

## 研究ノート

# Ainu Survival and Revival: Turning the Tide?

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**[Abstract]**

The colonization of Ainu lands in Hokkaido by the dominant Japanese, along with assimilation policies introduced by the Japanese government, ultimately resulted in a language facing extinction and the Ainu left fighting for cultural survival. In 2007, the Japanese government supported the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous people, finally providing a glimmer of hope for Ainu. Furthermore, under international scrutiny from hosting both the 2008 G8 Summit in the heart of Ainu ancestral lands, along with the Indigenous Peoples Summit, the Japanese government made a surprise announcement in June 2008, recognizing Ainu as an indigenous people. Although the announcement was coupled with the promise of a new law to help Ainu recover from two centuries of cultural assimilation, no law has yet been passed. Despite continued government setbacks and failures, Ainu, through self-designed initiatives and often support from other indigenous groups, are making an effort to combat and reverse the effects of cultural assimilation. This report provides a brief historical and cultural background then discusses recent shifts in governmental attitudes and policy. Finally, current efforts by Ainu themselves to save and rejuvenate their language and culture will be highlighted.

**I. Introduction**

This short research note attempts to collect and summarize past and recent information pertaining to the history, policy and present efforts to preserve and revitalize Ainu culture and language. By no means does it depict a complete historical account, entail all governmental policies or attitudes or describe every initiative. It does however, act as a starting point for two researchers new to this field, whose desire is to make a contribution by first understanding Ainu cultural, linguistic and political aspirations and secondly vocalizing them to those who are willing listen. This paper will serve as a leading paper for future research to be conducted by the writers in an endeavor to learn, understand and lend support to one of Japan's most resilient, captivating and important indigenous groups of people.

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Key words : Ainu, Language, Culture, Assimilation, Survival

## II. Historical and Cultural Background

Human heritage and the success of the human race is due to cultural diversity of which language plays a critical role (Crystal, 2002). One's culture is primarily transmitted through spoken and written language and language itself encompasses a "unique cultural wisdom of a people" (UNESCO, 2003, p.1). Crystal (2002) writes that languages are the vehicles of value systems, of cultural expressions, and both self-identity and group identity. That the two are deeply interwoven is acknowledged by most, if not all world cultures, many of which have proverbs emphasizing their importance. Examples of this are the Welsh proverb "Cenedl heb iaith, cenedl heb gallon" (A nation without a language is a nation without a heart) and the Malay proverb "Bahasa jiwa bangsa." (Language is the soul of a race). Therefore, as history has often proven, the quickest way to assimilate a culture is by prohibiting the use of that culture's language. The forced cultural and language assimilation of Ainu was an attempt to tear the heart and soul from of a proud race.

Once living throughout most of Japan, Ainu (meaning both 'human' and 'us') moved to principally Japan's northern most island Hokkaido and the Kuril Islands. Ainu had also lived in the south Sakhalin Island, Russia. According to the Smithsonian Institute (2000), their culture stretches back over 10,000 years with recent DNA research showing they are descended from the ancient Jomon people of Japan. UNESCO reports the Ainu language is a language isolate, that no other language is linguistically related to it.

Interaction between the Japanese and Ainu can be traced back to at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century and Ainu would trade goods obtained through hunting, gathering and fishing with the Japanese (Godefroy, 2012, Okada, 2012). Despite trade related battles with the Japanese, the relationship between the two groups was relatively good over a long period of time and Ainu at times referred to the Japanese as "sisam" meaning "good neighbours". However, as trading and economic bonds grew stronger, the Japanese gradually began to encroach on Ainu land and behavior towards each other became more aggressive (Godefroy, 2012, Okada, 2012). Godefroy and Okada provide a detailed history of events over this time. In 1590, the Matsumae clan was granted a march fief around the southern part of Hokkaido (Matsumae) by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the ruler of Japan at the time. This was effectively a border between the Japanese of the south and Ainu in the north. Whilst land north of Matsumae was still considered "foreign" Ainu land, the establishment of the Matsumae clan saw an increase in Japanese settlement and the beginning of the subjugation of Ainu. With the arrival of the Edo era (1603—1868), the Matsumae clan began to occupy many parts of Hokkaido. Ainu were becoming increasingly marginalized within their own land and faced increased discrimination and prejudices. This led to major conflicts, most notably the violent Shakushain's Revolt in 1669 led by Ainu chieftain, Shakushain. Initially a battle for resources between Shakushain's people and a rival Ainu clan, it developed into full scale effort by united Ainu to maintain their

