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### The Ainu

The story I'm researching is a story that has occurred throughout the world and is nothing new. It is the story of globalization; the story of the post-agricultural revolution, industrialized societies one by one colonizing and eradicating hunter-gatherer societies. As a Japanese major, I am very interested in the history of the land that I will be studying in next Fall. So, I will be exploring the history and present day situation of the indigenous people of Japan, the Ainu. I initially wanted to cover both the Ainu and their Southern cousins the Ryu Kyu Islanders, but there seems to be little to no information on the indigenous people to the south. I will discuss the history of the Ainu from the days of their earliest ancestors all the way to their present day civil rights movement. I hope to touch on points of view from both the inside and outside. Along the way I will explore both how the Ainu view themselves, and also why the Japanese have come to view the Ainu the way they do today. How have the Ainu come to be a people who are struggling to throw off the term "extinct".

According to Wongtack Hong in his article "Yayoi Wave, Kofun Wave and Timing: The Formation of the Japanese People and Japanese Language," many of the native Jomon people of Northern Japan, who did not wish to mingle with the newly arrived Kaya people from Korea during the Yayoi period, fled to the Northern tip of Honshu, the

island of Hokkaido, the island Sakhalin, and the Kurile Islands to join their brethren (Hong 9). Like their Ryukyuan cousins to the South, the Ainu would remain a separate homogeneous society, apart from the Japanese, until well into the 19th century. Hong argues, like many other modern day researchers and archaeologists, that the Ainu are not just a subculture of the greater Japanese people but instead, they are and always have been a separate nation and culture, whose people came to the Japanese archipelago thousands of years ago from the Northern Asiatic Mainland. In his book *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan* Richard Siddle explains that:

“By the ninth century, two distinct cultures flourished in Hokkaido, named by archaeologists as the Satsumon and Okhotsk. The bearers of the Okhotsk culture lived along the north and northeast coastlines of Hokkaido while the Satsumon, regarded as the direct ancestors of the Ainu, occupied the rest of the island and perhaps the northernmost tip of Honshu. What is now regarded as Ainu culture developed out of the Satsumon culture around the thirteenth, century, by which time the inhabitants of southern Hokkaido were engaged in regular trade with Honshu”(Siddle 26).

The Satsumon that Siddle speaks of are the descendants of the Jomon people who first occupied Japan. The Ainu lived as hunters and gatherers much like the Jomon and Satsumon before them did. Because of the natural abundance of resources that the Japanese islands provided, they were able to live relatively comfortable lives, subsisting mainly on salmon, deer, bear, wild vegetables and tubers. Although they did not have a written language, they were able to transfer their culture and history on to the future

generations through long stories called *yukar*. Each village had hunting and fishing territories called *iwor*. If they had a surplus of salmon, they would trade either to the Asian mainland to the north or to Honshu to the south. Even though the Ainu were a successful people who maintained a sustainable relationship with nature, Siddle makes sure to point out that “in the eyes of their southern neighbors they were no more than savages and barbarians”(27).

The term “barbarian” was imported from China into Japan between the sixth and eighth centuries, when the Japanese were interested in everything Chinese. The



Chinese viewed barbarians as “hairy, non-

human, flesh-eating savages who dressed in skins and lived in holes”(27). At first one may be surprised by the phrase “flesh-eating” being used in a derogatory manner, but during this time in Japan, along with the rest of Chinese culture, Buddhism was being widely spread throughout the land. Many believed that the butchery and eating of animals went against the tenants of Buddhism. Because of their differences in dress, hairstyle, customs and their place outside the rule of the Yamato government, the Ainu were

*A map of the Wajinchi and Ezoichi territories. The Matsumae han is a very small fief and therefore relies heavily on trade.*

turned into the “other”(28). The Ainu were first referred to as the “Emishi” by mainlanders. The Chinese characters for *Emishi* mean eastern barbarians (27). Up until the Kamakura Bakufu around 1185, many wars were fought with the *emishi* in order to gain control of the Touhoku region in northern honshu (29). Siddle explains that the vague term *emishi* was replaced by the term *ezo* which “came clearly to refer to the ‘foreign’ inhabitants of the islands across the Tsugaru Straits, the islands of Ezoga(chi)shima.” At this time, many *wajin* or mainland Japanese began to travel across the strait to Hokkaido and establish trade relations with the *ezo*.

