From Crafts to Agency: The Legacy of Colonial Discourses in Exhibiting the Ainu in the Tokyo National Museum and National Museum of Ethnology at Osaka between 1977 and 2017

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Abstract

The Ainu are indigenous groups of people found in Hokkaido and northeast Honshu, Japan. During the nineteenth century, their land was integrated into the Japanese empire and the people redefined and assimilated. While intended to erase the Ainu as distinct groups, policies and discourses also showed that Ainu communities were not accepted as belonging to the category of 'Japanese', with the notions that they lacked Japanese ingenuity and civilization, were stuck in a prehistoric past, and lived in *terra nullius*. These discourses influenced the formation of museums' collections in Japan, such as the Tokyo National Museum (TNM) and the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka (*Minpaku*). By offering a reading of exhibitions on the Ainu and their accompanying catalogues between 1977 and 2017, this research sheds light on how colonial legacies continue to be shaped and challenged in representing Ainu communities in museums. The TNM seems unable to challenge tropes of this colonial discourse due to their intricate connection with the government, their notion of political neutrality, and their focus on art that tends to exclude the Ainu from the museum. *Minpaku*, on the other hand, has tried to introduce notions of cultural relativism and centre cooperation with Ainu communities to facilitate best practices.

Keywords: Japan; Museums; Tokyo National Museum; National Museum of Ethnology; Ainu; Colonial legacy

Introduction: Ainu, museums, colonialism

The Ainu are indigenous to the provinces of Hokkaido and Northeast Honshu in Japan, as well as Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, part of Russia since 1945. Contact between the Japanese and various Ainu communities dates to at least the fifteenth century and intensified with the Matsumae domain established on the southern tip of Hokkaido in 1590. Scholars argue that contact between the two groups was social and economic in nature, to the extent that there was 'a civilisational boundary between the Ainu and Japanese' but that some exchange and cultural influence existed (Howell 2005: 110; see also Walker 2006: 39-44; Naganuma *et al*. 2011: 341-7; Loy 2015). Interaction developed slowly throughout the eighteenth century: Japanese-documented revolts of the Ainu against Japanese authority, such as the Shakushain's Revolt (1669-1672) and the Menashi-Kunashir Rebellion (1789), testify to increasing tensions between the various groups. In 1868, the Japanese government incorporated the Ainu lands into their empire and, with inconsistent variety and influence, tried to integrate and assimilate them. This can be typified as a colonial process and needs to be interpreted alongside nation-state formation (Komori 2012: 60-72; Hunter 2015: 47-57). Historiography and representation of the Ainu have been greatly affected by assimilation efforts from 1868 onwards, where their agency is often not fully represented (Howell 2005: 112; Ziomek 2019: 2-7). This can be ascribed to a lack of data, as the Ainu never developed a writing system, resulting in an over-reliance on Japanese sources as the primary information base. Additionally, contemporary data collection remains challenging due to discrimination and genealogy issues (Onai 2011:

1-5 and 23-30; Maeda and Okano 2013: 45; Lewallen 2016: 60-2).

Since the first Japanese museum was established in 1872, museums began to integrate imagery of the Ainu into their representation of the Japanese empire. Museum studies have since established the connection between colonialism and their representation of others to support the creation of a national identity and have been criticized for adhering to the legitimating logic that is the legacy of colonialism today (Bennett 1995: 148-73; MacKenzie 2009: 1-17; Boast 2011; Sunnucks 2021). As Nakamura and Sutherland (2019: 52-4) discuss in the case of Cham representation in Vietnam, museums themselves must be questioned on how they perpetuate hegemonic nationalist narratives. Japan is no exception to this: scholars have noted that the representation of various groups within Japanese museums is insufficiently researched (cf. Tomio 1997; Yoshida 2001; Nakamura 2007: 331-50; Huang 2016: 125-30).

This also applies to two of the most important museums in Japan today: the Tokyo National Museum (TNM), established in 1872, and the National Museum of Ethnology (*Minpaku*) in Osaka, established in 1976. Both museums have a hegemonic role in the current Japanese museological system, with their collections partially procured during colonial times and by using the colonial system; they also have been criticized for their representation of others (Aso 1997: 57-88, 2013: 51-84; Ryang 2004: 124; Pai 2013: 59-69; Huang 2016: 125-32) Despite this, research on Japanese museums and their representation of the Ainu remains incidental and lacks comparative perspectives across museums, with the most notable exception being Nakamura (2010: 8-9), who compared the Ainu exhibitions held in 1993 at the TNM and *Minpaku* and noticed different forms of representation as a result of cooperation with the national government and Ainu organizations, respectively. Given the scarcity of information, research could benefit from comparing both museums via a long-term perspective and how representation of the Ainu has changed in relation to the tropes of colonial discourses imposed on them historically and today.

