes, “Ainu is a noun that refers to our race [*jinrui*]. Why do we feel dissatisfied when people say, ‘you Ainu’? Is it because we are called ‘Ainu’ despite the fact that we too are Japanese? No. Why then? It is because Ainu is a synonym for stupid, poor, and drunkard.”⁸²

In addition to strategies for relating to their Ainu inheritance, Sjöberg also presents strategies used by those who choose to hide their Ainu Identity. One example is Ainu who migrates from rural to urban areas and through employment seek recognition as Japanese. These Ainu often do so in order to escape being discriminated against and considered inferior in the social system in their hometown. Some of them will even go as far as to claim to have lost contact with their family. Their family on the other hand, will still regard them as Ainu. Hence, they can identify themselves as Japanese, but never completely alienated themselves from their own people.⁸³ These people, even though they leave their hometown, if they do possessed the special features of Ainu it is difficult to fully merge into the mainstream society.

Another example is of Ainu that would wear their homemade traditional Ainu costumes and actively attend various Ainu festivities and activities, but, when asked, they will deny being Ainu. This shows that they ‘reject their Ainu identity in words, but reveal it in practice’.

⁸⁴These are often to be found among Ainu residing in rural areas who are engaged in agriculture. Rather than being identified as Ainu, they will strive to be recognized as farmers or peasants.⁸⁵

⁸² Howell, D. L. (2004). Making "Useful Citizens" of Ainu Subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Association for Asian Studies p.20

⁸³ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. p.46

⁸⁴ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. p.46

⁸⁵ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. p.46

Mina

Until I started high school I hid the fact that I was Ainu. I spent my high school years in Obihiro, Hokkaido, and for a long time I didn't talk about it [my Ainu background] but then I moved here [Tokyo] and I got around to telling people [...]

Mina (26)

Mina (26) was born in 1983 in Obihiro, a town with approximately 170 000 inhabitants located in the centre of the Tokachi region in the eastern part of Hokkaido⁸⁶. Her mother was Japanese and her father was Ainu. Sadly, her father died when she was only 5 and as a little girl she was reluctant to embrace anything connected to her Ainu background and consequently the topic became a taboo for her.⁸⁷ In an interview conducted in 2008 she states: “I hated being an Ainu, I had no self-confidence, I tried to hide my Ainu identity, I was embarrassed [...]”⁸⁸ In another interview she says, “the thing that hurt the most about being Ainu was the self-loading— I was negative about myself and thought I was ugly.”⁸⁹ The fear of discrimination and bullying kept her from fully acknowledging her Ainu heritage until she was 16 years old.

An article written in 1980 stated that “quite a number of Japanese will even today with great sincerity tell you, that the Ainu are unreliable, bad at arithmetic, careless with their personal hygiene, smelly, wildly passionate, unstable. etc...”⁹⁰ Now, over 20 years later, Mina (26) believes the situation has improved, but that the image of Ainu being poor and dirty has not completely disappeared⁹¹. “[...] Seeing and hearing about the older generations' bad experiences, you would naturally consider it to be wiser to hide your connection to Ainu society,” she says. According to Sjöbergs strategies, Mina rejected her identity in words, but due to her Ainu appearance and living in a rural area in Hokkaido, she could not escape her Ainu identity completely.

The turning point came at the age of 16. She participated on a cultural exchange trip to Canada and got the chance to encounter with the indigenous people there.

⁸⁶Downloaded January 20th 2011, from

<http://www.city.obihoro.hokkaido.jp/seisakusuisinbu/kouhoukouhouka/c010101obihoropurofiru.jsp#001>

⁸⁷ Hokkaido Shinbun (2009), 尽きぬ差別や貧困歌や踊り通して権利回復の道探る. 23.08.2009 p.34

⁸⁸ TITV weekly August 27 2008, Downloaded January 20th 2011, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dgexEvTEjs>

⁸⁹ Sharp, A. (2009), *Tokyo's thriving Ainu community keeps traditional culture alive*, Downloaded November 26th 2010 from <http://www.japantoday.com/category/lifestyle/view/tokyo%E2%80%99s-thriving-ainu-community-keeps-traditional-culture-alive>

⁹⁰ Taguchi K. Y. (1980) The Ainu People of Japan, *IWGIA Newsletter volume 24*, 79-92 p.85

⁹¹ TITV weekly August 27 2008, Downloaded January 20th 2011, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dgexEvTEjs>

When I saw Canadian indigenous people performing [...] I wanted to be like them. This were people from abroad, but really I wanted to be inspired by my own Ainu people, I want to become someone who can influence and inspire younger generations in the same way that I was influenced and inspired.⁹²

Mina (26)

“They had such positive energy. This was when I realized I had a choice... I could be like them, there’s no shame in being an Ainu,” she says in an interview with Japan Times in 2008.⁹³ The way they displayed their culture with pride and passion made a deep impression on her. “They were so cool and so proud of being native Canadians,” she said. “I realized that I have a beautiful culture and strong roots. I decided that I should be a proud Ainu and express that in my life”⁹⁴ Furthermore, she met her husband on an exchange trip to Australia in 2003 together with an Ainu group from the Kanto area. “[...] He told me that I was fine just as I was” [...] this freed me from any negative feelings I had.”⁹⁵

These days Mina Sakai is among one of the most prominent young Ainu activists and artist in Japan. Thus, according to Sjöberg’s theories, her strategy has changed from rejecting her Ainu identity to becoming an Ainu who put strong emphasis on being proud of her distinct cultural entity.⁹⁶ Ever since being a university student she has been working actively to promote Ainu Culture among the Japanese and to encourage Ainu to free themselves from the self-denial. She has done so by participating in several conferences, organizing numerous events and being one of the founders of the performance group ‘Ainu Rebels’. At the time of conducting my fieldwork in 2009 she was working as a cultural advisor for the foundation of Research and Promotion of Ainu culture, (*Ainu Bunka Kōryū Sentā*), FRPAC, in Tokyo. Part of her job was to give lectures about Ainu at universities, elementary-, middle- and high schools. In addition, she had presentations at festivals and various events. Always aiming to promote being Ainu as something positive. “What Ainu have been deprived of are the land, the language and their pride, but the worst thing is the self-loathing. That is thinking that it is

⁹² TITV weekly August 27 2008, Downloaded January 20th 2011, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dgexEvTEjs>

⁹³ Foster M. (2008) Ainu stepping out of social stigma, *The Japan Times Wednesday Aug. 13th*, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20080813f2.html>

⁹⁴ Foster M. (2008) Ainu stepping out of social stigma, *The Japan Times Wednesday Aug. 13th*, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20080813f2.html>

⁹⁵ Sharp, A. (2009), *Tokyo’s thriving Ainu community keeps traditional culture alive*, Downloaded November 26th 2010 from <http://www.japantoday.com/category/lifestyle/view/tokyo%E2%80%99s-thriving-ainu-community-keeps-traditional-culture-alive>

⁹⁶ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. p.45

normal to be discriminated and be ashamed of your own origins instead of fighting the prejudices,” she says.

Sayuri

I understood that I was Ainu [...] or at least that my face looked different from the others [...]. People would say, “I wonder where Sayuri-chan is from.”

Sayuri (26)

Sayuri was born in Chiba in 1983 and both her parents were Ainu. Right after she was born they got divorced and they moved back to her mother’s hometown, Obihiro, where she grew up with her mother and brothers. In third grade she started attending classes to learn old traditional Ainu dance together with other Ainu children, “ it’s might be quite superficial, but the reason I started taking those dance classes wasn’t to learn about my inheritance- I merely joined because my friends were there too,” she says. She was, however, very reluctant to attend dance performances as there used to be television- or newspaper journalists there. “I really hated it if they wrote about us in the paper, because then my classmates might see it and I would get bullied again.”

In the year 2000 indigenous people from Canada were invited to Obihiro and Sayuri, together with other young Ainu, got the opportunity to meet and interchange with them. They all camped together for a week and that made a huge impression on her.

[...] Something changed inside me. Up until then, everything related to me and my family being Ainu had always been so unpleasant that I rather it would just disappear, but they [the indigenous people from Canada] showed such strength and believed in themselves. Some of them even had a tattoo. They told us not to be ashamed, but to be proud of being Ainu. I was shocked and thought I would never be able to display my Ainu identity in the same way. It made a huge impression on me. Up until then being Ainu had only been associated as a negative thing, but being with them I finally managed to capture my Ainu inheritance as something positive. (*yatto purasu ni toraeta*)

Sayuri (26)

This occurred when Sayuri was in second grade of high school and this influenced her to understand what her mother had been saying about having self-confidence and being proud of being Ainu. “I finally accepted it and from that point on, little by little, I started telling people that ‘I’m Ainu’”, she says. However, a few years later, when Sayuri was 20 years old, her

Japanese boyfriend's parents were forcefully against their son marrying a person of Ainu origin. This came as a shock and Sayuri fell back to rejecting her Ainu identity.

‘At that time there was only one thing I wanted to do and that was to get married, so I just wanted to distance myself from everything. Up until then, after meeting with the people from Canada, I had been very active and had so much fun learning about Ainu and taking dance classes, but now I just wanted to separate myself from everything. So I stopped going to dance lessons and I also stopped helping out as a volunteer at this study circle for children. I just didn't want to be involved with anything [concerning Ainu] anymore’

Sayuri (26)

After distancing herself from everything involving her Ainu identity they finally got his parent's approval and got married. However even though more than 5 years have passed since they got married she says she still finds it hard to forgive and forget. “I was considerably hurt. [...] My parents and the generations before them denied everything about their Ainu identity and I was so sad that it happened to me too. I was very disappointed,” she says. In the summer of 2008 she saw Ainu Rebels performing live in Sapporo. “Up until then I had only seen them in pictures and video clips so this was the first time I ever saw them live. I was truly impressed and it really touched me,” she says. The members, in addition to her older brother, were all people she had known since she was a child. Knowing their background and how hard some of them had struggled, seeing them live turned out to be a very special experience for her. “There used to be so many people talking about my brother and his friends being delinquent and doing bad things. For that reason you would think that they would want to distance themselves far from their Ainu background, but instead they were unashamedly showing off their Ainu identity in public. I was deeply impressed,” she says. This performance gave her strength to once again recognize her Ainu inheritance as something positive. She thought that if these young Ainu are working so hard, she should be able to do the same. “It's really recent, but what is certain is that, now I really, maybe even more after joining the [Ainu] rebels, I am able to feel a 100% proud of being Ainu,” she says at an age of 26.