political independence and take back control over the terms and conditions of their trade with the Japanese. However, at the end of 1669, Shakushain's forces surrendered to the Matsumae. After celebrating a negotiated peace settlement, Shakushain, along with his army's leaders, were assassinated by soldiers belonging to the Matsumae. The Matsumae then increased economic control over Ainu by not allowing Ainu to formally learn the Japanese language or take up any form of agriculture. Other well documented revolts included Menashi-Kunashir battle in 1789 and Ainu rebellions in the Kuril Islands. In a response to the continued effort of Ainu to fight for their rights and as concerns rose over the interest foreign powers had in Hokkaido as a territory, the Tokugawa shogunate decided to take full control over Hokkaido in 1799. It is from this time a major shift in Japanese policies toward Ainu began, including the assimilation of Ainu into Japanese culture.

During the Meiji era, 1868—1912, Godefroy (2012) the assimilation of Ainu began in earnest. In 1869, the Colonization Commission was established and one the commission's first acts was to rename Ainu Mosir, Hokkaido. Additional regulations created by the Colonization Commission included the Land Regulation Ordinance 1872, in which Ainu land was appropriated as terra nullius. The land was given or sold to the Japanese, which resulted in mass immigration effectively leading to the colonization of Hokkaido. By 1877, all forests and wilderness in Hokkaido were state owned. Colonial administration resulted in further regulations targeting Ainu culture and language. As an example, Ainu were prohibited from speaking their language, and were forced to use Japanese names. Cultural practices such as the tattooing of women, and burning of the family home after the death of a family member were banned. Ainu were not permitted to hunt animals or fish for their staple foods, particularly deer and salmon. Many Ainu were forced to either obey the law and starve, or break the law and survive. The majority of these policies, including the ban on the use of the Ainu language, continued until the end of World War Two.

In 1899 the national government passed the 'The Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act' to speed up the assimilation of Ainu into the Japanese culture. One purpose of the act was to encourage the Ainu to cultivate the land. As the government had already confiscated Hokkaido from the Ainu in 1868 and gave or sold most cultivatable land to the Japanese, those Ainu who took up the offer were given small plots of waste land, usually hilly and unsuitable for agriculture. To make matters worse, Ainu who traditionally did not farm, were not trained in farming techniques and many failed at an almost impossible task. Another feature of this act was that Ainu children were only given a four-year compulsory elementary school education which excluded the teaching of geography and science, as opposed to the six-year education Japanese children received. The Ainu children were taught separately from Japanese children and their education was only conducted in the Japanese language.

Despite the discrimination, prejudices, and severe hardships that faced Ainu during most

of the Edo period, Ainu remained mono-linguistic in the Ainu language up to around 1800, and were able to live by and practice their culture. However, the policies introduced during the Meiji period had a rapid effect on Ainu language and culture. Due to economic and political pressures, Ainu made an almost complete shift to the dominant Japanese language by the 1940s.

The 1930's saw a new approach to the assimilation of the Ainu. Kita Masaaki, who oversaw Ainu welfare policies, proposed to the government that they support marriages between Ainu and the Japanese to facilitate assimilation (Lewallen, 2016). According to Lewallen, he argued that the superiority of the Japanese blood would mean children born through inter-marriage would retain the physical appearance of Japanese. In 1937, Hokkaido government officials ended segregated education in the belief that biological assimilation would yield greater results than the agricultural and education reforms under Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act. This was no longer the forced assimilation of Ainu but an attempt to eradicate the Ainu race.

