

# Managing the cultural promotion of indigenous people in a community-based Museum: the Ainu Culture Cluster Project at the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum, Japan

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## Abstract

In the District of Nibutani, Town of Biratori, Hokkaido, Japan, the inheritance of Ainu culture has been in a critical condition recently, despite the long-term struggle of a famous Ainu, Kayano Shigeru. From 2002 to 2005, the town developed the Ainu Culture Cluster Project under the auspices of the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum. The Project's goals were hiring local unemployed people to acquire traditional skills and encouraging local residents to inherit Ainu culture. This project is interesting because it demonstrates not only the ways and processes to develop, represent, promote, and inherit Ainu culture, but also the relation between the museum and the community and local residents. This paper discusses both the positive and negative aspects of the Ainu Culture Cluster Project, and explores the roles of a community-based museum for indigenous cultural promotion in contemporary society.

**Key words:** cultural promotion, indigenous people, community-based museum, Ainu, Japan

## Introduction

There has been radical and paradigmatic change at the museum over the past two decades. One aspect of this is that museums have been trying to attract and build 'deeper relationships with more diverse audiences' (Spitz and Thom 2003: 3). Many museums have organized innovative programs to create 'new ways for audiences to participate in museum learning' (*ibid*). These programs have attracted people who have previously not visited museums, such as ethnic minorities, low-income families, or women, and taught how to use museums as a cultural source. Museums have also constructed a closer relationship with their surrounding communities. Examples of museums which have organized such programs are diverse, and range from universal survey museums and city museums to indigenous-run cultural centres. The results of these projects are now widely published (e.g., Fuller 1992; Davis 1999; Bolton 2003; Peers and Brown 2003; Spitz and Thom 2003; Clifford 2004; Hendry 2005; NMAI 2006).

The development of community projects has been accompanied by a change of perspective which places emphasis on culture or cultural heritage. However, culture has often been considered less useful as a means to resolving social and economic problems. Terry Eagleton, for example, states that '[t]he primary problems which we confront in the new millennium – war, famine, poverty, disease, debt, drugs, environmental pollution, the displacement of peoples – are not especially "cultural" at all'. He continues that '[c]ultural theorists qua cultural theorists have precious little to contribute to their resolution' (Eagleton 2000: 130). For example in Canada, in some isolated indigenous people's reserves, in addition to poor living conditions which are comparable to the third world, we find that social problems such as a lack of adequate education, alcohol and drugs related problems, and suicide are serious issues that cultural promotion in itself does not address.

However, George Yúdice argues, to the contrary, that culture as resource does have the potential 'to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations' (Convention 1992: 5, quoted in Yúdice 2003: 1). 'Culture is increasingly wielded as a resource for both socio-political and economic amelioration' (Yúdice 2003: 9). This idea of 'culture as resource' has gradually been accepted and some community involving projects which have been developed by museums demonstrate this idea with a growing body of research available to support the claim. For example, in the Aki-Chin Indian Community, Arizona, US, 'the cultural traditions that sustained the Ak-Chin for thousands of years and defined them as a community' were in jeopardy in the early 1990s (Fuller 1992: 328). There was a gradual undermining of the community's culture by outside forces and especially with the expansion of roads through the reservation. The people were also going through economic, social, political, and generational transitions and the younger generation was becoming less familiar with the community norms. The then chair of the community council planned an eco-museum with the aim of getting the younger generation to learn about the tribe's history and to be proud of their ethnic identity (Fuller 1992: 338).

The eco-museum has proved successful in providing a new way of transmitting cultural knowledge. Fuller argues that '[t]he model offers a new role for community museums: that of an instrument of self-knowledge and a place to learn and regularly practice the skills and attitudes needed for community problem solving' (1992: 361). In Alaska, the Alaska Native Heritage Center was recently opened in Anchorage and has facilitated change in 'Alaskan Native identity politics touching on several different practices of cultural revival, translation, and alliance' (Clifford 2004: 6). Shifting our focus to a city example, in 1998, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, started the First Saturdays Program. This opens the museum until 11pm on the first Saturday of every month with admission after 5pm being free and aims to attract audiences who have previously not been served by the museum, especially the nearby Afro-Caribbean community. The program has succeeded in getting more first-time visitors from the neighbourhood and has served 'the community by creating a free, safe, fun, and educational destination for people of all ages' (Hoffman 2003: 54). In Oakland, California, the Oakland Museum of California developed the *Latino History Project: A Pilot Youth Program for Collecting Community History* for collecting, preserving, and exhibiting community history. This program 'engaged high school students in working with professional historians to conduct original historical research, including interviewing community members and using libraries and other local community resources' (Oakland Museum of California: 4). The program built and expanded museum audiences, trained youth, and collected community history. The project report observed that the museum was somewhere that 'diverse audiences come together to learn more about themselves and one another and concluded that 'youth were motivated by and proud that their works were going to be seen by so many visitors in a "museum"' (Oakland Museum of California: 67).

The women's cultural project in Vanuatu provides a further interesting example of this kind of work. The Vanuatu Culture Centre has been developing a women's cultural project since 1992 (Bolton 1994; 2001; 2003). The project has aimed to include women's knowledge and practice such as weaving mats into *kastom*, 'the word that people in Vanuatu used to characterize their own knowledge and practice in distinction to everything they identify as having come from outside their place' (Bolton 2003: xiii). Prior to the project, women's knowledge and practice had been considered as not *kastom* and as something unimportant. By means of this Project, however, people began to recognized that 'women have their own *kastom* and contribute to the *kastom* life of the community' (Bolton 1994: 160).