Both Sayuri and Mina changed their views from discarding their Ainu identity to fully embracing it. The main difference, however, is that Mina has been working to promote her culture ever since she was inspired to embrace her Ainu identity as something positive. Sayuri on the other hand, due to surrounding circumstances making it difficult to maintain her

newfound pride, went back to self-denial and rejecting her Ainu identity again in her early 20's. This continued for some years until she again at the age of 26 found the courage to recognize her Ainu identity as something to proud of. Furthermore, Sayuri did not migrate to Kanto to escape her Ainu identity; on the contrary, she got even more active in the Ainu society after moving away from Hokkaido.

Utae

[...] As a matter of fact I hid the fact that I was Ainu up until two-, three-, two and a half years ago. [...] I hid it from my daily life and it's now about two years ago since I started accepting and facing it [my Ainu in heritage]. Because of this I didn't study anything concerning Ainu culture or history, quite the opposite, I ran away from it.
Utae (32)

Utae (32) was born in Obihiro, Hokkaido. When she was two years old she moved to Fukushima prefecture in the north east of Japan where she lived until her second year of elementary school. After which she moved to Nakano in Tokyo. Utae (32) says that she became aware of her Ainu background in her last year of elementary school "I don't remember exactly how it went, but I think my mum just told me 'you are Ainu'". Despite being aware of her background, her mother being Ainu and the house being filled with Ainu artefacts, growing up she was determined to not reveal or admit being of Ainu descendant to anyone because of its negative image.

The image of Ainu; the stories I heard from my mother about Ainu being discriminated and bullied were shocking and made a pretty big impression on me. Because this image still remained strong I was afraid that I might be bullied and discriminated against too so that's why I didn't say anything for such a long time [about me being Ainu].

Utae (32)

People would frequently comment on her appearance and make remarks such as, "You really do look like a foreigner".. In addition they would ask if she was Ainu or from Okinawa⁹⁷. Which she would reply, "No, I'm not from Okinawa", purposely omitting to comment on the Ainu part of the question. According to Sjöberg's strategies Utae discarded her Ainu identity

⁹⁷ People from Okinawa (old Ryūkyū kingdom), like the Ainu, differ historically, culturally and linguistically from wajin. See Weiner, M. (ed.) (2009), *Japan's Minorities the illusion of homogeneity*, Allen, M. *Okinawa, ambivalence, identity, and Japan* (p.188-201) Routledge

and emphasized on the situation where she was recognized as Japanese, and due to her fierce denial and living in a metropolitan area with basically no other Ainu the strategy worked.

In 2007 Utae's mother started working on a project building an Ainu museum. Utae felt that due to her never acknowledging being Ainu, and thus knowing nothing about Ainu culture or heritage, she was not suitable for helping out. She did however help with other non-Ainu-related things such as planting trees and raising money for the project. After a while she decided she wanted to contribute more so in addition to participating in Ainu traditional rituals and ceremonies, she also became a member of the performance group Ainu Rebels⁹⁸. Although she signed up, it took her a year to become an active member of the group. "I had been denying it for such a long time so it was scary, but little by little I started facing the Ainu part of my life," she says. Half a year later her father suddenly passed away, something that gave her a new perspective.

'There is no way that there is anything worse than this,' I thought. Therefore, right after he died I slowly started learning more about it and acknowledging my Ainu inheritance. Compared to suddenly losing my father, things like being afraid of revealing that I'm Ainu, or performing Ainu traditional dance and songs in front of people, did not seem like a big deal anymore. [...] It made me realize that life is short and if there are things you want to do you should do them straight away. [...] I have now completely embraced and acknowledged that I'm Ainu.

Utae (32)

In addition to have been a member of the Ainu Rebels, Utae is also one of the main executives on "Haponetai" an outdoors exhibition for Ainu art held once a year since 2009.

In retrospect, she does not regret denying her Ainu inheritance for so many years. She says it made her who she is today. Keeping her Ainu identity hidden, thus not participating in any Ainu activity, made her engage in other activities giving her other experiences and encountering other people. "If I had been open about my Ainu background and actively engaged in Ainu related activities from when I was a child, I might have turned out differently. Not only that, but the people around me might have been different too," she says. Struggling through years of denial also allowed her to understand and sympathize with future generations of Ainu in the same situation. "I like my life and who I turned out to be," she says.

⁹⁸ See next chapter about Ainu Rebels

Looking at Utae's story one might suggest that she has what Coates refers to as "double identities"⁹⁹ both Ainu and Japanese. Despite people questioning her appearance and denying her Ainu identity for so many years Utae considered herself and was considered by her surroundings as Japanese. This has not changed even though she now accepts her Ainu identity too. As Utae was just a child when her family moved from Obihiro to Fukushima, one cannot say that she deliberately migrated to get away from her Ainu identity.

Nevertheless, growing up in an area with few Ainu peers and where the knowledge about Ainu was on a minimum, made hiding her Ainu identity from her surroundings easier. Never admitting to anyone that she was Ainu, even though she has some distinct Ainu features, also spared her from getting stigmatised.

Rodolfo Stavenhagen writes in his article *Indigenous Peoples: Emerging International Actors* from 1998, that "being indigenous is not usually a matter of individual choice, nor merely a question of personal identity or consciousness. It often relates to community structure and to the community as a way of life."¹⁰⁰ Mina and Sayuri's stories support this theory because, due to living in a small community on Hokkaido, no matter how hard they tried to hide their Ainu identity, they never succeeded completely and did not manage to avoid becoming victims of bullying and discrimination. Utae on the other hand, grew up in metropolitan areas and even though her mother was an Ainu activist she managed to hide her Ainu identity from her surroundings and avoid being bullied and discriminated against. Thus, in Utae's case one might argue that having an indigenous identity is a matter of individual choice.

Common for Mina, Sayuri and Utae is that changing their strategy from discarding their Ainu identity to embracing it and being able to grasp it as something positive changed their lives. Maybe not to the extent of claiming they got a new identity, but definitely to the extent of supporting the statement that, "Discovering a new source of ethnic pride can result in a renewed sense of identity."¹⁰¹ All three of them knew about their Ainu inheritance, however, due to the image of Ainu being inferior and the stories about their parents and grandparents being bullied and discriminated against, they did not consider being Ainu as something one could be proud of. Thus, they spent much time and effort on hiding their Ainu identity and trying to blend in as Japanese. According to Stavenhagen, the identity of indigenous people is

⁹⁹ Coates, K.S. (2004). *A Global History of Indigenous Peoples struggle and survival*. p.256-257

¹⁰⁰ Stavenhagen, R. (1998) *Indigenous Peoples : Emerging International Actors*. In: Young, C. ed. (1998) *Ethnic Diversity and public policy. A comparative inquiry*. p.142

¹⁰¹ Bogdanowicz, T. (2003), Where are the Ainu now? In search of answers about Japan's indigenous people. *The Japan Times Sunday, March 2*, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/fl20030302a3.html>

usually rooted in a common history and having a distinctive culture is the main factor when distinguishing the indigenous from other populations.¹⁰² Thus, refusing to embrace the Ainu culture should make it easier to blend in. However, according to the stories presented above, this strategy seems to prove more effective for Ainu living in the metropolitan areas.

At different stages in their lives, Mina at age 16, Sayuri at age 18 and Utae at age 30, something happened, Mina and Sayuri encountered and got inspired by indigenous peoples from Canada, while Utae's father suddenly passed away, giving them a new perspective and giving them strength to display their Ainu identity with pride. This newfound sense of pride towards being Ainu triggered the interest for learning more about the Ainu culture. This resulted in the establishment of the Ainu Rebels and their aim to encourage other young Ainu to be proud of their Ainu identity in addition to spread knowledge about their inheritance to both the Ainu and Japanese population.

One of the biggest differences between those who promote their Ainu identity today and the previous generations is their attitude. Chiri Yukie, an Ainu woman who died at only 19 years old in 1922, refused to discard her Ainu identity and submit to the ideal of becoming Japanese (*wajin*). She did however, appear to accept that keeping and announcing her Ainu identity would mean she would be considered inferior and discriminated against. "[...]I'm Ainu. Completely Ainu, What part of me is supposed to be *shisamu* (*wajin*; Japanese)?! Wouldn't I still be Ainu whether or not I called myself *shisamu*? The idea of becoming *shisamu* just through that kind of lip-service is ridiculous. Who cares about becoming *shisamu*? I'm Ainu, so doesn't that make me another human being? I'm still a human being just like them. I'm happy being Ainu. [...] Because I'm Ainu, I'm looked down upon, but it's still fine. If my *utari* (compatriots) were looked down upon but I wasn't, what kind of a situation would that be? I'd rather that I was looked down upon together with my *utari*."¹⁰³

Mina, Sayuri and Utae on the other hand have a different attitude. After finally accepting their heritage they began to relate to their Ainu identity with pride and, unlike Chiri Yukie, they do not accept that their people are being looked down upon. Performing together in The Ainu

¹⁰² Stavenhagen, R. (1998) Indigenous Peoples : Emerging International Actors. In: Young, C. ed. (1998) *Ethnic Diversity and public policy. A comparative inquiry*. p.139

¹⁰³ Hirano, K. (2009), The Politics of Colonial Translation: On the narrative of the Ainu as a "Vanishing Ethnicity", Translated from Japanese by G. Walker. *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan focus* 12.01.2009 Available at <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Katsuya-HIRANO/3013> p.11

Rebels they travelled around Japan promoting that they feel proud of being Ainu, aiming to encourage those still hiding their identity to stop and embrace their Ainu identity as something positive. One of the underlying reasons for this attitude change is that time has changed since the beginning of the 20th century; indigenous peoples around the world are now working together fighting for their rights, and making indigenous peoples more visible than ever. Furthermore, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adapted in 2007 underlining the importance of listening to the voices of indigenous groups of people. Eriksen suggests that even though the indigenous people of today are more visible in the modern society with ever increasing organizations, notoriety and considerably more political influence than previous generations, this is not a consequence of acquiring more members.¹⁰⁴ In Japan one might suggest that while Ainu organizations and movements do not create more Ainu people, they can be beneficial factors leading to more people being able to step out from their hiding and be proud of their Ainu identity, leading to more Ainu being visible within Japanese society.

