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# Making “Useful Citizens” of Ainu Subjects in Early Twentieth-Century Japan

DAVID L. HOWELL

THE MODERN JAPANESE STATE CALLED on its subjects to imagine themselves as members of a national community joined by a common bond to the imperial institution. This form of imagining—the so-called emperor-system ideology—did not emerge fully formed after the Meiji Restoration of 1868 but, rather, was the continually changing product of decades of institutional, political, and intellectual development and conflict (Gluck 1985; Gordon 1991; Fujitani 1996; Garon 1997). A central paradox of modern Japanese history is that this ideology evolved more or less contemporaneously with the acquisition of an ethnically and culturally diverse colonial empire. Ideologues tried hard to rectify the contradiction between a state organized around a uniquely Japanese sovereign and an undeniably diverse population of subjects. They did this in the early twentieth century by espousing a self-serving multiethnic discourse in which they linked the diversity of the empire to the heterogeneous origins of the so-called Yamato people (the majority Japanese). On the one hand, writers argued that the Yamato people were of mixed racial stock, while on the other hand, they justified colonial expansion as the reunification of peoples who in ancient times had enjoyed the beneficence of Japanese imperial rule (see Oguma 1995, and particularly 1998).<sup>1</sup> They argued in effect that Japan had always been multiethnic and that colonial subjects had always been Japanese. In this way, they were able to compartmentalize the manifest diversity of the empire’s population by relegating it to the category of residual difference that would disappear in due course as policies of assimilation (*dōka*) and “imperialization” (*kōminka*) took effect—just as the heterogeneity of the early Japanese population had been effaced by the spread of imperial rule through the archipelago.

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<sup>1</sup>John Lie briefly summarizes prewar multiethnic ideology (2001, 122–25). For examples of writings in this vein, focusing on Korea, see, for example, Kanazawa 1929; Kita Sa. 1979. Tessa Morris-Suzuki (1998a) discusses the complexities of ethnicity and citizenship, particularly in Karafuto (southern Sakhalin).

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The emperor-system ideology's accommodation to the fact of multiethnicity was rooted in what might be called its transcendental particularism. Because the emperor was a singularly Japanese sovereign, non-Japanese identities had to be assimilated through such means as the assignment of Japanese names, use of the Japanese language, and adoption of Japanese customs. Ainu, Okinawans, and colonial subjects were encouraged to assimilate in this manner, since this was the only way to universalize the intrinsically particularistic aspects of the state ideology. To be sure, the state generally refrained from unilaterally imposing Japanese identities on colonial subjects (a category that did not formally include the Ainu and Okinawans) until the period of total war in the late 1930s and 1940s. Nevertheless, assimilation was always a goal and necessarily so, since the ideology of a family-state, with the emperor as father-sovereign, was incompatible with the permanent presence of non-Japanese peoples. Thus, notwithstanding the discourse of multiethnicity, actual policy was aimed at ethnic negation, or an effort to remove non-Japanese identities from the realm of the politically meaningful. That is, the presence of non-Japanese ethnic groups in the empire was acknowledged and occasionally even celebrated, but assimilation was promoted as the only path to full incorporation within the national community. Imperial Japan was a multiethnic entity, but its multiethnicity was not perceived as a permanent condition, much less an essential feature of its character.

Discussions of the Ainu took place in the context of this peculiar discourse of multiethnicity and assimilation. Superficially, mainstream minority leaders in Hokkaido heeded the state's call for a monolithic view of Japanese identity. They urged their fellows to abandon their culture and assimilate fully into the majority population because they saw assimilation as the surest route to economic betterment and social acceptance. By tying assimilation to livelihood and everyday life, however, they left room for the survival of Ainu identities in the private sphere of household and community life. A handful of Ainu activists went even further. In response to the state's policies of ethnic negation, some prewar activists espoused an Ainu identity that was distinct yet firmly embedded within Japanese society. Viewing the Ainu as imperial subjects first and indigenes second, while hardly empowering, allowed for the possibility of lasting cultural diversity in the imperial Japanese state.

In this article, I will examine questions surrounding the assimilation and livelihoods of the Ainu in the early twentieth century. I will concentrate on debates conducted in Hokkaido about the proper place of the Ainu people in the Japanese national community; for the participants in these debates, assimilation and livelihood were not abstractions but, rather, questions of the fundamental constitution of local society. My aims are, first, to see who "counted" as Ainu and, second, to demonstrate that the goal of assimilation was to transform the Ainu into "useful citizens" of Japan by bringing their everyday lives and livelihoods into line with normative patterns. Implicit in government policy was the assumption that once the Ainu became "useful citizens" they would disappear from statistics and hence cease to exist as a distinct ethnic group. In contrast, Ainu activists argued in effect that becoming "useful citizens" was the only way for the Ainu to survive as a community.

The Ainu are the indigenous people of Hokkaido, southern Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands. Their history is intimately tied to Japan's: the Matsumae domain subjugated them militarily in the seventeenth century, and commercial fishers exploited their need for iron and other commodities in order to tie them to a wage-labor regime in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the time of the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the traditional Ainu economy of hunting, fishing, and gathering had been irreparably compromised, and virtually all Ainu depended to at least some

extent on trade and wage labor for their livelihoods (Howell 1994a, 1995; Siddle 1996; Walker 2001).

For the first fifteen years or so of the Meiji era, authorities in Hokkaido largely ignored the Ainu and instead focused their energies on fostering industrial development and agricultural immigration from the Japanese mainland. In the mid-1880s, when Hokkaido was divided into three jurisdictions, officials in Sapporo and particularly Nemuro Prefectures attempted haphazardly to turn the Ainu into farmers and thereby integrate them into the general Japanese population. This policy reflected the officials' conviction that farming was an occupation uniquely suited to genuine Japanese subjects: they pulled their Ainu charges out of relatively stable livelihoods as fishers, lumberjacks, and construction workers in an attempt to turn them into marginal cultivators of onions, radishes, and potatoes (Howell 1997). After the amalgamation of the three prefectures into the Department of Hokkaido (Hokkaidō-chō) in 1886, the government curtailed these sporadic attempts to transform the Ainu into farmers, only to revive them after the implementation of the Hokkaido Former Aborigine Protection Act (Hokkaidō kyūdojin hogohō) in 1899. This law, which remained on the books until 1997 (by which time it had long been a dead letter), was the centerpiece of the state's Ainu policy throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

The principal provisions of the so-called protection law were as follows.<sup>2</sup> All Ainu households were eligible to receive grants of up to 5 *chō* (15,000 *tsubo*, or 12.25 acres) of land to engage in agriculture. This land was free from all taxes for thirty years. No land in Ainu possession (including holdings acquired prior to implementation of the law) could be transferred except to an heir, nor could it be mortgaged under any circumstances. Land granted to Ainu under the law had to be cultivated within fifteen years or else control would revert to the state. The law also promised to provide welfare to Ainu who could not afford agricultural implements, medical care, funeral expenses, or tuition for their children's education; such expenses, however, were to be met with revenues from Ainu communal property holdings managed by the Hokkaido governor. Finally, the protection law provided for the establishment of hospitals and elementary schools in Ainu communities with central-government funds.

In its attempt to endow the Ainu with the ability to support themselves through agriculture, the protection law sought to bring the Ainu within the mass of the Japanese population as ordinary commoners. Not surprisingly, the program did little good for the Ainu as a whole and left many decidedly worse off than they had been before: even aside from their lack of experience or interest in farming, agriculture was generally less rewarding economically than wage labor. Indeed, land distributed under the law's provisions was sometimes allocated without prior surveying, so that Ainu households might receive several acres of wasteland only to lose it once they failed to put it under cultivation within the requisite fifteen years.<sup>3</sup>

The law was nevertheless the logical product of the modern state's policy of putting individual livelihood at the center of participation in the nation-building

<sup>2</sup>For the text of the protection law and related measures, with later amendments, see Ogawa and Yamada 1998, 409–51.

