

# Is “Ainu History” “Japanese History”?

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# Is “Ainu History” “Japanese History”?

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Anyone who writes on the history of the Ainu necessarily grapples with big questions about the nature of membership in the Japanese national community. Indeed, for many authors these days, the whole point of writing Ainu history is to critique the modern Japanese nation-state and its foundational myths, particularly the idea of ethnic and cultural homogeneity. For such writers, the answer to the question posed in this essay’s title is an emphatic “yes”: “Ainu history” certainly is “Japanese history,” perhaps even more so than it is a discrete field of inquiry. Not all scholars share this view, but even those who strive to write Ainu-centered histories struggle to overcome the nation-state’s centrality in discourses about the Japanese archipelago.

My goal in this essay is to place the study of Ainu history into its own historical context. The Ainu people and their culture have been the object of scholarly interest in both Japan and the West for over two centuries, but the idea that the Ainu have a history worth studying is relatively new. When, in 1878, the British travelogue writer Isabella Bird dismissed the Ainu as a people who “have no history,” she was merely

stating the obvious to her Victorian readers.<sup>1</sup> Even without being so openly dismissive, narratives of Japanese history have until very recently generally ignored the Ainu or treated them as a minor historical curiosity—a footnote or passing reference at best, and too often a carelessly or condescendingly conceived one at that. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising to learn that serious scholarship on the history of the Ainu first appeared only around the middle of the twentieth century, and that the literature remained sparse until the last quarter of the century. Even today, when interest in Ainu culture is strong in Japan and elsewhere, no more than a handful of professional historians work principally on Ainu history.

In the pages that follow I will survey the literature on Ainu history, focusing on Japanese-language scholarship published since the 1940s. Space does not permit a comprehensive review of every major work.<sup>2</sup> Instead, I will focus on introducing a handful of works that illustrate important themes in the development of Ainu historiography. In particular, I will dwell on the work of three scholars: Takakura Shin'ichirō, who founded and for decades embodied the field of Ainu history; and Iwasaki Naoko and Ogawa Masahito, who work on the Tokugawa and modern periods, respectively, and are the leading practitioners of what I shall call the New Ainu History.

## I. The Ainu in “Northern History” (*Hoppōshi*)

The idea that the Ainu are the subjects rather than merely the objects of

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<sup>1</sup>For example, John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation*, rev. ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989, pp.326–327, devote just one paragraph in their massive survey of East Asian history to the Ainu, whom they characterize as “apparently the remnants of a proto-Caucasoid people.”

<sup>2</sup>For a thorough, if highly critical, survey of histories dealing with the Tokugawa period, including works published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Iwasaki Naoko, *Nihon kinsei no Ainu shakai*, Tokyo: Azekura Shobō, 1998, pp.7–49.

history gained credence in Japan in the late 1970s and by now has become a matter of common sense among scholars. Nevertheless, the field is beset by methodological challenges. Overall, recent scholarship on Ainu history has contributed importantly to the revisionist literature on Japanese identity, but by the same token it has been limited by its tendency to reduce the Ainu's story to a critique of the hegemonic discourse of Japaneseness. Recognizing this limitation, specialists now are taking another look at the relationship between "Ainu history" and "Japanese history" in an effort to craft a narrative that endows the Ainu people with agency and subjectivity while also acknowledging the enormous influence of the Japanese state over the Ainu and their homeland during the past four centuries.

Whether or how the Ainu fit into narratives of Japanese history is a vexing question. Its vexations derive from the nation-state's hegemonic power over the historical imagination. It is tempting, for example, to argue that insofar as the Ainu today are Japanese citizens, their history is necessarily part of Japanese history: Japan has always been a multiethnic nation. Such an argument empowers the Ainu as Japanese on the same terms as other Japanese subjects—but only at the cost of subsuming their history into that of the Japanese nation-state. Privileging the state, however inadvertently, as the proper subject of history leads to teleology: Ainu history was always progressing toward its necessary ending place as part of Japanese national history. As a result, narratives of Ainu history tend toward extremes, portraying a timeless and often idyllic "before" Japanese conquest and a nearly invisible "after" modernity in which the Ainu are reduced to bit players in a fundamentally Japanese story of development. Conversely, marking the Ainu as largely outside of Japanese history can contribute to a monolithic view of Japanese ethnic and cultural identity. Historians thus find themselves torn between the twin desire to give the Ainu agency as the subjects of their own history and to insert the Ainu's experience into mainstream narratives of Japanese history.