The Matsumae clan was given complete control over trade and travel between the *wajin* and Ainu by Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1604 (32). The Matsumae domain was located at the southern tip at the bottom of the peninsula of Hokkaido, and was called Shamochi, Matsumae ryou, or Wajinchi. Ainu territory which took up most of Hokkaido and its surrounding areas was known as Ezochi. Ezochi was extremely important to the Matsumae because, according to Siddle “While the Matsumae domain possessed rich fishing grounds there was little agricultural potential and the mainstay of the *han* economy was the Ainu trade, so it was imperative for the Matsumae to gain control of this process.” In order to keep the Ainu from going directly to Touhoku or Sakhalin to trade, the Matsumae went into the Ainu territory to set up trading posts called *akinaiba* (33). From these posts the goods would be funneled into the Matsumae ports where they were controlled and taxed. Since the Matsumae were dependent upon the traders for rice and other essentials, the traders soon took advantage of their dependence and trade soon turned in favor of the Honshu traders. This movement of power took its toll

not only on the *wajin* of the island, but also on the Ainu themselves. From here on out, the *wajin* took great interest in the fishing and mining resources of *Ezochi* and began to encroach on the Ainu's resources and territories. In mid 1669, fed up with the encroachments on their land, some Ainu led by Shakushain attacked the Matsumae and other *wajin* around the Matsumae domain (35). After receiving help from the Bakufu, the Matsumae were able to quell the local Ainu. As a result, the broken Ainu alliances were not able to resist when the Matsumae made firmer demands for their trade monopoly set up trading posts as far as Sakhalin (36). Over the course of the 1700s, the Matsumae became indebted to mainland traders, and in order solve this they started contracting their over 70 trading posts out to mainland traders for fees. This had very important consequences for the Ainu. According to Siddle:

“Contractors introduced advanced fishing methods and equipment, built processing facilities and barracks for the Ainu labourers, and shipped the products directly to markets in the Kinai region. Risks were high, and high fees and forced loans to the Matsumae put pressure on the contractors to make the highest profits possible. while conditions varied between *basho*, in some areas this resulted in cruel treatment of the Ainu” (37).

The relationship between the *wajin* and the Ainu in the late 1700s changed very drastically. Instead of relying on trade from the Ainu, the Ainu began to be used in forced labor at the trading posts or *basho* as they were called. By this time the Ainu had become somewhat dependent upon the *wajin* trade, so samurai began to coerce the village leaders into giving them labourers for rations and other goods. More and more the

*wajin* used the Japanese “self-other” relationship as an excuse to treat the Ainu as something below themselves. At this time many countries were exploring and expanding their empires and Russia was no exception. They were pushing to the far eastern borders of their lands and approaching the Kurile islands (38). The Bakufu, who had kept their contact with the Ainu at a minimum, saw the Ainu as potential allies against the threat of Russian advances. They did not fully realize the situations that the Ainu were being placed in. So it was under these circumstances that the Tokugawa Bakufu set out to “civilize” the barbarians of *Ezochi*.

As the Russians made their way down the Kurile islands the Bakufu became more and more involved in the workings of *Ezogashima* and sent up explorers to spy on both the Matsumae and the Russians (39). Siddle states that soon after, to the despair of the Matsumae, “By 1807 all Ezochi had been placed under direct Bakufu control through offices established in Hakodate.” Although under Bakufu control, Ezochi proved to be too large to completely control, so they established military stations along the coast to ward off the Russians. The Bakufu used the excuse of needing to civilize the Ainu for their own good for the purpose of taking control of the Ainu’s homeland. They sought to Japanize the barbarians who they viewed as no more than children (41). The Matsumae for prejudicial reasons and the Ainu in order to keep their culture, both resisted the Bakufu’s attempts to civilize Ezochi, and as a result the program met little success.