This article sets out to fill this gap by applying a comparative perspective of the TNM and *Minpaku*, analysing their representations of the Ainu between 1977 and 2017. This research focuses on this period to compare the developments of Ainu representation in the post-war period and to account for differentiation between the two museums.[1] It provides an overview of permanent and temporary exhibitions and analyses the tropes presented in the accompanying catalogues. Specifically, it seeks to answer the question whether exhibitions have represented the Ainu via colonial tropes and how this representation has changed. The first part reconstructs tropes of colonial discourses via historiographical works; it focuses on the construction of Japanese imagery of the Ainu from 1868 onwards. The second part discusses the representation of the Ainu in the Tokyo National Museum (TNM) in their exhibitions during the period 1977-2017. The third section discusses the representation of the Ainu in *Minpaku* during the same period.

A reconstruction of Japanese colonial discourses regarding the Ainu

To understand the position and locus of representation of the Ainu in Japanese museums, this article argues that this must be done via notions of colonial discourses and tropes constructed in Japan to interpret the Ainu in the modern period. Colonial discourse here is defined as an overarching narrative that legitimizes rule over another area or areas. This framework requires specific modes of thought that evaluate subjected communities and oneself to justify control; various patterns of interactions constitute such a discourse, not merely between the colonizer and colonized (cf. Bhabha 1994; Herzfeld 2002).

In Japan, this framework developed through interaction with the West. As Kikuchi (2007: 1-11) shows, we must understand it through the notion of 'Oriental Orientalism' or *refracted modernity*, whereby we must regard this construction of discourse not merely as an unquestioned transfer of modernity but rather as a form of re-appropriation. It allows us to understand that colonialism cannot create a dialectic opposition, given that multiple discourses and people interplay under constant pressure. In other words, we must regard this process as one shaped through engagement that created elusive boundaries bound to

change (Uchida 2011: 146-53). Research testifies to the usefulness of this perspective in the case of Japan and its colonies, regarding it as a powerful tool to deconstruct essentialist notions of colonialism as found in works such as Said's *Orientalism* (Oguma 1998: 5-9; Said 2003 [1978]; Trouillot 2003; Mizoguchi 2007: 396-412; Ziomek 2019: 2-7).

In this respect, we can localize the construction of a new discourse on the Ainu in Japan from 1868 onward by focusing on the integration of their lands into the Japanese empire. The Meiji government established the 'Hokkaido Development Commission' (*Kaitakushi*) in 1869 to oversee the development of Hokkaido. Subsequently, it was reframed from the 'land of barbarians' (*Ezochi*) to the 'northern gate of the empire' (*Teikoku no Hokumon*) (Oguma 1998: 50-1). The *Kaitakushi*, in turn, decreed several policies to ensure cultural assimilation: it prohibited important traditions, e.g., the burning of one's house after the owner's passing and the facial tattooing of Ainu women upon reaching marriageable age. Schools were opened to educate local communities and children in the Japanese language, Shintoism, and the adoption of a Japanese national identity (*Kokutai*) (Siddle 1996: 1-11; Howell 2005: 172-4; Komori 2012: 64-6). Families had to change their names to correspond to Japanese pronunciation and spelling or adopt Japanese names entirely, erasing traces of Ainu heritage in the legal system (Howell 2004: 11-2; Lewallen 2016: 60-73). These efforts were understood by the Japanese and Ainu alike as meaning that the Ainu would become Japanese once they were deemed to have been properly assimilated (*Wajin he no Dōka*) (Seki *et al*. 2006: 77-80).