The beginning of the Meiji period also saw an anthropological and medical interest in Ainu from scholars in Japan and abroad. This included the illegal removal of Ainu burial remains and artifacts buried with the deceased. Such artifacts were gender segregated with men being buried with goods such as swords, bows, arrows, and pipes. Women were buried with items such as necklaces, sewing goods, and important every day possessions. These items accompanied the deceased through their afterlife. The first recorded instances of exhuming Ainu remains occurred in 1865, when a small group of foreigners, including the British Consul Captain Vyse based in Hakodate, illegally excavated graves in the village of Mori, Hakodate. Protests at the time by the Ainu demanding that the remains be reburied led to the return of 17 skulls from London (Lewallen, 2009). Captain Vyse lost his position and the other perpetrators were sentenced to hard labour by the British legation in Tokyo (Hudson et.al, 2014). Furthermore, foreign scholars were banned from excavating Ainu burial sites. Interestingly, the first paper written in the field of Ainu Anthropology was George Busk's 1868 paper "Description of an Ainu skull." (Hudson et al. 2014). One could only presume this study came about because three Ainu remains that were to be returned from the 1865 excavation were discovered in the British Museum of Natural History in 1997 (Low, 2012). Low suggests that the remains returned were replaced with non-Ainu remains. This did not stop Japanese anthropologists and decades later Dr. Sakuzaemon Kodama, an anthropologist belonging to Hokkaido University's Medical Faculty, re-excavated the burial site at Mori and removed the same remains. Today they are still housed at Hokkaido university, presumably with the three non-Ainu remains. Between 1934 and 1956 Dr. Kodama and his colleagues ended up removing over 1000 skeletons along with the artifacts buried with them (Lewallen, 2009, Low, 2012). Of the approximate 1600 Ainu remains being held in 11 universities around Japan, Hokkaido University is still in possession of around 1000 remains although the whereabouts of the

artifacts that would have been removed at the same time are unknown. Despite Dr. Kodama's own writings about the range of artifacts excavated with the remains, he denied that any of the 7000 Ainu artifacts in his possession came from Ainu graves (Lewallen, 2009).

### III. Recent Shifts in Governmental Attitude and Policy

Significant shifts in government policies and attitudes towards Ainu, particularly over the last 30 years has also seen a positive shift in the cultural identity and status of Ainu. This section briefly looks at the Sapporo District Court ruling in 1997, the ratification of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, and significantly in 2008 Ainu being officially recognized by Japanese government as an indigenous people. It could be successfully argued that such changes in government thinking were reactionary to the demands applied by Ainu and their support groups along with decades of pressure from the United Nations. As indigenous peoples are playing a greater role in major international events the government does not want its international reputation tarnished with the 2019 Rugby World Cup and 2020 Olympic games approaching quickly. At the same time, changes do seem more apparent with the Japanese government becoming more increasingly involved in efforts to preserve culture and heritage.

The statement by former Prime Minister Nakasone in September 1986 that "Japan is a nation of homogenous people" (Nettle & Romaine; 2002, p.203) is important in understanding the Japanese attitude to 'non-Japanese', either within Japan or abroad. For example, Japan refused to sign the 1965 United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) on the grounds that as there were no minorities in Japan, there was no discrimination. Under mounting international pressure Japan finally signed the convention however, continuing to argue that all of Japans' minorities are of the Japanese race and therefore do not need the protection of the CERD. Nakasone's comment was an attempt to justify his earlier comment "Since there are black people, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans in the United States its level of intelligence is lower on the average." (Chicago Tribune, 1986)

In April 2001, the United Nations CERD committee wrote that they were concerned with "statements of a discriminatory character made by high-level public officials and, in particular, the lack of administrative or legal action taken by the authorities as a consequence". A Sapporo High Court ruling on September 16, 2004 effectively ruled that the CERD was non-binding.

Unfortunately, comments like those of Nakasone are still heard at various government levels. In 2005, then Internal Affairs and Communication Minister, Taro Aso, described Japan as having "one nation, one civilization, one language, one culture, and one race". (Japan Times, 2005).

Okada (2013) provides additional examples. More recently, as reported in the Japan Times (2014), Sapporo City Assemblyman Yasuyuki Kaneko drew public condemnation when on 11 August 2014 he posted on Twitter that “Ainu people no longer exist.” Adding further insult to Kaneko’s comments, on 11 November 2014, Hokkaido prefectural lawmaker Onodera Masaru made the comment that it is “highly questionable” that the Ainu are the indigenous people of Japan (Japan Times, 2014). He also suggested that any government funding allocated to Ainu programs and Ainu welfare must be reconsidered, and possibly come to an end. Interestingly Onodera had instigated a detailed financial audit of the Ainu association of Hokkaido in 2009 looking for avenues to reduce or cancel funding (Lewallen, 2015). In reaction to these online attacks, Lewallen (2015) wrote “anti-racism campaigners and Ainu activists have labeled these media-based and cyber-based attacks as “hate speech,” grouping them with a wave of xenophobic protests and cyber bullying emerging around the mid-2000s”. Public condemnation resulted in both lawmakers losing their seats in government in the April 2015 election.