Shigeru Kayano, an Ainu from the Hidaka region on Hokkaido who, before he passed away at 79 years old in 2006, was an indefatigable defender of his own people. He said the following in 1988 ‘My opinion is that the Ainu people have come to realize that in order to become a complete human being, and “Ainu” cannot repress one’s origin. Instead one has to let it come into the open and that is exactly what is happening among our people today. They are eager to know about old times, values, things, everything. They have been starving, mentally, for so many years now. There is nothing to stop their enthusiasm now....’¹⁰⁵ There are still many young Ainu hiding their identity, but on the other hand there are also those who, even though they do not have a typical Ainu appearance, proudly proclaim their Ainu identity.

Regarding the display of their Ainu identity Mina, Sayuri and Utae have all have traditional Ainu costumes, which they use on special occasions and when they performed with the Ainu Rebels. Normally they would not dress differently from other young Japanese. They might however, wear accessories with an Ainu pattern and embroideries. ”It is not to demonstrate that I’m Ainu, it’s just accessories”, says Utae.

¹⁰⁴ Hylland Eriksen, T. (2010). *Ethnicity and Nationalism* 3rd ed. United Kingdom: Pluto Press p.171

¹⁰⁵ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu. Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. p.175

Summary

This chapter has presented different theories on defining indigenous people. The only thing one might say for sure about this matter is that the number of definitions are many and that finding a definition suitable to include all the different indigenous groups around the world is very difficult. This was the main reason behind the Working Group's decision to rely on self-definition when drafting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Regarding the identification of Ainu several methods have been presented; some regard Ainu identity as being something which is closely connected to where one lives and what work one does, whereas according to the Ainu themselves; people with Ainu blood in their veins are Ainu no matter where they live and what they do. However, due to there not being an official definition and that the Ainu, according to Coates, "have not shared a common approach to their relationship with Japan,"¹⁰⁶ there are different strategies used among the Ainu when relating to their indigenous identity. The last section of this chapter presented the stories of how three Ainu women in their late 20's and early 30's, went from struggling with Ainu heritage through self-denial and an overwhelming desire to become Japanese to discovering a new source of ethnic pride and strength which allowed them to relate to their Ainu identity as something positive. The next chapter of this thesis will deliberate further on the reasons for common self-denial among young Ainu and give examples on how and why attitude towards Ainu identity is still closely connected to the fear of discrimination and the perception of Ainu being inferior in comparison to their Japanese counterparts.

¹⁰⁶ Coates, K.S. (2004). A Global History of Indigenous Peoples struggle and survival. p.256-257

Chapter 5: Discrimination and general knowledge

Why are there Ainu who still conceal their identity?

“Because they get bullied and discriminated against. In Hokkaido discrimination concerning marriage and employment still occur. No matter how nice and sympathetic the person is some parents will not approve of their child marrying an Ainu.¹⁰⁷”

(Male member of the Ainu Rebels)

Sjöberg writes in her book “The Return of the Ainu” from 1997 that “82,5% of the Ainu today feel that they are discriminated against.” While only 44,8% of the Wajin believes that the Ainu are being discriminated against.¹⁰⁸ Based on the experiences of my interviewees, this chapter will elaborate on those and provide examples of what kind of bullying and discrimination Ainu in modern Japan are being subjected to. Furthermore, it will also discuss the reason why this kind of discrimination appears to be more common in rural areas than in metropolitan ones. This chapter is divided into different sections according to reflect the different situations where discrimination occurs, starting with daily life followed by school, marriage and employment environment. Ultimately, there will be section covering the situation concerning the general knowledge about Ainu in the Japanese society.

“What Ainu have been deprived of are the land, the language and their pride, but the worst thing is the self-denial, that is thinking that it is normal to be discriminated and be ashamed of your own origins instead of fighting the prejudices.”

(Mina Sakai (26))

Mitsumori Ueki, Minister of State of Japan in 1976 said:

“[...] I believed that discriminatory consciousness against those people living in the urban areas was relatively small. But in areas where there were many rural communities, discriminatory consciousness still exists among non-Ainu people [...]”¹⁰⁹ In the beginning of the 1960, due to the opinions of their Japanese neighbours such as, “however mixed you are, if you have only a little Ainu blood you are Ainu”, individual Ainu were not able to escape their Ainu identity even within their local community. The intensity of discrimination and

¹⁰⁷ DieKatzeJames. (2009) You Tube - The Ainu Rebels, interview with some members of the Ainu Rebels. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwMhjY5uI9U> [Accessed 24/01/2011]

¹⁰⁸ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. p.46

¹⁰⁹ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. p.47

prejudice varied between the different communities, but the Ainu were the subjects of discrimination at school, in the workplace and in marriage.

Mina grew up in Obihiro, Hokkaido, in the 80's and 90's and frequently recalls being the victim of bullying and discrimination. "[...] When I went shopping, people accused me of shoplifting. Whenever I got into an argument with someone and they called me 'Ainu', I wasn't able to say anything back,"¹¹⁰ she says in an interview. She would also be harassed when just walking down the street. People would laugh and yell; 'look at her! Isn't she Ainu?!'¹¹¹ 'aitsu ainu ja ne ka.'

According to my informants discrimination and bullying is still a common problem for Ainu living in Hokkaido. Sayuri says that in small communities it is not ignorance that causes the bullying. The idea of Ainu being inferior is passed down from generation to generation and therefore, regrettably, discrimination becomes a natural thing.

"You might say that bullying Ainu has become too much of a natural thing for some people. [...] (*atarimae ninarisugichatte*) Children hear stories passed down from their parents and the generation before them again telling them that Ainu is inferior [in the social system]. Because of that they consider themselves superior and bullying and looking at their Ainu classmates as inferior comes naturally."

Sayuri (26)

School

Due to increased immigration Ainu children have rarely been in the majority at schools since the end of the 19th century.¹¹² Mina believes that during her years at elementary school there were only three or four Ainu among a hundred pupils. According to Mina and Sayuri, Ainu children living in local communities on Hokkaido are easy targets for bullying. During elementary school Sayuri had good friends and was hardly picked on, but her six-year-old brother was frequently bullied for being Ainu. "When that happened I was scared, and wanted to hide. It wasn't just that I didn't want to know anything about being Ainu, I really truly desired becoming a real Japanese." (*kokoro mo hontō no nihonjin ni naritai to omotta*) ,she says. According to Mina, it was not just the students that were bullies, she says that even

¹¹⁰ Sharp, A. (2009), *Tokyo's thriving Ainu community keeps traditional culture alive*, Downloaded November 26th 2010 from <http://www.japantoday.com/category/lifestyle/view/tokyo%E2%80%99s-thriving-ainu-community-keeps-traditional-culture-alive>

¹¹¹ Hokkaido Shinbun (2009), 尽きぬ差別や貧困歌や踊り通して権利回復の道探る. 23.08.2009 p.34

¹¹² Siddle, R.(1996), *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan*. Routledge p.90

her afterschool teachers bullied her for being Ainu.¹¹³ A 1999 Hokkaido Prefectural Government survey reports the ratio of Ainu who enter high school is 95.2 per cent, compared with the local average of 97 per cent. However, only 16.1 per cent go on to university, half the general average of 34.5 per cent.¹¹⁴ According to a 2006 local government survey, only 17.4 per cent of the Ainu receive a college education while 38.5 per cent of the locals do.¹¹⁵ According to my informants the main reason for the low percentage of Ainu going to university is, however, not because they were bullied at school. The problem for many Ainu families is that they are not financial strong enough to send their children to university.

Ainu living outside of Hokkaido are rarely targets of discrimination. “This is because they do not know anything about us”, says Sayuri. “When I tell them that I’m Ainu, they just say, “Oh, I see... what kind of people is that?” Like they have no idea,” she says. In Obihiro however, people would instantly know that she was Ainu just by looking at her, and shout ‘aa-inu’ after her. (Inu is Japanese for dog.)

When asked if modern young Ainu have more self-esteem and are able to relate to their Ainu identity with pride, Mina says: “In Hokkaido the discrimination and prejudice are still strong so I don’t think there are many [young Ainu proudly displaying their Ainu identity] there. The members of Ainu Rebels are all performing proudly but other people... not so much. If you are in Hokkaido there are a lot of people still hiding I think.” According to Sjöberg, “The position of Ainu is that the authorities, by denying them ethnic status, promote discriminatory treatment against them as their position as well as their actions are explained through ideologies and values which do not belong to the Ainu.”¹¹⁶ She continues to argue that if the Wajin authorities have been more concerned about restoring the ethnic rights of the Ainu people they could have been spared discrimination and prejudice they have endured for so long and their situation would have improved a long time ago.¹¹⁷ Discrimination against the Ainu people appears to be strongly rooted in history. In particular, Ainu have been exploited and considered inferior compared to the Wajin population for centuries, and so it will be

¹¹³ Hokkaido Shinbun (2009), 尽きぬ差別や貧困歌や踊り通して権利回復の道探る. 23.08.2009 p.34

¹¹⁴ Bogdanowicz, T. (2003), Where are the Ainu now? In search of answers about Japan's indigenous people. *The Japan Times Sunday*, March 2, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/fl20030302a3.html>

¹¹⁵ <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2008/0609/p04s01-woap.html>

¹¹⁶ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. p.47

¹¹⁷ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. p.47

difficult to extinguish the discrimination completely even though they have been recognised as an indigenous population since 2008.