<sup>3</sup>About one-fifth (21.5 percent) of the land granted under the protection law was repossessed for noncultivation. Another quarter (25.6 percent) was turned over to majority Japanese tenants during the postwar land reform. In 1987 only 1,360 hectares, or about 15 percent, of the land remained in Ainu hands (Utari Mondai Konwakai 1988, 2). After World War II, Ainu groups sometimes tried—usually without success—to regain land that had been taken away from Ainu cultivators (see one such petition in Hokkaidō Ainu Kyōkai 1946).

project because it made Ainu households individually responsible to contribute to the nation. By ostensibly giving them the means to support themselves without further government assistance, it endowed the Ainu with a measure of agency: from the state's standpoint, the success or failure of individual Ainu households after 1899 was less a product of government policy than of the will of the Ainu themselves to make their own way in modern society. This attitude held although even experienced majority Japanese farmers would have been hard pressed to succeed under the terms of the protection law: after all, the point of the policy was not to meet the Ainu's complete subsistence needs so much as it was to provide a minimal base from which they might build according to their own ambitions and abilities.<sup>4</sup> In any case, because agricultural promotion lay at the heart of the state's colonization efforts in Hokkaido more generally, giving the Ainu adequate amounts of fertile land would have imperiled the ability of immigrants from the mainland to contribute to the island's development.<sup>5</sup> Although the protection law was tragically inadequate, any more thorough attempt at providing welfare—not to mention simply leaving the Ainu in peace—would have called into question the premises behind the modern state's economic policies throughout the country.

### Everyday Life

Let us examine these issues against the background of changes in the position of the Hokkaido Ainu during the period between the enactment of the protection law in 1899 and its revision in 1937. As noted above, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the Ainu had seen their hunting, fishing, and gathering economy transformed by centuries of trade with and domination by the Japanese. The spread of commercial fishing drew Ainu into wage labor, beginning in the south and west of Hokkaido in the latter half of the eighteenth century and spreading throughout the island and beyond into the Kuril Islands and southern Sakhalin by the early nineteenth century (Howell 1995; Walker 2001). The effects of Ainu involvement in the fishing economy were compounded by the Meiji regime's policies after 1868. Nevertheless, although they had long been politically and economically subordinated to the Japanese, the impact of contact before the implementation of the protection law was gradual enough to allow the Ainu to accommodate themselves to new conditions without completely undermining the integrity of their society and culture. Thus, although Ainu culture in the late nineteenth century—never isolated in the first place—was decidedly less insular than it had been two or three centuries earlier, it was no less authentic as a result.

During the early twentieth century, however, immigration from the Japanese mainland and rapid economic development undermined earlier patterns of accommodation, with the result that traditional Ainu society quickly collapsed. The state's policies after 1899—and consequently the Ainu's response to them—were based on the Hokkaido Former Aborigine Protection Act. As we have seen, the ostensible purpose of the measure was to facilitate Ainu participation in agriculture while

<sup>4</sup>A government report issued in 1934 noted that the paucity of funds expended for Ainu welfare was justified because the government's goal was never to provide welfare to the Ainu *per se*, but rather to hasten their assimilation into Japanese society (Hokkaidō-chō 1981, 350–51).

<sup>5</sup>On the state's development efforts in Hokkaido more generally, see Kuwabara 1994.

shielding them from the predations of majority Japanese who might try to deprive them of their landed property. At the time of the law's implementation, however, very few Ainu lived by farming, nor had many shown interest when officials had tried earlier to push them in that direction. Nevertheless, the protection law included no provisions for helping Ainu establish themselves in nonagricultural occupations.

A significant problem with the protection law was that, despite its nearly exclusive emphasis on establishing agricultural communities, the state in fact had relatively little land to distribute to the Ainu. Although most Ainu in rural areas did receive land grants, they typically received only a fraction of the 5 chō maximum— itself barely half the amount needed to support a typical household under Hokkaido's difficult climatic conditions. By 1909—about the time that the state ran out of land to distribute—3,850 of a total 4,314 known Ainu households had received just 9,656 chō of land (about 23,658 acres, or 2.5 chō [6.1 acres] per land-receiving household) (Hokkaidō-chō 1981, 291 [land grants], 327 [population]).<sup>6</sup> To make matters worse, a loophole in the law made it possible for Ainu to lease farmland to majority Japanese tenants, with the result that many holdings passed quickly out of Ainu control (Kita Sh. 1968, 13).

Despite these and other problems, however, the protection law had a profound impact on Ainu society, most visibly in the relocation of scattered groups of households to larger farming communities. For example, Chiroto (in present-day Makubetsu-chō)—the home of a number of twentieth-century activists, including such diverse figures as Yoshida Kikutarō (a conservative advocate of assimilation) and Takahashi Makoto (who called for the creation of an independent Ainu state after World War II)—was founded when the state brought thirty-two households together to farm.<sup>7</sup> This relocation policy was part of a long process of Ainu movement within Hokkaido, which began during the Tokugawa period with the establishment of Ainu communities near Japanese-run commercial fisheries and continued under the Meiji regime before 1899 with the removal of Ainu for reasons of "protection" and government convenience.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, with the exception of Nibutani and other *kotan* (small settlements whose residents were usually members of the same lineage) along the Saru River, the best-known Ainu communities in contemporary Hokkaido—including Shiraoi and Chikabumi (in Asahikawa City)—were artificial creations of Japanese economic expansion and state policy (on Shiraoi, see Moritake 1977, 94; on Chikabumi, see Ogawa 1991a, 277).<sup>9</sup>

The transformation of the Ainu's everyday lives accelerated after the implementation of the protection law. This can be seen in the spread of formal education and the concomitant decline in the use of the Ainu language as the medium

<sup>6</sup>On the lack of land to distribute, see "Kyūdojin hogo shisetsu kaizen zadankai" 1935, 21–22 (hereafter *Zadankai*).

<sup>7</sup>On Yoshida and the relocation of Ainu to Chiroto, see Murakami 1942, 75; on Takahashi, see *Tokachi daihyakka jiten*, no. 352, s.v. "Takahashi Makoto." Takahashi made his calls for independence through a short-lived newspaper, the *Ainu shinbun*, which he published monthly in 1946. The Hokkaido Prefectural Library has much of the newspaper's run; some issues have been reprinted in Tanigawa 1972, 251–70, and in Ogawa and Yamada 1998, 234–76.

<sup>8</sup>Sasaki Toshikazu (1984) discusses forced relocation in the Tokugawa period. Ogawa Masahito has counted twenty significant instances of forced relocation before 1899 (1991a, 277).

<sup>9</sup>Even along the Saru River, four Ainu *kotan* were moved in 1886 (see Ogawa 1991a, 277nn8–11).

of daily interaction.<sup>10</sup> School enrollment among Ainu children rose from under 45 percent in 1901 to 89 percent just six years later; it continued to rise thereafter, topping 99 percent by 1927 (Hokkaidō-chō 1981, 274). To be sure, not every child enrolled in school actually attended regularly. Since the use of the Ainu language was not permitted in the schools, children born after about 1890 grew up more fluent in Japanese; one Japanese observer, Sasaki Chōzaemon, said in 1931 that only a few older people in Iburi and Hidaka—regions in eastern Hokkaido with the highest concentrations of Ainu residents—were still monolingual in Ainu (1931, 94–95). Today no more than a handful of people are fluent in the language: only 5 of 642 respondents (0.8 percent) to a government survey in 1993 claimed to have conversational ability in the language, while 590 (91 percent) said they knew no more than a few words (Hokkaidō Seikatsu Fukushima 1993, 45).<sup>11</sup> Indeed, as early as 1925, the loss of the language and its accompanying oral traditions had progressed so far that the linguist Kindaichi Kyōsuke lamented in a speech in Tokyo that the old ways had all but disappeared (1926, 25). His response was to recruit informants such as Kannari Matsu and Chiri Yukie to help him record and translate oral literature, which resulted in the preservation of many important works before it was too late (Fujimoto 1991, 125–65).

Like the language, other features of Ainu culture came under increasing pressure after the implementation of the protection law. Japanese clothing had almost completely replaced Ainu garments in all but ritual uses by the beginning of the twentieth century. Dietary practices changed, too, as a combination of overhunting and government restrictions on fishing made it increasingly difficult for Ainu to obtain the deer and salmon that had once been their principal foodstuffs.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the symbolically most significant change, however, was in housing: the physical layout of Ainu dwellings (*chise*) had great religious import, but officials and reformers, including some Ainu advocates of assimilation, saw them as unhygienic breeding grounds for disease and also as disturbing emblems of the Ainu's alien ethnicity.