Most of the scholars I discuss here write as specialists in Northern history (*hoppōshi*)—that is, the history of Hokkaido and surrounding regions, including northernmost Honshu, Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands and, occasionally, areas even further afield, such as the Amur River basin and southern Kamchatka. The geographical area encompassed by the field of Northern history roughly coincides with the area of Ainu habitation and trade activity in the Tokugawa period (1603-1868). Although they see themselves as historians of Japan, scholars of Northern history challenge the conventions of Japanese historiography by refusing to take for granted the nation's boundaries and by inverting the usual categories of center and periphery in their work. Their use of a regional perspective to contribute to debates about national history distinguishes them from practitioners of “local history” (*chihōshi*), whose gaze rarely strays from their particular object of interest, wherever that might be. Instead, they serve as the regional representatives of a style of historical scholarship associated with the medievalist Amino Yoshihiko and others who have issued calls to look at the Japanese archipelago and its peoples in their East Asian context.<sup>3</sup>

All post-World War II scholarship on Ainu history is deeply indebted to the work of Takakura Shin'ichirō. Perhaps it is his fate as the founding father of his field to be revered and reviled in equal measure by his intellectual progeny. Or not equal measure: nowadays he is too often simply dismissed as an exemplar of the bad old way of doing Ainu history. A telling sign of the sorry state of his reputation is that publication of his collected works stalled after the release of five out of twelve planned volumes for want of editorial energy and popular

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<sup>3</sup> See for example, the series *Ajia no naka no Nihonshi*, ed. Arano Yasunori, Ishii Masatoshi, and Murai Shōsuke, vol.6, Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1992-1993. A number of works in English have taken up this theme. For example, see David Denoon, et al., eds., *Multicultural Japan: Palaeolithic to Postmodern*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, and Bruce Batten, *To the Ends of Japan: Premodern Frontiers, Boundaries, and Interactions*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003.

enthusiasm.<sup>4</sup> This is unfortunate. However much Takakura's work reflects the prejudices of its times, it both breaks decisively with previous scholarship and anticipates the major themes of future work on Ainu history.

Takakura personified the academic establishment in Hokkaido. A native of the eastern Hokkaido city of Obihiro, he was a fixture at Hokkaido University in Sapporo for forty-six years, from his entry into the agricultural economics department as a freshman in 1920 until his mandatory retirement in 1966. He remained prominent in Hokkaido academic and policy circles until his death in 1990. He was an active writer and editor of government-sponsored scholarship, including two versions of the official history of Hokkaido, the first completed in 1937 and the second in 1981.<sup>5</sup>

Takakura's most important book is entitled *A History of Ainu Policy* (*Ainu seisakushi*).<sup>6</sup> Published at the height of the Pacific War in 1942, *A*

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<sup>4</sup> Takakura Shin'ichirō Chosakushū Henshū Iinkai, ed., *Takakura Shin'ichirō chosakushū* (Sapporo: Hokkaidō Shuppan Kikaku Sentaa, 1995-. Volumes one through four and nine, of a projected twelve, were published between 1995 and 2000. Although the publisher has not publicly abandoned the project, colleagues in Sapporo tell me that a lack of public demand and the deaths of key boosters make it unlikely that the remaining seven volumes—including a reprint of Takakura's monumental *Ainu seisakushi* (discussed below)—will ever be published.

<sup>5</sup> Hokkaidō chō, ed., *Shinsen Hokkaidōshi*, vol.7, Sapporo: Hokkaidō chō, 1936-1937, and Hokkaidō, ed., *Shin Hokkaidōshi*, vol.9, Sapporo: Hokkaidō, 1969-1981. Takakura was the lead author of the former and general editor of the latter.

<sup>6</sup> Takakura Shin'ichirō, *Ainu seisakushi*, Tokyo: Nihon Hyōronsha, 1942. A revised edition was issued in 1943, and a partial English translation was published as Takakura Shinichirō, *The Ainu of Northern Japan: A Study in Conquest and Acculturation*, trans. and annot. John A. Harrison, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* New Series, vol.50, part 4, Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1960. The translation is of the entire pre-Meiji section of the original. Harrison, who was the author of the first monograph in English on Hokkaido history (*Japan's Northern Frontier: A Preliminary Study in Colonization and Expansion, with Special Reference to the Relations of Japan and Russia*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1953), did not translate the Meiji sections of the book because "the history of the conquest comes to an end, Modern Japan is at hand, and the remainder of the story is the sad and familiar one of well-meant but weak and unenforceable protection laws for the natives, native reservations, and the decline of a handful of thoroughly acculturated tourist attractions," p.5.

