THE WORLD OF THE AYNUS

An Ethnological Record

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1. Introduction

In the desolate moss-covered wastes of the tundra, sprawling south of the Arctic Ocean, and the great evergreen forests of the taiga south of that live the foraging and hunting peoples of the circum-Arctic region: the indigenous Chukchi and Koryaks, as well as others who, like the Yakuts, were driven there by mass population movements in the central part of the Eurasian continent. Springing from diverse historical origins, these people are naturally of differing stocks and speak different languages, but they share numerous common cultural elements. For instance, they all forage for vegetables, keep bees, hunt, fish, raise reindeer, horses, and dogs, and wear clothes made of animal skins; and though they carry out some primitive agriculture, it is insufficient to alter either the nature of their occupations or their food and industrial economy. Their dwellings are either semi-pit dwellings, with grass-thatched roofs, or tents. Religion centers on shamanism, accompanied by an animal cult; and means of transportation are the sled, snowshoes, skis, wooden canoes, or skin-covered kayaks. Interestingly, their sole social and political organization, a unit consisting of a few families possessed of a specified land preserve, in which members of other groups are forbidden to hunt or carry out any other occupation, never forms combinations or federations.

The culture of the Aynus*, inhabiting mainly Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and the Kurile Islands, until one hundred years ago, shared deep bonds with those of the circum-Arctic foraging and hunting peoples; and it is easy to imagine how similar it must have been to the way of life of the ancestors of the Japanese, before the advent of rice cultivation. An ancient, sturdy, and beautiful product of human creativity, the foraging and hunting culture has, however, been largely destroyed by agriculture and animal husbandry and, in later years, by modern society.

The beginning of the downfall of this civilization in eastern Eurasia began nearly 400 years ago. In 1581, when the Russians broke through the Urals to crush the Küčüm Empire, they began the march across the taiga and the steppes to the south that, 150 years later, led them to the Kamachatka Peninsula and, in 1741, to Alaska. The course they followed, the so-called Taiga Route—the same one that lead paleolithic man to the American Continent—was doubtless easier for the sixteenth-century

**The text uses the spelling "Aynu" instead of the usual "Ainu" on the advice of Dr. Mashio-chiri, an Aynu philologist.*

Russians than a long and perilous sea voyage. The people living along this Taiga Route, however, lacking suitable social or political organization to resist, gradually succumbed to the invading Russians, who found it profitable to barter cheap trinkets for valuable furs. Thus began the Russification of the taiga civilization; the process continues at an accelerated pace under the Soviet Union's plan to develop Eastern Siberia.

The Sinicization of northeastern Manchuria gained impetus at the beginning of the Ch'ing dynasty, founded by Tungus Manchus. Distrustful of the native Chinese, the Manchu rulers surrounded themselves with armed banner garrisons of troops from their own land, who, living in China, naturally fell under the influence of Chinese ways. The undercurrent on which the Sinicization of the Manchus was based was the relationship between the man of commerce and the forager and hunter. The merchants, among them Chinese, Sinicized Manchus, and Daghur Mongols, by supplying the Manchus with furs, grains, metal utensils, and articles of daily use, introduced not only the Chinese language, but Chinese culture as well. Later, when the Chinese began the agricultural development of Manchuria, the traditional nomadic culture broke down even faster.

In contrast to the collapse of the cultures of the Eurasian continent, explained simply in terms of either Russian or Chinese influence, that of the Aynu is more complicated. By trading with the Kiryaks who lived at the mouth of the Amur River, the Aynus came into contact with the civilization of Manchu China, and, a little later, with that of Russia. Both archaeology and the pictures in this book offer proof of these cultural influences: particularly, garments of embroidered Chinese silks and cloaks of velvet, probably imported from Russia.

Nevertheless, the longest and most powerful influence on the Aynus undoubtedly came from the Japanese themselves. Contacts between the two peoples have existed since ancient times; the forebears of the Aynus and the Aynus themselves, when they lived on Honshu, the main island of the Japanese archipelago, mixed with the Japanese. Although some Japanese are thought to have gone to live on Hokkaido during the Kamakura period (1185–1333) because, few in number, they were forced to live in restricted areas, they never altered the basic cultural patterns of the Aynu people.

With the social upheaval accompanying the Meiji Restoration (1868), however, Japanese people in reduced economic straits found participat-

ing in the development of Hokkaido a good way out of their troubles and began to flood the shores of the northern island.

The Aynu population of Hokkaido, at that time, was approximately 15,000 people, just the right number to maintain the population-land balance necessary to their way of life. But moving in with their agricultural implements, the Japanese, by clearing forest and burning underbrush to make rice fields and by setting up permanent fish nets in the waters around the island, destroyed the basis of Aynu society and reduced the proud hunter to a day-worker traveling from construction site to construction site, while the woman of the family stayed at home to raise the children and guard the village (*kotan*). Under such circumstances, the traditional culture was doomed.

In 1960, a census showed 17,000 Aynus living on Hokkaido, and the people of mixed descent who do not recognize their Aynu blood would raise the total; but traditional Aynu culture, for the last 100 years, has been dying.