CERD’s report to Japan dated August 28, 2014 echoed its 2001 report in that it continues to be concerned by reports of discriminatory statements made by public officials and politicians. Accordingly, CERD urged the Japanese government to introduce punitive measures against public officials “who disseminate hate speech and incitement to hatred” (CERD, 2014, p.3) including removing them from office, due to the potential of such rhetoric to escalate into physical and other forms of debilitating violence.

A positive outcome of Nakasone’s 1986 comment was that it galvanized the Ainu and made them more determined to have their voices and protests heard at both a national and international level. The Nibutani Dam injunction in 1993 furthered such determination when two of the landowners, Shigeru Kayano and Tadashi Kaizawa, refused to sell their land to make way for the construction of the dam on the Saru River (Okada, 2012). The Saru River is a sacred place for Ainu and also salmon a staple food for Ainu go there to spawn. The government implemented the Land Expropriation Act, took their lands and construction work began. When Kayano and Kaizawa sued the government the spotlight again was focused on the plight of Ainu again contributing to a greater awareness of their existence. After the dam was completed Ainu were granted access rights to use the dam for traditional events.

It wasn’t until March 27, 1997, that Ainu were recognized officially when the Sapporo District Court ruled that “the Ainu people should be granted recognition as an indigenous people of Japan and therefore entitled to the protection of their distinct culture” (Sonohara, 1997). It was this decision that led to Japan’s first law recognizing the existence of an ethnic minority, in which the purpose of the legislation includes “to realize a society in which the pride of Ainu people as an ethnic group is respected” (Outline of the Act on the Promotion of Ainu Culture, p1.). Known as the “Act on the Encouragement of Ainu Culture and the Diffusion and Enlightenment of Knowledge on Ainu Tradition” the law was passed by the Japanese

Diet Parliament on May 8, 1997. This effectively replaced ‘The Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act’ 1899–1997. While widely viewed as a historic step by the government for Ainu and Japan, Giichi Nomura, a former director of the Ainu Association of Hokkaido, noted that discussion was still required over land ownership, along with educational, political, social, and economic rights as none of these issues were addressed by the act. (Okada, 2013)

On September 13, 2007, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by affecting some 370 million indigenous people in 90 countries around the world. The United Nations Declaration states that by adopting the Declaration, governments have agreed to work with indigenous peoples to determine the “minimum standards required for their survival, dignity and well-being” (p.6). The declaration encompasses both individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples and addresses the most pressing issues including the right to self-determination, civil, political, social, economic, and educational rights, and land and natural resource rights (p.8).

Following on from the declaration the first Indigenous Peoples Summit, representatives of 21 indigenous groups met prior to the G8 summit in Hokkaido, Japan (Okada, 2012). Okada notes that discussion centered around gaps in policy-making concerning education, the environment, and economic well-being. This summit and many other efforts led to the Japanese government’s 2008 recognition of the Ainu as an indigenous people of Japan along with the promise of a law to help Ainu “recover their status, regain their culture, and rebuild relationships between Ainu and non-Ainu people in Japan” (Okada, 2012,p7). At the time of this publication however, the promise law has yet to materialize. The Japan Times in August, 2017 wrote “The central government is likely to stipulate for the first time in law that the Ainu are an “indigenous people” of Japan, according to sources”.

That nine years have passed since both houses of parliament officially recognized Ainu as indigenous, questions the government’s commitment to passing such a law. As suggested earlier, is government policy concerning Ainu simply reactive? The fact that the Japan Times uses the words “*is likely*” and “*according to sources*” questions the government’s ability to honour past promises.

#### **IV. Current Initiatives for Survival and Revival**

Interwoven into any struggle for the survival and revival of the Ainu language and culture are the rightful and desired changes in governmental policy and law, as highlighted above. Although some warming by the government can be seen, the necessary law changes that have been promised do not seem to be forthcoming. However, this has not stopped dedicated groups and individuals from taking matters into their own hands, and thus instigating initiatives to fight for the survival and revival of the Ainu language and culture.