*History of Ainu Policy* is a comprehensive history of Japanese-Ainu relations from the early Tokugawa period to the promulgation in 1899 of the Hokkaido Former Aborigine Protection Act (*Hokkaidō kyūdojin hogohō*). Takakura frames the book as a practical contribution to the science of colonialism, on the premise that policies concerning native peoples are at the heart of any colonial enterprise. Interestingly, however, Takakura excludes the Ainu from the modern history of Japanese colonialism, which he dates from the acquisition of Taiwan in 1895. Instead, he places them at the center of the long history of Japanese expansion within the archipelago, a story that begins with the proto-historical campaigns against the Kumaso and Hayato in Kyushu and the Emishi in northeastern Honshu, and ends in Hokkaido, where, in his telling, the Ainu survive as the last remnant offshoot of the Emishi. In Takakura's presentation, then, *A History of Ainu Policy* relates only the last three centuries of a fifteen-hundred-year-long story of internal colonization.<sup>7</sup>

Takakura's vision of the book as a study in applied colonial science fits the wartime circumstances of its publication. It also accounts for many of its flaws, including its lack of attention to the internal history of the Ainu: after all, colonial administrators had no stake in endowing native peoples with the agency to narrate their own histories. Insofar as Takakura sees the Ainu solely as the objects of Japanese state policy, it follows that he understands their prospects for survival as a people to be a function of government efforts to protect them. He decries the Matsumae domain's failure to shield the Ainu from the brutal exploitation of fishing contractors and other Japanese merchants and laborers, and lauds the Meiji state for liberating the Ainu from the worst depredations of the feudal era. At the same time, however, he reminds the reader that modernity brought subtle and highly complex new forms of

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<sup>7</sup>Takakura, *Ainu seisakushi*, pp.1~3.

exploitation, which in his view could be overcome only through assimilation. Doomed to lose out in the new economic order, Takakura sees government protection in the form of education as the Ainu's best hope for integration into the Japanese population. In seeing the extinction of the Ainu as a distinct population to be the inevitable outcome of Japanese expansion into Hokkaido, Takakura fits very much into the mainstream of prewar opinion on the Ainu (and, for that matter, indigenous peoples in general).<sup>8</sup> His task, as he sees it, is to help policy makers find the smoothest and most humane route to assimilation.

Today no reputable scholar would describe the Ainu as a doomed race whose only hope for happiness lies in assimilation into the Japanese population. For many contemporary readers, Takakura's work is hopelessly tainted by the discredited attitude at its heart. The shortcomings of the framework overshadow Takakura's unparalleled knowledge of sources and his sympathy for his Ainu subjects. Yet on close examination one sees that Takakura anticipates many of the key concerns of later Ainu historiography. For example, he argues against seeing the Ainu as a homogeneous people. He even cautions against facetiously assuming that the Ezo—the name given by the Japanese to the people they encountered in Hokkaido—were all necessarily Ainu: at the very least, until fairly recent historical times there were people living in northeastern Hokkaido who were apparently distinct from the Ainu.<sup>9</sup> (He seems to be referring to the bearers of the Tobinitai culture, whose material remains suggest affinities with both Ainu and Neolithic Okhotsk cultures.<sup>10</sup>)

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<sup>8</sup> Takakura, *Ainu seisakushi*, p.629. On the discourse of the Ainu's imminent demise, see Kinase Takashi, "Ainu 'suibō' ron no shosō to kindai Nihon," *Kindai Nihon no tashazō to jigazō*, ed. Shinohara Tōru, Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 2001, pp.54–84; Richard Siddle, *Race, Resistance, and the Ainu of Japan*, London: Routledge, 1996; David L. Howell, "Making 'Useful Citizens' of Ainu Subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan," *Journal of Asian Studies* 63:1, February 2004, pp.5–24.

<sup>9</sup> Takakura, *Ainu seisakushi*, pp.16–17.

Most important, for all his talk of the Ainu's imminent extinction, Takakura refuses to slot the Ainu into a ready-made social Darwinist framework. He notes that according to the criteria laid out in Lewis Henry Morgan's then-influential *Ancient Society* (1877), the Ainu belong on a very low rung on the ladder of human development—the Lower Status of Barbarism, perhaps, or even a step down, on the Upper Status of Savagery.<sup>11</sup> Yet using Morgan's taxonomy to dismiss the Ainu as primitive on the basis of their relatively simple technology and hunting-and-fishing economy misrepresents the realities of their situation. Their constant exposure to other peoples—Manchus and Siberian peoples to the northwest, Itelmens to the northeast, and above all, Japanese to the south—meant that trade was central to their economy and influences came from many quarters.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Takakura argues, the Ainu were not particularly “primitive” when they succumbed to Japanese dominance in the seventeenth century. Their social and economic lives entailed far more than simple hunting and fishing. They had acquired rudimentary agriculture and animal husbandry; thanks to the development of trade, individual households had supplanted communal groups as the primary units of production; and regionally powerful chieftains had consolidated power over old affine groups.<sup>13</sup>

Takakura's work looks particularly nuanced in comparison to the first full-length history of the Ainu to appear after World War II, Okuyama Tōru's depressing *Decline of the Ainu (Ainu suibōshi)*, published in 1966.<sup>14</sup> The author, a Sapporo high school teacher, intends

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<sup>10</sup> Utagawa Hiroshi, *Ainu bunka seiritsushi*, Sapporo: Hokkaidō Shuppan Kikaku Sentaa, 1988, pp.302–306.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient society; or, Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, through Barbarism to Civilization*, New York H. Holt and Company, 1877, See the discussion in Takakura, *Ainu seisakushi*, p.18.