Marriage

In the early 20th century Japanese bureaucrats had encouraged intermarriage. They claimed that this would mean progress for the Ainu people and enable them to become mixed blood with people of Yamamoto race. They argued that: ‘based on the principles of eugenics, mixed-blood children take after the superior race and are born almost as Japanese.’¹¹⁸ However, due to the fact that most Japanese were prejudiced and considered the Ainu as innately inferior this proved almost impossible to implement. Some Ainu women were forced by their parents to marry a Wajin in order to let their children be considered Japanese. Nevertheless, these women were often unhappy and fell victim of beatings and abuse.¹¹⁹

In 1986, Katarina Sjöberg interviewed a 19-year-old Ainu woman about the Ainu’s view regarding discrimination, “[...] If we want to marry a Shamo [impolite word for Wajin], it happens that his or her parents declare the person who will marry an Ainu dead. It may not happen too often, but to me one such incident is enough.”¹²⁰

In the article “‘Mr. Ainu’ in the Japanese culture”, written in 1990, Sjöberg claims that Wajin who marry Ainu are almost forced to give up their Wajin identity and get adopted into the Ainu society. However, even though their children will be considered Ainu, the intermarried Wajin will not. They are simply Wajin integrated into the Ainu society. In extreme cases their relatives oppose to the intermarriage and regard them as dead if they marry an Ainu.¹²¹

[...] When my husband told his parents that the girl he wanted to marry was Ainu. They were totally against it. [...] ”If you marry this Ainu girl we will remove you from the family register.” (*jibun no seki kara nukero*) they told him. Sayuri (26)

¹¹⁸ Siddle, R. (1997) The Ainu. Indigenous people of Japan. In: Weiner, M. (ed.) (2009), *Japan’s Minorities the illusion of homogeneity*, p.21-39 United Kingdom: Routledge p.29-30

¹¹⁹ Siddle, R. (1997) The Ainu. Indigenous people of Japan. In: Weiner, M. (ed.) (2009), *Japan’s Minorities the illusion of homogeneity*, p.21-39 United Kingdom: Routledge p.29

¹²⁰ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. p.48

¹²¹ Sjöberg, K. (1990), "Mr. Ainu" in the Japanese Culture, *IWGIA Newsletter volume. 79*, p.90

In 2003, when Sayuri was 20 years old, her Japanese boyfriend proposed to her. They had been together for two years and she had only met his parents once. “They knew the instant they saw me [that I was Ainu], and their first response when he told them he wanted to get married was just one word ”Ainu?” Her boyfriend’s parents were farmers and lived in an area on Hokkaido where Japanese and Ainu have been living and working side by side for decades. Thus, Sayuri and her husband were shocked to discover they were so prejudiced. “They had several Ainu friends, but when it came to their own son getting married, they did not want his wife to be Ainu. I really couldn’t believe It,” she says. Sayuri had heard stories about discrimination towards Japanese marrying Ainu, but not in her wildest dreams did she imagine that it could happen to her, especially these days. Her husband, however, shocked at realizing his parents being so prejudiced, told her that he didn’t care about his parents objecting, he just wanted to be with her no matter what. Eventually, they ended up getting his parent’s approval and have now been married for more than five years. “Since we got married they have acted very caring and loving towards me, but I am not convinced”, she says. Even though years have passed she still finds it’s difficult to forgive and forget. “There is still an unpleasant feeling inside of me.”

Sayuri believes that the prejudice is due to lack of knowledge and understanding of Ainu culture. After finding the will to acknowledge her Ainu identity and joining the Ainu Rebels,¹²² she tried to enlighten her parents-in-law by telling them about her activities. She also gave them a book with information hoping they would gain some more knowledge on the subject. Even so they do not seem to be convinced. “[...] Whenever I start talking about something related to Ainu their reaction is vague and they do not seem to be interested at all (*bimiyō na taiō wo suru*) so I guess they still don’t like it”, she says.

Sayuri’s story can be considered evidence of that old prejudice which still remains among people in local communities throughout Hokkaido. When discovering that her parents-in-law did not approve of their son marrying an Ainu, Sayuri tried to distance herself from everything relating to her Ainu identity, but deep down she was aware that she could never completely discard her inheritance.

¹²² As explained in previous chapter

Employment

”We feel discriminated against because our skills are not wanted, by the Shamo. They only hire us to do jobs which they themselves do not want. We are not their equals, since if a person of Ainu descent and another person of Wajin descent apply for a job, they [the employers] will choose the Shamo regardless of qualifications. If we ask for an explanation they [the Wajin] say we [the Ainu] cannot be trusted.[...]” (19 year old Ainu woman in an interview in 1986)

Sayuri went to a vocational school (*senmongakkō*) and after she graduated, in 2003, she started looking for a job. “[...] They were really nice on the phone and they would ask me to come in for an interview the next day. But the moment they saw my face they said ‘sorry, we have already decided [to give the job to someone else]’. This happened many times”, she says. After getting turned down several times she finally got a job in a store selling dresses and accessories. However, working there she was harassed by many really unpleasant costumers, mostly young people. ”They would say ‘ah- Ainu’ when they saw me, be really rude and make a huge mess in the store.” Sayuri worked so hard to get this job and was determined not to give up. “They were the customers and I was the salesclerk so there was no point in complaining. I just had to be strong and put up with it and cry when I got home,” she says.

After moving to the Kanto area, Sayuri has not encountered any situation where her Ainu identity has caused her to suffer any disadvantage. This might be related to people’s lack of knowledge about Ainu enabling them to point out that she is Ainu, but most likely it is because most people living in metropolitan areas did not grow up in an area where prejudice and discrimination towards the Ainu people were a part of everyday life.

General knowledge

I often hear about being ‘pure’ (*junsui*), but I believe that people and different groups have been mixing since early days so I have always found the meaning of the word to be quite vague. [...] People would often say ‘There aren’t any [pure Ainu] left, right? (*Mou inai desyō?*)’, but I have got Ainu friends that are married and have children. [...] It is a mystery to me where this attitude comes from.

Mina Sakai (26)

According to the media and the newspapers headlines in the late 1950's, there were "five Ainu left in Hokkaido in 1956 and in 1958 the number decreased to "Now only four Ainu". In 1964 the headlines read "Only One Ainu in Japan" and in 1984 Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro stated that there were "no minorities" in Japan.¹²³ Taking these statements into consideration there might not be such a mystery where the attitude regarding there being no pure Ainu left originates.

"I think that many people believe that we are extinct and that there is no Ainu left. [...], When I tell people that I'm Ainu some people are surprised, while others say 'oh, so they are still around'. (*ima mo iru n da*)

Utae (32)

In addition to their dark history, a lot of the discrimination and prejudice against the Ainu population today is also rooted in the lack of general knowledge. In 1942, an Ainu activist wrote a manuscript complaining of the portrayal of the lives of the Ainu. He meant that they "were inevitably outdated and emphasized the backwardness of Ainu culture."¹²⁴ A survey conducted among 810 school children and university students in Tokyo in 1975, stated that all age groups regarded the Ainu as non-Japanese and associated them with American Indians. In 1990 Katarina Sjöberg writes in her article "Mr. Ainu" in the Japanese culture: "there are people who think that Ainu stands for some kind of food or even a new computer."¹²⁵ Furthermore, in fieldwork conducted some years later Sjöberg describes how she met people in Japan who did not know anything about Ainu. When she explained who they were and where they came from they would sometimes respond with: "Oh! You mean those 'bear people'. They use to catch bears and such things. I do hope they are more civilized now."¹²⁶ This implies that the education about Ainu might be out-dated or even non-existent. A report from 1993 showed that among history textbooks in Japanese high schools only ten out of twenty mentioned the assimilation and politics that was forced upon the Ainu population and only four books mentioned the Hokkaidō Former Aborigines Protection Act.¹²⁷ There might be some who believe that Japan has come a long way since the end of the Tokugawa period,

¹²³ Cotterill, S. (2011). Ainu Success: The political and Cultural Achievements of Japan's Indigenous Minority, *Japan focus* 21.03.2011. <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Simon-Cotterill/3500>

¹²⁴ Howell, D. L. (2004). Making "Useful Citizens" of Ainu Subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Association for Asian Studies p.19

¹²⁵ Sjöberg, K. (1990), "Mr. Ainu" in the Japanese Culture, *IWGIA Newsletter volume*. 79, p.86

¹²⁶ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. p.144-145

but as late as in 2001 a politician from the House of Representatives in Hokkaido stated that ” I think it’s reasonable to say [that Japan is] a ‘one nation, one language, one race/ethnicity nation-state.’ In Hokkaido, there are these people know as the Ainu, and I’m sure there are those who will object to this comment, but they [the Ainu] are completely assimilated now”¹²⁸ Statements like this do not help increase the general knowledge or improve the perception of Ainu.