The Matsumae and the contractors held a similar yet different view of the Ainu. They also believed the Ainu to be barbarians, but they differed in that they felt that the Ainu should be kept completely separate from all things Japanese. They believed they Ainu

to be sub-human and mock them as trying to become human when they tried to learn katakana (43). The *wajin* would say that while they themselves were “ningen” or human in Japanese, they would say that the Ainu were in fact descended from dogs. Siddle explains that “Whatever its origins, there is little doubt that the generation of this myth paralleled and justified the dehumanization of the Ainu as exploited labour on the fishing stations and the callous cruelty with which they were treated”(44). This situation is very similar to the tactics used by European explorers when conquering new lands. They would say that the natives were uneducated and unlearned in the ways of civilization and Christianity. They would claim to be their “saviors” and help them make full use of the land by subjugating them. The people who had the most contact with the Ainu were not the officials but the *dekasegi* who were typically uneducated second or third sons who stood to gain no inheritance in their families. They were in charge of the *basho* were responsible for much of the cruel treatment that the Ainu workers received. Siddle argues that “it is likely that the superstitions and images of demons and outsiders that were a vital part of the folklore of village Japan also influenced the way Ainu were perceived by *dekasegi*”(44). It is for these reasons that the Tokugawa Japanisation policy failed the way it did. In 1821 the Matsumae regained control of their domain and the contractors once again subcontracted from them (46). At this time they began more aggressive forced labor and resettlement programs, and over time more and more Ainu women were sexually exploited by the *dekasegi*. Siddle gives a figure that “In the Kushiro *basho*, for instance, thirty-six out of the forty-one *dekasegi* had taken Ainu women after sending their husbands to work in the fisheries at Akkeshi.” Hard working condi-

tions, disease and abuse reduced the Ainu population in West Ezochi from 9,068 in 1798 to 4,384 in 1854 (47). By the time of the Meiji Restoration, the Ainu had gained the social image in Japan of a dying, inferior race of people who lacked the guidance of civilization.

Siddle begins the chapter entitled “Former natives” with the distinction between two words; “colonisation” and “development”(51). Although many Japanese use the word colonization (*takushoku*) when referring to North America, Africa and other countries occupied by Europeans at that time, when referring to post-Restoration Hokkaido they use the term development (*kaitaku*). This seems to be a very important distinction in the narrative telling the story of history. The term development implies that the island Hokkaido was rightfully the Japanese’s to begin with, and that there was no coercion necessary in the reclamation of that land. The problem is the fact that there was indeed people living there, who had been there for many many years before then. The only term that can fit Japan’s actions toward Hokkaido and the Ainu people would be colonization.

On July 8, 1869, after the Meiji Restoration, “Ezochi was Renamed Hokkaido (the North Sea Circuit) and divided into eleven major administrative districts (*kuni*) and eighty-six counties (*gun*)”(53). The newly formed government laid claim to Hokkaido as officially part of Japan, and in order to accomplish this they had to settle the island with Japanese and partition the island into a grid-like pattern of private property. Incentives such as cheap land and years of free rent brought many up north to try their hands at developing the land agriculturally (58). Mining also became a large part of Hokkaido’s economy fueled mostly by convict labor. Richard Siddle also talks about this issue in his



essay “Ainu: Japan’s indigenous people” featured in the book *Japan’s Minorities The Illusion Of Homogeneity*. Siddle writes that in order to settle Hokkaido and create a capitalist market “both of these policies required the dispossession of the Ainu as a prerequisite,” and as a result of this process “By the end of the [19th] century, the 17,000 Ainu accounted for around 2 percent of the population of Hokkaido” (Siddle 23). In order to “save” the Ainu, they were given small plots of land to encourage them to become farmers like other civilized Japanese. The Ainu were more and more purposefully being portrayed as a “dying race”:

“By the beginning of the twentieth century, the activities of scholars, educators, colonial officials and journalists ensured that the image of an inferior ‘dying race’ informed both government policy and public opinion.

Against a broader background of sustained ideological efforts to forge a Japanese ‘sense of nation’ and the colonial expansion of an increasingly powerful and assertive state, ‘race’ and nation became increasingly synonymous as common-sense categories of understanding for most Japanese since ‘blood, as expressed in ‘racial’ homogeneity, provided the essential adhesive which bonded the constituent parts into a uniquely powerful Japanese collectivity” (24).