<sup>12</sup> Takakura, *Ainu seisakushi*, p.24.

<sup>13</sup> Takakura, *Ainu seisakushi*, p.42.

his study as a biting indictment of Japanese capitalism, particularly Tokugawa merchant capitalism as it functioned in Hokkaido's contract fisheries. Okuyama clearly differentiates between the Ainu and "we Japanese" (*wareware Nihonjin*), yet he insists that the Ainu have no meaningful history beyond their relationship with Japan. To be sure, each *kotan* and region has its own past, albeit forever obscured for want of written records and reliable oral traditions. But even if it were possible to recover those lost histories, there would be no point in doing so. Change in Ainu society has always been driven by contact with the politically, economically, and culturally superior Japanese: Ainu history is the history of Japanese contact—and contact ineluctably hastened their decline as a people.<sup>15</sup> Okuyama goes so far as to argue that, for all practical purposes, Ainu history ends with the Tokugawa era, for the story after 1868 can be reduced to three keywords: immiseration, assimilation, and discrimination.<sup>16</sup>

Okuyama's grim and dogmatic Marxism reflected (even as it caricatured) mainstream Japanese historiography in the 1960s. This approach conceded that the exploitation of the Ainu was surely connected to their ethnicity, yet it held that, ultimately, all forms of exploitation are reducible to class conflict. The status of Ainu workers at Japanese-run fisheries as nascent proletarians seemed far more significant historically than their membership in a distinct ethnic group.<sup>17</sup>

Things began to change in the 1970s and 1980s: Marxist theories

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<sup>14</sup> Okuyama Tōru, *Ainu suibōshi*, Sapporo: Miyama Shobō, 1979, 1966. Okuyama's *Shinkō Hokkaidō shi* (1950) was the first survey of Hokkaido history written from a Marxist perspective. It discusses the Ainu only in passing but in the same tone as his later work. See the discussion in Iwasaki, *Nihon kinsei no Ainu shakai*, pp.32–33.

<sup>15</sup> Okuyama, *Ainu suibōshi*, p.230.

<sup>16</sup> Okuyama, *Ainu suibōshi*, pp.233–236; quote from p.234.

<sup>17</sup> Similar trends can be seen in the literatures on other minority groups in Japan. See Jeffrey P. Bayliss, "Discrimination, Identity Politics, and Inter-Minority Relations in Japan: Koreans and Burakumin," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2003.

continued to dominate Japanese historical writing, but scholarship on the Ainu grew increasingly detailed and sophisticated. Notably, Kaiho Mineo, Emori Susumu, and Kikuchi Isao began to publish careful studies of the Ainu in the medieval and early modern periods.<sup>18</sup> As various critics have noted, all three scholars focus their attention largely on political and economic ties between Japanese and Ainu in Hokkaido. Yet even in their early work one can see them grappling with the Ainu's historical subjectivity; their most trenchant critic, Sasaki Toshikazu, is too severe in dismissing these efforts as amounting to little more than pious denunciations of discrimination against the Ainu.

One of the signal accomplishments of scholars like Kaiho, Emori, and Kikuchi was to overcome the longstanding tendency to reduce Hokkaido history to the story of territorial rivalry between Japan and Russia. Kikuchi traces this impulse all the way back to 1839, when the daimyo of the Mito domain, Tokugawa Nariaki, petitioned the shogunate to protect Japan's "northern barrier" (*hokumon no sayaku*) against Russian incursions. As a result, throughout much of the modern period the trope of Japan's "northward advance" (*hokushin*) has dominated the literature on Hokkaido history.<sup>20</sup> Such scholarship tends to focus on policies and discourses emanating from Edo/Tokyo. In contrast, Kaiho and company ground their analyses on events in Hokkaido. Their themes

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<sup>18</sup> Representative works from the 1970s through the early 1990s include the following. Kaiho Mineo, *Nihon hoppōshi no ronri*, Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1974; Kaiho Mineo, *Bakuhansei kokka to Hokkaidō*, Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō, 1978; Kaiho Mineo, *Kinsei no Hokkaidō*, Tokyo: Kyōikusha, 1979; Kaiho Mineo, *Kinsei Ezochi seiritsushi no kenkyū*, Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō, 1983; Kaiho Mineo, *Chūsei no Ezochi*, Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1987; Emori Susumu, *Hokkaidō kinseishi no kenkyū: Bakuhan taisei to Ezochi*, Sapporo: Hokkaidō Shuppan Kikaku Sentaa, 1982; Emori Susumu, *Ainu no rekishi*, Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1987; Kikuchi Isao, *Bakuhan taisei to Ezochi*, Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1984; Kikuchi Isao, *Hoppōshi no naka no kinsei Nihon*, Tokyo: Azekura Shobō, 1991.