2. Research in Aynu Culture

The key to an understanding of traditional Aynu culture as a whole is a reconstruction of that society as it existed at the end of the Tokugawa period, before the onslaught of Japanese colonists. Despite certain outside influences, the traditional society had remained so fundamentally unchanged till that time, that a comprehension of it makes possible projections back into time in the form of speculations about still older stages of the culture. Unfortunately, however, few people of that time considered the Aynus important enough to warrant detailed delineations of their way of life.

The first three men to devote attention to serious Aynu studies were foreigners: John Bachelor (1845–1944), a Christian missionary who concentrated on the Aynu language and compiled an Aynu dictionary; B.H. Camberlain, (1850–1935), a teacher at Tokyo University who traced connections between the Aynu and the Japanese and reported them in *Language, Mythology and Geographical Nomenclature of Japan Viewed in Light of AynuStudies:* and the Scottish doctor G.N. Munro, who lived among the Aynu and left much valuable information about them.

Later, Japanese scholars undertook studies of the Aynu language, material culture, crafts, and many other aspects of their way of life. Among the most eminents are Kyosuke Kindaichi, Mashiho Chiri, Itsuhiko Kubo-

dera, Shiro Hattori, all linguists; Tunekichi Kono, Hiromichi Kono, Takemitsu Natori, historians and archaeologists; Shinichiro Takakura, historian of Japanese policy toward the Aynus; Tetsuo Inukai ethnozoologian; and Sakuzaemon Kodama, physical authropologist. Iwao Yoshida and Sueo Sugiyama have also made useful contributions to understanding of the Aynu culture. But scholarship, never at rest, always turns its eyes to the parts of a subject that remain unexplained. For instance, scholars still want to know more about the organizations of the *kotan* and of the hunting parties that unified the civilization and about the spirits of the ancestors and the relationships among Aynu divinities. They would also like comperhensive expositions of material culture based on studies of the regional characteristics revealed by dialects. But since, the traditional Aynu world is nearly lost, the impossibility of adding to the present store of knowledge about it forces scholarship to rely on ethnology, the science that reconstructs history by means of comprehensive evaluations of the evidence of archaeology, excavated artifacts, and old documents. The method has till now been seldom applied to the Aynu problem. (*The Secret History of the Aynu* by Kiyohiko Sakurai, is an exception.)

In reconstructing late-Edo-period Aynu culture, many difficulties arise because of the indefinite datings of what few references remain. For instance, record exists of a celebration of the "Bear Festival" at the Nibutani *kotan* in the early part of the Showa period (1926–present), but there is no reason to suppose that a twentieth-century version of this ancient festival would duplicate a celebration held in the late Edo period. After all, the composition of the ceremony, the utensils used, and the very attitudes of the Aynus themselves have undergone many changes. Ethnology must decide the value of this Showa evidence and determine its usefulness. If a description of a Bear Festival of the Edo or Meiji period were available, evaluation of the Nibutani celebration would not only be possible, but should a comparison between the modern festival and the older version reveal no major differences, photographs, detailed descriptions, and recordings of the later celebration would be invaluable ethonological material.

3. An Evaluation of The Paintings of Aynus

Though they have their own literature songs, dances, sculpture, and textiles, the Aynus have developed no art of painting; consequently, any

painted representations of them are either the work of Japanese or of foreigners. We can divide the group of existing paintings into two subgroups. The first contains those painted by Japanese during their early visits to Hokkaido in the Kamakura period. Very few in number, this group includes an interesting picture story of the famous prince Japanese Shotoku Taishi. In the series, painted in 1323 and now the property of the Jogu-ji temple in Ibaragi Prefecture, a version of the subjugation of the Aynus clearly reveals the stereotyped conception the people of Kamakura-period Kyoto had of the northern tribes. Done in the style of the Tosa school of painting, the picture shows Aynu with bulging eyes and hairy bodies clothed in the *attushi*, a coat made from the fibers of tree bark, and other garments made of feathers. The men carry the typical Aynu quiver and short bow. Another picture of Aynus of nearly the same age and of similar style is kept in the treasury of the Eifuku-ji, the temple in which Shotoku Taishi is buried. *Aynu Pictograph* by Sōchi Koshizaki includes a *History of the Aynu Revolt*.

A set of twelve scrolls with pictures and commentary entitled *Pictures and Commentaries in the Suwa Daimyo Shrine* (*Suwa Daimyosha Eshi*) (1356–60) deals with the Aynu; but unfortunately all of the pictures have been lost, and only the text remains. The comments mention the Aynus' use of flesh and fish as food and their ignorance of cereal cultivation. According to the text, though these people, with whom the Japanese apparently found it difficult to converse because of linguistic differences, are supposed to have resembled the Japanese somewhat, the scroll points out their thick beards and body hair. It goes on to say that in times of war, the men arm themselves and depart for battle, while the women remain at home to carve wooden talismans to be offered to the gods for the safety of the warriors. Although neither men nor women rode horses, they themselves are said to have been as fleet as running beast and flying bird. The poison they used to annoint the fish-bone tips of their spears was deadly enough to kill on contact.