Since the Ainu were not of the Yamato ‘race’ they were therefore excluded and their inequality was thought justified by innate natural lacking. The years after World War II brought no relief to the Ainu when the Japanese nation more than ever strove form a sense on national homogeneity where there was no place for the Ainu. It wouldn’t be

until the 1970s when the Ainu would have a voice in Japanese politics (25). Starting in the 1960s, young Ainu activists, “bypassed the administrative structure of previous relations and sought instead to confront the social and administrative mechanisms that underlay Ainu Marginalization”(28). In this quote Siddle is explaining how in previous years, the Ainu leaders and representatives took many steps to gain rights in Japanese society, but the younger generations believed that the elders had sold themselves short and sacrificed too much in the negotiation processes. The new Ainu generations rejected the idea of assimilating into Japanese society. They wished to go back to their roots and establish the Ainu as a stand-alone people once again. To introduce the next text on the Ainu that I wish to present, I want to use one last quote by Richard Siddle,

“...in 1994 Kayano Shigeru entered the Upper House as the first Ainu elected to the Diet. But within Japan at large, the dominant narratives of national homogeneity and peaceful development in Hokkaido remain secure enough to ensure that, despite growing Wajin support, the majority of the population still know little, and care even less, about Ainu demands” (Richard Siddle 43).

Kayano Shigeru is one of the most famous Ainu in recent history and gave a large voice to their movement. In 1980 his book *Our Land Was a Forest, An Ainu Memoir* was published in Japanese and translated into English in 1994. In the forward of the book, Mikiso Hane describes it as “...An absorbing account of Ainu life written by an Ainu striving to preserve his people’s cultural heritage and sense of nationhood.” This book is so important because unlike being written from an outsider’s perspective, Kayano does not

impose any scientific categories or cultural stereotypes into his stories. He instead writes his experiences as they happened with no third party in between. He draws on the experiences of three generations of his family to portray the Ainu way of life, and its degradation at the hands of successive invasions of Japanese culture. Much of the book takes place in the 1930s during the author's childhood.

His childhood is lived in a Nibutani (village) in the town of Biratori located in the Saru region of Hidaka county, Hokkaido, which even in those respectively modern days, had a large Ainu population. Kayano is responsible for the construction of two Ainu museums in the area. Throughout the text, you can see pictures of traditional Ainu dwellings and storehouses. They all have straw, thatched roofs and some are even built on stilts a couple of meters above the ground. I found the author's description of layout of his house and family to be really interesting. Of all the books I have read trying to learn about the lives of the Ainu, only this one gives such an up close an personal look into their everyday lives. One could argue that this book is therefore biased, but I believe due to the fact that an overwhelming majority of the texts on the Ainu are from outsiders perspectives, balance and a shift in perspective are sorely needed.

According to Kayano, his home life was rather hectic because his family of nine crammed into a space of about forty square meters (3). His family consisted of "my grandmother (born in 1850), my parents, and older sister, two elder brothers, myself, and two younger brothers" and the author. The fire pit was the center of the house both literally and rhetorically speaking. Living in such a cold climate for much of the year, it is no wonder that the fire would play a large part. The fire pit at the author's house was

about 90 by 180 centimeters, at the head of which was the master's seat where his father would use to stumps as carving stools to create many of the tools they needed for daily life. A special seat to the right of Kayano's father was reserved for his grandmother. While using a *kanit* which was a stick for winding thread, she would relate Ainu folktales called *uwepekere* to the grandchildren in their native language. This is the way the Ainu passed down their culture from generation to generation for many thousands of years, and it is also the main reason why Kayano Shigeru came to be one of the few Ainu language specialists of the twentieth century. These stories had a practical purpose which meant to instruct the new generations on how to live in harmony with their environment. These lessons included, "One must not arbitrarily cut down trees, one must not pollute running water, even birds and beasts will remember kindnesses and return favors and so on" (4-5). Another essential part of the Ainu culture are the *Kamuy yukar*, or the tales of the Ainu gods. Looking at the Ainu religion from the outside, it is very easy to point out many similarities between it and the native Japanese shinto religion. According to Kayano, his grandmother would relate these stories of the gods to them:

A god dwells in each element of the great earth mentioned in these tales, she would tell us, in the mountains off in the distance from Nibutani, the running waters, the trees, the grasses and flowers. Those gods looked just like humans, spoke the same language, slept at night, and worked by day in the land of the gods (5).