The lessons from these projects are, I would suggest, that there can be a return on investment in culture (Yúdice 2003: 288). And, as Kylie Message has recently argued:

Culture as heritage is thus increasingly recognized as providing a valuable new resource that may contribute clear and assisted development options for the national benefit and for local community development and support. ... [I]t continues to offer new modes of experience and new products as well as renewed labour markets and producers. (2006: 141)

In these projects, the museum has worked as a cultural capital of the community. Nancy Fuller describes this style of museums as 'ecomuseum' (Fuller 1992, see also Davis 1999). According to Fuller,

An ecomuseum is an agent for managing change that links education, culture, and power.... It extends the mission of a museum to include responsibility for human dignity. The methodology, based on educational and psychological concepts of lifelong learning and life-stage development, seeks to put in place those conditions that enable communities to learn about themselves and their needs, and to act upon that knowledge. The ecomuseum concept establishes a role for the museum as a mediator in the process of cultural transition.

...Ecomuseums are community learning centers that link the past with the present as a strategy to deal with the future needs of that particular society. Their activities and collections reflect what is important to the community, not necessarily conforming to mainstream values and interpretations. ... [A]n ecomuseum recognizes the importance of culture in the development of self-identity and its role in helping a community adjust to rapid change. The ecomuseum thus becomes a tool for the economic, social, and political growth and development of the society from which it springs. (Fuller 1992: 328)

The case study which is the focus of this paper, the Ainu Culture Cluster Project, may be understood in this context. In 1972, in Nibutani on the northern island of Hokkaido, Japan, an Ainu named Kayano Shigeru established a small private museum, and this museum became the forerunner of the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum.<sup>1</sup> Despite Kayano's long-term activities to transmit and promote Ainu culture, the cultural heritage in Nibutani has recently been put in jeopardy partly due to the 'Japanization' of lifestyle and the lack of interest amongst local residents in Ainu culture. The Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum has recently developed unique projects with the aim of solving this problem. One of them is the Ainu Culture Cluster Project, which has tried to restore a traditional ritual *i-oman-te* (a ceremony to send an animal's spirit back). This paper analyzes the project and explores its impact on Nibutani with particular reference to a number of key issues. These include (i) the question of how external agencies may inspire local residents to engage in cultural activities; (ii) the business of obtaining funds for project development; (iii) the impact of this project on both the community and the participants; (iii) how local residents understood and managed to transmit the local 'tradition', and (iv) an evaluation of the project's success in providing a blueprint for the future of the museum and Nibutani. Existing analyses of community projects have tended to focus on short-term gains and have overlooked their long-term effects on the community. My analysis evaluates the project with an eye to assessing the long-term effects.

The primary methods deployed in this project were participant observation and interviews. I participated in museum activities as a volunteer in July and August 2004 and in June 2005, and this volunteer activity formed the basis of my fieldwork as a participant-observer. Interviews were mainly conducted with museum staff and project participants. It is important to note that my museum fieldwork formed part of a wider doctoral investigation into Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum, and that the importance of the Ainu Culture Cluster Project emerged during the course of my fieldwork and the analysis of the data I collected.

### **The Ainu in Japan, and the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum**

The Ainu are an aboriginal people of Japan, the majority of whom have lived in the northern island of Hokkaido, and in part, the Kurile Islands and southern Sakhalin (Fig.1). According to the *Survey of Living Conditions of the Ainu* produced by the Hokkaido local government, the estimated population of the Ainu in 1999 was 23,767, 0.02% of the total population of Japan (Ainu Affairs Office 2001: 20). However, there are several reasons for believing that this is an under estimate and that the true figure is about 50,000.<sup>2</sup>



Fig 1. Japan and the surrounding, the location of Hokkaido

Historically, the Ainu have experienced hardships and racism similar to that experienced by other aboriginal peoples in the world: long-term colonization by the Japanese, the Government's policy of assimilation, the relocation of community, the spread of disease, a decreasing of population, and discrimination. The Ainu have not been widely recognized in the international literature on aboriginal studies until relatively recently. In English-speaking countries, however, specialists on East Asian studies have often discussed the issues of the Ainu. Some research findings, especially the history of the Ainu, are now becoming available in English language publications (e.g., Siddle 1996; 1997a; 1997b; 2002; 2003; Cheung 1996; 2000; 2003; 2004; 2005; Fitzhugh and Dubreuil 1999; Walker 2001; Irimoto and Yamada 2004; Howell 2005).<sup>3</sup>

The Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum is a Biratori town-managed museum and is located in Nibutani District, where some 70% of the residents are of Ainu ethnicity. Nibutani District is approximately six kilometres north of 'downtown' Biratori; it is situated along route 237 and on the Saru River (Figs 2 & 3). In Ainu language, the Saru River is called *Shishirmuka*, which means the river of the god.

In Nibutani, the preservation of Ainu artefacts in an Ainu museum resulted from the perseverance of one individual, Kayano Shigeru. In the 1950s, mainstream researchers who were working on the Ainu often visited Nibutani and conducted research in unprofessional ways.