<sup>19</sup> Sasaki Toshikazu, "Ainu shi wa seiritsu suru ka," *Kita kara no Nihon shi*, ed. Hokkaidō-Tōhoku Shi Kenkyūkai, Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1988, p.310.

<sup>20</sup> Kikuchi Isao, *Ainu minzoku to Nihonjin: Higashi Ajia no naka no Ezochi*, Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1994, pp.271~281.

overlap quite a bit, but in general Kaiho has focused on the medieval and early Tokugawa periods; Emori on the Matsumae domain's economic policies; and Kikuchi on the late Tokugawa period, with an emphasis on relations between the Ainu and Japanese officials and traders. All three address the shogunate's policies toward Hokkaido and its relations with Russia, often at great length, but do so from the perspective of Hokkaido.

Less familiar to students of Hokkaido history than Kaiho, Emori, and Kikuchi is Namikawa Kenji, whose work has focused mostly on the history of the Tsugaru domain in northernmost Honshu, including a 1992 book about the tiny Ainu community in Tsugaru.<sup>21</sup> Namikawa's work compels scholars of Ainu history to look beyond the territorial confines of Hokkaido. The book is a model of meticulous scholarship that brings a poorly understood facet of Ainu history to light for the first time. From the standpoint of Ainu history, it is particularly noteworthy for connecting discussions of Ainu ethnicity to the political economy of the Tsugaru domain and, by extension, to the Tokugawa status system in general.

## II. The New Ainu History

Perhaps the most influential statement of the difficulty of reconciling "Ainu history" and "Japanese history" is a short piece published by the anthropologist Sasaki Toshikazu in 1988. Sasaki makes it clear that he doubts that even the best-intentioned attempts to incorporate the Ainu into narratives of Japanese history can ever do more than give them a bit role as an "alien people on the periphery" of Japan: after all, even in the modern period, when they indisputably became subjects of the Japanese state, the Ainu have hardly figured into Japanese history as seen from the center. In Sasaki's view, only by shifting the focus of history from Japan

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<sup>21</sup> Namikawa Kenji, *Kinsei Nihon to hoppō shakai*, Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1992.

to the *Ainu moshir*—the Ainu homeland of Hokkaido and its environs—can the Ainu move to center stage and the Japanese take their place as alien intruders.<sup>22</sup>

At the heart of Sasaki's critique lies his profound discomfort with the vocabulary of historical discourse, which imposes teleology of development that relegates the Ainu to a permanently primitive state, unable to attain modernity or develop lasting political institutions. Perhaps most vexing, in Sasaki's view, is the term *minzoku*, or "ethnic group," and what it suggests about the relationship between ethnicity and the state. Scholars commonly refer to the Ainu *minzoku*, but they cannot agree on an ethnonym for majority Japanese. That is, they agree that the majorities Japanese are a *minzoku*, yet they cannot decide what to call it. The term "Japanese" (*Nihonjin*) is unacceptable because it collapses the distinction between state and people in a way that excludes minorities from the national community. Although Sasaki overstates the singularity of this dilemma—after all, Europe is full of countries in which the state and the dominant ethnic group share a name—it is true that the myth of ethnic and cultural homogeneity has been particularly fetishized in Japan. Other ethnyonyms have been proposed over the years, but they are flawed in various ways. "Yamato," once a common choice, is now tainted by its association with prewar nationalism. "Wajin" is the default option of most contemporary scholars, even though it is not familiar to non-specialists. It has the advantage of having been in widespread use in Hokkaido from the end of the eighteenth century to at least the middle of the nineteenth century.

Sasaki, however, prefers "Shamo," the word most commonly used by the Ainu themselves (historically and today) to refer to majority Japanese. "Shamo," a corruption of the Ainu *shisam*, or "neighbor," has a long history of usage, having first appeared in a 1467 text. The earliest

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<sup>22</sup> Sasaki, "Ainu shi wa seiritsu suru ka," p.309.

known written use of “Wajin,” by contrast, dates only to 1799. But its long pedigree is not the only reason Sasaki prefers “Shamo” to the alternatives. The term is vaguely derogatory, and in that sense is analogous to *haole*, used in Hawai’i to refer dismissively to Caucasians. Although it is tempting to see Sasaki’s use of “Shamo” as a demonstrative stunt, intended to express guilt about the historical mistreatment of the Ainu, he insists that he wants to make the point that if the Ainu really were the subjects of their own history, the ethnonym issue would sort itself out. Ogawa Masato, the leading scholar of modern Ainu history, uses “Shamo” as well, for essentially the same reasons that Sasaki does.<sup>23</sup>