Despite this, however, the existing imaginary border continued to play a role of importance: in 1899, the Japanese government enacted the 'Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act'. This law was to speed up the assimilation of 'former aborigines' or the Ainu, defined as a 'dying race' whose appearance indicated fundamental differences to the Japanese; this enforced a distinct category for Ainu members as people who were unable to become Japanese (Siddle 1996: 123-7; Oguma 1998: 66-9; Komori 2012: 67-9; Hudson et al. 2014: 2-7). Another trope found via this law is *terra nullius* ('the land of no one'), which presented Ainu lands as a 'limitless source of hitherto untapped natural resources waiting for Japanese ingenuity and civilisation' (Mason 2012: 34; see also Oguma 1998: 54-5; Seki *et al*. 2006: 105-78). Such imagery continues to resonate in Japan: in 2015, Ainu communities protested against a banner of the Nippon Ham Fighters that contained the slogan that 'Hokkaido is the land of pioneers' (*Hokkaido ha, Kaitakusha no Taichi da*).[2] Ainu activists today, such as Ukaji Shizue and Tahara Ryoko, have mentioned the existence of these tropes as reasons for their lack of trust in the Japanese government and society (Ukaji 2018: 80; Tahara 2018: 155).[3] Such developments highlight that colonial discourses identify the Ainu in two contradicting ways: one where the Japanese government intended to erase the Ainu as a distinct group, whilst enacting policies that cast doubt on whether the Ainu were ever to be accepted as Japanese.

Since the Ainu do not have their own writing system and Japanese sources rarely considered their perspectives, we must caution against the idea that this process was something the Ainu willingly undertook. For example, research shown by Loy (2015) on the Ainu headman Chaemon problematizes the existing narratives on the Ainu as either entirely willing to assimilate or be mere victims of modernity, trying to protect their identity at all costs. Instead, Loy argues that Ainu communities had to learn how to cope with the socio-ecological contradictions inherent to modernity. Kannari Taro, who petitioned the National Diet to implement Ainu welfare policies in the 1890s, and Moritake Takichi (1902-1976), who used his pride in Ainu heritage to develop tourism in Hokkaido between the 1930s and 1970s, are examples that further problematize this narrative (Siddle 1996: 115; Ziomek 2019: 306-31).

From the 1950s onwards, documentation surrounding Ainu activism increased, and we can see a reconfiguration of Ainu heritage and identity. Moritake, who established the Shiraoi Ainu Folk Museum in 1967 to fight against the commodification of Ainu tourism in the 1960s and increase representation, was an important actor at the time (Ziomek 2019: 349-52). In the 1980s, Ainu activists became prominent in international organizations for indigenous rights, such as the UN World Council of Indigenous Peoples. Thanks to the Ainu activist Kayano Shigeru (1926-2006), the Ainu dance was recognized as national intangible heritage in 1974, and the *Asircepnomi* (the ritual to receive the first salmon of the year) was restored in 1982. Kayano was also the first Ainu to sit in the National Diet (1994 to 1998), and his efforts were instrumental in revoking the Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act in 1997.

However, issues of recognition continue to exist due to lack of official data, continuing discrimination felt by Ainu members, apparent socioeconomic gaps between the Ainu and the Japanese, and the perpetuating issues of Japanese monoculturalism in public debates (Onai 2011: 1-5 and 23-30; Maeda and Okano 2013: 45). The depth and sincerity of official recognition efforts are highly scrutinized despite the Ainu being recognized as an ethnic minority, which was enshrined in Japanese law in 2019. Critics question whether it is a genuine acceptance or shift in attitudes towards the Ainu or to appease the Ainu and international organizations (Hunter 2015: 47-57; Lewallen 2016: 72-3; Kosaka 2018: 75-7). Therefore, it must be questioned to what extent colonial legacies are fundamentally challenged and if the representation of the Ainu in Japan today is adequate; museums have a clear role here, but their own colonial legacy and its impact on Ainu representation must be researched first.

The Ainu represented in the Tokyo National Museum, 1977-2017

As the first museum in Japan, The Tokyo National Museum (TNM) has held a monopoly on discourses of Japanese history, cultural identity, and heritage since its opening in 1872 (Tseng 2008: 93-6 and 124-35; Pai 2013: 59-69). In its formative years, this was strengthened with the right to acquire artefacts deemed necessary for Japanese cultural identity, and their exhibitions centred on the narrative of a unique Japan. In 1938, the art and history sections were merged, representing Japanese history and identity foremost through art (Aso 2013: 52-3; Huang 2016: 131-2). Between 1945 and 1977, the TNM fell under the control of the Ministry of Education (MEXT) but was able to strengthen its influence by temporarily overseeing other national museums and having a primary role in conducting art and historical research. Since 1977, the museum has expanded (such as with the *Tōyōkan*, opened in 1988, or renovations in 2014) and, since 2001, it has been part of the Independent Administrative Institution National Museums (Pai 2013: 169-71; Zeniya 2015: 36).