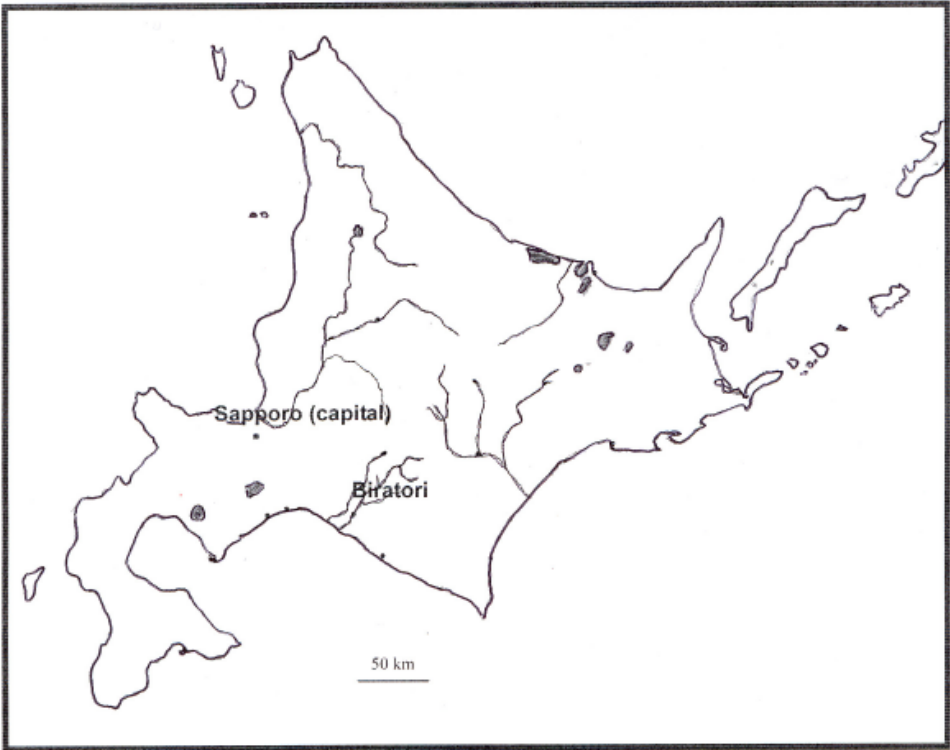


Fig 2. Hokkaido and the location of Biratori

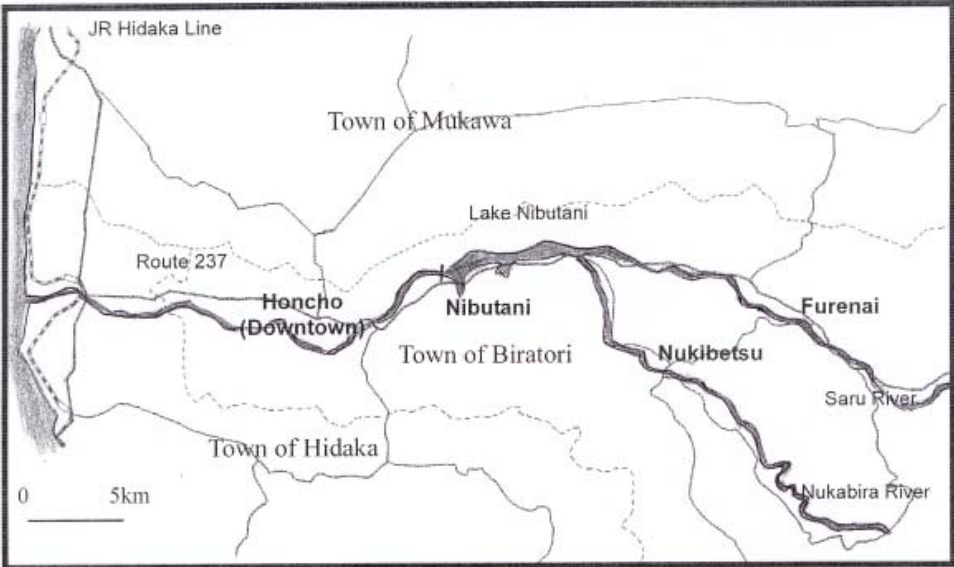


Fig 3. The town of Biratori



For instance, they stole Ainu artefacts, excavated graves and took skeletons as specimens, obtained blood for genetic investigation, and pulled clothes off people in order to confirm that they had 'hairy backs'. Kayano often witnessed such behaviour. To prevent these unprofessional activities and to preserve Ainu artefacts, Kayano started to collect them (Kayano 1990: 127). He went around Nibutani as well as the town of Biratori and bought as many artefacts as possible. His acquaintances wondered why he, a man who was not rich, spent so much money on 'useless' things. He believed, however, that these useless artefacts would be valuable in the future, and collected about 2,000 objects over 20 years (Kayano 1990: 138, 170). Since the artefacts occupied a huge space in his home and he worried about the threat of fire destroying his collection, he decided to establish a small museum. Supported by the town of Biratori and the Hokkaido Ainu Association, the *Nibutani Ainu Shiryô -kan* (Nibutani Ainu Culture Material Museum) opened in 1972, and the museum was transferred to town ownership in 1977 (Kayano 1990: 174).



*Fig 4. Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum, photograph by author*

By the end of the 1980s, with the Nibutani Dam construction in progress, the town was planning to establish a new museum with funds from the national government. Kayano's museum building had become too small to store the growing size of the collection. Worried about its future, Kayano concluded that the best thing for his collection was that it should be publicly owned. The town bought the bulk of his material and opened the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum in 1992 with a mandate to promote and preserve traditional Ainu culture (Kayano 1990: 125; 2005: 103-4; Yoneda 1999). On the same day, the original building was reopened as Kayano's private museum (Biratori-chô Nibutani Ainu Bunka Hakubutsukan 2003: 25).

Thus, in Nibutani today, there are three museums: the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum (**Fig. 4**), Kayano's private museum and the Historical Museum of Saru River. Thanks to Kayano, Nibutani, in particular, is now famous as the 'Ainu village.' Nearly 30,000 people per year, including individuals from North America and Europe, visit the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum.



Fig 5. The exhibit of the Museum, Lifestyle, photograph by author, courtesy of the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum

Just behind the Historical Museum of Saru River, lies Lake Nibutani, an artificial lake formed by the Nibutani Dam construction. Nibutani also has some restaurants and Ainu craftwork shops, and they are open all year round. Some restaurants offer Ainu cuisine, such as deer meat and *shito* (lily root ball).

