

The Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture

The following projects are being implemented to promote the measures for Ainu culture and dissemination and enlightenment of knowledge of the people about Ainu tradition, etc.

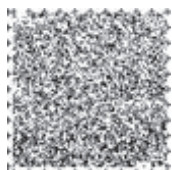
1. Promotion of comprehensive and practical research on the Ainu
2. Promotion of the Ainu language
3. Promotion of Ainu culture
4. Dissemination and enlightenment of Ainu traditions, etc.
5. Restoration of Ainu traditional life space
Ainu Culture Center
6. Administrative operation of Upopoy
(the National Ainu Museum and Park)

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.



If you have any questions about this leaflet, please contact the following office:

Human Rights Measures Promotion Section,
Human Rights Division, Bureau of General Affairs,
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Act on Promotion of Measures for Realization of a Society in which the Pride of the Ainu People is Respected (Ainu Measures Promotion Act)

In May 2019, the “Ainu Measures Promotion Act” came into effect.

The purpose of this Act is to realize a society in which the Ainu people can feel pride in leading their lives as an ethnic group and in which the pride of Ainu people as an ethnic group is respected and thereby to contribute to the realization of a society of coexistence with mutual respect for personality and individuality by recognizing the Ainu as an indigenous people and providing for the basic principle etc. relating to the promotion of Ainu measures.

Housing

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



Appearance of *cise*

Ritual

The Ainu believe that the “spirits” dwell in everything from natural phenomena to animals and plants, and even to human-made tools. The spirits are not only beneficial to human beings but get detrimental in the form of natural disasters and diseases. Ainu people respect those as “gods” that are essential to human beings and beyond human capabilities.

Thus, humans can enjoy their peaceful daily lives only when gods protect them and provide food to them.

Hoping that such lives will continue, the Ainu people pray to gods.

Praying to gods involves a variety of rituals. A leading one is *iomante*.

Iomante (Sending back the spirits of animal gods)

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.



Harpoon hook — Tool for salmon fishing, etc



Five-stringed zither — *tonkori*



Human Rights of the Ainu

To Understand Ainu Culture and Tradition



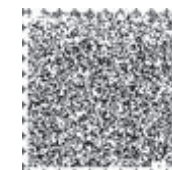
Ruumpe

Cotton garment that has an applique of rags of white cotton, silk and narrow-sleeve clothing torn into shreds. Piping is given for their pasting and for decoration.

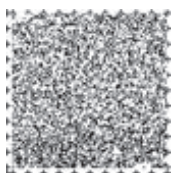
This leaflet has voice barcodes printed on its four squares of the spread sheets.

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All photos courtesy of Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture.



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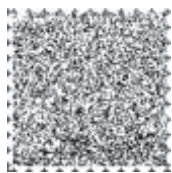
History of the Ainu

Since old times, the Ainu people have been living in Hokkaido and neighboring regions. Many Japanese from mainland Japan began to advance to these regions in the 15th and 16th centuries. Gradually, free trade activities of Ainu people came to be regulated and their very daily lives were eroded.

In the Meiji era (1868 - 1912), the national government pushed its policy to develop Hokkaido. Immigrants flowed into the northern frontier in a surge. The government introduced new land measures and limited hunting one after another. Living territory of the minority population of the Ainu was further narrowed. The government prohibited Ainu's distinctive customs, compelled them to learn the Japanese language in schools, and promoted assimilation policy of the Ainu people. The unique culture of the Ainu people faded away. The government's policies for the Ainu people of agriculture promotion and education were not sufficient. Impoverished state of life was forced upon them.

After the World War II, the environment of life and education of the Ainu people was improved and enhanced gradually. In 1997, the Hokkaido Former Aborigine Protection Act, promulgated in the Meiji era, was repealed and the "Ainu Culture Promotion Act" was enacted.

Because the United Nations General Assembly adopted the "Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples" in September 2007, the two houses of the Japanese Diet unanimously adopted the "Resolution to Recognize the Ainu as an Indigenous People" in June of the following year. With the submission of the final report by the "Advisory Council for Future Ainu Policy," the national government hosted the first meeting of the newly launched "Council for Ainu Policy Promotion" in January 2010 and has since been promoting comprehensive and effective Ainu measures step by step.



What is Ainu?

The word Ainu means "human" as opposed to *kamuy* meaning god. It is also used for the ethnic group as a whole. In its long history, however, the word Ainu came to be misunderstood and sometimes carried a derogatory connotation, too. Thus, it was replaced by the word *utari* meaning "fellow beings". In recent years, the word Ainu has been back in use since there is nothing malicious in the meaning of the term itself.

Clothing

The Ainu people had a variety of clothes in terms of not only materials but designs and patterns. Characteristics of these clothes also varied from area to area. They used threads spun from bark fibers for some clothes and animal hides or fish skins for others. Also used were silk and cotton cloth from mainland Japan and the Asian continent. There were both official (festive) and casual clothes. Many of beautifully patterned clothes that you see at museums and in pictures today were official dresses for rituals.

Clothes at rituals and ceremonies were accompanied by ornaments such as headbands, earrings and necklaces of glass balls. When people walked around in the hills and mountains or worked in the fields, they put on covers on the back of hands as well as leggings.

In daily lives today, Ainu people do not wear their distinctive clothes.

However, when they take part in rituals or perform traditional music and dances, Ainu people have come to be dressed in official clothes or make time-honored costumes again. It's thanks to the recent trend of revaluation and restoration of Ainu tradition and culture.



Bark-fiber clothes : *attus*

Food Culture

Believing that food was the blessings bestowed by natural gods, the Ainu people acquired it only as needed, thanking to gods.

Getting food mainly by hunting, fishing, and plant gathering, they hunted wild animals and gathered wild plants for food.

Though there were some variations depending on where they lived, their main food supplies were Yezo deer, hares and wild ducks in mountainous areas. They fished salmon and trout in the river basins. Those living by the sea caught seals and whales besides fish.

Among plants, they mainly picked wild vegetables. They collected edible leaves and stalks of wild garlic called *pukusa*, butterburs and ostrich fern from spring to summer, while from summer to fall, they gathered walnuts and berries of mulberries, crimson glory vines and so on.

The basic of daily meals was stew using meat and fish with wild vegetables in season as well as porridge of grains such as millet.

On occasions of rituals and festivals, they prepared special cuisines such as simmered dishes of seasonal foodstuffs and dumplings.

Ainu people today take mainly Japanese food and western food. They rarely prepare their traditional cuisines.

Under these circumstances, though, they have inherited their food culture by aptly arranging time-honored foodstuffs to modern taste and preparing traditional cuisines for rituals.



Traditional Ainu cuisine: *cipor rataske* (upper left), boiled *pukusa* (upper right), *rataskep* of pumpkin (center) and *amam ipe* (bottom center = cooked rice mixed with millets)

Language

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 Tohoku 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 "tonakai" or reindeer, "rakko" 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.

Useful Ainu Greetings

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 Hello. / How do you do? | <i>irankarapte</i> |
| 2 Thank you. | <i>Iyayraykere</i> |
| 3 Bon voyage. / Good bye. | <i>apunno paye yan</i> |

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