The intricate connection with the government has remained influential. Since 1969, every director has been an assistant director or undersecretary (*Jikan*) of the Cultural Office (*Monbu Jimu*). A notable example is Sato Teiichi (1941-), director of the museum from 2007 to 2009 and special ambassador to UNESCO for Japan. Zeniya Masaya (1949-), director between 2009 and 2022, has been a government official since 1973. He has identified the museum as the 'Face of Japan', where it is a crucial partner for organizing exhibitions alongside the Ministry of Education and Foreign Affairs. Despite this connection, he argues that the role of the TNM is to be politically neutral and focus on art and history; he notes that ethnology, which he links to the Ainu and the Ryukyu, is not a focus of the museum (Zeniya 2015: 36-7; see also Shimoyu 2011: 53). Zeniya is not unique in these views; this policy of representation through art can be traced back to the early twentieth century in Japan (Yoshida 2001: 84).

This view of art, which Ainu objects do not seem to be part of, since the museum classifies them as ethnology, requires scrutiny. The etymology of the concept of art (*Bijutsu*) is a specific trope introduced in January 1872 and in the same context as the founding of the TNM, namely for the Vienna World Exhibition in 1873. Translated from European sources, the notion (that includes the character for beautiful, *bi*) was interpreted as a requisite for a nation to be considered a civilization (*bunmei*) and allowed Japan to compare itself to other places regarded as being of high and ancient civilization, localizing beauty within the notion of art (Shimoyu 2011: 57-60; Pai 2013: 59). The *Kaitakushi* started to collect Ainu artefacts to exhibit them at the Vienna World Exhibition, revealing an intricate connection between Ainu artefacts of ethnology, the idea of art, and the museum. In 1881, the *Kaitakushi* gifted another set of artefacts to the TNM. Colonialist collectors such as Tokugawa Yorisada (1892-1954) and Heiko Hatsu (unknown dates) donated objects, ranging from archaeological items to children's collectables. Since then, all Ainu artefacts have been classified as archaeological, a classification that has been typified as colonial (Tokyo National Museum 1992: VII-XI; Pai 2013: 61-9). It should be emphasized that this is not unique to the TNM but that the collection and display of Ainu artefacts are practices that occurred within a global museological network and broader discourse on indigenous curation (Tokyo National Museum 1992: VII-XIII; Siddle

1996: 78; Yoshida 2001: 77-88). This research has not identified curators specializing on the Ainu at the TNM during the period 1977 and 2017. The leading specialist at the time was Sasaku Tohiskazu, honorary librarian (*Meiyo Kanin*) at the museum between 1982 and 2004. His views and role are not clear in the exhibitions, given that this information is not published.

Between 1977 and 2017, the TNM has used and not used these items to represent the Ainu: one room within the Japanese gallery (*Honkan*) is designated to show the 'variety of culture of the Japanese archipelago'.[4] Here, Ainu and Ryukyu artefacts rotate every few months.[5] Ainu artefacts that are displayed consist of clothing, religious, and other traditional artefacts such as hunting material or models of houses and boats. A permanent text briefly introduces Ainu history from the twelfth century, their trade with the Japanese mainland, and the museum's first Ainu artefacts of 1873. There are no accompanying catalogues with these permanent exhibitions, meaning no changes can be analysed, despite a renewal occurring in 2004 (Shimoyu 2011: 66). Due to lack of provenance, descriptions of artefacts are limited to the year of acquisition, the era of usage or production, and used materials. What is clear, though, is that the permanent exhibition is characterized by limitations: lacking information, generalized introductions, and the regular absence of the Ainu altogether.

The exhibition *Crafts of the Ainu: the Tokyo National Museum*, held between 23 November and 19 December 1993, was the only temporary exhibition on the Ainu organized at the TNM between 1977 and 2017. Coinciding with the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples in 1993, the museum organized an exhibition in cooperation with the Agency of Cultural Affairs (*Bunka-chō*) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Here, it only displayed items from the Berlin Museum of Ethnology and the Regional Museum of Ethnology in Leipzig, Germany (Nakamura 2010: 9). The accompanying catalogue supports this by focusing on the acquisition of Ainu artefacts by Europeans and these two German museums. Here, it implies that the Europeans and ethnically Japanese (*Wajin*) held misconceptions toward Ainu culture but does not indicate what these misconceptions were, nor what their implications could be towards the conceptualization and representation of Ainu communities and culture (Tokyo National Museum 1993: 1-37). Ainu artefacts are standardly referred to as *kougei* ('crafts') and *mezurashii* ('rare') here (Tokyo National Museum 1993: 94-107). These terms are often contrasted with *bijutsu* ('art'), inferring that the Ainu do not possess the kind of art associated with civilization.