Sayuri tells a story about when she was in high school and they went to Osaka to perform an Ainu traditional dance; “they really didn’t have a clue, and asked questions like, “Do you live in the mountain and hunt bears?” [...] They were so surprised when one of the Ainu in the dance group told them that we live and go shopping like normal Japanese.” Mina says that travelling around giving lectures at schools, she has encountered many different questions about Ainu. One middle school student once asked. “What is the Ainu’s soul?” (*Ainu no kokoro wa nan desu ka*), another question was “can you play notes?” (*onpu ni dekimasu ka*) Most of the Japanese people I have talked to about this thesis have heard about Ainu. However, during my stay in Tokyo in 2008 and 2009 I met one Japanese guy who had no idea and had never heard about Ainu before. Furthermore, I also discovered that most of my Japanese friends had heard about Ainu, but almost everyone was surprised to hear that there were Ainu living outside Hokkaido too. Nevertheless, there are some improvements to be found. A study conducted in 2009, shows that some small schools in Hokkaido have managed to successfully incorporate knowledge acquired from local Ainu into the curriculum, thus offering the children accurate and up to date information about the Ainu.¹²⁹

Summary

As shown in chapter three, throughout history the Ainu people have been subjects to severe discrimination and exploitation. Getting acknowledgment as an indigenous group and finding inspiration from other indigenous groups around the globe has lead to more Ainu discovering a new sense of pride in their ethnic identity. This has greatly improved their situation in

¹²⁷ Hiwasaki, L.(2000), Ethnic Tourism in Hokkaido and the shaping of Ainu identity, *pacific affairs volume 73-3*, p.394

¹²⁸ (Suzuki Muneo a politician from the House of Representatives in Hokkaido) Lewallen, A.E (2008), Indigenous at last! **Ainu Grassroots Organizing and the Indigenous Peoples Summit in Ainu Mosir**. *Japan Focus* 30.11.2008 Available at: http://www.japanfocus.org/-ann_elise-lewallen/2971 [Accessed 12 November 2010] p.22

¹²⁹ Cotterill, S. (2011). Ainu Success: The political and Cultural Achievements of Japan’s Indigenous Minority, *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan focus* 21.03.2011 p.17

Japan. However, according to my informants who are demonstrated through this chapter discrimination against Ainu is still a common problem and this is the main reason why many young Ainu today still reject their Ainu identity. The prejudice and discrimination appears to be wider spread in smaller communities than in cities. In local communities stories about Ainu being an inferior social class have been passed down from generation to generation and people are able to recognize who are Ainu or not. This makes it difficult for the Ainu in these communities to avoid being subjects of non-Ainu's prejudice. Ainu living in metropolitan areas on the other hand are seldom subjects for discriminatory behaviour. This is mainly due to people's ignorance and because bigger cities often have a mixed population with people from many different cultures and countries making the inhabitants less prejudice. Furthermore, raising the levels of general knowledge about the Ainu in the Japanese society might also improve their situation.

Chapter 6: Cultural revitalization- the Ainu Rebels

According to Irimoto “it is [only] when culture and language are perceived to be in danger that people become aware of identity and ethnicity and concerned with expressing that identity and ethnicity. Though cultural revitalization movements are ideologically directed toward tradition, aiming for a reverse shift of a changing process, namely, for returning, as in reality it is impossible to go back in time, tradition reconciles its differences with reality, new culture is created, or political settlement is made. Traditional systems may be changed and sometimes destroyed, and subsequently, fragments of culture and languages, which have lost their conventional functions, become ethnic symbols as the basis of people’s identity in a new system.”¹³⁰ Eriksen has another way of expressing this idea “[...] today’s generation does everything in its power to revive the customs and traditions that their grandparents followed without knowing it, and which their parents tried so hard to forget.”¹³¹ This chapter will present one of these cultural revitalization movements consisting of members of today’s generation, the Ainu Rebels. The group, their purpose and their performance will be discussed in the light of Irimoto’s and Eriksen’s theories presented above.

The Ainu Rebels



¹³² ”Today there is a new movement, to revitalize the Ainu culture, and at the centre; the Ainu Rebels.”¹³³

¹³⁰ Irimoto, T. (2003). Anthropology of Ethnicity and Identity. In: Irimoto, T. and Yamada T. eds. 2004. *Circumpolar Ethnicity and Identity*. Osaka: Yubunsha Co. Ltd. p. 402-403

¹³¹ Hylland Eriksen, T. (2010), *Ethnicity and Nationalism* 3rd ed. United Kingdom: Pluto Press p.156

¹³² Downloaded January 26th 2011 from <http://www.kyotojournal.org/10,000things/117.html>

¹³³ CTV News British Columbia. (2009) First story, Japan's first inhabitants. Available from:

http://www.ctvbc.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20090309/bc_firststory_japan_inhabitants_090309/20090309/?hub=BritishColumbiaSpecialEvent3 [Accessed 26/01/2011]

The Ainu Rebels are described as “young Ainu in their 20’s and 30’s who sing and dance to pre-recorded music that celebrates their ethnicity in an unusual fashion by mixing traditional dress, dance and language with hip hop and rap.”¹³⁴ On their own website they describe themselves as: “AINU REBELS [are] a group of young Ainu in the Tokyo area, formed in the summer of 2006. While learning traditional dancing and singing, we also work on producing new ways of expressing our identities and culture. We are doing our best to 'have fun' and 'be cool' while spreading Ainu culture throughout the world!!”¹³⁵

Beginning

Mina Sakai started the Ainu Rebels together with her brother in the summer of 2006, when she was 23 years old. Initially, the idea was merely to make learning about their native culture fun, but they progressed into becoming a performance group doing live performances all over Japan. In an interview conducted after a show one of the male members explains the rebellious choice of name:

“[...] We would like to change the Ainu society, start a revolution in the Ainu community.” (*ainu shakai ni kakumei wo okoshitai*) [...] Not a revolution in terms of creating a Ainu country, but a revolution of the soul, (*kokoro no kakumei*), in the means of creating a society where Ainu no longer deny or hide their identity.”¹³⁶

This means that even though they called themselves the Ainu *rebels* they were not radical Ainu activists, merely a group of young people wanting to show and inspire other Ainu to be proud of their culture and heritage. Irimoto suggests that cultural revitalization movements are formed when the members believe that their culture is in danger. This, however, did not seem to be the main reason for the establishment of the Ainu Rebels. Rather than proclaiming and worrying about their culture being in danger their main focus was to educate themselves and spread their newfound pride in their Ainu identity. Hoping to reach out to young Ainu who were still struggling with self-denial.

According to Eriksen’s theory the modern younger generation of indigenous populations aim to promote their ancestor’s language and culture their parents tried so hard to forget. This

¹³⁴ TITV weekly, (2008) You Tube- Ainu’s new identity. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dgexEvTEjs> [Accessed 20/01/2011]

¹³⁵ <http://www.ainupride.com/>

¹³⁶ DieKatzJames. (2009) You Tube - The Ainu Rebels, interview with some members of the Ainu Rebels. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwMhjY5uI9U> [Accessed 24/01/2011]

might be the accurate for some of the members of Ainu Rebels, however, Mina, Sayuri and Utae all had at least one parent who was active in the Ainu society. This probably gave them opportunities to learn more about their culture. However, due to the fear of discrimination they deliberately chose to hide their Ainu identity, thus refused to learn anything about their culture. This resulted in many Ainu in their 20's and 30's, having to learn about their traditions and culture from older Ainu before being able to perform it themselves. This is how the expression "Ainu hajimeta bakkari" came to being used.

"Ainu hajimeta bakkari"

"*Ainu hajimeta bakkari*", translated, as "just started being Ainu", is a phrase I heard used by Mina Sakai in a lecture at The Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture Centre, FRPAC, in Tokyo in 2008. She was referring to the members of the 'Ainu Rebels'; "We have just started becoming Ainu and have many things still to learn," she said.

During their years of performing they had up to 15 members in total, consisting of young Ainu in their 20's and 30's residing in the Kanto area. As mentioned before, the three interviewees were all members of the Ainu Rebels. Mina Sakai was one of the founders, Utae joined in 2007 and Sayuri became a member just after she moved to the Kanto area in 2008.

[...] I joined right after I moved here [Kanto area], in addition to my older brother, the members were all people I knew from when I was a little girl. So when I moved here I joined and started practicing right away. [...] Dancing and performing with other Ainu my age is a lot of fun.

Sayuri (26)

Utae (32) was told to join the Ainu Rebels by her cousin in Obihiro, who is a friend of Mina Sakai, and she was surprised to discover that she was not the only young Ainu in the area. "I was under the impression that we were a very small ethnic group (*minzoku*) so I was surprised to find out that there are many other young Ainu too," she says.

Purpose

Still there are many Ainu that are hiding [their identity] and have not stepped forward. If you add all them that are still holding their Ainu identity a secret, the number of Ainu will become considerably larger. I would like those people to quickly stop hiding and step forward.¹³⁷

(Male member of the Ainu Rebels)

¹³⁷ DieKatzeJames. (2009) You Tube - The Ainu Rebels, interview with some members of the Ainu Rebels. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwMhjY5uI9U> [Accessed 24/01/2011]

Although the original reason for establishing the Ainu Rebels might have been simple, the group quickly evolved into having bigger ambitions. In an interview with a newspaper called Hokkaido Shinbun in 2009 Mina Sakai (26) stated that the Ainu rebels had two main purposes. One was to initiate a change in a society where many Ainu still disassociated themselves from their heritage. The second was to learn more about Ainu traditional culture while creating a different perspective and to reach out to the young audience.¹³⁸ In addition, they also wanted to spread knowledge about Ainu to the general population in Japan.

‘In Japan there are many that don’t understand or know anything about the existence of Ainu. Our goal is therefore to spread further knowledge about our culture on the Japanese arena. In addition, we also want our performance to give power to the many young Ainu in Hokkaido that still are unable to be proud of who they are.’¹³⁹

(Mina Sakai, member of Ainu Rebels)

According to Sayuri the Ainu Rebels were also contributing to the changing image of Ainu. “Stories about Ainu are often related to discrimination and other very serious topics. This might lead to people having a rather dark and negative image of Ainu, but if they can see us perform and hear our music, they will discover that there are good things too. In this way we can contribute to improve the image of Ainu,” she said. An example of this is when I brought three Japanese friends to the "Ainu Night Rhythm” event in Sapporo. After the performance they were all pleasantly surprised, commenting that they had never seen Ainu culture presented in that manner before.