Sasaki calls for an Ainu-centered history but does not propose a concrete methodology. Ogawa takes up the call. His aim is to describe change in modern Ainu culture and society without reducing every aspect of Ainu life to the narrative of assimilation and resistance that heretofore has dominated scholarship. His most self-conscious attempt at a new methodology is a survey of the modern history of the emblematic ritual practice of the Ainu people, the *iyomante*, or bear-spirit-sending ceremony.<sup>24</sup> Although in the Tokugawa period it was not unusual for Japanese officials and fishery bosses to participate in the ritual as honored guests, in modern times non-Ainu have generally attended the *iyomante* as passive spectators. By the beginning of the twentieth

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<sup>23</sup> Ogawa Masato, *Kindai Ainu kyōiku seidoshi kenkyū*, Sapporo: Hokkaidō Daigaku Toshō Shuppankai, 1997, pp.4~5, n.1.

<sup>24</sup> Ogawa Masato, “*Iomante no kindaishi*,” *Ainu bunka no genzai*, ed. Sapporo Gakuin Daigaku Jinbungakubu, Ebetsu: Sapporo Gakuin Daigaku Seikatsu Kyōdō Kumiai, 1997, pp.241~304. Interestingly, scholars including Sasaki Toshikazu argue that the *iyomante* in its familiar historical form was itself a product of Ainu interaction with Japanese officials and merchants in the late eighteenth century. Its development can be seen as evidence of the vitality of Ainu culture in the face of outside pressure. See David L. Howell, *Geographies of Identity in Nineteenth-Century Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, p.118, which draws on Sasaki Toshikazu, “*Iomante-kō: Shamo ni yoru Ainu bunka rikai no kōsatsu*,” *Rekishigaku kenkyū* 613, Nov. 1990, pp.111~120, and Utagawa Hiroshi, *Iomante no kōkogaku*, Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1989.

century, officials were increasingly joined by throngs of tourists, whose disregard for proper etiquette disrupted the ritual. Ainu responded by staging highly attenuated faux-*iyomante* shows purely for the amusement of tourists.

Against this background, the Japanese government sporadically attempted to restrict or even ban the *iyomante*, particularly during the transwar decades in the middle of the twentieth century, generally on the grounds of protecting public morals or preventing the objectification of Ainu culture. Since the 1950s, most calls to ban the ritual have been made in the name of animal welfare, for the centerpiece of the *iyomante* is the ceremonial killing of a bear cub. All the talk of a ban notwithstanding, during the prewar period *iyomante* were frequently staged for the benefit of visiting military and civilian officials, members of the imperial household, and academics. This suggests to Ogawa that control and supervision, rather than outright prohibition, was the actual goal of government policy toward the *iyomante*.

From the Ainu's viewpoint, the *iyomante* looks quite different. Beginning in the 1920s, a number of prominent Ainu publicly embraced the idea that the ritual was barbaric or at least obsolete. Some—particularly advocates of assimilation—saw the ritual as a symbol of a discredited past, while others felt it would be better to abandon the *iyomante* entirely rather than to comply with demands to perform it for every official who happened to pass by. Even Ainu who were ready to ban the *iyomante* tried to impress on outsiders the deep religious significance of the climatic killing of the bear cub, which observers tended to dwell on as the symbol of the ritual's barbaric character.

From the 1930s onward, *iyomante* were often described as being in the “old” or “classic” style, with the strong suggestion that each such performance was likely to be the last truly authentic one. Ogawa sees these comments as a tacit recognition that the *iyomante* was no longer connected to the realities of everyday life for most Ainu. He also notes subtle changes in the performance of the ritual. For example, he

examines one prewar *iyomante* in which the elders all wore Ainu clothing, but the young men attended in their best Western-style suits. Ogawa sees this as a logical transition, given that both styles of clothing count as haregi, or formal attire for auspicious occasions. Finally, Ogawa estimates that until the 1960s all sorts of animal-spirit-sending rituals were held fairly commonly, including both formal *iyomante* and ad hoc rituals to send the spirits of bears and other animals killed during hunts. Since the 1970s, with the spread of the worldwide indigenous rights movement to Hokkaido there has been a revival of the *iyomante*, now performed as an expression of cultural pride and ethnic solidarity; which has largely silenced the discourse of the *iyomante* as a dying practice. However, this does not alter the fact that the ritual is now utterly divorced from the everyday lives of Ainu.

