

Introduction

The geographic center for the Ainu people, an ethnic group, has for the last four hundred years been the Japanese island of Hokkaido and farther north. Their ancestors, in the ancient time period of Jōmon (15,000 B.C. to 300 B.C.), were the original inhabitants of the Japanese main islands. The arrival of migrants from the Asian continent during the Yayoi period (300 B.C. to 250 A.D.) pushed them to the north. There were still many Ainu on the northeastern third of the main island of Honshu for the next millennium but by the early modern era, they mainly lived on the northern island—slightly smaller than the state of Maine—which was then called Ezo by the Japanese. Ezo in Chinese characters can also be read as Emishi, a name not only for an area but also for a group of people. Emishi meant to Japanese people “the barbarians,” which is how they thought of the Ainu ancestors who had earlier lived in a larger portion of Japan. The Ainu people themselves called their northern island Ainu Mosir, which means “the peaceful land for people.” Then, when the other three main Japanese islands were unified under a Shogunal government in 1600, the samurai leaders of the Matsumae domain monopolized trade with the Ainu, which they exploitatively conducted. Many Ainu men were forced to labor under brutal conditions and many women became sex slaves to the Japanese. When a merchant working for the domain was suspected of murdering an Ainu chief in 1789, the Ainu carried out an uprising against the domain that came to be called the Menashi-Kunashir Rebellion. The rebellion was swiftly put down and the Ainu leaders were executed.

Ezo, on the outskirts of Japan, was the first place to be annexed and made into Japanese territory after the Meiji restoration of 1868. Because of this, the Ainu are often regarded as the first victims of Japanese colonialism. As such, their plight was similar to that of Native Americans in North America and other indigenous peoples all over the world. Indeed, the new government of Meiji (1868-1912; named to emphasize the Meiji emperor's reign) further entrenched their subjugation.

The Meiji restoration of 1868 was a seminal event in modern Japanese history in that it marked the moment when the Shogunate and samurai rule collapsed, and the modern, centralized Japanese state with the emperor as a sovereign monarch began. When the Japanese annexed Ezo, they also renamed it Hokkaido. While “Ezo” signified a barbarian land, “Hokkaido” in Japanese means “the north sea road” or “the path to the northern seas.” The Japanese saw control of the island not only as an end in itself but also as their gateway to the seas and lands farther north. The emergence of modern Japan also heralded the beginning of the Japanese empire: Japanese colonial rule over other Asians and their lands. The late 19th century was an era of imperial rivalries, and Japan competed with the Russian empire for hegemony over the area to their north. Farther south, the Japanese competed with the Americans, British, French, Dutch, and Germans, among others. China, which had dominated East and Southeast Asia in earlier periods, was eclipsed and divided at this time by the European imperial nations. The Europeans colonized small portions of China, such as Hong Kong, and crippled the government's control over the rest of the country. Many Japanese were resolute that they would not go China's way. This was the concern that drove the new Japanese government to lay claim to, and territorialize, its peripheries to the north and south. The Meiji government simultaneously started encouraging Japanese migration to Hokkaido and sought to assimilate the indigenous Ainu as citizens of the Japanese empire. Moreover they did the same thing on

the southern border. After turning Ezo into Hokkaido, the Japanese annexed Okinawa in 1879. The samurai of the Satsuma domain had already controlled Okinawa from 1609 to 1871, much like the Matsumae domain's running of Ezo during the same era. Fifteen years later the Japanese took possession of Taiwan, in 1895, following their victory in the first Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895. The Japanese and the Russians next clashed militarily in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905; the Japanese victory resulted in southern Sakhalin, where some Ainu lived, becoming a Japanese territory. This area was then called Karafuto until 1945. The Japanese, after their win, also claimed control of the Korean peninsula as well as building railways in southern Manchuria, in northeastern China. They went on to annex Korea as a formal colony in 1910 and set up a puppet state in Manchuria in 1932. Meanwhile, back in Hokkaido, the Former Aborigines Protection Law of 1899 further accelerated the changes that the Japanese had been imposing on the Ainu. The Japanese made hunting and fishing—the earlier livelihood of the Ainu—illegal in many places and instead sent the Ainu to designated lands, often in areas previously unknown to them, again like quarantining Native Americans in reservations. Understandably, the Ainu often failed to adapt to the transitions that were forced on them. The law also suppressed practices that were indigenous to the Ainu such as their language and customs. Their children were forced to attend schools where only the Japanese language was allowed. Iomante, the sending off the bear ceremony that stood as the pinnacle among Ainu religious rituals and customs, was deemed barbarous and banned. The ban was finally lifted many years later, in 2007. In short, the 1899 law induced the splintering and the disintegration of Ainu communities and caused great hardship.