Appearance

The members of the Ainu Rebels dressed up in their traditional Ainu costumes when performing traditional songs and dances. However, when performing rap songs they would change into jeans and t-shirts. At the event I attended in Sapporo in 2009 the male members were wearing ‘Ainu Rebels’ t-shirts with the face of Che Guevara wearing an Ainu patterned headband and t-shirts with Ainu pattern with the inscription ‘Ainu Pride’.

¹³⁸ Hokkaido Shinbun (2009), 尽きぬ差別や貧困歌や踊り通して権利回復の道探る. 23.08.2009 p.34

¹³⁹ CTV News British Columbia. (2009) First story, Japan's first inhabitants. Available from: http://www.ctvbc.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20090309/bc_firststory_japan_inhabitants_090309/20090309/?hub=BritishColumbiaSpecialEvent3 [Accessed 26/01/2011]

Performance

“We want our performance to be cool, fun and to move the hearts of the people watching, making them want to learn more about Ainu.”¹⁴⁰

(Mina Sakai, leader of the Ainu Rebels)

Mina Sakai, the leader of Ainu Rebels, usually opened their performance by welcoming the audience with a greeting in the Ainu language, followed by a short introduction about the Ainu Rebels and their motivation for performing.¹⁴¹ As mentioned above, in order to get the younger generation’s attention, the Ainu Rebel’s performance mixed Ainu traditional music and dance with rock and hip-hop, summed up in two words it might be referred to as ‘Ainu Fusion’. They would play Ainu traditional instruments like ‘mukkuri’- a jaw harp made from wood or bamboo¹⁴², sing poems in Ainu language, arrange traditional songs and dance to hip-hop beats and perform rap songs in Japanese about the harsh experience of being Ainu.¹⁴³ The Ainu rebels performed live in bars, clubs, universities and festivals, for the most part in the Tokyo and Osaka area, but they also had events in Hokkaido. In March 2009 I saw the Ainu Rebels perform at an event called "Ainu Night Rhythm." The event was held in a three-story underground club, called ‘the acid room’, in the centre of Sapporo and there were six different performances in total. In addition to the Ainu Rebels, the Ainu Art Project, the Ainu hip-hop unit UNIA, Ainu singer Yōko Toyokawa and DJ Kanto were performing. Furthermore, there was also a stage performance called ‘Tukkantam’ consisting of stories from the Ainu folklore, Yukar. Even though the event was held at a club the age range among the audience was wide, from young children to old people. As the club was rather small the place was practically filled to the rim with a mixture of Ainu, Japanese and a few western spectators before the performance started. Despite the room and stage being close to overcrowded, the Ainu artists managed to create a very nice atmosphere giving us a taste of both traditional and modern parts of Ainu Culture. In the final act of the performance all of the artists crammed themselves together on the stage and engaged everyone, both young and old, in the audience to join in on the singing and dancing too.

¹⁴⁰ CTV News British Columbia. (2009) First story, Japan's first inhabitants. Available from: http://www.ctvbc.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20090309/bc_firststory_japan_inhabitants_090309/20090309/?hub=BritishColumbiaSpecialEvent3 [Accessed 26/01/2011]

¹⁴¹ DieKatzeJames. (2009) You Tube - The Ainu Rebels, interview with some members of the Ainu Rebels. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwMhjY5uI9U> [Accessed 24/01/2011]

¹⁴² World instrument gallery <http://www.asza.com/ijmukkuri.shtml>

¹⁴³ Cotterill, S. (2011) Ainu Success: The political and Cultural Achievements of Japan’s Indigenous Minority. Downloaded from: <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Simon-Cotterill/3500> [Accessed 24/03/2011]

Reactions and critique

“I am under the impression that it’s more and less divided fifty-fifty between the people that support us and those who are critical. [...] The rebels dare to add music to the originally very plain Ainu singing and dancing [...] this leads to some people criticizing us. I however, welcome criticism because critique will only give us boost to aim higher [...]”

(Sayuri, member of the Ainu Rebels (26)

The Ainu Rebel’s ‘Ainu fusion’ was an example of how cultural revitalization movements sometimes change traditional systems and culture in order to reach the contemporary audience. Some of the elder Ainu, wanting to see their tradition passed on in a more conservative manner, accused the Rebels of damaging the Ainu culture. According to Sayuri some of the most common reactions were; “Is it really necessary to go as far as to destroy traditions that have been passed down from old times like this?” or “Old traditional stories should not be changed, but continued to be told in the same way as always.” However, at the same time it is impossible to go back in time it is also very difficult to keep old traditions from being influenced by modernization. Not long ago the modernization of an indigenous group was equivalent to the group disappearing, and referred to as ‘progress.’ Thus, the debate is whether a culture is able to change and adapt without losing its original identity.¹⁴⁴ According to Irimoto “traditional systems may be changed and sometimes destroyed, and subsequently, fragments of culture and languages, which have lost their conventional functions, become ethnic symbols as the basis of people’s identity in a new system.” The Ainu Rebels did make changes the traditional system, however, the leader of the group said that they were not aiming to destroy the traditional culture they were just targeting a new audience. “It would be a bit dull if it was just traditional music, but we get through to young people by playing club events,”¹⁴⁵ she said. Getting through to other young people were their goal and, according to Mina, the results of their work were very encouraging and as a matter of fact some people would admit being envious and say, ““you can have an identity as Ainu, but we Japanese don't know what we can be proud of,' ”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Stavenhagen, R. (1998) Indigenous Peoples : Emerging International Actors. In: Young, C. ed. (1998) *Ethnic Diversity and public policy. A comparative inquiry*. P.133-152 United States of America: Palgrave

¹⁴⁵ Sharp, A. (2009), *Tokyo’s thriving Ainu community keeps traditional culture alive*, Downloaded November 26th 2010 from <http://www.japantoday.com/category/lifestyle/view/tokyo%E2%80%99s-thriving-ainu-community-keeps-traditional-culture-alive>

¹⁴⁶ Foster M. (2008) Ainu stepping out of social stigma, *The Japan Times Wednesday Aug. 13th*, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20080813f2.html>

Ann-Elise Lewallen, an American cultural anthropologist at Hokkaido University commended the work of the Ainu Rebels. "These young people are trying to overcome nasty historical baggage by creating positive self-images through music and dance,¹⁴⁷" she said.

Break-up

At the time of conducting the first interviews for this thesis the Ainu Rebels were still performing, however in the autumn of 2009 they decided to break up due to the members being busy and wanting to continue on their own paths. (*yaritai michi wo susumu*).¹⁴⁸"Maybe we will perform again someday?" Utae said with a smile.

¹⁴⁷ Foster M. (2008) Ainu stepping out of social stigma, *The Japan Times Wednesday Aug. 13th*, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20080813f2.html>

¹⁴⁸ Ainu Rebels homepage <http://rebelsblog.ainupride.com/>

CD



Before breaking up, the Ainu Rebels recorded one of Mina Sakai's songs called "ekatuhi pirka" in the Ainu language or "You are Beautiful". The song was part of the Ainu Rebels repertoire and compares the Ainu to the beauty of nature, which Sakai says are as beautiful as her people.¹⁴⁹ The lyrics were written in Ainu and Japanese inside the CD cover, and I took the liberty to translate them from Japanese to English. Following are the lyrics presented in Ainu and English:

e=katuhu pirka

apto huraha
rera humihi
upas houyuppa
e=katuhu pirka

"You are beautiful"

the smell of the rain
the sound of the wind
the snow is running
you are beautiful

e=katuhu pirka
e=an i neon e=an yakun pirka
iteki isitoma yan
ene e=an i neon e= an pirka na

you are beautiful
just the way you are
don't be afraid
you are beautiful just the way you are

tuyama apkas humi
kaype rera suye
nitay tususatiki
e=katuhu pirka

distant footsteps
wave on the surface
shivering trees
you are beautiful

eani en=epakasnu
ene k=an i neno k=an yakun pirka

you taught me
that I'm fine just the way I am

e=katuhu pirka
e=an i neno e=an yakun pirka
iteki isitoma yan
ene e=an i neno e=an yak pirka ya

you are beautiful
just the way you are
don't be afraid
you are fine just the way you are

¹⁴⁹JapanToday (2008) Ainu rise up from the margins of Japanese society

<http://www.japantoday.com/category/lifestyle/view/ainu-rise-up-from-the-margins-of-japanese-society>

Summary

This chapter described how a study group formed by three young Ainu with the goal of having fun while learning about Ainu culture, evolved into becoming a performance group performing at events all over Japan. Furthermore, there was a section describing their purpose and performance followed by the positive and negative reactions they got from their audiences. How to juggle modernization and traditional culture in a way that best preserves the core of the culture is still an on going debate, but the Ainu Rebels did seem to get through to the young audience with their 'Ainu fusion'. Even though the group is now dissolved, there is no doubt that the Ainu rebels' performances contributed to enlighten and change the bad image of Ainu at least for some people in the audience.

Chapter 7: Changes and Future Outlook.

This chapter will take a closer look at the reactions and changes that followed the Japanese government acknowledgment in June 2006 that the Ainu are indigenous people. Furthermore, the young Ainu's participation in the Indigenous Peoples Summit in Aino Mosir in 2008 will be examined. In addition there will be a third section called "future outlook" covering young Ainu's expectations and ambitions towards the future of their culture.

