

**(DE)MARGINALIZATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF  
THE AINU OF JAPAN**

**DESMARGINALIZAÇÃO DOS POVOS INDÍGENAS: UMA ANÁLISE HISTÓRICA  
DOS AINU DO JAPÃO**

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**Abstract:**

In recent times, the Ainu minority population of Japan has seen a concerted effort by the Japanese government to promote their culture and heritage. This comes after centuries of marginalization in which the Ainu faced assimilation and oppression that silenced their native identity and contributed to the erasure of their culture. Since 2008 however, there has been a growing awareness of these issues which has culminated in increasing government support for the Ainu people in the form of new legislation and cultural promotion initiatives. These

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initiatives have helped revitalize the Ainu culture and led to increased recognition of its historical significance in Japan and abroad.

This article explores how the Ainu were marginalized in Japanese society, how they fought for their recognition as Indigenous people, and the effect of these efforts on their culture. Thus, the first section presents a timeline of the marginalization of the Ainu people, the second section details the trajectory of the Japanese government's efforts to demarginalize the Ainu and finally, a reflection on the cultural significance of demarginalization is offered.

**Keywords:** Ainu, Indigenous peoples, Marginalization, Demarginalization, Multiculturalism.

### **Resumo:**

Nos últimos tempos, a população minoritária Ainu do Japão viu um esforço concentrado do governo japonês para promover sua cultura e herança. Isso ocorre após séculos de marginalização em que os Ainu enfrentaram assimilação e opressão que silenciaram sua identidade nativa e contribuíram para o apagamento de sua cultura. Desde 2008, no entanto, tem havido uma crescente conscientização sobre essas questões, o que culminou no aumento do apoio do governo ao povo Ainu na forma de nova legislação e iniciativas de promoção cultural. Essas iniciativas ajudaram a revitalizar a cultura Ainu e levaram a um maior reconhecimento de sua importância histórica no Japão e no exterior.

Este artigo explora como os Ainu foram marginalizados na sociedade japonesa, como lutaram pelo reconhecimento como povo indígena e o efeito desses esforços em sua cultura. Assim, a primeira seção apresenta uma linha do tempo da marginalização do povo Ainu, a segunda seção detalha a trajetória dos esforços do governo japonês para desmarginalizar os Ainu e, finalmente, oferece uma reflexão sobre o significado cultural da desmarginalização.

**Palavras-chave:** Ainu, Povos indígenas, Marginalização, Desmarginalização, Multiculturalismo.

## **Introduction**

The Ainu people are Indigenous peoples of Northern Japan, who originally inhabited a vast swathe of territory from the Japanese island of Hokkaido to Sakhalin and Kuril Islands of far-eastern Russia. The ancestors of the Ainu have been traced back to Jomon culture around 13,000 B.C.E., the earliest major civilization of pre-historic Japan. (Danver, 2015) The relations between the Japanese (known as the Wajin) and the Ainu can be traced back to early times. Historical records show contact around the 8<sup>th</sup> century, when the Ainu inhabited the northmost region freely living outside the purview of the Japanese Imperial Court. The Ainu were referred to as “Emishi”<sup>2</sup> they were nomadic people who grew crops, raised livestock, fished, and hunted as their major means of subsistence. (Takakura, 1943)

The Ainu have been struggling for centuries to be recognized as Indigenous people with their own distinct culture. Despite their deep ancestral roots, they were denied legal recognition and subjected to numerous forms of discrimination and exploitation. This had a significant effect on the Ainu culture, leading to its marginalization and decline. (Kingston, 2013)

This article details how the Ainu people were marginalized in Japanese society, and how they have fought for recognition as an Indigenous people and the effects of this fight on their culture. In the following sections, a historical timeline of the ways in which the Ainu have been marginalized is presented, subsequently the trajectory of the demarginalization efforts by the Japanese government is chronicled and finally, a reflective view of the cultural significance of demarginalization policies is offered.

### **1. Conceptual clarification**

In this section, definitions of the three key concepts – Marginalization, Demarginalization and Indigenous People – are presented to gauge the degree to which the subjects of study align to those definitions.

#### **1.1. Marginalization and Demarginalization**

In the humanities, the terms Marginalization and Demarginalization appear quite frequently and play a key role in understanding cultural and social structure of people

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<sup>2</sup> Japanese people referred to the Ainu as "emishi" which literally translates to Barbarians due to their nomadic lifestyle and foreign physical features

living in different regions of the world. Marginalization has no universally accepted definition, like most concepts in the diverse disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, it is 'essentially contested' (Gallie, 1955).