According to Kayano, in Nibutani, Ainu lifestyle and its material and immaterial culture were well preserved until the first half of the twentieth century, and some Ainu rituals were still performed during that period. Most of the artefacts which are today exhibited in the museums are ones which were used at that time and subsequently collected by Kayano. The 'traditional Ainu culture' exhibited in the museums is that of the first half of the twentieth century. Kayano also revived some annual rituals such as *cip-sanke* (a boat launching ceremony), published autobiography and a series of books on both material and immaterial culture, and even created an Ainu language school. In 1994, he was elected a Member of Parliament and worked for the enactment of the Ainu Culture Promotion Act in 1997. Kayano made substantial contributions, not only to the restoration and recreation of 'traditional Ainu culture' of Nibutani, but more widely to its promotion.

The exhibits at the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum are presented as four major sections categorized by anthropological taxonomy: lifestyle (fig. 5), spiritual culture (fig. 6), agriculture and hunting, and Ainu motifs (fig. 7). This taxonomy follows Kayano's elaborate work, *Ainu no Mingu (Ainu Artefacts)* (1978). The exhibits include tools for hunting, fishing, weaving and cooking, small swords called *makiri*, clothing, and utensils such as *inaw*, and *nima* (small wooden plates) with Ainu motifs. Audiovisual equipment broadcasts the traditional Ainu lyric, *yukar*. Visitors are invited to set up hunting traps using a replica. Outside the building, there are some restored traditional Ainu houses called *ci-set*. The exhibits also include examples of contemporary Ainu craftwork produced by crafts people in Nibutani. The Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum is one of quite a few institutions which collects and displays contemporary Ainu craftworks as a permanent exhibition.



Fig 6. The exhibit of the Museum, Spiritual Culture, photograph by author, courtesy of the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum

### The Ainu Culture Cluster Project

The town of Biratori recently adopted a policy of *Ainu bunka no sato zukuri* (the creation of the home of Ainu culture), and has developed several projects to realize this policy. One such project is the invitation and development of the state managed park of *Iwor*.<sup>4</sup> The *Iwor* plan was first proposed by the national government in 1996. In January 2002, the Hokkaido local government designated Ainu place names and Ainu motifs as one of *Hokkaido Isan* (Hokkaido Heritage), and acknowledged the town as an organization which has inherited and preserved this heritage in the area. In the following February, the 1,121 collections of Ainu artefacts owned by the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum and the Kayano's private museums were acknowledged as *Jûyô Yûkei Minzoku Bunkazai* (the important national cultural property). Despite these results of the Ainu culture promotion policy and the increasing number of visitors to Nibutani, the heritage of Ainu culture has recently been faced with severe problems. Sawanobori states that this is due to the aging of people who have traditional skills, the small number of younger people who desire to inherit the skills and the exhaustion of natural environment and resources which have supported traditional Ainu culture (Sawanobori 2003: 38). Another reason, I would add, is that in Nibutani, Kayano's legacy seemed too huge to be inherited by local residents. On the one hand the Nibutani of today would not exist without Kayano's long struggle. On the other hand local people, especially the younger generation, sometimes seem to be afraid that they will inherit the 'Nibutani tradition' created by Kayano in a 'wrong' way, which, in part, has made local residents reluctant to engage in Ainu cultural activities.<sup>5</sup> As James Clifford has observed, '[w]hat counts as "tradition" is never politically neutral' (Clifford 2004: 8). The Ainu Culture Cluster Project was planned by Yoshihara Hideki, the curator of the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum, to solve these problems.

In 2002, the national government's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (*Kôsei Rôdô*



*Shō*) established the *Kinkyū Chiiki Koyō Sōshutsu Tokubetsu Kōfukin Jigyō* (a special subsidy to create immediate employment in local areas, hereafter the special national project). The aim was to subsidize local governments over a period of three years (the fiscal period 2002-2004) in their efforts to create temporary employment in their areas. To qualify for the subsidy, each local government was required to devise a project to create employment.<sup>6</sup> The Ainu Culture Cluster Project is the one which the town of Biratori applied to for subsidies. The town of Biratori subcontracted the Ainu Culture Cluster Project to a think tank, the Hokkaido Intellect Tank in Sapporo (hereafter HIT), since the policy of the special national project required these development projects to be subcontracted. Under the terms of the subcontract, HIT hired approximately fifteen local residents every year as part-time staff who engaged in studying and restoring Ainu culture, thus acquiring traditional skills. One room at the Museum was set up as the HIT Biratori Office, and HIT hired additional three local residents who could take leadership roles. Two HIT staff also visited the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum on a regular basis and they worked with the curator and three leaders to organize the Ainu Culture Cluster Project.

The word Cluster indicated the basis from which Ainu culture spreads out and is transmitted whilst also promoting growth in the regional economy. The primary purpose of the Ainu Culture Cluster Project was the creation of this basis. During this process, the organizers thought it necessary to restore and preserve both material and none-material Ainu culture and to record the results of restoration and restorative processes. In the first year, 2002, previously unemployed people conducted an investigation into what traditional skills and resources are necessary for the transmission of Ainu cultural heritage, and they also restored a traditional Ainu house, *ci-set* as well as 171 artefacts. Since the curator thought that Ainu culture was closely connected with Ainu views concerning the spiritual and natural world they tried to follow the traditional construction process of *ci-set* precisely. This included a series of ceremonies such as those expressing gratitude to the gods. All of this was recorded. They also collected Ainu place names and Ainu motifs, and entered them into a database. In the second year 2003,



Fig 7. The exhibit of the Museum, Ainu patterns, photograph by author, courtesy of the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum

building on the results of the previous year, they engaged in the recovery and recording of traditional Ainu culture, especially non-material cultural forms such as song and dance. People were trained in the acquisition and improvement of traditional skills, and in planning the performance of these songs and dances for the public. They were also trying to harness these results for the development plan for *Iwor* (Sawanobori 2003: 39-43).