Komori Yoichi, in this course reader, argues that the Meiji policy toward the Ainu was replicated later in other parts of the Japanese empire toward other non-Japanese such as the Koreans and Chinese. (In Japanese names, family names come first. Following this custom, Komori is the family name.) In other words, Japanese actions toward the Ainu was the model on which the modern Japanese empire was built. Moreover, Japanese anthropologists, archaeologists, linguists, and other scholars at the time were complicit in the developing colonialism. Later scholars in Japan and elsewhere have criticized this complicity. The American anthropologist Ann Elise LeWallen wrote in 2007 that the Japanese anthropologists who victimized the Ainu in the past still haunted and hindered her fieldwork during the 2000s. Some Ainu people declined to associate with her, because they were at the time still traumatized by the exploitative Japanese academics of the bygone era.

Such modern history of the Ainu places them squarely as “indigenous populations” who were defined by the United Nations in 1983: “Indigenous populations are composed of the existing descendants of the peoples who inhabited the present territory of a country wholly or partially at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts of the world, overcame them, by conquest, settlement or other means, reduced them to a non-dominant or colonial condition.” It is as such group of people that Ainu holds significance in Japan today; not for the size of the group.

During the era of the Japanese empire before World War II (WWII), a number of Ainu began to write and talk about their lives and worldviews. They also wrote down their oral folktales in Japanese, the language of the colonizers. A translation from Ainu into Japanese by Chiri Yukie (1903-1922) of *The Collection of Ainu Legends* (Ainu shin'yōshū) remains quite exemplary as one such text. Prior to 1945, complying with the dictates of the state,

the Ainu often stressed their desire to become children of the emperor and loyal citizens of the Japanese empire. With the concept of “indigeneity” still undeveloped then, coming to identify totally with the Japanese ethnicity and nation was reckoned to be the only course of action that might overcome discriminations.

Japanese colonization had a catastrophic effect on Ainu communities in part because the Japanese colonial era was the time when the Japanese government was most committed to assimilating the non-Japanese into the Japanese state. The Ainu, Okinawans, Chinese, Koreans, and some Pacific Islanders came to be designated as the “children” of the Japanese emperor and constituents of his empire in the first decades of the 20th century, like mainstream Japanese. A large number of Japanese migrated to the recently acquired Japanese territories. In turn, Koreans, Chinese, and other non-Japanese migrated to the Japanese mainland in order to make a living, and it became necessary to accommodate those people too. With this, a kind of proto-multiculturalism emerged and evolved as a discourse and a policy objective. The Japanese also developed and disseminated Pan-Asianism, an ideology that promotes the unity of all Asian peoples, as a rationale for the Japanese to rule and expand their empire. The emergence of some Ainu texts such as Chiri’s *The Collection of Ainu Legends* became part of this process.

With the Japanese WWII defeat in 1945, however, the Japanese empire disintegrated: the territories claimed by Japan over the previous century other than Hokkaido were no longer Japanese-owned. China reclaimed Taiwan and Manchuria, although the Republic of Taiwan is an independent country today. The Soviet Union, today’s Russia, invaded southern Sakhalin during the final week of WWII and reclaimed that area. The Korean peninsula was initially jointly controlled by the United States and the Soviet Union; afterward the Cold War splintered it into the two Koreas. Okinawa was placed under American rule until 1972, when it again became a Japanese prefecture, like Hokkaido. The collapse of the empire resulted in legal exclusion (depriving Koreans uniformly of their Japanese citizenship in 1947, for example), and a general attitude of condescension on the part of the public toward former fellow subjects of the Japanese empire, who continued living as minorities in Japan. Unlike most of Japan’s former colonial subjects, the Ainu in Hokkaido and elsewhere in Japan entered the postwar era with a formal status equal to all Japanese, but they still faced severe discrimination.

Ainu activism that sought to promote Ainu rights and identity grew rapidly after 1945, even though the Ainu were still under the yoke of the Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Law. Ainu activists such as Kayano Shigeru (1926-2006) initiated a number of protests, legal suits, and efforts to protect and revive Ainu cultural heritage. Consequently, the 1899 law was finally abolished in 1997, 98 years after it was promulgated. In place of the 1899 law, the Ainu Cultural Promotion Law was proclaimed in the same year. The main goal of that law is to realize a society in which the ethnic pride of the Ainu people is respected, and to contribute to the development of diverse cultures in Japan. The law also states that it will subsidize those who conduct the promotion of Ainu culture.