Acknowledged as indigenous people

"Recognizing that the Ainu is an indigenous people with own and unique language, religion and culture, who inhabited the northern periphery first, in particular Hokkaido, of the Japanese Archipelago, we will continue to promote the Ainu and establish a comprehensive policy according to the relevant provisions in the UN declaration."¹⁵⁰

On June 6th 2008, both Houses of the Diet unanimously passed a bill granting the Ainu recognition as indigenous people. Mina, 25 years at the time, was sitting in the visitors' gallery. "This was just in time before Japan hosted the 2008 G8 summit meeting at Lake Toya on Hokkaido and the bill was passed unanimously without any discussion, followed by cheer and applause, as if it was a party. And instead of dealing seriously with the situation of the Ainu people's history, discrimination and poverty, they just turned to us and said 'congratulations to all Ainu people'. I was so disappointed that tears were rolling down my face," she said.¹⁵¹ She was hoping for more than just hearing the words 'indigenous people' (*senjūminzoku*). "I wanted the government to take a proper responsibility for the assimilation policies and for destroying the culture and identity of the Ainu people," she says. A Lower House lawmaker from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, Hiroshi Imazu, led a bipartisan group drafting the resolution recognizing the Ainu. Although, apparently being pro-aborigine he denied the need of an apology. In an interview at his Diet office he said, "Japan's situation is different to that of Australia or America, I don't think an apology is necessary and I think the Diet resolution is enough to show our feelings [toward the Ainu people]."¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ (2008) Ainu as indigenous people, resolution by the chief Cabinet Secretary *Asahi Shinbun* 6 June. P.1

¹⁵¹ Hokkaido Shinbun (2009), 尽きぬ差別や貧困歌や踊り通して権利回復の道探る. 23.08.2009 p.34

¹⁵² Sharp, A. (2009), *Tokyo's thriving Ainu community keeps traditional culture alive*, Downloaded November 26th 2010 from <http://www.japantoday.com/category/lifestyle/view/tokyo%E2%80%99s-thriving-ainu-community-keeps-traditional-culture-alive>

Many claim that the reason for the government recognizing the Ainu as indigenous was connected to Japan hosting the G8 meeting in Hokkaido a month later.¹⁵³ Thus, it is argued that the recognition was nothing but a content-less and hasty decision that did not significantly change the situation of the Ainu people. “For me as an individual nothing changed at all,” says Sayuri (26). “After all they put us through they simply said ‘we acknowledge you [as indigenous people]’, you would have thought that they should have added something in front of that.”

“[...] When acknowledging Ainu as indigenous people it was merely a statement without any content, so the situation haven’t changed much. [...] The thing that has changed is that Ainu are more visible in the media now.”

Mina (26)

However, According to Utae, getting acknowledged as indigenous people has created some significant changes. “I think that, among the Ainu, it has provoked the discussion on how we can make the Ainu society better. I also believe that it has lead to discussions concerning Ainu to increase nationwide too.” In addition, the fact that the Ainu have become more visible in the media has also had a positive effect on those who are still hiding or denying their Ainu identity. Hopefully to inspire them to come out from their hiding brought about by the indigenous population’s newfound awareness of their collective worth and identities and the world becoming a place where “respect for cultural and ethnic diversity will be more the rules than the exception.” Sociologist Rodolfo Stavenhagen claims that indigenous peoples of today are most likely to not merely succeed surviving but even flourish in the modern society.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Lewallen, A.E (2008), Indigenous at last! Ainu Grassroots Organizing and the Indigenous Peoples Summit in Ainu Mosir. *Japan Focus* 30.11.2008 p.1

¹⁵⁴ Stavenhagen, R. (1998) Indigenous Peoples : Emerging International Actors. In: Young, C. ed. (1998) *Ethnic Diversity and public policy. A comparative inquiry*. P. 148

Indigenous peoples Summit in Ainu Mosir 2008

The Indigenous Peoples Summit in Ainu Mosir, the first of its kind, was held from Tuesday 1st till Friday 4th of July 2008. The wording on the English program was: “We invite people from all over the world to join us in discussing the issues most important to us all: our environment, the recovery of our rights, education, and empowerment. Based on our discussions, we will present an Appeal from Indigenous peoples to the G8 leaders, the summit chairpersons and the government of Japan.” In addition to the Ainu, a total of 26 delegates, each representing their indigenous people, participated in the four-day summit. Counting everyone contributing a total of approximately 350 people were involved. According to Lewallen, the indigenous peoples summit might not have led to an international breakthrough for the indigenous peoples, nevertheless the internal gain among the Ainu people were significant. Organizing the summit helped building solidarity and cooperation among the planners from different Ainu communities and the Indigenous peoples summit, together with the G8 Summit, have also been considered as crucial elements resulting in the Diet acknowledging Ainu as an indigenous people.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, young Ainu got the opportunity to fully participate without being constrained by age-based hierarchies.¹⁵⁶

”We hope to involve many young Ainu [...] Through hosting the summit, the younger generation of Ainu who have lacked opportunities for self-expression until now, were central organizers and have now developed a new network among themselves and are working to expand their global network. It was evident that many Ainu reawakened to their identity as Ainu, they gained self-confidence, and were able to recover assurance in an Ainu way of living”

(Shimazaki organizer of the indigenous peoples summit in Ainu Mosir 2008)¹⁵⁷

Three out of the ten Ainu in the indigenous peoples summit’s implementation committee were young Ainu. Among them were Mina Sakai and her brother Atsushi Sakai. On the first day Mina declared the summit for opened. Furthermore, during one of the workshops were education and language was to be discussed both Mina and her brother argued that first of all, the change has to start within the person him/herself. “It has occurred to me that if you change your point of view, the world will change too. [...] Meeting indigenous people from

¹⁵⁵ Lewallen, A.E (2008), Indigenous at last! Ainu Grassroots Organizing and the Indigenous Peoples Summit in Ainu Mosir. *Japan Focus* 30.11.2008 p. 4

¹⁵⁶ Lewallen, A.E (2008), Indigenous at last! Ainu Grassroots Organizing and the Indigenous Peoples Summit in Ainu Mosir. *Japan Focus* 30.11.2008 p. 18

¹⁵⁷ Lewallen, A.E (2008), Indigenous at last! Ainu Grassroots Organizing and the Indigenous Peoples Summit in Ainu Mosir. *Japan Focus* 30.11.2008

Canada inspired me to change, and now I would like to be someone who can inspire young Ainu,” said Mina. Atsushi said, ”Until only a few years ago, because I really disliked the fact that I was Ainu, the word ‘Ainu’ would never even leave my mouth. However, Ainu who dislike being Ainu do not come to place like this. Therefore, I believe that a person that does acknowledge his or hers own ethnicity and culture need to, first of all, do so in order to be able to think about the next step. If you acknowledge your indigenous identity the will to continue studying will follow.” Print maker and secretary-general of the Indigenous Peoples Summit Koji Yuki agrees that the change have to start with oneself, "We are at a turning point, whether we are proud of being Ainu or we hide our identity makes a huge difference to our children."¹⁵⁸

In addition to the internal benefits within the Ainu, the indigenous peoples summit in Ainu Mosir 2008 also contributed to create a stronger and wider network between the participants’ peoples. Encouraging them to further cooperate and work together for the rights of indigenous peoples around the world. The indigenous summit also emphasizes that among the indigenous peoples the will to survive lives on. Coates places it all in a perspective stating, ”Most of the colonial empires which first colonized indigenous societies around the globe have disappeared or declined dramatically. The indigenous societies they colonized have persisted.”¹⁵⁹

Future

Cotterill states that the Ainu have survived against all odds and that they “will continue to promote themselves as simultaneously indigenous and modern and their political and cultural movements will exist on trans-national planes.¹⁶⁰” The survival of the Ainu depends on being embraced and passed on by the younger generations, however, many young Ainu are still struggling with self-denial and hide their Ainu identity. In an interview in Hokkaido Shinbun in August 2009 Mina Sakai said the following concerning this matter, “Due to discrimination and poverty there are still Ainu who don’t want touch the issue of Ainu Culture. If these Ainu don’t start (paying attention) caring, I don’t think that we will be able to recover the rights of

¹⁵⁸Koji Yuki, print maker and secretary-general of the Indigenous Peoples Summit in Ainu Moshir 2008. *The Christian Science Monitor*. (2008), Japan's Ainu hope new identity leads to more rights, 09.06.2008 <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2008/0609/p04s01-woap.html>

¹⁵⁹ Coates, K.S. (2004). *A Global History of Indigenous Peoples struggle and survival*. New York: Pallgrave Macmillan p.23

¹⁶⁰Cotterill, S. (2011). *Ainu Success: The political and Cultural Achievements of Japan’s Indigenous Minority*, *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan focus* 21.03.2011. p.18

the Ainu people. (*Ainu minzoku no kenrikaifuku*)”¹⁶¹ Mina, Sayuri and Utae all come from families where at least one of their parents was active in the Ainu community. Tragically there are also those who go through life not knowing about their Ainu inheritance because their parents did not enlighten them, but considered it for the best to keep the Ainu identity hidden. ¹⁶²When I asked if she thinks the number of young Ainu stepping out from their hiding will increase in the future, Mina said: “ yes, I believe it will increase, the time is slowly changing and the message about it being ok to be Ainu, (*Ainu de ii n da*), is slowly spreading too. We are doing everything we can to spread the message and with becoming more public we might succeed to reach out and encourage young people in the local communities. I am determined to continue this work and maybe from now the time will come were there are many active Ainu.” As mentioned in chapter four, at the time of conducting my fieldwork, Mina worked as a cultural advisor for the foundation of Research and Promotion of Ainu culture, (*Ainu Bunka Kōryū Sentā*), FRPAC, in Tokyo. Part of her job was to give lectures about Ainu at universities, high school, festival and other arrangements. Through these lectures Mina is always aiming to promote being Ainu as something positive.