Housing was thus a target of the first efforts to intervene in Ainu cultural practices, which began in 1871 with a ban on the custom of burning dwellings after the death of a family member (Kaiho 1992, 24–26). By the end of the Meiji period, most Ainu lived in Japanese-style houses. A 1916 report on health conditions in Chikabumi said that no more than a handful of traditional dwellings survived in that community, while a 1929 government survey found few Ainu-style houses outside the most remote districts on the Pacific coast of Hokkaido (Hokkaidō-chō Keisatsubu 1916, 14; Hokkaidō-chō Gakumubu Shakaika 1929, 4). Another survey in the early 1930s found that, of a total of 3,417 Ainu households, 558 lived in “grass huts” (*kusagoya*) without wooden floors; 1,607 were housed in grass huts with wooden floors; and 1,252 had dwellings with Japanese-style roofs of wood or tin (Hokkaidō-chō 1981, 341).

<sup>10</sup>I will not devote much attention to Ainu education, which, after the promotion of agriculture, was the main focus of the protection law. Ogawa Masahito, in a series of excellent articles, has examined Ainu education within the broader context of state policy (see Ogawa 1991b, 1993a, 1993b, and, particularly, 1991a). These works have been collected as Ogawa 1997. For an English treatment, see Ogawa 1993c.

<sup>11</sup>On the question of Ainu's status as a dying language, see Maher 1995.

<sup>12</sup>On the depletion of the deer population, see Blakiston 1883, 45. For a poignant description of an elderly Ainu's arrest for poaching salmon in the river near his home, see Kayano 1993, 57–71.

Both the state and private reformers saw the replacement of surviving Ainu dwellings with Japanese-style houses as the cornerstone of their efforts to modernize Ainu everyday life. For example, the pro-assimilation Ainu activist Yoshida Kikutarō considered the conversion of all 23 dwellings in his home community by 1930 to be the crowning achievement of his career. The state concurred, sending an imperial emissary to present him with a commemorative plaque in 1936 (Kita Sh. 1968, 14–15; Yoshida K. 1958, 18, 28). In a roundtable discussion that the Hokkaido departmental government sponsored in 1935, Ainu activists in attendance—most of whom favored rapid assimilation—stated that the decline of Ainu religion meant that new houses could be built without regard to the symbolic significance of their design (“Kyūdojin hogo shisetsu kaizen zadankai” 1935, 27–35 [hereafter, *Zadankai*]). Accordingly, when in 1937 the state implemented a fifteen-year program to replace the 1,000 or so (of a total 3,700) remaining Ainu-style houses, standard floor plans made no provisions for the so-called god’s windows, treasure shelves, or central fireplaces that were essential elements of Ainu dwellings (Kita K. 1937a, 39–40).<sup>13</sup> Because of the outbreak of the Pacific War, however, the program was curtailed in 1943, after just 170 houses had been built (Hokkaidō Minseibu 1960, 12).

From the perspective of government officials, these changes in the pattern of daily life were evidence that the Ainu were blending into the general population. For such observers, it was only a matter of time before the Ainu would disappear completely as a distinct ethnic group. Their optimism—they celebrated the loss of Ainu ethnicity—was unfounded, insofar as ethnic identity is distinct from cultural practice, to which the persistence of a distinct Ainu ethnicity to this day attests despite the almost complete disappearance of cultural practices. The issue is important, however, because it reveals much about the way that Ainu identity was situated within the modern Japanese polity. An examination of Japanese understandings of Ainu demography illustrates this point.

The most basic questions of modern Ainu history—who was Ainu and how many there were at any given time—are unanswerable because of the way in which records were kept. This problem is much more than a question of statistics. In 1871, when the state applied the household-registration law to the Ainu, it stopped keeping separate tallies of them in population registers. This decision was part of a more general policy of nominal homogenization in which minority groups—including ethnic minorities such as the Ainu and Okinawans as well as early modern status groups such as the outcastes and Buddhist clergy—were incorporated into the general population as commoners (*beimin*). Throughout the modern period, demographic data on the Ainu have been estimates based on the populations of traditional Ainu communities (Hokkaidō-chō 1981, 324–35).<sup>14</sup> Ainu who left home to seek better

<sup>13</sup>For statistics on the distribution of Ainu-style dwellings in communities throughout Hokkaido, see Teikoku Gakushūin Tōa Shōminzoku Chōsashitsu 1944, 34–38. For standard building plans, see Hokkaidō-chō Gakumubu Shakaika 1937.

<sup>14</sup>The number of Ainu living in such communities in Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands hovered around 17,000 throughout the prewar period. The officially estimated Ainu population was 15,275 in 1872 and 15,703 in 1930; it reached a peak of 18,674 in 1916 and dropped steadily thereafter. For yearly statistics, see Hokkaidō-chō 1981, 326–28; for a breakdown by community (c. 1930), see Hokkaidō-chō 1981, 328–39. Today, incidentally, the estimated Ainu population of around 30,000 is calculated from membership figures in the principal Ainu political organization, the Hokkaido Utari Association. Ainu who do not belong to the group—and many do not—are not considered to be Ainu for statistical purposes, nor are they eligible for state welfare policies.



economic opportunities in cities and at commercial fisheries dropped out of the state's gaze as Ainu, although they continued to suffer discrimination from majority Japanese. In essence, then, only residents of predominantly Ainu communities were officially considered to be Ainu, while those who left were amalgamated into the undifferentiated mass of the commoner population.

## Assimilation

Integral to the demography question was the problem of defining Ainu ethnicity for administrative purposes. The long history of interaction between the Ainu and majority Japanese had given rise to an equally long history of intermixture, with the result that many, if not most, people who identified as Ainu were in fact of mixed ancestry. This issue was not directly addressed in the protection law or other measures, and so it became a matter for the authorities to work out later. Home Ministry officials, at the prompting of the Hokkaido government, tried to come up with a legal definition of Ainu ethnicity in 1900, but ultimately they fell back on superficial physical characteristics as the key criterion. That is, only individuals whom "anyone would recognize as an aborigine" (*darebito mo dojin to mitomu beki mono*) were Ainu. In practice, this referred almost exclusively to residents of predominantly Ainu communities in rural areas and certain districts of cities such as Asahikawa and Muroran, since these were the only places where officials sought to distinguish Ainu from their majority neighbors. Pressed by the Hokkaido authorities to provide guidance on the treatment of households into which persons of different ethnicity had been adopted, the Home Ministry made its position clear: ethnicity was independent of household membership except that only heads of households were eligible to receive land grants. In fact, many Ainu adopted orphaned or abandoned majority Japanese children. With regard to the progeny of mixed marriages, however, the ministry could not be so definitive: thus, persons of one-fourth Ainu ancestry would be eligible for assistance under the protection law only if they were physically recognizable as Ainu ("Kyūdojin kakei ni kansuru ken" [June 16, 1900], inquiry from Hokkaido departmental governor and response from vice minister of home affairs, Hokkaidō-chō Gakumubu Shakaika 1937, 44–45).<sup>15</sup>

The equation of Ainu ethnicity with residence in an Ainu community and the concomitant assumption that once Ainu communities became indistinguishable from their majority counterparts the Ainu would cease to exist reveal that the state was more concerned with negating Ainu ethnicity as a viable alternative to identification with the Japanese state than in promoting assimilation per se. I say this in part because combating discrimination against individuals in employment, marriage, and other social relations—that is, bringing about assimilation in a way that would benefit the Ainu themselves—has never been a significant policy goal. The Marxist poet Nakano

<sup>15</sup>On the Ainu practice of adopting majority Japanese children, see Kōno 1911, 9; Peng 1977, 146–50. The poet Moritake Takeichi's elder sister, Tsuru, was such a child, adopted by Takeichi's father while he was working at the herring fishery at Atsuta (Moritake 1977, 90). Likewise, Nukishio Shirusu adopted Iizuka Nagamasa, the son of Iizuka Shinzō, a leader of the Chichibu Rebellion of 1884 and who lived underground in Hokkaido after escaping in the aftermath of the rebellion. Nagamasa attended the Ainu school in Shiranuka and was eventually married into the Su household, another Ainu family in the same community (*Ekashi to fuchi* Henshū Iinkai 1983, 324).