Ogawa aims to expose the fabric of culture in practice without making judgments about authenticity. As the everyday lives of Ainu people changed over the course of the twentieth century, the *iyomante* inevitably came to serve new purposes for its participants. Similarly, the fact of constant outside pressure—from pushy officials, academics, and missionaries; and from tourists, who brought their gaping curiosity and their money to Ainu communities—affected the function of the *iyomante* over time. All of these factors reveal the inseparability of modern Ainu and Japanese histories; yet, a nuanced approach like Ogawa’s also demonstrates that Ainu history does not fit neatly into the Japanese trajectory of modernization.

In contrast to Ogawa’s relatively subtle revision of modern Ainu history, the Tokugawa historian Iwasaki Naoko boldly challenges what is perhaps the defining trope of all Ainu history, the exploitation of the Ainu at the hands of the Matsumae domain and its merchant proxies.<sup>25</sup> This trope, accepted unquestioningly as historical fact, has informed every

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<sup>25</sup> Iwasaki, *Nihon kinsei no Ainu shakai*, pp.43~45.

academic work on Hokkaido history published since the beginning of the twentieth century. Iwasaki is no apologist for the domain or the privileged fishing contractors who employed Ainu labor. Rather, her point is that reducing Ainu identity to the fact of their suffering at Japanese hands inevitably leads to an essentialized and homogenized view of the Ainu. She argues instead that only by looking beyond exploitation can we gain insight into the internal history of Ainu society.

Iwasaki traces the origins of the pervasive image of exploitation to the aftermath of the Kunashiri-Menashi uprising of 1789, which was the only significant instance of armed conflict between the Ainu and the Japanese after the suppression of Shakushain's War in 1669.<sup>26</sup> The uprising is generally attributed to the brutal mistreatment of Ainu workers at a Japanese-run fishery. Yet even a cursory examination of the conflict reveals elements that do not fit neatly into a simple narrative of oppression and subjugation, most notably the domain's reliance on a group of powerful Ainu leaders for assistance in suppressing the uprising.

The Matsumae domain exercised power in northeastern Hokkaido by superimposing itself atop already extant Ainu political structures. A number of regional leaders controlled labor and access to trade, fishing and hunting. Their territories expanded and contracted through the workings of fluid alliances and occasional conflict. The domain behaved much like a regional leader itself, particularly in its use of Ainu cultural practices like the payment of indemnities to resolve conflict. For the most part, it remained aloof from the everyday lives of Ainu communities in the northeast.

Indirect control served the domain well, but the system unraveled when a labor dispute at a fishery run by an influential Japanese merchant, Hidaya Kyūbei, occurred at a time of increasing anxiety over Russian

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<sup>26</sup> Iwasaki summarizes her argument in *Nihon kinsei no Ainu shakai*, pp.233~237.

activity in the area. Ainu who had worked at Hidayā's fishery when it opened in 1788 refused to come back for another season because they felt their wages were too low. They could afford the luxury of refusing to work because, in contrast to many Ainu workers elsewhere, they had plenty of ways to support themselves without recourse to wage labor. During the course of the dispute, Japanese workers at the fishery threatened to poison the Ainu. When a powerful Ainu leader died after drinking Japanese sake, his kinfolk immediately concluded that he had been murdered and planned retaliation. Altogether 130 Ainu from eighteen communities participated in attacks on Hidayā's Japanese employees. Many of them, Iwasaki argues, already felt aggrieved toward the domain because their demands for various indemnities had been rejected or ignored in the past.

The Matsumae domain responded swiftly and uncharacteristically harshly to the conflict, sending troops who eventually beheaded thirty-seven Ainu. No doubt fear of Russia exacerbated the tension; indeed, initial reports of the conflict suggested that Russians had been involved in fomenting it. In any event, the domain owed its successful suppression of the conflict to the assistance of Ainu leaders in Akkeshi, Nemuro, and Kunashiri. Iwasaki argues that regional leaders often intervened into disputes to serve as mediators, and they may have felt that was what they were doing in this instance as well.

In the aftermath of the incident, the domain stripped Hidayā of all his fisheries in northeastern Hokkaido. Nevertheless, policymakers in Edo concluded that Matsumae's mistreatment of the Ainu was at the heart of the conflict. The shogunate assumed direct control over most of Hokkaido in 1799 and proceeded to dismantle the domain's structure of relations with the Ainu. It posted officials around the island, which had the dual effect of limiting the power of Ainu leaders and exposing Ainu communities directly to the power of the Japanese state. Those officials further displaced traditional leaders by recruiting sympathetic Ainu to serve as intermediaries between themselves and local communities.