This discussion above reveals that tropes of colonial discourse continue to be present: with the absence of art – understood as the Ainu being uncivilized – underlying their representation, the museum negates its own influence on how the Ainu are represented. This results from the lack of provenance, the temporary erasure of the collection, and not reflecting on its own role, whether historically or contemporary. By doing so, the exhibitions effectively exclude the Ainu from the museum, or the 'Face of Japan' (Shimoyu 2011: 58-69; Zeniya 2015: 36-7).

The Ainu represented in the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, 1977-2017

The National Museum of Ethnology (*Minpaku*) in Osaka is Japan's first national ethnographic museum. The first director (between 1974 and 1993), Umesao Tadao (1920-2010), was a prominent anthropologist whose work was informed by anthropological expeditions during Japanese colonial times. His work classifies three geographical and cultural spaces (the West, East, and Middle) in the world, which significantly impacted anthropological studies in Japan and became the foundation for the museum (Umesao 2001: 10-1; Yoshida 2001: 93-6). His work has since been criticized for adhering to colonial hierarchies, in that he interprets Japan as culturally West and the West as implicitly superior (Yoshida 2001: 93-6; Ryang 2004: 217; Ziomek 2019: 257). The second director Sasaki Kōmei (1929-2013, museum director from 1993 to 1997), was also an influential anthropologist and was a board member of the Foundation of Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture. All directors up to 2017 were part of the group that founded the museum, with the current director Yoshida Kenji joining the museum in 1988.

Through these founders, the museum stipulates that its foremost goal is to conduct anthropological and ethnographic research. The second goal is to raise awareness of societies and cultures worldwide. Therefore, the museum does not have curators but rather, academic

and administrative staff involved in creating exhibitions. The museum often cooperates with other institutions to organize their exhibitions. Ohtsuka Kazuyoshi, trained in Japanese archaeology, was the primary specialist on the Ainu between 1976 and 2005. Since then, Sasaki Shiro has organized exhibitions about the Ainu, although Ohtsuka continued to be involved. The current specialist for the Ainu collection is Saito Reiko, who was trained in Hokkaido before she arrived at *Minpaku*.

The core of the museum's collection is intertwined with colonial legacy, as it was formed by artefacts acquired through the Anthropological Society of Nippon, founded in 1884, and the Japanese Society of Ethnology, founded in 1934. Since then, the collection of Ainu artefacts has expanded, such as through the 1975 donation of 21,000 items from the Tokyo Anthropological Laboratory and Tokyo University, which have been criticized for abusing the colonial system in acquiring such items. Other donations include over 6,000 items by Torii Ryūzō (1870-1953). Ryūzō was a prominent anthropologist who conducted ethnographic surveys around the Japanese colonies. Also, being active in politics, he exerted his influence to acquire objects from all over the 'new' places that the Japanese controlled, made possible by the colonial setting (Pai 2013: 164; Yoshida 2001: 88-101).

Looking at the first permanent exhibition (1977-1986), the Ainu were presented via two tropes: first, the trope of tradition (*dentōteki*), as in pre-Japanese lifestyle, was centred. The exhibition centred traditional hunter-gatherer materials and objects of religious rites. An example of such a rite being emphasized was the bear ceremony (*Iomante*), where a bear is sacrificed to release its spirit from the human world. The second trope can be found in the explanation of the *Kotan*. This Ainu word refers to their settlements; in the exhibition, however, it was explained and emphasized as a whole, small, and ordered world of the Ainu, representing it as timeless and unchanging. The exhibition had no room for discussing the provenance of objects, historical developments, or differentiation between communities. However, the exhibition did note that the Ainu communities had proficient skills and crafts, which should be regarded as beautiful (*utsukushii*) (National Museum of Ethnology 1977; 1981).