Shigeharu, anticipating postcolonialist discourse, made this point forcefully when he wrote that the Japanese wanted to see Ainu and colonial subjects assimilate, but only superficially so: the Japanese say, in effect, "speak Japanese, but speak it badly; wear kimonos, but wear them badly" (Nakano 1979, 11:186). More immediately, the government's policy of targeting Ainu communities and their residents' patterns of daily life had the effect of erasing spheres of Ainu social life that were autonomous from the modern state. If there were no communities of Ainu living differently from other Japanese communities, then supposedly there would for all practical purposes be no Ainu. However those people fared as individuals in their relations with other groups, they would lose the physical and social space in which they might assert a distinct and hence politically significant identity.

Decisions that individual Ainu made about how to lead their lives thus had a profound impact on the political meaning of Ainu ethnicity. Young people who left home to work in Sapporo or some other major urban center did not necessarily do so in an attempt to escape from their identity as Ainu. From the standpoint of the state and private reformers, however, once they left, they ceased functionally to be Ainu and were therefore no longer a concern for policymakers. This left the state free to concentrate its effort to resolve the "Ainu problem" on a diminished community of rural—and mostly very old or very young—Ainu (see Dohi 1895; Nakanome 1918; Ogawa and Yamada 1998, 452–75). It is no coincidence in this context that in 1936 Yoshida Iwao, the non-Ainu former principal of an Ainu school in Obihiro, called on the government to assist individual Ainu in relocating and intermarrying with majority Japanese (1936, 23). By the same token, when the poet Iboshi Hokuto decided to embrace his Ainu identity, he felt compelled to leave Tokyo and return to Hokkaido to tour kotan as a traveling salesman, in part because he felt that if all ambitious Ainu left their kotan, scholars and others who visited them would develop the wrong impression of the Ainu in general (Siddle 1995a, 7; Murakami 1942, 38; Kita K. 1937a, 8–16).

This point is particularly clear when one examines the discourse of assimilation during the prewar period. Commentators of all sorts, regardless of their other ideas, took for granted that the Ainu were doomed to extinction as a distinct population. Indeed, *horobiyuku minzoku*—a "dying race"—became a stock phrase in discussions of Ainu affairs. The notion of the Ainu's inevitable disappearance was an example of the social Darwinist discourse popular throughout the industrialized world at the time (Siddle 1996). The debate over the Ainu's fate in modern Japan was thus not over the question of whether they would disappear—much less whether they ought to disappear—but, rather, over the circumstances and meaning of their extinction as a distinct population. In all cases, the issue of intermarriage between Ainu and majority Japanese was central to the discourse. At one extreme were advocates of an apartheid policy, who warned of the supposedly deleterious effects of miscegenation, but such writers were more concerned with the Ainu of southern Sakhalin than with the far more numerous Ainu of Hokkaido (Aoyama 1918, app.; Nakanome 1918). Commentators in Hokkaido, conversely, almost universally welcomed intermarriage, as they saw it as a key to assimilation.

The most vocal advocate of intermarriage was Kita Shōmei (also read "Masaaki") (1897–1986), a self-appointed spokesman for the Ainu. Originally from Tokushima Prefecture in Shikoku, Kita served in various capacities in local and departmental government in Hokkaido between 1922 and 1936 and dedicated his career, both as an official and after returning to private life, to Ainu affairs. In addition to working in the Hokkaido Social Bureau, which was responsible for Ainu policy, Kita led an

organization of Ainu based in Obihiro, the Tokachi Clear Dawn Society (Tokachi kyokumeisha) (founded in 1922), and participated in the establishment of the Ainu Association (Ainu kyōkai, later renamed the Hokkaido Utari Association [Utari kyōkai]) in both its prewar and postwar incarnations (*Tokachi daihyakka jiten*, no. 345, s.v. “Kita Shōmei”).<sup>16</sup> In a booklet published in 1937,<sup>17</sup> Kita waxed poetic on the “bright” future of the Ainu people:

The Ainu people today resemble the sun sinking into the western sea, but on the morrow they shall be reborn as members of the Yamato race, sending forth bright rays of light. Their happiness shall ride forth on the clouds of daybreak.

The national policy of assimilation, pursued for three millennia since the nation’s founding, shall culminate here, the ideal of one people and one nation realized.

O! Is this not the path the Ainu should take?

Go forth!! Go forth!! Seek ye the ideal of assimilation.

(Kita K. 1937a, 52–53)

Throughout his writings, Kita expressed the same attitude toward Ainu assimilation. In the title of the tract from which the above quotation is taken, he posed a question—Shall the Ainu in fact vanish? (*Ainu hatashite horobiru ka*)—to which his answer was an unequivocal “no.” To be sure, he argued, the Ainu would eventually assimilate completely into the majority population through acculturation and especially intermarriage, so in that sense they would indeed disappear. Because the total volume of Ainu blood in the body politic would never diminish but only become diluted, however, the Ainu would live forever within the Japanese nation (Kita K. 1937a, 1–7; see also Kita Sh. 1927, 70–74).

As idiosyncratic as the forced logic of Kita’s argument sounds, it was in fact echoed and even anticipated by a number of other writers, all of them Ainu or, like Kita, their self-proclaimed friends. Indeed, perhaps the first person to argue that, insofar as the volume of Ainu plasma in the Japanese bloodstream never diminished, they would not become extinct was Takekuma Tokusaburō, who in 1918 became the first Ainu to publish a book (Takekuma 1918, 14–15).<sup>18</sup> Along these same lines, Yoshida Kikutarō proudly asserted in 1958 that the prevalence of comely women in northern Japan was evidence of the high concentration of Ainu blood in the population of northeastern Honshu and Hokkaido (1958, 31–32); if one agrees with Yoshida that physical beauty is a laudable racial characteristic, then the intermixture of the Ainu and majority Japanese populations redounded to the benefit of both.

On the surface, this discourse of liberation serology is hardly emancipatory, particularly when contrasted to the position espoused by activists today that the Ainu are Japan’s indigenous people and as such deserve a measure of political autonomy (Siddle 1996, 1995a). In the context of its time, however, this discourse suggested that the emperor’s family of subjects in fact comprised an amalgam of ethnic groups whose unitary identity as Japanese was of recent origin and that as a result the Ainu’s alien identity was no handicap to eventual participation in the Japanese nation as the equals of other subjects. A number of writers came close to making this argument explicitly by saying that, inasmuch as the ancestors of the Ainu had lived throughout Japan, the contemporary Japanese population was in fact part Ainu. Thus, the Ainu

<sup>16</sup>A number of Kita’s writings have been collected and reprinted as Kita Sh. 1987.

<sup>17</sup>Parts of the booklet were published as Kita K. 1937b.

<sup>18</sup>The book is reprinted in Ogawa and Yamada 1998, 351–72. On Takekuma, see Siddle 1995b, 4–6.

activist Kawamura Kaneto wrote, "if one equates the Japanese nation [*kokumin*] with the Yamato people [*minzoku*], then it stands to reason that their ancestors, the Ainu, are full-fledged Yamato themselves" (Murakami 1942, 99; see also Mitsuoka 1944, 119–23).<sup>19</sup> As I shall demonstrate below, a few other activists, notably Nukishio Kizō and Iboshi Hokuto, took the argument even further and asserted the possibility of a distinctly Ainu yet fully Japanese identity.

Most of the discourse on Ainu assimilation focused not on genetics but, rather, on practical policy issues, such as education, employment, and hygiene. Let us examine the proposals of Takekuma Tokusaburō and a group of concerned officials and private citizens in turn. In his 1918 book, *The Story of the Ainu* (*Ainu monogatari*), Takekuma put forward a plan to reform Ainu culture and thereby hasten assimilation. Takekuma was an elementary-school teacher; accordingly, most of his recommendations centered on the importance of Japanese-style education for the future improvement of the Ainu's position in society. Indeed, he saw the lack of educational attainment as the single most detrimental characteristic of his people. Greater learning would reduce the Ainu's dependence on government welfare, which assured them access to the essentials of food, clothing, and shelter but did not guarantee future improvements in their standard of living. Once properly educated, he wrote, the Ainu would be able to form self-help groups to study agriculture and other skills necessary for their livelihoods. Such reforms, combined with a heightened awareness of the need for proper hygiene and an assault on the nearly universal custom of drinking among Ainu men, would allow the Ainu to become "useful citizens" (*yūi naru kokumin*). In any case, he argued, neither Ainu nor majority Japanese should allow a person's Ainu background to be an excuse for failure (1918, 56–59).