Arguably the least in danger and the most active aspect of Ainu culture would be that of Ainu art. Both traditional and contemporary, Ainu art such as cloth and textiles, carving, painting, storytelling, dance and music seem to be thriving, with over 30 locations throughout Hokkaido alone where Ainu art exhibitions can be seen daily. Furthermore, almost every weekend an Ainu event of some kind, be it an Ainu art exhibition, music, dance, a symposium or lecture or an Ainu cultural festival is taking place. Yuki Koji, a world-famous artist and performer explains that art is a way for people of the world to share something with each other (Kondo, 2017).

With a good number of individual and group singers and musicians playing such traditional instruments as the tonkori (string instrument) or mukhuri (mouth harp), often coupled with dancing, Ainu and non-Ainu alike can choose from a wide variety of Ainu art to experience. Traditional performances or more contemporary performances can be mixed and often there are crowd participation activities such as dancing on stage, workshops for weaving or carving or instrument making or playing. Many artists are active, both locally, nationally and also internationally, only too happy to share their rich Ainu art culture with the world. Uyeda (2015) states that Ainu contemporary arts are “being newly created and currently in a transformative process, initiated by key musicians who are also cultural and political leaders” (Uyeda, 2015, p 10). It is worthy to note that in September, 2017 Ainu musicians performed for the Hokkaido Assembly for the first time.

Wood carvings of the Hokkaido bear, salmon, owls, deer, *kamuy* (Ainu deities) and others have long been master crafted and show-pieced by the Ainu. Traditionally, Ainu artists would portray *kamuy* and creatures in an abstract form, not making the object too life-like or realistic as this would endanger the *kamuy* of becoming trapped inside the object. Abstract forms are thought to please the gods and the more realistic carvings that we see today in souvenir shops of bears catching salmon or holding corn in their mouths have been in response to tourist interest and the high sales of these items (Isabella, 2017). Isabella (2017) suggests that this actually shows the remarkable adaptability by the Ainu to survive in trying economic times, as opposed to any loss of pride by changing their traditional culture.

Another art form which has not only survived but has flourished in the past two decades is that of patternwork, particularly weaving and embroidery on cloth. Patternwork motifs and designs are important for the identity, expression and pride for Ainu women and also carry meaning through stored cultural knowledge such as legends and genealogy in the absence of a written language (Lewallen, 2014). By passing down these techniques and patterns by maternal generations, through lessons and workshops in, and the production of this art, perpetuation has been assured and shows how strong the resistance to colonization and cultural homogenization by Ainu women really is (Cicap, 1986).

In October 2017, the first edition of the Ainu food festival was held in Sapporo. Food is an important part of many cultures around the world and Ainu food culture is no exception. Until this festival, Ainu food, including its history and culture did not get the proper recognition it has deserved as opposed to other cultural forms above. Such food culture involves the types of food eaten, rituals around food, rules and etiquette for gathering, hunting and farming. The nutritional value of food, preserving techniques for winter months and medicinal properties of various foods are also parts of Ainu food culture. With a naturalistic approach to everything pertaining to food, festivals of these kinds can help to show other cultures how biodiversity and protection of the earth and its resources is important not only for indigenous, but also for the future of all.

Tourism has long been a way for Ainu to practice and exhibit culture while also making a living at the same time. However, there has always been a certain love-hate relationship between Ainu, tourism and of course government policy with, “some Ainu preferring anonymity, ordinariness, and invisibility to the outward expression of cultural difference.” (Morris-Suzuki, 2014, p.62) Some forms of Ainu tourism include Ainu museums, cultural performances, displaying and selling of arts and crafts and also Ainu cuisine. With inbound tourism in Hokkaido increasing in recent years, a positive effect on tourist numbers to Ainu tourist locations has also been noticed. To accommodate this recent interest, changes in infrastructure and planning are important.

With the help of government funding, a refurbished Ainu museum, park and memorial in Shiraoi promises to share the beauty of Ainu culture with visitors, both domestic and foreign. There has been opposition to the plan, with one reason being that the control and running of the museum is likely to shift from predominantly Ainu control to governmental offices. However, others are of the opinion that the benefits will outweigh the disadvantages, especially with the envisaged tourism increase to the area before, during and after the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. During this busy period, it is hoped that Ainu will be not only consulted on all proposed ideas and changes, but be an integral part of the decision making and running of the museum.