In 1986, the museum acknowledged that its permanent exhibition did not represent the Ainu adequately and upgraded it to focus on traditional cultures and differences between various Ainu communities (National Museum of Ethnology 1986: 1 and 161-5). Here, historical developments were acknowledged, particularly Meiji era influences and the integration of the Ainu into the world system. However, these influences were not discussed in detail nor displayed through artefacts, thereby continuing the first exhibition's narrative. Niessen (1994: 23; 1996: 133) criticized the exhibition for displaying a reified, static, and nostalgic image that, despite representing the Ainu as distinct and separate from the Japanese, fundamentally denies Ainu identity. Ohtsuka and his colleague Shimizu criticized her, stating she did not consider her own and the museum's limitations and that through her lens of North American indigenous studies, she was emphasizing a contrast between the museum and the Ainu that did not exist. However, it needs to be emphasized that both acknowledged that the permanent exhibition could be improved (Ohtsuka 1997: 118, 2011: 118; Shimizu 1997: 129).

Following this, *Minpaku* altered its permanent exhibition in 2000. Here, they continued to utilize the trope of tradition but also incorporated active resistance of Ainu members to protect their culture, such as rebellions. However, by doing so, the exhibition created a dialectical opposition between the Ainu and the Japanese, emphasizing the differences between the two and the one-sided perspective of Ainu communities protecting their culture at all costs. It lacked multiple perspectives, which is peculiar given that the museum explicitly mentioned the wish to focus on the dynamics and peculiarities of Ainu cultures via cooperation with Ainu communities in the accompanying catalogue. Why this did not occur is not indicated (National Museum of Ethnology 2000: 93-100; see also 2004; 2007a).

Between 2009 and 2016, the museum was closed for renovation, which allowed another upgrade of the Ainu exhibition. Here, it utilized this wish to cooperate with Ainu communities and incorporated three tropes to represent the Ainu: first, it explicitly acknowledges the issues of assimilation and discrimination since the Meiji period. Second, it centres on changes in the political and cultural recognition of the Ainu. Third, it emphasizes diversity and revitalization of Ainu culture. With these tropes, the complexity of Ainu identity nowadays is emphasized. The main critique, however, is that the information has quickly outdated, as by 2017, the

presented information only covers the period up to 1997, the year the Former Aborigines Act was revoked (National Museum of Ethnology 2016: 79-84).

Minpaku organized six exhibitions centred on the Ainu between 1977 and 2017, complementing the image presented in the permanent exhibitions. The first exhibition was a general exhibition that showcased newly acquired artefacts between November 1988 and May 1989. This exhibition, however, had no accompanying catalogue and therefore cannot be analysed here. The second exhibition, and the first focused exclusively on the Ainu, was held alongside the International Year of the World's Indigenous People in 1993. It was also the first co-organized by Ainu organizations and activists, including Kayano Shigeru. The central trope within this exhibition was indigeneity. Through an activist lens, it interpreted modern Ainu identity as under attack, mentioned how assimilation policies (*Dōka*) hollow it out, and showed that the Ainu communities used political resistance as a vocal strategy. However, similar to the exhibition of 2000, a dialectical opposition between the Japanese and the Ainu was emphasized (National Museum of Ethnology 1993: 10-31).

In 2004, the museum organized the exhibition *Message from the Ainu: Craft and Spirit*, exhibiting the works, conditions, and background of four Ainu artists in woodworking and embroidery. It was one of the first Japanese museums to centre artists in this way (Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture 2003: 168; Nakamura 2010: 10). The central tropes utilized in this exhibition were the ones of tradition (*Dentō*), in particular how they continue their practices amidst pressure, and also the perspective of the 'new' (*atarashii*), namely how they adapt their work to changing forms and practices (Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture 2003; see also Nakamura 2010: 10; Ohtsuka 2011: 133-4).

In 2007, the museum displayed fifteen Japanese and four foreign books from the nineteenth century that described the Ainu. This exhibition differed from previous ones as it centred self-reflection: in particular, it asked questions about what imagery these books establish, the need to question their accuracy and information, and what bias constitutes these works (National Museum of Ethnology 2007b: 2-8). By doing so, it argued against essentialist notions presented in Japanese historiography, arguing that our information is incomplete and fractured.

The exhibition on the lifestyle of the Ainu (*Ainu no Kurashi*) of 2011 was of a different kind, co-organized by the Ainu Research Foundation and centred on the collections of German museums. Via a lens of lifestyle, it provided a more introductory perspective on the Ainu at large. However, the exhibition adopted a clear reflective lens: it argued for a diverse history of the Ainu and explicitly contrasted official images presented, linking it to the legacy of the *Kaitakushi* and the Meiji government. It stated, for example, how our knowledge of Sakhalin Ainu is too greatly influenced by official governmental documents created between 1905 and 1950. Here, the exhibition argued, an explicit role is to be found for museums to counter such perspectives (National Museum of Ethnology 2011: 108-14).