The second major grouping of Aynu pictures begins with the *Record of Ezo* (*Ezoshi*: Ezo—old word for Northern Japan) by Arai Hakuseki (1720) and continues till the early Meiji period. Professor Takakura Shinichiro has categorized and described these genre pictures in his section of the present book.

As ethnological material, the more modern pictures are of such great value that they require careful examination, although, till the present,

documentary research on them has lagged. To further complicate matters, though copies of some of the works are available in Japan, many others are scattered all over the world or lost.

One of the most interesting of these sets is the *Wonders of Ezo Island* (*Ezoto Kikan*) begun in 1789 by Murakami Shimanojo, supplemented by him, and still further amplified by various artists at different times. More than 100 copies of this set exist, most of them made by several artists, who have added their own individual touches to such an extent that it is often difficult to separate the genuine from the spurious.

A later work, *Depictations of the Way of Life on Ezo* (*Ezo Seikei Zusetsu*), also by Murakami, is a truly outstanding piece of ethnological information. The copy held by the Department of Anthropology Library at Tokyo University has long been considered the original, but the discovery of a badly damaged book with identical contents in the library of the Council of Ministers convinced certain scholars that accuracy demands the use of both books together.

Problems are numerous in dealing with these pictures, and one of the most troublesome is determining how faithful the pictures themselves are to fact. For instance, Kakisaki Hakyo's *Series of Portraits of Ezo Chieftans* (*Ishu Retzuzo*) (1790) depicts the chiefs and their mothers clothed in Chinese silks and Russian velvets and surrounded by the magnificence and dignity of their positions (Figs. 1–4).

In contrast, Kodama Sadayoshi, who actually worked thirty years before Hakyo, painted the Aynu chieftans in their own native costume instead of the gaudy foreign fabrics. Some scholars feel that Kodama's version is the closer to fact, whereas Hakyo garbed his subjects in the discarded finery of a Japanese family for the sake of effect. Whichever is the case, it is interesting to notice the pride and dignity of the chiefs as represented by both artists. These men show us Aynus as they were before the incursion into their land of the Japanese.

Many painters like Murakami and his student Rinzo Mamiya, increased the ethnological value of their work by their conscious desire to preserve in pictorial form a culture that, even at the close of the Tokugawa period, was falling victim to political advances from the Japanese.

4. Other Painters of Aynu Pictures

Though they did not clearly state their intention of leaving a record of the dying Aynu culture—as Murakami Shimanojo did in the opening section of *Ezoto Kikan*—several other artists did, in fact, perform that service.

One of the earliest of these, Tani Gantan, the younger brother of the famous painter Tani Buncho, compiled an illustrated travel diary during his journey to Hokkaido in the company of an official physician of the Tokugawa Government (1799). Many copies of the book survive, but the original is lost. Possessing universal interests, Gantan painted invaluable pictures of aspects of Aynu life ignored by everyone before him; for example, an Aynu lying down singing a *Yukar* (Fig. 95), a man pole vaulting (Fig. 131) and another starting a fire (Fig. 81).

Because of a deep knowledge gained from living with the Aynus, Hirasawa Byozan left an even more detailed account of them as they were in the mid-nineteenth century in his screen entitled *Twelve Months of Ezo Customs* (*Ezo Fuzoku Juni-ka-getsu*) (Figs. 7, 8, 25, 41, 43, 137, 153) and in his picture of *Vaccinations of the Aynus* (*Ezojin Shuto no Zu*) (Fig. 109). Smallpox was rampant enough among the Aynus at this time to warrant the first mandatory vaccination in Japan.

The tradition of Aynu genre painting continued into the Meiji period with Nishikawa Hokuyo's *Meiji Aynu Genre Pictures* (*Meiji Aynu Fuzoku Zukan*) amplified with simple explanatory notes. Although the pictures lack the vigor of those by Byozan, their ethnological value is nonetheless great. The original of the work is in the possession of the Hakodate Library, but a printed version with nearly identical contents and entitled *Aynu Genre Picture Book* (*Ainu Fuzoku Ekan*) is published in the city of Asahikawa. Discrepancies in the two suggest that a second original must have been the source of the Asahikawa book.

5. Conclusion

The pictures in this book were selected for their ethnological importance rather than for their artistic merit. Furthermore, the order of their appearance has nothing to do with their dates or painters, but depends solely on their relationships with the following divisions of the content: daily life, society and politics, and religion, art, and amusements. Although pictures alone must perforce remain silent on such important aspects of culture as speech and social structures, these concrete representations of Aynu customs shed light on important facts that have lain obscure till now.

Illustrations for the text are by Prof. Shinichiro Takakura, specialists Hondo Kono and Kazuyoshi Otsuka contributed articles on Aynu cultuer, and Asei Matsuzawa, Hondo Kono, Joji Nihei, and Seiichi Izumi did the photography.

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