Takekuma's most specific policy proposals concerned the system of Ainu schools set up under the provisions of the protection law. He greatly lamented that Ainu children spent only four years in school, instead of the six years required of majority Japanese, and that they were segregated from their majority neighbors in a special curriculum. He also called for higher levels of government spending on Ainu education and urged that scholarships be funded for Ainu children who wanted to go to middle school (1918, 59–61).

On July 10, 1935, seventeen years after Takekuma made his policy proposals, the Hokkaido government sponsored a roundtable discussion among bureaucrats, scholars, and prominent Ainu to consider the need for revising the Ainu protection law of 1899. The meeting was necessary, its organizers said, because after thirty-six years the protection measure no longer fit the circumstances of the Ainu, among whom assimilation had proceeded quite far. The discussion covered many facets of Ainu life, including government welfare, employment, hygiene, education, lifestyle, and assimilation, all with an eye to the proposed revision of the protection act, which was then under consideration at both the departmental and national levels (Zadankai 1935, 4–5; reprinted in Ogawa and Yamada 1998, 282–347; Yoshida I. 1936).

On the topic of employment, the participants agreed that the protection law's emphasis on agriculture was both impractical and obsolete—impractical because most Ainu continued to earn their livelihoods in other fields, and obsolete because, as noted above, the state had run out of land to distribute long ago. Thus, the discussants suggested that the state make small loans or grants to Ainu to help them buy fishing

<sup>19</sup>This discourse was replicated by leading postwar scholars, as well. See a report on the preservation of Ainu culture addressed to the Hokkaido governor, Machimura Kingo, in Ainu Bunka Hozon Taisaku Kyōgikai 1963, 1.

gear or establish workshops to make bear carvings and other crafts for the tourist trade, which was rapidly becoming an important source of livelihood for many. Moreover, Ainu who did own land should be helped in their efforts to expand their holdings and thereby establish viable farming operations. In general, the participants agreed that, in the end, practical training was more important than financial aid, which might encourage further dependence on government welfare (Zadankai 1935, 10–27, 65–68; Yoshida I. 1936, 15–16).

Health and hygiene was another major topic of discussion. The participants considered this issue to be intimately linked to housing, since they subscribed to the widespread (but probably inaccurate [Usami 1993]) assumption that the dark, poorly ventilated, and unclean Ainu dwellings were intrinsically unhealthy. Thus, the construction of Japanese-style houses would reduce the incidence of tuberculosis, trachoma, and other chronic diseases. Indeed, tuberculosis was a severe health problem among the Ainu. A study of Chikabumi in 1916 found that, at 39.9 cases per 10,000 people, the mortality rate from the disease was much lower than among the Hokkaido Ainu in general but was nevertheless about twice the national level and 2.6 times higher than that for Asahikawa City in general (Hokkaidō-chō Keisatsubu 1916, 16). The situation had not improved by 1935, as the mortality rate remained above 40 per 10,000 among the Hidaka Ainu, while it was just 27 per 10,000 in Sapporo, which had few Ainu residents (Zadankai 1935, 43–44). (Even at these lower rates among the majority population, tuberculosis was by far Japan's worst public-health problem [Johnston 1995].) Better housing, along with active efforts to promote regular bathing and abstinence from drinking, would supposedly curtail the spread of disease (Zadankai 1935, 27–35, 42–48; Yoshida I. 1936, 17–19).

Concerning education, the participants agreed with Takekuma's assessment that segregation was detrimental to Ainu development and thus recommended that the education provisions be stricken from the revised protection law (Zadankai 1935, 48–53, Yoshida I. 1936, 22–23). In any case, the question by that time was nearly moot, since majority Japanese immigration into areas with sufficient concentrations of Ainu population to warrant the establishment of schools had led to de facto integration—non-Ainu children enrolled in Ainu schools because they were usually the only ones in the vicinity (Ogawa 1993a).

A final major concern of the participants was the issue of customs and lifestyle as they related to the need to combat discrimination against the Ainu and promote assimilation. A general consensus prevailed that community self-help was the surest route to improvement (Zadankai 1935, 37–41; Yoshida I. 1936, 19–24). In that regard, we should keep in mind that the “Ainu problem” was in many ways one common to agricultural communities throughout the country, where Home Ministry bureaucrats throughout the early twentieth century embarked on a series of campaigns for improvements in daily life (*seikatsu kaizen*), including housing reform, the promotion of hygiene and savings, and the elimination of “backward” customs (Garon 1997; Smith and Wiswell 1982, 31–37). Nevertheless, the Ainu's status as an ethnic minority created problems particular to them, most notably the persistence of ritual practices and the tendency of majority Japanese to see the Ainu as tourist attractions. The two issues went hand in hand.

The performance of the bear ceremony (*iyomante*) and other rituals set the Ainu apart most visibly from their majority Japanese neighbors. The Ainu participants in the discussion, all of whom favored a ban on the bear ceremony and on Ainu dances, suggested that the principal reason that they survived at all was that visiting officials and other tourists expected to see them when stopping at Ainu communities. For

instance, Mukai Yamao, a prominent Christian from Usu, complained that children were pulled out of school to participate in the bear ceremony every time a dignitary passed through an Ainu village. Adults had turned to performing rituals for money, with the result that many Ainu communities had turned into tourist attractions (Zadankai 1935, 36–37). Several other Ainu in attendance made similar comments (1935, 37–42). Yoshida Iwao added that the prevalence in the media of unflattering images of the Ainu, which did irreparable harm to their self-esteem, exacerbated the tendency to objectify Ainu villages as spectacles (Yoshida I. 1936, 24; see also Kindaichi 1941, 76–81).

Other commentators similarly called for the separation of Ainu cultural practice from the Ainu people themselves. Thus, Takakura Shin'ichirō (1936a), a prominent historian and agricultural economist at Hokkaido Imperial University, urged that the government establish an Ainu museum for the benefit of officials and tourists but said that it should be located in Sapporo or some other place away from any Ainu community (see also Zadankai 1935, 53–56; Okabe 1937). The state did not act on his suggestion during the prewar period, but in 1965 an artificial Ainu village and museum was constructed on an uninhabited tract of land in Shiraoi to divert tourist traffic away from the Ainu neighborhood there (see Howell 1994b).<sup>20</sup>

The 1937 revision of the protection law incorporated many of the panelists' suggestions. It abolished the special Ainu schools and extended assistance to Ainu who wished to establish or expand fishing operations or other nonagricultural employments. However, it kept most of the original law's restrictions on the disposition of Ainu landholdings (Kita Sh. 1968, 23–29).<sup>21</sup> This is the version of the law that remained formally on the books until 1997, despite activists' longstanding efforts to have it abolished and replaced with a new, nondiscriminatory measure.

## Imagining a Multiethnic Empire

For the people involved in formulating and implementing policy in the early twentieth century, ethnicity could not be considered separately from the state. (A concurrent discourse of race and ethnicity appeared in academic debates [Doak 1998; Morris-Suzuki 1998b; Siddle 1996], but it was less explicitly connected to policy issues.) This is not surprising, given the state's obvious concern with policy, but the issue goes deeper than that, which the tendency to equate Ainu ethnicity with residence in an Ainu community reveals. Ultimately, the place of the Ainu in modern Japan must be understood in the context of ideological justifications for the state itself.

The so-called emperor-system ideology of the prewar period conceived of the Japanese nation as being analogous to a family, with the emperor at its head as both

<sup>20</sup>The decision to build the artificial Ainu settlement, Porotokotan, was motivated in part by tension within the Ainu community, in which two households claiming to be the local "chief" (*shūchō*) ran businesses directed at the tourist trade over the objections of other residents (see Moritake 1977, 76). Porotokotan remains a prominent tourist attraction.