The final exhibition on the Ainu was held in 2016 in cooperation with the Hokkaido Museum and the National Museum of Japanese History. Similar to 2011, it focused on historical works on the Ainu; specifically, it analysed the picture-book *Ainu Chieftains Portraits* (*Ishū Retsuzōzu*), which depicts 13 Ainu chieftains that have a deep connection to the Menashi-Kunashir Rebellion (1789), where Ainu communities revolted against the Japanese, leading to 70 Japanese deaths and the execution of 34 Ainu. Similar to 2011, it displayed and questioned the imagery created in this book, focusing on their sophisticated clothing, relationship with Japanese merchants, and the difficult decisions that Ainu chieftains often had to make. It highlighted, for instance, chieftains that pledged allegiance to the Japanese to prevent war between the groups (Hokkaido Museum 2015: 4-15). By doing so, it tried to forgo the framework imposed on this rebellion as one of Ainu versus Japanese. Rather, it emphasized its complexity and the issues of sources and representation.

As becomes clear from the above, evident changes in tropes utilized to represent the Ainu occurred at *Minpaku* between 1977 and 2017. Here, the museum renounces essentialist notions of tradition and dialectical opposition towards self-reflection, introducing new perspectives and centring agency of the Ainu to reconstruct their history and culture. Yoshida, the director since 2017 but active at the museum since 1988, attributes this change to developments in the field of ethnology: in the 1980s, the field of ethnology criticized the usage of ethnology in

representing merely 'other cultures' and started to use ethnology to perform introspection and to change awareness of the juxtaposition between one's 'own culture' and 'other cultures'. For Yoshida, the exhibition organized with the British Museum, *Images of Other Cultures* (1997), allowed him and the museum staff to realize the importance of 'cultural relativism', claiming it made them abandon the axis of tradition/modernity as the framework to interpret culture. He acknowledges that this is only slowly becoming more visible in the museum and can be most explicitly found in the permanent exhibition of 2016; the museum has been criticized for not implementing such practices earlier (Shimizu 1997: 122; Nakamura 2010: 7; Yoshida 2023: 492). For the Ainu exhibition specifically, Ohtsuka attributes these changes to the context of time. He states that at the start, the views of the museum coincided with official governmental views, which did not acknowledge the Ainu (Ohtsuka 2011: 118). International developments in the 1980s and 1990s, criticism of the museum and politics of representation in the 1990s invoked the need for incorporating Ainu perspectives. He shows how the main changes occurred through active cooperation with Ainu communities and members, noting the experiences of organizing the exhibition in 1993 and 2003, the cooperation with Ainu artists since 1999, and the revoking of the Former Aborigines Act in 1997 (Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture 2000; Ohtsuka 2011: 129-40).

This research supports these views but notes an apparent discrepancy between permanent and temporary exhibitions. For the permanent exhibitions, we can see change incorporated at various stages. Between 1977 and 1986, the central tropes consisted of tradition and timelessness that connected to the historical colonial discourse as sketched earlier. Between 1986 and 2000, the exhibition incorporated historical developments, of which one can question whether this fundamentally challenged colonial tropes by applying dialectical oppositions and a lack of agency. With the upgrades in 2000 and 2016, changes occurred whereby the agency of the Ainu is acknowledged. This focus had been incorporated much earlier in the temporary exhibitions. As this research indicates, the permanent exhibition could benefit from the temporary exhibitions held so far by embedding their perspectives and updating its information to represent current developments.

Conclusion

Scholars and academic research have noted that the role of museums in representing others is constructed with the legitimating logic that is the legacy of colonialism (Chang 2012; Sunnucks 2021). This article has highlighted that this representation has been exercised differently across Japan by offering a critical reading of the representation of Ainu communities in the Tokyo National Museum (TNM) and the National Museum of Ethnology (*Minpaku*) in Osaka between 1977 and 2017.

As acknowledged here, the history of Ainu communities is fractured, contested, and complex. While there were clear policies to assimilate Ainu communities with the aim to erase them as a distinct group, the Japanese government also continued to differentiate them, inciting tropes that the Ainu were unable to become Japanese. Research has pointed out that Ainu members had mixed responses but held agency in choosing their battles: some wanted to become part of the Japanese empire, some actively resisted assimilation, and some wanted neither. This complexity remains today, where issues continue to acknowledge Ainu identity and traditions, persisting discrimination, and feelings of inadequate representation by the Japanese government and museums. Representation could be improved by centring or highlighting agency.