The hotel industry has also responded to the influx of tourism in Hokkaido with some hotels such as Tsuruga in Akan, having spent considerable time, effort and money on displays of Ainu art and culture including detailed explanations in their hotel. This high-class hotel is using a form of indigenous tourism as promotion and marketing to attract tourists to Akan, thus having a positive financial effect on the area. Guests that stay in the hotel, in turn, visit the Ainu *kotan* (village) and can observe Ainu arts and crafts in the making and view Ainu performances. With some Ainu themselves labelling these everyday, tourist-targeted performances of traditionally yearly rituals as ‘non-authentic,’ one could argue that they are by no way fake, that they have meaning to those performing them and can portray and

impart knowledge to others (Uyeda, 2015). Visitors can then take knowledge and hopefully a fondness for Ainu and Ainu culture back to their homes, whether those homes are in Japan or abroad.

Another way in which Ainu have been pro-active in looking for ways to help keep Ainu culture and language alive is through exchanges with other indigenous cultures. With many Ainu, participation in such exchanges “triggers a heightened sense of self-awareness and consciousness of one’s belonging not only to the Ainu community but to the Indigenous community as well” (Lewallen, 2017, p.5). There have been numerous exchanges to date and as these relationships grow and strengthen with other indigenous cultures, so too does the frequency and depth of such exchanges.

It would be formidable to cover the full breadth of the many exchanges that have occurred to Japan with other indigenous peoples and by Ainu travelling abroad in this paper. Therefore, one exceptional example will be highlighted. This is the relationship between the Ainu and the Maori people of New Zealand. In the late 1990’s *Nga Hau E Wha* (the four winds), a Maori culture group made up of Maori living in Japan, was formed and has continued to support indigenous peoples of Japan, including Ainu, through performance at indigenous events and also liaising between Ainu and Maori in New Zealand.



*Figure 1: Nga Hau E Wha—Maori Culture Group members with Ainu performers and guests – 2017 Ainu Thanksgiving Event in Yokohama (Photo by Yasuhiro Iguchi)*

When Maori Party member of parliament Te Ururoa Flavell participated in the 2008 Indigenous Peoples Summit in Hokkaido a relationship an even deeper relationship between Maori and Ainu was struck. Since that time, yearly exchanges of both Maori teachers travelling to Japan to conduct workshops on language learning and delegations of Ainu have

also travelled to New Zealand to study successful strategies by Maori to revive language and culture. Minister Flavell, as a Maori party representative, attended the 2012 launch of the Ainu party where he publicly announced to Ainu that he hoped, “the establishment of the Ainu party will contribute along with other initiatives to ensure your culture, your livelihood, your values and traditions are preserved, promoted and protected.” (Flavell, 2012).

In 2013, the *Aotearoa* (New Zealand) *Ainu Mosir* Exchange Program was formally established and through crowd funding was able to send a delegation of 13 Ainu to New Zealand where they spent a full month observing and learning Maori initiatives in areas of language and cultural revival, politics and also business endeavors. In 2014 and 2015 experienced teachers of the Maori language came to Japan to impart knowledge and show successful methods of teaching language to students who had no former knowledge of the language. 2016 saw another delegation of Ainu land on New Zealand shores again to take part in a 2-day language revitalization conference. Minister Flavell also came to Japan with top leaders in Maori business and politics to speak about future aspirations. In 2017 two Ainu high school students were placed in a rural kura kaupapa (Maori language immersion school) for four months. It is exchanges such as these, that through the desire, mutual support and respect by both cultures, separate from any form of governmental support, have become rays of hope for Ainu.

One area that Ainu have fought long and hard and have had some recent success with is the repatriation of ancestral remains and artifacts from certain academic institutions. As mentioned earlier there are more than 1,600 remains of Ainu kept at universities nationwide, predominantly Hokkaido University (Mainichi Shinbun, 2016) and more, known and unknown throughout the world. From institution and governmental perspectives, the issue is complex, but from an Ainu perspective it is not. If the remains and also the artifacts buried with the remains were taken unrightfully and unlawfully, they should be returned so that they can be respectfully given a proper burial along with the rituals pertaining to Ainu custom, tradition and religion.