<sup>21</sup>Documents relating to the 1937 revision were collected as "Hokkaidō kyūdojin hogohō kaisei ni kansuru shorui (1, 2, 3)" 1937. Kita Shōmei accompanied a group of Ainu, who went first to Tokyo to witness the passage of the revised protection law in the House of Peers and then on to the Meiji and Ise shrines to thank the spirits of the imperial ancestors (Kōyōsei 1937).

ruler and father-figure. Such a “nation as family” was of necessity ethnically homogeneous, which meant that minorities eventually had to be integrated into the homogeneous family if they were to participate fully in the nation. The efforts to assimilate the Ainu and other non-Japanese subjects on the one hand and to reimagine previously alien others as having always been somehow essentially Japanese on the other hand were by-products of this imperative. In some respects, the idea of a family-state was merely the Japanese manifestation of a phenomenon common to all modern nation-states: the creation of an “imagined community” linked, in this case, by fictive ties of kinship to the emperor (see Anderson 1983). To call the emperor-system ideology Japan’s version of an imagined community, however, begs the question of why the community had to be imagined in that way in the first place. After all, Benedict Anderson’s formulation of the concept of imagined communities addresses the problem of how multiethnic empires reconceived of themselves as modern nation-states, but in prewar Japan, ideologues were never able to reconcile the paradoxes inherent in imagining a Japanese national community while pursuing colonialism. Their failure, however, was not for want of trying (see Morris-Suzuki 1998a).

Ainu activists and their allies responded to the emperor-system ideology in a variety of ways. As we have seen, most activists accepted assimilation as a goal, if for no other reason than it seemed to be the most realistic route to bettering the Ainu’s lives. Even advocates of assimilation, however, vocally complained of the mistreatment that the Ainu faced at the hands of both the state and majority Japanese. Takekuma fits into this category, as does Fushine Kōzō (also known as Yasutarō or Hotene) (1874–1938) of Fushiko kotan in the Tokachi region of eastern Hokkaido, who was one of the first prominent Ainu activists (Murakami 1942, 54–56; *Tokachi daihyakka jiten*, no. 349, s.v. “Fushine Kōzō”; Takakura 1936b; Takakura n.d.).<sup>22</sup> Beginning around 1898, Fushine frequently spoke out in support of temperance and, particularly, education. Indeed, he was so dedicated to the cause of Ainu education that he went so far as to raise money for a school that he had founded by appearing in a controversial anthropological exhibit (which included Okinawans and Taiwanese indigenes, as well as Ainu) that the anthropologist Tsuboi Shōgorō organized at the 1903 Osaka Industrial Exposition.<sup>23</sup> He participated in the spectacle after an attempt to gain central-government support for the school had foundered shortly before the enactment of the protection law. Fushine’s turn to Christianity was inspired by his contacts with John Batchelor and a group of British missionaries in Hakodate, who operated schools for Ainu children. He later said that he converted in part because, in contrast to Ainu religious practice, sake played no role in Christian ceremonial life; he accordingly felt as though adopting Christianity would help eradicate alcoholism from Ainu communities. In addition to his work in education and temperance, Fushine devoted himself to improving the situation of the Ainu more generally. He traveled to Tokyo a number of times to petition the government for the revision of the protection law

<sup>22</sup>At one point in his life, Fushine was apparently quite wealthy, having made a fortune in trapping and farming; he is said to have employed thirty majority Japanese laborers on his farm. Later, however, he lost his money and his family, so that by the time he died he was completely dependent on his niece for support.

<sup>23</sup>The exposition was controversial in part because the original plan called for the display of Chinese and Koreans (an idea that was abandoned after those governments protested) and also because of the public outcry in Okinawa against the lumping of Okinawans together with Ainu and Taiwanese indigenes. The display of Ainu prompted no protest, and indeed a group of Ainu was put on display at the St. Louis exposition the following year (see Kaiho 1992, 157–62; Tomio 1997; on the St. Louis exposition, see Starr 1904).

and for other causes, such as the return to Hokkaido of a number of Ainu left stranded in Osaka after the industrial exposition. In a speech delivered in Tokyo in 1925, he complained that, although they had received Japanese educations and were therefore Japanese subjects like anyone else, the Ainu nonetheless did not enjoy equal treatment; he expressed particular bitterness at the fact that Ainu schoolchildren endured all manner of harassment by their majority classmates. Moreover, he attributed the social problems that disrupted Ainu communities, such as internecine quarreling and alcoholism, to a combination of government policies and the odious influence of the majority Japanese with whom the Ainu interacted (Fushine 1926).

Similar in outlook to Fushine was Kawamura Kaneto, an Ainu activist from Chikabumi. In a short manuscript addressed to his "compatriots" (*dōbō*)—referring to majority Japanese—he mixed defensive expressions of pride in his Ainu heritage and objections to discrimination with an insistence on the Ainu's equal standing as imperial subjects and an optimistic view of assimilation ("*Dōhō ni taisuru kōgi,*" reprinted in Murakami 1942, 87–102).<sup>24</sup> His principal complaint was that, although they were "the children of the same emperor" (*onaji tennō heika no sekishi de arinagara*) as other Japanese, portrayals of the lives of the Ainu were inevitably outdated and emphasized the backwardness of Ainu culture. Thus, elementary-school textbooks described conditions of "eighty years ago" in the present tense, and "old people and young maidens" were tricked into appearing in anthropological exhibitions. Majority Japanese visitors to Chikabumi were incredulous at his ability to "speak Japanese like a native" and wondered if other Ainu could speak the language as well. "Among them are some who ask, 'Are you really an Ainu?' Who in the world would pretend to be an Ainu? Sometimes in my frustration it is all I can do to keep myself from answering back, 'How could a Japanese not speak the Japanese language?'" (Murakami 1942, 99–100).

In Kawamura's complaints, we see the link between livelihood and participation as citizens in the modern national community made by many other activists and commentators in Hokkaido. This connection, in turn, was intimately tied to the tendency to equate the Ainu people as a whole with the residents of predominantly Ainu communities. Thus, Kawamura attacked the widespread view that Ainu men were lazy drunkards. Although visitors to *kotan* would indeed see Ainu men sitting around drinking all day, they did not realize that the men had returned home briefly to visit friends and family and would soon be leaving again for two or three months' (presumably abstemious) work (Murakami 1942, 92–93). In any case, he argued, most Ainu had already left the *kotan* and blended into the general population; once the remaining residents of Ainu communities died off, the label Ainu would disappear from census records, although the Ainu people would survive as fully assimilated Japanese (94).

To an extent not articulated by other writers, Kawamura linked the Ainu's condition to the development of the Japanese empire as a whole. All Japanese had Ainu, Korean, and Taiwanese blood, so they had to see themselves as brothers and sisters and live without practicing discrimination. Only by doing so, he insisted, could they build up Japan: "Without making any distinction among the Ainu, Koreans, and Taiwanese, we must join together and help one another to work on behalf of Great Japan" (Murakami 1942, 101). The uplifting of individual Ainu contributed

<sup>24</sup>Murakami Kyūkichī says that he made "minor editorial changes" to the manuscript but does not otherwise elaborate (1942, 87).



to the development of Hokkaido, and from this the “family-state of Japan” (*ketsuzoku no kuni Nippon*) derived its strength (94).

Those activists who, like Fushine and Kawamura, resisted the pressure to deny their Ainu identity altogether attempted to take the state at its word by understanding assimilation to mean the adoption of the patterns of everyday life that the government and its ideologues promoted throughout Japan. As Katahira Tomijirō wrote in *Utari gusu*, a journal put out by John Batchelor’s mission, “‘Ainu’ is a noun that refers to our race [*jinrui*]. Why do we feel dissatisfied when people say, ‘you Ainu’? Is it because we are called ‘Ainu,’ despite the fact that we too are Japanese? No. Why then? It is because Ainu is a synonym for stupid, poor, and drunkard” (quoted in Ogawa and Yamada 1998, 81). Similarly, Pete Warō, writing in 1933, lambasted his fellow Ainu for relying on the beneficence of the majority Japanese, who had founded “our Yamato empire” (*waga Yamato teikoku*) more than three millennia earlier but whose racial stock included elements from the Ainu and a dozen other peoples. The only way to escape the contempt of the majority Japanese, he wrote, was for the Ainu—and particularly the youth among them—to become self-aware and raise themselves to the level of the rest of the population (see also Ogawa and Yamada 1998, 177–78). Sentiments such as these abound in the prewar activist literature, as Tessa Morris-Suzuki has shown (1998c, 2–6), discussing the journal *Ezo no hikari* in particular.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the Ainu participants in the social bureau’s roundtable discussion on the revision of the protection law were among the most vocal in their call for the adoption of the trappings of modern Japanese life: so long as the Ainu’s living standards remained below the level of those of the majority neighbors, they felt, they would never free themselves from the burden of discrimination (see, for example, the comments by Mukai Yamao and Ogawa Sasuke in *Zadankai* 1935, 6–10, and 21–22, respectively; see also Hayakawa 1936).