Despite or perhaps because of such steady accomplishments by the Ainu, in the last decade a reactionary anti-Ainu movement has developed in Japan. In 2014, Kaneko Yasuyuki, a Liberal Democratic Party (LDP; Japan’s ruling political party during most of the post-1945 years) member of the Sapporo municipal assembly in Hokkaido, tweeted that “Ainu no longer exist in Japan.” His assertion was that so-called “Ainu” groups claimed Ainu identity solely in order to sponge off of the taxpayers. In November of the same year,

Onodera Masaru, an LDP member of the Hokkaido prefectural assembly, followed suit by commenting at the assembly that he does not believe the Ainu to be an indigenous ethnic people in Hokkaido. Kaneko and Onodera are not alone in criticizing the Ainu. Nationalist journals and websites support such views. These attacks were part of a larger trend of growing historical revisionism and right-wing speech in Japan during the 2010s—to a degree unprecedented since 1945. These discourses frequently characterize Japan as a homogeneous nation, and are antagonistic toward the non-Japanese, especially migrants in Japan, and all groups that claim a distinctive identity that differs from mainstream Japanese. Even earlier, a manga artist, Kobayashi Yoshinori (1953-), had proclaimed in 2008 that he did not think of the Ainu as an independent ethnicity and also went on to describe them as a vanishing race. He argued that the Ainu's assimilation with the Japanese majority is now almost complete. Kobayashi's manga is discussed in "Everything You Know about Ainu Is Wrong: Kobayashi Yoshinori's Excursion into Ainu Historiography," included in this course reader. Kobayashi criticizes the UN definition of "indigeneity" which is that "any individual who identified himself or herself as indigenous and was accepted by the group or the community as one of its members was to be regarded as an indigenous person" in that it leads to an entirely subjective kind of self-identification. This is a curious understanding in that his thoughts incline strongly towards the strengthening and sharing of Japanese identity and he allows people of non-Japanese descent to identify as Japanese, so self-identification is not a problem for him in that case. He and many others, moreover, are similarly dismissive of Zainichi Korean (long-term residents in Japan), and buraku (Japanese outcasts) activists. In all three cases, they argued that these groups claimed special rights based on their identities because they desired to extort political concessions and money from national and regional governments.

In response, increasing numbers of other people in Japan, not just from Ainu, Zainichi Korean, and buraku communities, reject this hateful claim. It is urgent that scholars and educators who teach on Japan and East Asia study the arguments by the Japanese nationalists and the counterarguments because they are at the center of Japanese political and social life today. This multidisciplinary course reader was assembled with this aim in mind. The articles in *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* vary in themes and scope, but they tell the history of the Ainu both during the colonial era and in postwar Japan. They allow teachers, students, and the general public outside the country to learn about the Ainu and how they are represented and understood in modern Japan.

This course reader contains three sections. The first section, "The Ainu People: A Minority in Japan," provides a general overview of the lives of Ainu today. The first article compares Ainu people with other minorities in Japan. The second is on a 2005 United Nations report on racist attacks on minorities in Japan. The second section, "The Ainu People: From the 19th century to 1945," looks at the experience of the Ainu from the early 19th century to the end of WWII, focusing on the ways that their experience was a colonial one, as well as how the Ainu came to represent themselves to the Japanese at the time. The first two articles discuss Japanese actions that came to have a substantial effect on Ainu: the Japanese mapping of the northern islands before 1868 and the redesigning of cities and agriculture in Hokkaido after 1868. The third discusses how enacting the Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Law of 1899 increased the number of Japanese migrants to Hokkaido and forced the Ainu into becoming citizens of the Japanese empire. This meant enormous

pressure on them to give up nearly everything that was culturally distinctive about Ainu. Nonetheless, some traditions survived. The fourth and fifth articles are Ainu oral stories that have been passed on for centuries. While the Ainu did not have a written language, they had a rich oral tradition through which these stories were told and shared. The sixth article situates some of those translations as “colonial translation” and argues that they served two conflicting purposes: self-assertion on the part of the Ainu and also efforts by the Japanese to assimilate the Ainu into the fabric of the Japanese empire.

The third section, “The Ainu People: From 1945 to the 21st Century,” consists of seven articles. The first criticizes the general neglect of Ainu culture and art in Japan in comparison to the situation of Native American peoples and cultures in North America. The article also envisions how the condition of the Ainu can be transformed in the present century. Ainu political activism had been critical of the Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Law since 1899 but political protest dramatically heightened in the late 20th century, leading to the 1997 law that respected Ainu identity and distinctive Ainu cultural forms, the Ainu Cultural Promotion Law. The Japanese government in 2008, moreover, finally recognized the indigeneity of the Ainu by enacting the Resolution of the Ainu as an Indigenous People. The remaining six articles in this section discuss both the positive aspects of those laws and their shortcomings and reveal a variety of attitudes—and political rivalries—about how to think about Ainu identity today.