Much like Shinto, the Ainu gods dwell in all things and act much the same as humans do. It is sadly ironic to see how the Japanese have treated a people so poorly, when both their original religious systems are so similar. Kayano's telling of the *shamo's* (Japanese's) treatment of his grandfather is very compelling and worth mentioning. It is a vivid example of how the Ainu were treated by the Matsumae clan when the shogunate was still in power. His grandfather was born in 1847 and died in 1919, passing away before Kayano was born (26). He explains that his grandfather was drafted, like many of the other people in their village, to work at one of the fisheries that the *shamo* retainers lent out to contractors. At these locations, the Ainu were basically treated as slaves, working for one-seventh to one-eighth what the *shamo* were paid. One day, two samurai came to his grandfather's village and demanded to the village elder that they hand over "villagers and their son's"(27). Knowing about the high mortality rates at these "locations", the elder initially declined, but after the samurai threatened to kill all the villagers he had to give in. Even though he was just a little boy of eleven at the time, his grandfather along with forty-two of the one hundred sixteen villagers were forced to make the 350 kilometer march to Atsukeshi for forced labor (27-28). At the camp "The Ainu were beaten awake when the morning stars still glimmered and were forced to work until they could no longer see the ground at night"(32). Since Totkaram (his grandfather) was too small to do heavy labor, he was made to pump water and collect firewood for the kitchen, but even this was too much for a small child. Thinking he would be sent back if he was injured, Totkaram set to cut off a part of his index finger. When he finally mustered up the courage to commit to the act, his aim went awry, and he cut off the finger at its

base. To his dismay, the samurai told him he would be fine in a few days and sent him back to work once he was healed. Yet, the work still proved so grueling that Totkaram set about once again to go home. He collected the poisonous bile from the blow fish and spread it all over his skin which in turn turned a grayish/yellow color causing him to look jaundiced. The overseers feared Totkaram had contracted a disease so he was sent back to Nibutani (34). This is just one of many vivid stories that Kayano tells through his book. I can't help but wonder how many Japanese would feel today upon reading this book. Would they, in the words of Richard Siddle, "...know little, and care even less about Ainu demands"?

Being an eternal optimist, I like to think the answer to that question would be no. I looked to other media to see how the Ainu are represented in Japanese society. It turns out that one of the most famous *mangaka* of all time, Tezuka Osamu, wrote a manga titled "Brave Dan" whose main characters were an Ainu boy named Kotan Nakamura and an escaped tiger bound for the zoo named Dan (wikipedia). Although the story is a work of fiction with not many facts based on reality, it is interesting that Osamu would make one of his main characters Ainu. I would also like to find out how many people in Japan know of this manga's existence.

In one of the most famous animated movies of all time, *Princess Mononoke*, Hayao Miyazaki decided to cast one of the main characters as one of the *Emishi* which as I said earlier, is what the *wajin* called the northern barbarians in the beginning of the last millennium (wikipedia). In a scene from the movie where Ashitaka (the emishi) is talking to Jigo (the government spy), Jigo tells Ashitaka that he reminds him of the mysterious,

powerful people from the East known as the Emishi. Again, a major figure in the anime world (influenced by Osamu) chooses to place one of the Ainu as their main characters. I have a theory that there is an untold rule in Japan where one cannot explicitly state whether or not they support the rights of the Ainu or any other minority. So, people like Miyazaki and Osamu express their views through their work. I find it interesting that, even though *Mononoke-Hime* is one of the highest selling movies in Japan to date, there has been no discussion as to why Miyazaki chose one of the Eastern barbarians to be the main character.

The Ainu have a story that is not very different than that of the Native Americans, or any other indigenous society. Like the Aztecs in Mexico, they have been systematically assimilated into the master race for the sake of creating a sense of National Homogeneity. Their homeland held many natural resources and a strategic position that were and are convenient for their oppressors. As the world grows smaller and smaller with the advent of the internet, cell phones and airplanes, more and more indigenous societies are calling out for their innate rights and challenging the colonizers. One very controversial question therefore remains. Will the Ainu be able to break through the Japanese's well-established, national myth of homogeneity and establish a self-determined nation? The future looks shaky for the Ainu, but in the times of the occupy generation, the odds may start shifting away from "the man."

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