By asserting their ability to contribute to the betterment of the nation, Ainu activists clearly hoped to undermine the bases of discrimination. Most articulated this hope in terms of assimilation, while a few, notably Nukishio, saw no contradiction between being Ainu and a civilized Japanese. Although the distinction between these two camps is important for our purposes—because one envisioned the possibility of a permanently and openly multiethnic Japan while the other did not—the activists themselves probably would have seen no essential difference between the two. The discrimination that they sought to overcome was not a question of the constitution of the state so much as one of their majority Japanese neighbors’ perceptions of their everyday lives. Unfortunately, however, because those perceptions were themselves shaped by the state’s ongoing project of attaining modernity through the imposition of ever higher standards of civilized life, the activists’ goal of making the Ainu modern was forever elusive—as indeed it was for the rest of the Japanese population. Nevertheless, under the circumstances, their strategy was the best for which they could hope, insofar as it at least held out the possibility of preserving a private Ainu identity within the confines of the household and local community. After all, for the majority who eschewed activism, the private realm of religion and social relations was most central to their Ainu identity anyway.<sup>26</sup> The activists advocated strategic compromise on issues important to the state as well as a concurrent preservation of the practices at the core of individuals’ sense of themselves as Ainu.

<sup>25</sup>Ogawa and Yamada 1998 reprints a number of Ainu publications (*Ryōyū*, *Utari gusu*, *Utari no tomo*, and *Utari no hikari*).

<sup>26</sup>Morris-Suzuki, discussing the Uilta and Nivkhi communities in Sakhalin under Japanese rule, makes a similar point (2001, 667–68).

A few prewar Ainu asserted the possibility of a distinct Ainu ethnicity compatible with imperial subjecthood. I should like to discuss briefly two such men, Iboshi Hokuto (Takijirō) and Nukishio Kizō, a Christian activist from the Kushiro region.<sup>27</sup> Iboshi (1902–29) was born in Yoichi, on the Japan Sea coast of Hokkaido, and spent most of his short life working in a variety of menial jobs while writing poetry. According to Murakami Kyūkichī, Iboshi did not know that he was Ainu until he was about eight years old, but later he became self-conscious to the point of suspecting that everyone whom he passed on the street was staring at him contemptuously. The turning point in his life came sometime after he contracted the tuberculosis that would eventually kill him: a schoolteacher asked him whether he preferred to be called "Ainu" or "Aborigine." Realizing that neither carried positive connotations, Iboshi resolved to feel pride in his Ainu identity. In 1925 he moved to Tokyo, where he encountered Iha Fuyū, the folklorist and father of Okinawan studies, and the linguist Kindaichi Kyōsuke. Kindaichi impressed on him the importance of studying Ainu culture—in part, he said, because if it turned out that the Ainu were a Caucasoid people, it would help resolve the racial tensions between Japan and the United States! With Kindaichi's encouragement, Iboshi decided to return to Hokkaido to work for the betterment of his people (Murakami 1942, 33–39; Siddle 1996, 128–31; Morris-Suzuki 1998c, 13–15).

In his poetry and other activities, Iboshi expressed his great distress at the way that people in government, academia, and tourism exploited the Ainu while dismissing them as the remnants of a "dying race." At the same time, he lamented the Ainu's own decline into poverty and alcoholism (see the poems translated in Siddle 1995b, 8). Despite his criticism of discrimination against the Ainu, however, Iboshi never politicized his thought in the sense of attacking the institutions of Japanese rule in Hokkaido or calling for Ainu autonomy (Siddle 1995b, 9). On the contrary, the frontispiece of the single issue of *Kotan*, a magazine that he and another Yoichi Ainu, Nakasato Tokuji, published in 1927, carried the motto, "For good Japanese" (*yoki Nihonjin e*), as a sign of his embrace of a Japanese national identity. Although the motto convinced Murakami that Iboshi was "single mindedly dedicated to the cause of assimilation" (Murakami 1942, 33), Iboshi's frequent statements of pride in being Ainu suggest that his true ambition was to articulate an identity that was both Ainu and Japanese. As Morris-Suzuki points out, Iboshi was able to take this stand because he saw that being a Japanese national was not necessarily the same as being an ethnic Japanese (*wajin*) (1998c, 15).

The notion that one might be both Ainu and Japanese—and that Japan might thereby be a truly multiethnic nation—was expressed even more forcefully by Nukishio Kizō (who wrote under the name Hōchin or Hōmaku<sup>28</sup>). Nukishio (1908–85) was born in an Ainu community in Shiranuka in northeastern Hokkaido.<sup>29</sup> After graduating from the local Ainu school he became the first Ainu to attend the higher elementary school in his hometown. Batchelor Yaeko (the adopted daughter of the

<sup>27</sup>In addition to Nukishio and Iboshi, the poet Moritake Takeichi (1902–76) asserted the validity of a distinctly Ainu yet fully Japanese identity (see Moritake 1937 [reprinted in Tanigawa 1972], 1977).

<sup>28</sup>In Nukishio H. 1986, the name is written with characters that would normally be read "Hōchin," but *furigana* (glosses in the *kana* syllabary for the reading of Chinese characters) give both readings at different points in the text.

<sup>29</sup>Except where otherwise noted, biographical information on Nukishio is from Nukishio K. 1978, 11–29. The year of his death is noted in the website accompanying a radio Ainu-language course for lesson 4 (Ainugo rajio kōza).

missionary and scholar, John Batchelor, and the younger sister of Mukai Yamao) somehow learned of him and invited him to come live with the Batchelors in Sapporo, where he attended middle school and, later, normal school. In an interview many years later, he said that he had hoped to accompany the Batchelors back to England someday (*Ekashi to fuchi* Henshū Iinkai 1983, 321). That never happened, but Nukishio did leave Hokkaido briefly to attend the Aoyama Higher Normal School in Tokyo. After returning to Hokkaido, he moved around the eastern part of the island, spending some time in Bihoro, where he tried his hand at street-corner evangelism, and in the Tokachi region, where he wrote and self-published the work that I shall discuss presently. After his younger brother was conscripted and sent to Manchuria in the mid-1930s, Nukishio returned to Shiranuka, where he spent most of the rest of his life. In the decades after his return home, he remained involved in Ainu organizations but devoted most of his energy to local affairs, most notably as a member of the Shiranuka Village Assembly, to which he was elected repeatedly from 1942 to 1967.<sup>30</sup> A few years before his death, Nukishio fulfilled his long-standing dream of publishing a recording, a transcription, and a translation of a *sakorpe* (*yukar*) that his mother had frequently sung to him (see Nukishio K. 1978).

In 1934, at the age of twenty-six, Nukishio published the manifesto of his organization, the Group to Revitalize the Small People of the North Seas (Hokkai shōgun kōseidan). He intended the book, entitled *Ainu Assimilation and Vestiges* (*Ainu no dōka to senshō*), to be the first step in organizing the group. The movement never developed any further, no doubt because Nukishio had to return to Shiranuka to help his family. Nukishio's organization may have been a nonstarter as a social movement, but the book is nonetheless fascinating. The photograph on the frontispiece shows the author with shoulder-length hair and the full beard that would be his lifelong trademark (see fig. 1; Nukishio H. 1986; Nukishio K. 1978). This forceful expression of Nukishio's Ainu identity contrasts sharply with the demeanor of other young activists whose clean-shaven faces and short hair better fit Japanese expectations of civilized physical appearance (see, for example, the photographs in Kita Sh. 1987, 138–40).