Sayuri once participated as a dancer at one of Mina’s presentations. The feedback from the youngsters in the audience was very positive. “Many said that they had never heard anyone this young talk about these things before and they thought it was really great,” she says.

I think it’s so great that we have someone like Mina. [...] People giving lectures or talking about these things are usually elder people. [...] But, to an audience of teenagers or young people in their 20’s stories told by old people do not easily catch on. I think it’s easier for the younger generations to relate to a girl their own age talking about her childhood and Ainu identity. It’s also easier for them to reach out to her and talk about things they find difficult [...]

Sayuri (26)

Utae also believes that promoting and being exposed to positive experiences related to the Ainu culture might contribute to change the image of Ainu and inspire those reluctant to reveal their Ainu identity to step forward and be proud of their culture.

¹⁶¹ 2009, August 23rd. 尽きぬ差別や貧困歌や踊り通して権利回復の道探る. Hokkaido Shinbun [sapporo], p.34

¹⁶² Bogdanowicz, T. (2003), Where are the Ainu now? In search of answers about Japan's indigenous people. *The Japan Times* Sunday, March 2, Available at: <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/fl20030302a3.html> [Accessed 5 February 2008]

“How to make people reveal their Ainu background? [...] I believe that visiting places like the historic museum in the forest in Tokachi, going to exhibitions with works of Ainu artists’ or participate in Ainu festivals might help. If what you see impresses you it might become easier to relate to and talk about your Ainu background. That is why it is important that we, the people already active in the Ainu society, show others how hard we have been working. We would like to acquire something we can leave behind [for the next generation].”

Utae (32)

At the time of conducting my fieldwork, Utae was volunteering and being one of the main executives on a project called ‘Haponetai’. Haponetai’ means ‘forest becomes our mother’ (*hahanarumori*) in the Ainu language, and is the name of an outdoor art exhibition displaying art inspired by the Ainu culture. The exhibition was arranged for the first time in the autumn of 2009 in Shimizu in the Kamigawa district on Hokkaido. At that time two artists participated exhibiting paintings with Ainu motives, silver accessories and drawings of animals closely connected to the Ainu culture. During the 10 days it lasted approximately 300 people came to see the exhibition and around a 100 attended the party on the last day.

According to Utae around one third of the participants were Ainu. The second Haponetai took place in September 2010 this time with five contributing artists, a woodblock artist from Sapporo, a metal-carver, an illustrator and a graphic designer from Tokyo and a pottery maker from Kanagawa. Their work, everything made from a theme inspired by Ainu patterns and animals connected to the Ainu people, were lined up in the forest giving the audience the possibility to appreciate the art and nature simultaneously.

“An art exhibition in the middle of a forest is unusual and the viewer can enjoy the atmosphere in a different way than if inside. I want the audience to get a taste of the Ainu culture while appreciating the art. [...]”¹⁶³, Says Utae. Projects like this, representing Ainu culture is contributing to intrigue the interest for Ainu culture and shows that being Ainu is not only about being stereotyped and discriminated, but something beautiful that one can be proud of being a part of.

Our spirit will always remain so I don’t think we will disappear [...]”¹⁶⁴

(Male member of the Ainu Rebels)

¹⁶³ (2010), “Haponetai”, Five artists’ art Exhibition in the Ainu’s motherland *Tokachi mainichi Shinbun* 21.sep Available at: <http://www.tokachi.co.jp/news/201009/20100921-0006668.php> [Accessed 5. January 2011]

¹⁶⁴ DieKatzeJames. (2009) You Tube - The Ainu Rebels, interview with some members of the Ainu Rebels. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwMhjY5uI9U> [Accessed 24/01/2011]

Summary

This chapter have examined how getting recognized as indigenous people by the Japanese government affected and were received among the Ainu people. In June 2008 they did finally get the acknowledgement they had been fighting for, however the Japanese government did not provide them any form of official apology for the maltreatment of their people.

Consequently, some Ainu argue that the recognition was merely a hastily decision with empty words prompted by the G8 meeting being held in Hokkaido one month later. Furthermore, there was a section on the subject of the Indigenous Peoples Summit in Ainu Moshi 2008.

Explaining how young and old Ainu worked together to organize the first Indigenous Summit to coincide with the G8 Summit. The Summit was a success regarding establishing a stronger solidarity and cooperation between the indigenous peoples around the world. Additionally, it is also argued that, in addition to the G8 Summit, the Indigenous Peoples Summit in Ainu Mosir was one of the key elements to “push the Diet toward granting Ainu indigenous recognition¹⁶⁵”. The last part of this chapter illuminated how young Ainu consider the future outlook for their people. According to my research and observations it seems like those who have embraced their Ainu identity are working hard to influence those who are still hiding. Aiming for a society where the Ainu will be more active and visible and were young Ainu can relate to their identity with pride, they promote their culture with for example giving lectures and arranging art exhibitions.

¹⁶⁵ Lewallen, A.E (2008), Indigenous at last! Ainu Grassroots Organizing and the Indigenous Peoples Summit in Ainu Mosir. *Japan Focus* 30.11.2008 p.4

Conclusion

The topic for this thesis has been Ainu - a group of indigenous people from the northern part of Japan. Based on the thesis statement "how do young Ainu in Japan today relate to their own identity?" the chapters above have discussed and examined ways in which young Ainu relate to their inheritance and the reason why they relate the way they do. In order to illuminate this, interviews of three young Ainu women, previous research on Ainu and identity and several theories concerning identity and ethnic minorities have been presented and compared to the history and current situation.

This thesis has shown that being part of an indigenous population in a country that has been considered 'homogenous' even after entering the 21st century has been and still is a struggle, but the Ainu people have survived against all odds. Even so, the dismal history still has an impact on the perspective young Ainu in Japan today have on their own identity. This thesis has presented two different manners in which young Ainu today relates toward their Ainu identity. One way is to reject, deny and hide the Ainu identity. The other way is to embrace, promote and be proud of the Ainu identity. This thesis has also presented that those who are now embracing and promoting their Ainu identity most likely have a history of denying rejecting and spending lots of time and effort to hide their Ainu identity. Furthermore, it has illuminated that the bullying and discrimination against Ainu are significantly worse for Ainu living in local communities on Hokkaido compared to those living in metropolitan areas. Some places bad attitude and stories about Ainu being inferior are still being passed down from generation to generation. This explains why some young Ainu living in rural areas still spends a lot of time and effort to hide their Ainu identity. Nevertheless, the time is changing and the world is becoming a place where "respect for cultural and ethnic diversity will be more the rules than the exception."¹⁶⁶ Thus, making it easier for young people these days to reveal and promote their Ainu identity. Furthermore, among the young Ainu that have discovered that being Ainu is something one should be proud there are many people working to inspire and reach out to those who are still struggling with self-denial and hides their Ainu identity.

¹⁶⁶ Stavenhagen, R. (1998) Indigenous Peoples : Emerging International Actors. In: Young, C. ed. (1998) *Ethnic Diversity and public policy. A comparative inquiry*. P. 148

Conclusion

The future of the Ainu culture depends on the younger generation's will to proudly embrace it and pass it on. This thesis has shown there are reviving movements and members of the younger generation of Ainu are aiming to show that one can be a proud Ainu and live in a modern society. This agrees with what Sjöberg wrote in 1997 "In order to change the official view of themselves as a less developed people, the Ainu have chosen to reinvestigate their own cultural and historic past."¹⁶⁷ In addition they are aiming for a strategy to put both themselves and their culture on show.¹⁶⁸ As Yuki Koji, the leader of the Ainu art project once said, "I am Ainu, not dead. I am living in this modern society."¹⁶⁹ The young Ainu presented in this thesis did all at some point in their lives deny and hide their Ainu identity, but they got inspired and discovered a new source of pride towards their Ainu inheritance. Thus, even though there are still many young Ainu hiding their identity today, the ones who have embraced their Ainu identity are pushing for others to follow.

How one relates to one's own identity is as Mina Sakai said in a speech at the Indigenous Peoples Summit in Hokkaido 2008, "If you are able to change your own point of view, the world will change."¹⁷⁰

“Ainu hajimeta bakkari”

Naming this thesis “Ainu hajimeta bakkari”, just started being Ainu, is something I decided on after hearing Mina Sakai using the phrase in her lecture at the foundation of Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture, (*Ainu Bunka Kōryū Sentā*) in Tokyo. Mina used the phrase referring to the ‘the Ainu Rebels’, and how the members would use the phrase, “just started being Ainu,” (*Ainu Hajimeta bakkari da kara*), when they had to take classes to learn about their own culture. I propose that the phrase is very describing not only for the members of the Ainu rebels, but the situation many young Ainu in Japan find themselves in today.

¹⁶⁷ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers p.188

¹⁶⁸ Sjöberg, K. (ed.) (1997), *The return of the Ainu, Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers p.189

¹⁶⁹ Cotterill, S. (2011). Ainu Success: The political and Cultural Achievements of Japan's Indigenous Minority, *Japan focus* 21.03.2011 <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Simon-Cotterill/3500>

¹⁷⁰ Indigenous Peoples Summit in Ainu Mosir 2008 Steering committee (2008). Official report of Indigenous Peoples Summit in Ainu Mosir 2008. p.

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Interview sheet

Main questions used in the interviews:

1. How does people react when you tell them you are Ainu?
2. Why do you think some still choose to hide their Ainu identity?
3. What do you think about the general knowledge about Ainu?
4. How has the situation changed after the Ainu got acknowledged as indigenous people?
5. What do you think can be done to help those hiding their Ainu identity to come out?

Map of Hokkaido and Kurile islands



¹⁷¹ <http://www.freeworldmaps.net/asia/japan/hokkaido.html>

Map of Hokkaido and Kurile islands



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¹⁷² <http://www.zemkedesu.com/maps.htm>