In the third and final year 2004, the organizers and formerly unemployed people tackled the business of recovering a traditional ritual, the bear *i-oman-te*. *I-oman-te* is a ritual which returns an animal's spirit to the spirit world. Animals which were used for the ritual varied from region to region; bears, foxes, raccoon dogs, deer, and fish owls, for example. Among those animals, bears were the highest-ranked animals in most regions, and bear *i-oman-te* was at the core of Ainu spirituality (Akino 1999).<sup>7</sup> Many hunting people in the world have practised a ritual to send back an animal's spirit. However, the Ainu and some other ethnic peoples around the north Pacific region have practised a unique style of the ritual. They kept a bear cub for one or two years after its capture, and then, after 'killing' it, sent the spirit back. The reason why they kept a bear cub before the ritual is still under investigation. Amano (2003) argues that this is due to an economic reason, notably they were waiting for the gallbladder to be developed. (Bear gallbladders were valued for medicinal reasons amongst the Ainu).

According to Kayano, *i-oman-te* had been held almost every year in Nibutani until approximately the end of World War II, but after that, it was held once every decade. The last *i-oman-te*, which was conducted in 1977, was planned and managed by Kayano. Undertaken, in part, with the purpose of recording the process of *i-oman-te*, Kayano also tried to secure the passing on of knowledge of the spirits and ritual skills to the next generation (Himeta *et al.* 1979). However, today the ritual practice has lapsed and more than half of those who engaged in its 1977 enactment have now passed away.

Why was then *i-oman-te* not held after 1977 in Nibutani? A possible reason is that *i-oman-te* became less meaningful for the Ainu society because of the Japanization of their lifestyle and their decreased dependence on hunting. Another possibility is the increased difficulty in getting approval for 'killing' animals. In addition, since the Ainu have experienced severe discrimination, many Ainu tend to hesitate to engage in Ainu rituals and hide the fact of their Ainu ethnicity (Yoshihara 2004). *I-oman-te*, however, contains many elements of traditional Ainu culture. Himeta Tadayoshi, who engaged in the *i-oman-te* ceremony held in Nibutani in 1977 as the recording director, stated:

The preparation for the ritual took a week. Men went to mountains, streams and riversides which were covered with deep snow every day, and collected woods and grasses for ritual utensils. At night, they sat around the fire in Ainu *ci-set* and made various utensils. While their faces and hands, which were facing the fire, almost burned, their backs were extremely cold. They worked every day, and every night.

During the daytime, women devoted themselves to making sake and food for the ritual.

The ceremony started on 3 March and lasted for three days. In the morning of the third and final day, when *ke-oman-te* ceremony (ceremony to send dead body back to the spiritual world) was held, strong Nibutani men were extremely fatigued.

*I-oman-te* requires extreme tenseness and fatigue both of body and spirit. I really felt so when everything was over. I also thought that this is a really serious ritual. (Himeta *et al.* 1979, author's translation)

As this statement makes clear, killing a bear is just a small part of the entire ritual. In order to conduct a ritual, the Ainu had to start gathering materials and making utensils and cuisine. The Ainu also sang and danced in front of the god (bear) to please it. They believed that the god dwelled inside an animal's body, and if the god enjoyed staying in the human world, it would dwell in another animal and return again to the human world. For the Ainu, animals were important

resources necessary to for survival. *I-oman-te* not only required traditional skills, but also contained the belief and spirit of the Ainu people.

One major problem was that almost all the participants in the Ainu Culture Cluster Project lacked the experience to engage in *i-oman-te* as a ritual which uses a live wild brown bear. Among the organizers, only one leader had experienced *i-oman-te* in 1977. The Ainu do not depend on hunting in the twenty-first-century and so the younger generation lacks the knowledge of how to treat bears. Using a living bear would not only be dangerous but in addition, as I have noted, there is little sympathy these days for the idea of 'killing' a bear. The solution to these problems was to perform the ritual as a contemporary stage play and without the use of a bear. It was also decided that the ritual would not last for a week but for a couple of hours. Thus, the curator and staff sought to synthesize and compress the most important elements of the ritual with the performance of an edited stage version of *i-oman-te*. Nevertheless, despite this transposition they believed that it was possible to restore, preserve, and convey the core and significant elements of *i-oman-te* to a new generation (Yoshihara 2004).

The reasoning behind this thinking was that the *i-oman-te* performance was linked to another agenda. For the organizers cultivation of the ritual was a means of encouraging the acquisition of traditional skills, and practice through performance was considered to be an effective way of promoting them. They also tried to get local residents to support the venture as audiences and thus to familiarize themselves with traditional Ainu culture. They organizers approached their project with a community art performance model in mind, and invited Hasegawa Satoshi (a specialist in community performance and field development research from Hokkaido Iryō University) to be a consultant and performance instructor. Hasegawa visited Nibutani on regular basis, and instructed those involved in performance skills. In addition a director for the production was also hired under the terms of the special national project.<sup>8</sup>

In September 2004, the third and final year of the Ainu Culture Cluster Project started with many obstacles needing to be overcome. For example, at the beginning, only four local residents were hired though the HIT recruited fifteen. There were not enough documents available to provide for an authentic restoration *i-oman-te*. Furthermore, some people believed that misfortune would occur unless the tradition order of the ritual was observed exactly and some that the very planning of *i-oman-te* itself might bring misfortune. Old people were hesitant to participate is interviewees since they had experienced discrimination in their lives. Although these problems often brought the organizers to a standstill, they were not pessimistic about the restoration of *i-oman-te*, and considered the year 2004 as a first step in Ainu cultural promotion



Fig 8. The brochure of the Kurasta Festa, courtesy of the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum

for the future. For example, Hasegawa believed that the restoration of *i-oman-te* and the performance would succeed. He stated:

I'm taking a role of consultant as my job, so it's my obligation to plan what should be done next to succeed. I have established some steps to develop the Project. ...I'm quite sure these steps will lead to the success of the performance. (Hasegawa 2004, author's translation)

He considered that the three steps he established were really important to the success of the performance. First, he tried to get local residents to recognize that he was coming to Nibutani as a consultant of the Ainu Culture Cluster Project. He expected that if they would recognize this, it would be easier to communicate with them. Second, he actively encouraged the participants themselves to develop the project. If the participants were to become interested in and committed to the performance, the improvement of their performance skills, which was the third step towards success, would be more easily achieved.