Iwasaki is not alone in her challenge to the trope of exploitation. Tajima Toshiya has uncovered evidence that Ainu workers at fisheries in western Hokkaido enjoyed significantly more responsibility and agency than was previously thought.<sup>27</sup> Neither would deny that Ainu workers at contract fisheries were exploited and often mistreated. Rather, the point of the revisionist stance is to argue that scholars' preoccupation with denouncing abuse blinds them to the structures that bound Ainu communities internally and governed their relations with one another and with the Matsumae domain and its agents. It traps, them, moreover, into reducing Ainu history into a story neatly bifurcated between an idyllic, antediluvian age of Ainu living at one with nature in small *kotan* and the aftermath of the apocalyptic collapse engendered by Japanese conquest. At the very least, she is correct to be suspicious of a trope that has appealed to such a diverse cast of critics, including the Tokugawa shogunate; apologists for Japanese colonial policies in Hokkaido; and contemporary advocates of indigenous rights.

Iwasaki's work is hardly immune to criticism. At the very least, she underestimates the distinctiveness of northeastern Hokkaido and the southern Kurils, which came under Matsumae's authority later and less completely than other parts of Hokkaido. But it does represent a significant methodological step forward in making the Ainu the subjects of their own history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The debates that her work will undoubtedly spark will also push the field forward in exciting ways.

### III. Conclusion

Is "Ainu history" "Japanese history," after all? The allure of braving a

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<sup>27</sup> Tajima Yoshiya, "Basho ukeoisei kōki no Ainu no gyogyō to sono tokushitsu: Nishi Ezochi Yoichi basho no baai," *Zenkindai no Nihon to higashi Ajia*, ed. Tanaka Takeo, Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1995, pp.271–295.

“no” is very strong, for it would serve as a bold statement that the Ainu have the agency to narrate their own history on their own terms. Yet however much one talks of agency, the reality is that Ainu history must be practiced through the medium of Japanese, which constrains the questions one can ask and often skews the answers one reaches. For now, Ainu history cannot be anything other than a small subfield within the broader terrain of Japanese national history.

Three barriers stand in the way of Ainu history coming into its own. The first is a problem of acceptance. Sasaki relates the story of an undergraduate at a major national university in the late 1980s whose advisers in the history department laughingly dismissed his desire to write a senior thesis on the Ainu, saying that one cannot write the history of a people who have none.<sup>28</sup> It is hard to imagine that scene being replayed today, but it demonstrates how very young the field is. Ironically, it will be hard for Ainu history to establish itself as a field until historians of Japan come to incorporate the Ainu routinely into their narratives, for that is the only way to overcome the current near invisibility of the Ainu in scholarly discourse.

The second barrier is the vexing problem of sources. Before the end of the nineteenth century the only writings that claimed to represent Ainu voices were filtered through multiple layers of translation, from Ainu into spoken Japanese, then into *sōrōbun* or some other form of literary

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<sup>28</sup> Iwasaki, *Nihon kinsei no Ainu shakai*, pp.42–45, acknowledges this criticism but insists that conditions in the northeast were not fundamentally different from those elsewhere. Some of the differences among works in English can also be attributed to their geographical focus. Brett L. Walker, *The Conquest of Ainu Lands: Ecology and Culture in Japanese Expansion, 1590-1800*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, focuses largely on conditions in eastern and northeastern Hokkaido. In contrast, David L. Howell, *Capitalism from Within: Economy, Society, and the State in a Japanese Fishery*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, and “Ainu Ethnicity and the Boundaries of the Early Modern Japanese State,” *Past and Present* 142, Feb. 1994, pp.69–93, deals almost exclusively with southern and western Hokkaido. Wage labor is central to Howell’s portrayal of Ainu society in the Tokugawa period, while Walker’s focuses much more on trade.

language. Even such flawed sources are surprisingly sparse. Under the circumstances, historians have done well, and as they begin to incorporate more non-textual sources, including archaeological evidence, there is every reason to think the field will make further progress. Nonetheless, given the constraints, it is difficult to imagine work as rich and nuanced as, say, Richard White's work on American Indian history, appearing in the Ainu field any time soon.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, the third barrier may be the most difficult because it speaks to the way minority issues are discussed in Japan. At present, scholars who do not position themselves as impassioned defenders of the Ainu risk being tarred as crass assimilationists. This is a common enough phenomenon in young fields such as Ainu history, and it has parallels in the politics of indigenous studies elsewhere in the world. It helps to account for the tendency of many studies of the Ainu to include denunciations of discrimination past and present as a framing device. The special difficulty in Japan is the general reticence in the media (including academic media) concerning problems of discrimination. Rather than risk censure for statements that are taken as discriminatory, the media find it easier to ignore minorities altogether. The pervasive self-censorship that characterizes coverage of minority issues is particularly striking with regard to the Buraku community, whose existence is barely acknowledged in most public discourse, but it extends to other groups, including resident Koreans and the Ainu.<sup>30</sup> Until scholars feel free to confront painful topics without fear of incurring the wrath of groups that claim to speak for the entire minority community, academic discourse is likely to remain stalled.

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<sup>29</sup> Sasaki, "Ainu shi wa seiritsu suru ka," p.307.

<sup>30</sup> See Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983, and *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.