With repatriation talks being painstakingly slow, it took litigation by Ainu families against Hokkaido university for progress to be made. As many of the remains could not be identified, the government suggested the remains be returned to a memorial space to be built in the town of Shiraoi. However, many Ainu believe that the remains should be buried in the villages where they belong. In 2016, 12 ancestral remains were successfully returned by Hokkaido university and in July 2017, repatriation of an Ainu skull from Berlin which had been stolen by a German tourist in 1879 was also returned. After discovering ancestral remains of two Ainu in its own museums, the Australian government has also started repatriation negotiations. With the return of four more remains from Hokkaido university in October 2017, it can be seen that the process is finally gaining momentum and it is hoped that it will continue to do so.

Being an oral culture, the Ainu language is vitally important for passing on customs, laws and knowledge via legends, stories, music and conversation. With the policies and history mentioned earlier it is plain to see why survival of the Ainu language is on shaky ground. Only a handful of people are able to converse in Ainu and there is no person alive who has learned Ainu as a first language (Refsing, 2014). Therefore, the Ainu language is classified as critically endangered by UNESCO.

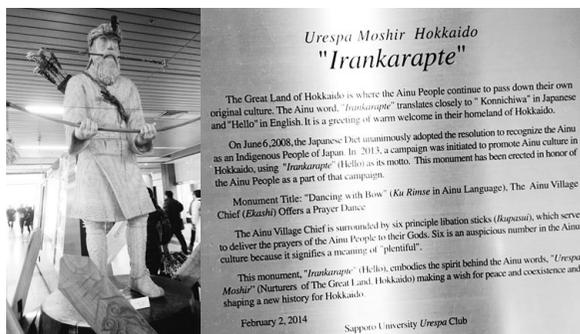
However, in the past and present there are dedicated people who have and are continuing to revitalize the language. As previously mentioned, other indigenous groups offer exchanges and methods of successful language teaching to be studied, learned and implemented if deemed suitable by Ainu. Local communities have also set up regular language classes and language camps (Cox, 2016). The yearly Ainu speech contest, started in 1998 has sections for both children and adults, mainly reciting memorized yukar (epic poems), and has gained a following by Ainu and non-Ainu alike.

As Ainu had no written language, English or Japanese characters have been used to make Ainu textbooks, research reports and also a private pen club which publishes a quarterly Ainu newspaper. Picture books and comic books have become more frequent with the recently popular Golden Kamuy by Satoru Noda winning national awards. Although written in Japanese, with eleven books published to date in the ongoing series, some Ainu words are included giving the language exposure to, not only Japanese readers, but also world readers as the first three books have already been translated and published in English. In addition, an Ainu radio station has been set up and YouTube videos of Ainu language samples, documentaries about the language and also stories told in Ainu with Japanese subtitles are increasing, serving as another avenue to promote interest and learning of the language.

In 2013, the '*Irakrapte*' (let me touch your heart softly = hello) campaign was launched by the Council for Ainu Policy Promotion to help increase visibility and recognition of Ainu (Ann-Elise Lewallen, 2017). *Irakrapte* is now a word that is commonly seen on t-shirts and souvenirs bought in Hokkaido. Photos of a wooden statue known by some as the 'Irakrapte statue,' which was erected at the ticket gates of Sapporo station by *Urespa*, the Sapporo university Ainu club, are prevalent on travel blogs. The plaque on this statue also introduces the words *urespa* (nurture) and *mosir* (land) which teaches the Ainu ideology of looking after nature and the land. Through campaigns like the '*Irakrapte* campaign' the Ainu language can be promoted to become more publicly noticeable and help Ainu, those living in Hokkaido and also Japanese people be proud of Ainu language and culture. With knowledge comes understanding and with understanding comes acceptance.



Figure 2: Irankarapte Photoboard  
(Photo by author)



Figures 3 and 4: Urespa Moshir Statue and Plaque  
(Photo by Author)

## V. Conclusion

It is plain to see that Ainu have been dealt a horrendous deal, both historically and within past and present governmental policy, due to the colonization of Hokkaido. It is astonishing that Ainu, along with cultural beliefs, practices and a struggling, yet surviving language, even exist today. Many other groups may have perished under such adversity. Credit can be given to an almost inhuman-like perseverance that may be backed by Ainu *kamuy* themselves. Although more effort and support is needed to invoke both governmental policy and also social change, it is good to know that the Ainu struggle for language and culture revival has made steady progress in recent years. To all those that fight for the Ainu rights, survival and revival there is one word we can say ‘*iyayraykere*’ – thank you!

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