Hasegawa also tried to emphasize the 'performance' values of art and entertainment, rather than unnecessarily stressing the complexity of the works and the importance of *i-oman-te* in Ainu culture. It was actually a hard task to allay the participants' fears of tackling this serious ritual. The method adopted to improve performance skills was prototyping, which requires participants to repeat the same action many times to gain skills and memorize the exact order of the ritual. This method was also quite effective in recalling the memories of those people who had an experience of engaging in *i-oman-te* (HIT staff A 2005).

December 2004 was a turning point for the Ainu Culture Cluster Project, because the organizers and the participants decided not to perform *i-oman-te*. The demands of preparing materials and of learning new skills, plus the constraints of traditional taboos and the very seriousness of *i-oman-te* itself, brought the participants under more and more pressure and they became unwilling to develop the project as a performance of *i-oman-te*. Instead, it was decided that the *Kurasuta Festa* (Cluster Festival), a stage play, would be performed with traditional songs, dances, instruments, and some ceremonies as a festival of entertainment show.

A number of local residents applied for positions after this decision, which resolved the problem of the shortage of people. The date of the performance was set for March 2005, and development of the project continued. One member of the HIT staff described the eagerness of the participants after the December as follows:

I was keeping a little distance from the participants, but I saw their power to make the performance successful. They had only nine weeks to prepare for the performance, but they really worked well. They showed the solidarity as a group, and revived from the deadlock and traumatic experience of the project. (HIT staff A, 2005, author's translation)

The *Kurasuta Festa* was held on 5 March 2005 (Fig 8). Hasegawa had indicated three measures with which to judge whether the performance was successful: how many audience members came, if the audience applauded, and if the participants wanted to perform again (Hasegawa 2004). The film record of the festival shows that a number of the smaller programmes for visitors were well attended, and the lecture hall that the Historical Museum of Saru River provided for the stage play was almost full. Audience response was also good. An audience questionnaire confirmed that the audience really enjoyed the stage play. The participants also stated that they would like to perform the play again (Hasegawa 2005). All the organizers and the consultant declared that the performance itself was successful.

### The products of the Ainu Culture Cluster Project

Most organizers and participants agreed that the restoration of *i-oman-te* did not go well. They had failed to achieve an accurate restoration of the ritual process, and even if they produced a result and record of *i-oman-te* under the Ainu Culture Cluster Project, it would not add to, or improve, existing materials (HIT staff A 2005).

No one, however, believes that the Ainu Culture Cluster Project itself did not go well. The museum offered local residents, not all whom are Ainu people, the opportunity, funds, and



materials to learn about Ainu culture and the attitude of young residents toward Ainu culture was changed. The participants recognized afresh the importance of the museum as a cultural capital of Nibutani. They now know what the museum has, and how to use the sources of the museum. For example, a leader observed:

I rarely visited the museum before I participated in the Ainu Culture Cluster Project. Now my perspective and interest are changing. This Project was a good opportunity for me to learn about the ritual as well as the entire Ainu culture. If I didn't study Ainu culture right now when could I do it? I want to see a lot of artefacts in the museum. Since I coming to the museum for the project, I have had an opportunity to see the artefacts in storage. I have never regretted joining the project. (Leader 2004, author's translation)

Through the Ainu Culture Cluster Project, the participants acquired not only traditional skills but also a computer, and presentation and performance skills, as the results of the first and second year of the project show (Sawanobori 2003: 44). The participation of the younger generation was a huge dividend. They became interested in Ainu culture and discovered the invaluable legacy passed down from generation to generation. In terms of this, it can be said that the Ainu Culture Cluster Project established the base to inherit and promote Ainu culture in today's Nibutani.

Meanwhile, to some extent, it cannot be denied that this invaluable legacy and Kayano's authority worked as obstacles to the development of the project. In Nibutani, where Kayano's personal struggle created and restored almost everything, the question of how local residents might inherit his legacy and pass it down to the future as their local 'tradition' is a major issue. They sometimes seem to be afraid of confronting Kayano's authority, which results in the hesitance of the promotion of culture in a 'new' form. As some leaders and participants implied in interviews, they often seek Kayano's instruction on what to do and look for his authorization. 'Tradition' is often invoked 'to mark the authority [it carries] – and even to endorse and sustain it' (Phillips and Schochet, 2004: x). Especially with respect to the attempt to restore *i-oman-te*, local 'tradition' put much pressure on the participants. They believed that *i-oman-te* was something more than Kayano's legacy, that *i-oman-te* is sacred and subject to many taboos. They often felt that even planning of *i-oman-te* was breach of taboos.

Hasegawa, however, considers that in the past, when *i-oman-te* was 'an annual event', it was not accompanied by such extreme seriousness. In the process of lifestyle change, *i-oman-te* gradually became an unusual ritual, and acquired a sacred aspect, while losing the familiarity of an annual event. For the younger participants who lacked personal experience, *i-oman-te* did not seem to be a ritual with which they should involve themselves (Hasegawa 2005). Interestingly, Kayano's statement that when he was working at a tourist site Noboribetsu in the 1960s he performed '*i-oman-te*,' not as it should be over a week, but twice a day for tourists, implies that Kayano himself did not approach *i-oman-te* in terms of these taboos (2005: 46). Regarding *i-oman-te* in Nibutani, its future prospects do not seem hopeful to the organizers. All of them state that *i-oman-te* will not be held in Nibutani in the future, as long as the participants remember this 'traumatic' project of 2004. The Ainu Culture Cluster Project can be seen as a first step to passing down Ainu culture by the present generation to the next in Nibutani. But it has not created a 'new tradition' which is completely freed from Kayano's legacy. A cumulative succession of projects of this kind will be necessary to promote Ainu cultural heritage amongst the present generation.

