Iomante is a ritual to send back the spirits of animal gods, such as gods of bears and Blakiston’s fish owls that the Ainu people regard high to kamuy mosir or the gods’ world. These gods have the same appearance with humans in the divine world, when they descend to the human world, however, they clothe themselves like bears and fish owls, so they appear like them – so it is considered. By welcoming the visiting gods of bears and fish owls and offering them experiences of the goodness of the human homeland through iomante, the Ainu people make a wish that gods will visit them again.

The Ainu lived in houses called cise in the Ainu language. Their houses were built of woods, grasses and other natural materials. Preferring to use durable and hard-to-decay materials, people chose chestnuts and oaks for pillars and alders for joists and beams. They used locally abundant plants for walls and roofs that required a large amount of materials. For instance, reed was popular in Iburi and Hidaka, dwarf bamboo grass in Kamikawa, and barks in Nemuro in eastern Hokkaido.

Traditional building skills have been succeeded to the present generation. You can witness restored traditional cise in various parts of Hokkaido nowadays.

The Foundation operates Ainu Culture Center to support Ainu people living in the Tokyo metropolitan area in their cultural activities and disseminate and enlighten knowledge about Ainu tradition and culture. It is open also to the public free of charge. To learn Ainu tradition and culture, you can read books, borrow DVDs and videos, and choose learning opportunities such as experience programs.

Location: 3F, Unizo Yaesu 2-chome Bldg. 4-13 Yaesu 2-chome, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 104-0028, Japan
Tel: 03-3245-9831
Open: 10:00-18:00
Closed: Sundays, Mondays (If a Monday falls on a holiday, it is open), the day after Holidays and December 29 through January 3.
The Ainu language is another language of Japan, though different from Japanese. Word order is similar, but vocabularies are quite different. The language used to be spoken in Hokkaido, Sakhalin, Chishima (Kuril) Islands, and the northern part of the Tokboku region of mainland Japan. However, today, even those who can speak their unique language lead their daily lives using the Japanese language. The Ainu people have been passing on their rich culture, history, art, etc. to their children by word of mouth. Among Ainu oral literature, a heroic epic yukar is the most representative. In addition to animal names in Japanese of “tanakai” or reindeer, “tiko” or sea otter, “shishamo” or shishamo smelt, etc., it is believed that many place names are derived from the Ainu language, such as “Noboribetsu” and “Wakkanai.”

Today, in order to inherit the Ainu language to future generations, the Ainu language classes and various other activities have been expanded in Hokkaido and other regions.

The Ainu language is usually spelled out in either Japanese katakana or Roman characters nowadays.