In the TNM, through the construction of its collection, its interconnection with governmental organizations, the scarcity of exhibiting the Ainu, and the words used to describe them, one can witness the adherence to tropes present in the colonial discourses towards the Ainu in Japan. This research suggests a failure of best practice to challenge the colonial discourses and its tropes, found in the regular absence of the Ainu, the artefacts on display that lack provenance and are classified as 'prehistoric', as well as focusing merely on introducing the Ainu in a manner that ignores historical developments and critical reflection.

Regarding *Minpaku*, we witness several developments in their Ainu-focused exhibitions

in the same period. In the first permanent exhibitions of 1977-1986 and 1986-1999, essentializing tropes of tradition and lack of historical developments prior to Japanese colonization are visible. Through changes in practices and international discourses on anthropology and the Ainu, museum staff adapted their practices and exhibitions. Notions of 'cultural relativism', cooperation with Ainu members, and self-reflection became central in temporary exhibitions. Permanent exhibitions from the 2000s have incorporated this to some extent.

When comparing the two museums, the representation differs significantly. Some key differences lie in their cooperation and focus. While the TNM focuses on notions of art and being politically neutral, it has not been able to challenge colonial discourses that underpin its collection and foundation. The lack of interest is implied by the museum's focus on art, which, in the case of the Ainu, the museum implies is non-existent, and the absence of cooperation with Ainu organizations and people. A significant contrast is found with *Minpaku*, where the notions of academic research and developments alongside cooperation with other museums and Ainu organizations have led to more self-reflection and changes in perspectives in their permanent and temporary exhibitions since the 1990s. This research supports other research, such as that of Nakamura (2010: 1), who explains such a difference via the use of exhibitions, namely if it is to offer an introduction (*nyūmon*) or to provide new perspectives (*atarashii shiten*): renouncing essentialist notions of tradition or art/craft, implementing self-reflection, and centring agency of the Ainu to reconstruct their history and culture towards this necessary shift in perspective and goal.

The Ainu's position inside and outside Japan's museum system remains fragile. Despite continuous fights for recognition and change, the Ainu struggle with the homogenizing chronotopes inherent in nationalist Japanese historiography, which can also be seen in other countries and museum systems (MacKenzie 2009: 1-17; Nakamura and Sutherland 2019: 52-3). Museums play a crucial role here through the notion of representation. On 26 April 2019, the Japanese government promulgated the first official governmental National Ainu Museum (*Upopoy*), which opened on 12 July 2020. It replaced the existing Ainu Museum in Shiraoi, Hokkaido. The *Upopoy* has been criticized for applying tropes of extinction, emphasizing colonial tropes of 'cultivated among nature', and even disrespecting the Ainu by displaying Ainu remains that were taken unethically by Japanese researchers in the 1930s (Zaman *et al*. 2022: 12).[6] This shows that museums continue to struggle with the complexity of the history of the Ainu and need to find ways to do justice to their complexity. As Nakamura (2007: 331-50) has emphasized, museums could benefit from more cooperation and exhibit the postcolonial realities that postulate the situation of the Ainu, which has been effective in *Minpaku* to a great extent, as this research testifies to. Therefore, this research urges further reflection on such matters, as well as more research on the two museums above and their representation of others, for example, the former colonies of Korea and Taiwan, and to reveal if and how we can learn from their representation and how they can enhance their best practices.

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Notes

1. Shimoyu (2011) has analysed the exhibitions at the TNM since 1872.

2. Kyodo, 'Fighters to Take Down Banners Offensive to Ainu', *Japan Times* 9 November 2015. https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/11/09/national/social-issues/ainu-group-unhappy-baseball-teams-banner-chitose-airport/, accessed 25 October 2017.

3. Names here follow the Japanese convention of family name first, given name second.

4. This quote derives from the permanent text that is displayed in the Ainu/Ryukyu room as visited in the summer of 2017.

5. As there is a designated room with a permanent text on the Ainu, this research regards this as a permanent exhibition.

6. Yusuke Suzumaru, 「ウポポイ批判」は何故見過ごされてはならないのか ['Why We Should Not Ignore the Groundless Rumors of Upopoy'] Note 2020. https://note.com/yusuke_suzumura/n/nd7d305056357, accessed 21 April 2023.

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