It is interesting that the Ainu Culture Cluster Project offered people outside of the community the opportunity to experience Ainu culture. Two HIT staff and the consultant, one from Sapporo and the other two from outside Hokkaido, did not have an enough experience of Ainu culture before engaging in the project. As the project progressed participants experienced changes in their own outlook as they began to feel that Ainu culture is alive, and they improved their communication skills with the minority. One of them stated that s/he became able to accept a different way of thinking and the existence of different people. In this sense, the museum was a 'contact zone' (cf. Pratt 1992; Clifford 1997).

The Ainu Culture Cluster Project also demonstrates the possibilities concerning museum exhibitions of both immaterial culture and material culture (Hasegawa 2005). It

illuminates the museum's distinctive role with respect to traditional cultural heritage in contemporary local society. Thus, it is a reminder that immaterial culture is never performed without living people. Exhibiting immaterial culture is, therefore, a realization of the lives of real people in contemporary society. In the case of the Ainu Culture Cluster Project, the performance contained the aspects of traditional Ainu culture and spirit, while it incorporated aspects of entertainment and humour, and the result was a contemporary stage play. For example, the stage play performed the story of an Ainu young man, who gave a traditional Ainu string *mukkur* to two women as a sign of love, which resulted in an eternal love triangle. This story came from a real experience of one of the participants. No other Ainu museums exhibit this kind of lived culture, especially immaterial culture. Hasegawa observes that:

By giving up *i-oman-te*, the performance, in part, became free from the aspects of sacredness, and was an entertainment, instead. The performance is unique in that no other Ainu museums or tourist sites have this kind of performance with humour. Meanwhile, I don't think the performance destroyed the aspects of 'traditional' Ainu culture. *I-oman-te* is just a symbol of the entire Ainu culture. Song, dance, and *yukar* (Ainu oral legend), everything is the element of *i-oman-te*. The performance contained such elements enough. (Hasegawa 2005, author's translation)

Another outcome of the Project is a way to get funding to develop projects. For cultural institutions, especially small-scale institutions such as the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum, getting funding opportunities is always a serious issue. But this issue is not always accorded the primacy it deserves in discussion. Dombrowski criticizes Clifford's analysis of the Alaska Project for its lack of this perspective. Dombrowski states:

Nowhere here do we learn about the financing of the events and the shows discussed or of the various museum positions held by authors and the contributors. Who paid for all of this authentically remade articulation and why? Actually, to inquire into the funding of the museum exhibit alone would be to duck the more important questions about the social and economic costs of the projects undertaken here. The social costs are generally far more substantial than the direct costs and almost always unevenly distributed within the communities being positioned. (Dombrowski 2004: 23)

Dombrowski is right especially if considering the 1988 *The Spirit Sings* exhibition at the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Canada, and Lubicon Nation's boycott of the exhibition. But for small-scale museums, even the direct costs are an issue. They rarely get long-term sponsors to develop community involving projects. Considering this, it can be said that the Ainu Culture Cluster Project is a good example of effectively getting and using funds. Funds do not always have to be secured solely for cultural promotion. The ideas of the curator and the support of the museum and HIT staff should be praised.

### Long-term impacts of the project on Nibutani

How then can the project understood in a wider context, especially in comparison to other similar projects? Based on the analysis of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Bolton argues:

The role that the independence movement and the Cultural Centre created for *kastom* was to attribute value. The reasons for the attribution of value differed. The independence movement attributed values to *kastom* in order to assert the distinct and separate identity of the indigenous citizens of the archipelago, as a basis for nationhood. The Cultural Centre attributed value in support of that objective, but it also attributed value to *kastom* on the basis of a museological and anthropological assessment of the importance of cultural diversity in and of itself. (Bolton 2001: 183)

The case of the Ainu Culture Cluster Project also demonstrates that there was a return on the investment for culture (Yúdice 2003: 288). The museum worked as a cultural capital of the

community, and the project asserted its identity. The voice of a participant of the Ainu Culture Cluster Project verifies this.

When I was in my early 20s, I never answered yes when I was asked if I'm of Ainu ethnicity. Now I can say yes. I don't care even if I'm photographed. Before I started working here, I'd never visited the museum. I believed the museum is free of charge, and I didn't know there is another museum (the Historical Museum of Saru River) behind the museum. I didn't know what the museum was doing. First of all, I wasn't interested in the museum and Ainu culture. (Since Nibutani is famous as an Ainu village,) I didn't like even passing through Nibutani to get to downtown Biratori from my home. I decided to work here because there were no other jobs available. Now I'm learning things I didn't learn at school. I'm having a good experience. If a residence is available, I may consider moving to Nibutani. (Participant 2004, author's translation)

The Ainu Culture Cluster Project is a good example of how community-based small-scale museums can inspire local residents to engage in cultural promotion. The Project demonstrates that museums can embrace communities and get their members to recognize the importance of their cultures even in a situation where people are losing interest. The curator Yoshihara's intention to offer the museum to the local residents as a space where they can have a fruitful experience was successful (Yoshihara 2004). Learning a culture is a process in which it is important to confirm identity and gain the confidence to live as a person who belongs to the culture. The opportunities and sources of this process are especially important for minorities. The participants of the Ainu Culture Cluster Projects really enjoyed this process. They also discovered the valuable legacy of Nibutani inherited from their ancestors. Culture can be seen as 'intellectual enjoyment' and 'emotional fulfillment' (cf. Eagleton 2000).