Nukishio argued that majority Japanese used the notion of the Ainu's inevitable extinction to engage in a social Darwinist denial of their fundamental humanity and a concomitant denial of their ability to participate in the Japanese nation. The widespread perception that the Ainu were dying out was rooted, in turn, in the fallacy that they were uniquely dependent on government welfare as provided through the protection law. In fact, he wrote, non-Ainu immigrants to Hokkaido were even more dependent on the state, since they were eligible to receive land grants of up to ten chō—twice the maximum entitlement of the Ainu. In other words, if an independent livelihood was a marker of participation in the nation, the Ainu were better subjects than many immigrants to Hokkaido. Having affirmed the Ainu's essential humanity, Nukishio went on to insist on the importance of self-help to better the social position of the Ainu and thereby make them more useful imperial subjects (Nukishio H. 1986, 58–61).

Although he was not opposed to assimilation per se, Nukishio—in contrast to most other commentators—did not see it as a precondition to full participation in the national project. Indeed, he explicitly stated that his group was not founded to

<sup>30</sup>Nukishio (1963) wrote that he had regularly attended meetings of the Hokkaido Ainu Association and its postwar reincarnation, the Hokkaido Utari Association (reprinted in Hokkaidō Utari Kyōkai 1994, 261).

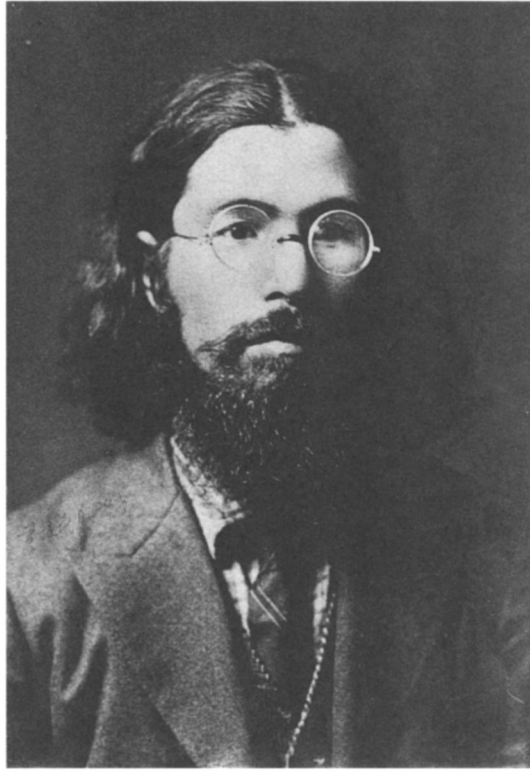


Figure 1. Nukishio Kizō (courtesy of his son, Nukishio Mitsuru).

further assimilation so much as to contribute more broadly to the betterment of the entire nation (Nukishio H. 1986, 111). He was able to take this stand because he refused to cede ground to Japanese racism. In response to writers such as Aoyama Tōen, who called for an apartheid policy, Nukishio pointed to the myriad problems that bedeviled Japanese society in the 1930s: economic depression, political radicalism, social disorder, and pervasive arrogance. Majority Japanese, in other words, were in no position to assert their racial superiority over the Ainu. For Nukishio, the issue facing majority Japanese and Ainu alike was the cultivation of altruistic, true people (*hito taru mono*) who would rise above the general run of atomized, selfish humanity (*ningen*) and contribute to society. He performed some bizarre philological and philosophical contortions to make this argument: an idiosyncratic interpretation of the characters imbued the word *ningen* (人間) with a negative connotation for him; he also valorized Ainu culture in part by finding unexpected commonalities between Ainu religion and Christianity. Nevertheless, Nukishio’s basic point was clear: a subject’s essential humanity, as expressed through private actions and the fulfillment of public duties, was the measure of his contribution to the nation—and humanity was a moral quality, not an ethnic one (61–73).

## Conclusion

Nearly every participant in the debate over the “Ainu problem” in the early twentieth century spoke of assimilation as a goal or at least as the inevitable outcome

of government policy in Hokkaido. For all of their talk about it, however, few writers explicitly defined what they meant by “assimilation.” The term in Japanese—*dōka*—encompasses a range of meanings, including both physical assimilation and acculturation; as a result, writers used the same vocabulary to different ends. The ability of the notion of assimilation to accommodate a diversity of meanings made it possible to avoid having discussions of Ainu policy break down over the question of whether blood, livelihood, or morality joined the emperor’s subjects together as a national community.

Non-Ainu observers such as Kita Shōmei clearly thought in racial terms: the Ainu would someday cease to exist as a discrete population, so the real question was whether they would embrace the process and actively fold themselves into the Yamato bloodstream or else resign themselves to a slow process of racial extinction. In contrast, Nukishio Kizō’s work suggests clearly that he saw assimilation as a spiritual goal to be sought by all Japanese, not just the Ainu. He tried to look beyond ethnicity and livelihood to the creation of a moral order within the imperial Japanese state: he wanted all subjects to “assimilate” themselves as “true people.”

Between these extremes, most Ainu activists spoke not of blood, but of houses and hygiene, schooling and sobriety in their calls for assimilation. Their vision allowed for the possibility that a private sphere of Ainu ethnicity would survive beneath the surface of fully assimilated daily lives. Mainstream, conservative Ainu activists—such men as Mukai Yamao and Yoshida Kikutarō—equated assimilation with a particular type of livelihood, one that would conform to the standards prevailing elsewhere in rural Japan; they assumed, in turn, that pursuing such a livelihood would secure a place for the Ainu in the Japanese national community as good imperial subjects. Conservative Ainu logic did not, however, require the Ainu either to abandon a private identity as Ainu or to seek actively to promote the extinction of a racially distinct population of Ainu.

The Japanese state implicitly endorsed the conservative activists’ view of assimilation with its policy of identifying only residents of Ainu communities as Ainu. Officials thought that effacing the obvious differences between the Ainu’s livelihoods and those of other Japanese would succeed in making the Ainu disappear as an identifiable population and would hence solve the “Ainu problem.” Whether individual subjects continued to consider themselves as Ainu—or indeed whether such subjects continued to face discrimination as Ainu in their social and economic relations—was not immediately relevant to the project of creating useful citizens.

Ainu affairs dropped off the state’s list of pressing problems after the revision of the Hokkaido Former Aborigine Protection Act in 1937. This is hardly surprising: the Ainu were a small and politically impotent segment of the population, and as Japan entered into a period of total war in Asia and the Pacific, the state faced far more pressing ideological and economic problems at home and abroad. Although the Hokkaido government continued to devote resources to Ainu policy, its social-policy journal, *Hokkaido Social Work* (*Hokkaidō shakai jigyō*), published its last article on the Ainu in March 1938 and instead devoted its steadily dwindling pages (on steadily deteriorating paper) to problems of wartime mobilization, until the journal itself expired in July 1944. By the time that people began to discuss Ainu policy again, the war was over, the empire lost, and the emperor-system ideology was discredited. As Morris-Suzuki writes, before 1945 “assimilation and discrimination, Japanization and exoticization, were different sides of the same colonial coin” (1998a, 159). Afterward, talk of Japan’s multiethnic origins ceased, and the groundwork was laid for the modern myth of Japanese homogeneity (Oguma 1995; Lie 2001).

Despite these discontinuities, however, the vision of the conservative prewar Ainu activists remained essentially in place. All talk of assimilation per se ceased, but the Hokkaido Utari Association, working from its base of politically conservative Ainu farmers, cooperated closely with the Hokkaido prefectural government to provide assistance to its constituency in matters of employment and education, while avoiding confrontational cultural activism. Ainu identity survived and even thrived in the largely private realm of household and community, and discrimination against the Ainu continued to be a significant social problem. In the public sphere, however, the Ainu—at least as represented by the Hokkaido Utari Association—behaved less as an ethnic minority than as one of a myriad interest groups competing for government aid. Certainly until the 1980s, when a new generation of Ainu activists recast the Ainu as one of the world's indigenous peoples (Siddle 1996), the prewar vision of making useful citizens of Ainu subjects retained great currency in Hokkaido.

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