Meanwhile, the Ainu Culture Cluster Project left a big problem unsolved, namely, that the project did not provide a blueprint for the museum and Nibutani's future. This is primarily because the project finished with the end of the special national project and the museum did not get a further funding for a new project. In 2003, the museum and HIT tried to apply for another project to create local employment opportunities funded by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. But the town withdrew the application since the museum was already developing three big projects<sup>9</sup> and the town was afraid of placing too heavy a burden on the museum. The organizers of the Ainu Culture Cluster Project are now looking for new funds to continue the project of cultural promotion (HIT staff B: 2004).

There is a real need for the museum to draw up a blueprint for the future. The museum has been working on a project-to-project basis recently: therefore the biggest issue has always been how to get funds to develop the next project. The funding for recent projects depended on temporary subsidies from the national government. Museum staff do not have a clear view of how to keep attracting local residents to engage in cultural activities which do not guarantee employment after the completion of these temporary projects. The participants became skilful, but are they still eager to engage in cultural activities without employment while doing another job outside the museum? If they stop such activities, Nibutani will again lose the base established to preserve heritage and promote Ainu culture that was created by the projects.

One HIT staff person worries that local residents lose their spontaneity and eagerness to continue cultural activity, and regrets that the town withdrew an application for a new national project to create local employment. This staff person is negative in his/her view that in Nibutani, cultural activity will be continued without employment, and stresses that it is important to raise skilful human resources. To do so, the staff person argues, some people need to engage in cultural activity as their profession for a certain period. The accumulation of the result of small projects will also develop the plan for the state-managed park of *Iwor* (HIT staff B: 2005).

Meanwhile, Hasegawa argues that the museum should establish a supporters' club first, rather than getting additional funding or creating employment. He believes that people do not continue to engage in cultural activity for the long-term without a strong interest for doing so. If a supporters' club is established, people who are interested in Ainu culture will participate in the club, and they will eagerly engage in cultural activity (Hasegawa 2005).

Actually most examples of this kind of project do not demonstrate how museums, especially small-scale community-based museums, which depend on short term financial funding to attract local residents can successfully promote cultural activities in the long term. Many short-term projects developed by such museums have borne fruit, but few have provided a long-term vision of cultural promotion for the future. The Ainu Culture Cluster Project is not an exception.

Based on a study of local authority museums in England, Lawley also identifies this problem. According to Lawley, while museums are required to promote social inclusion and work with ethnic minorities, young offenders, people with learning difficulties, unemployed people etc., 'many of these projects are short-term, are not evaluated effectively, and are not sustainable' (Lawley 2003: 82). Therefore, the importance of these projects and the museum itself is often overlooked. In Nibutani, my interviews with museum and HIT staff made it clear that the town office does not understand the significance of these projects, or the wider Ainu culture. The town office is located in downtown Biratori, where the majority of the residents are ethnically Japanese. For example, one museum staff person stated that while Ainu culture attracts people nation-wide and brings them to Nibutani, the town office does not positively promote Ainu culture as a strong characteristic of the town. This person added that the town office seems to be afraid of attracting criticism from Japanese residents that the town only cares about its Ainu residents. Another staff person complained that the town office believes that the museum is not busy, and that staff working at the town office rarely visit the museum. When they visit the museum, they are always surprised because the museum gets so many visitors.

Yoshihara, the curator of the museum believes that historians will positively evaluate the late twentieth and early twenty-first century as the beginning of a cultural renaissance for the Ainu. Ainu cultural activities are moving from being viewed as negative to being accepted as positive, from restraint to manifestation, from repression to progress, from discrimination to respect, and from resignation to hope (Yoneda 1999: 377). Whilst the activities of the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum may be considered to be steps towards cultural promotion for the future, there do seem to be many problems remaining to be solved.

Received 5<sup>th</sup> September 2006

Accepted 30<sup>th</sup> October 2007

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Japanese and Ainu names in this paper are following the Japanese convention; family name first, followed by given name. Unfamiliar Japanese and Ainu words, except placenames, are italicized. The Roman spelling of Ainu words is following Kayano's Ainu language dictionary (Kayano 2002). The character C is pronounced as [ch].
- <sup>2</sup> First, the official figure does not include those Ainu who live outside Hokkaido since the local government does not extend the survey beyond Hokkaido. Second, the statistic represents the Ainu who replied to the *Survey of Living Condition of the Ainu* and naturally does not include those who failed to respond to the survey. In addition, the Hokkaido Ainu Association has requested that the Hokkaido local government does not send questionnaires to the Ainu on the grounds that, fearing discrimination, they do not want to be known as Ainu.
- <sup>3</sup> Among these works, Siddle's *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan* (1996) is the best general history of the Ainu I have ever read, including Japanese works.
- <sup>4</sup> Iwor is an Ainu word which means 'traditional living space' (Kayano 2002).
- <sup>5</sup> This statement is based on my interviews to the project participants.
- <sup>6</sup> Kōsei Rōdō Shō 'Kinkyū Chiiki Koyō Sōshutsu Tokubetsu Kōfukin (Kikin) Jigyō no Go-An'nai', Kōsei Rōdō Shō. <<http://www.mhlw.go.jp/general/seido/anteikyoku/kikin/>>



- <sup>7</sup> Arctic Studies Center, National Museum of Natural History 'Ainu',  
<http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/features/ainu/index.html>
- <sup>8</sup> Kôsei Rôdô Shô ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> The Ainu Culture Cluster Project, the Cultural Assessment Project (concerning the Biratori Dam construction), and the plan for the state-managed park of Iwor.

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