One of the most commonly used definitions of Marginalization was explicated in UNESCO Education for All, Global Monitoring Group 2010, it states that Marginalization "is a form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities", further adding that "it represents a stark example of 'clearly remediable injustice'." (UNESCO, 2010; Sen, 2009). Marginalization connotes the exclusion of individuals or groups from wider society on the basis of characteristics such as ethnicity, beliefs, gender, etc. In many cases, there is both 'geographical and social exclusion' of people from society and these excluded groups often face "physical poverty and multiple forms of deprivation" and live with the reality of low income, poor education, poor health, and little access to housing. (Pears, 2016)

In their work on marginalization, Dery et al. (2012) put forward the notion that Marginalization and Demarginalization are two sides of the same coin in a fundamentally dynamic process. They posit that "marginality is constantly changing", by undertaking a study of the socioeconomic situation of a particular social group, one can determine whether the situation is 'diminishing': connoting marginalization or 'augmenting': denoting demarginalization. (Dery et Al, 2012) Thus, Demarginalization is understood as the process of creating notable improvements in the socioeconomic situation of a historically marginalized social group. It occurs when remediating the injustice of social exclusion becomes a priority on national and international agendas, this could result from groups mobilising to seek redress (internal), pressure from the international community (external) or ideological paradigm shift. Demarginalization involves mechanisms such as institutions and legal provisions geared towards the collective socioeconomic advancement and reintegration of marginalized groups; wherein such groups are granted access to the same benefits, rights and privileges enjoyed by wider society. Depending on the circumstances, the government may also offer some form of reparation as compensation and restitution for their past wrongs. (Osabu-Kle, 2000) Reparations are an important gesture of atonement which empower marginalized groups by repositioning them as 'creditors' receiving payment of a long overdue debt and beyond that, it demonstrates the government's commitment to repairing their 'broken relationship. (Westley, 1998; Yamamoto, 1998)

## 1.2. Indigenous People

This is yet another contested concept which has been the subject of much scholarly debate. A considerable amount of contention stems from the very origin of the word Indigenous and its roots in colonialism. In the past, colonizers typically used the label as tool of ‘othering’ to delineate themselves from the conquered peoples. However, in modern times, the word indigenous has been co-opted by such conquered peoples, now denoting ‘plurality’, a driving force for people staking their claim to a place among the general population. (Semali and Kincheloe, 2002)

Although definitions of Indigenous Peoples may vary, few satisfy the divergent ideological strands as well as the working definition propounded by UN special Rapporteur Jose Martinez Cobo, who writes that “indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of societies now prevailing in those territories or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations of their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems”. (Cobo, 1986) In this lengthy and multifaceted definition, Cobo (1986) sets out to represent the various social and cultural aspects which reflect the current reality of indigenous people. He put forward a number of key factors in identifying Indigenous people with historical continuity in a given territory, they are as follows:

*‘(1) Occupation of ancestral lands, or at least part of them; (2) Common ancestry with the original occupants of these lands; (3) Culture in general, or in specific manifestation; (4) Language; (5) Residence in certain parts of the country, or in certain regions of the world’ (Ibid)*

These factors form the basis of the intellectual framework for evaluating such social groups. Using this framework in studying the history of the Ainu, it can be said with a reasonable degree of certainty that the Ainu are indeed indigenous people of Japan. Hence, this article opts to use the term Indigenous People to describe the Ainu in the essay.

## **2. The Ainu: A historical timeline of Marginalization**

This section covers an overview of events significant to the marginalization of the Ainu people in recent history.

### **2.1. Signing the 1875 Treaty of Saint Petersburg:**

In 1875, representatives of Japan and Russia began meeting to set terms for a peaceful resolution of the dispute over the ownership of Sakhalin Island. This ended with the signing of the Treaty of Saint Petersburg, in which Japan formally relinquished ownership claims of Sakhalin to Russia, in exchange for ownership rights to the Kurile chain of 18 islands. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, 1987:5) In this negotiation process, Japan did not include representatives of the Ainu, native inhabitants of the islands, in crucial proceedings which would inevitably determine the fate of their homeland. This lends credence to the view that Japanese saw themselves as being separate from the barbarians (Emishi) of the north and thus, saw fit to exclude them from national matters even those which directly impacted their way of life.

In the aftermath of the Treaty, The Ainu inhabitants of Sakhalin and the Kurile Island were obligated to decide which nation they owed their allegiance and relocate accordingly. For many, however, this decision was made arbitrarily on their behalf and significant segments of the Ainu population was forcibly relocated to Hokkaido (Emori, 2008; Uemura, 2008)

### **2.2. Establishing the Hokkaido Development Commission in 1869:**

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 which brought about the establishment of the Meiji government, signalled the start of great change throughout Japan, and the Ainu began feeling the ripples of said change with the colonisation of the Hokkaido. Hokkaido was seen as an undeveloped, unclaimed territory and the Meiji government came to recognize its strategic importance in the northernmost part of Japan. Hence, the Hokkaido Development Commission was established and tasked with carrying out geographical research and formulating plans to develop the territory and incorporate it into the Japanese state. This policy of colonisation under the guise of virgin land development (Kaitaku) succeeded in modernizing the territory, creating avenues for new Wajin settlers, and altering the existing social and cultural values to align with traditional Japanese values. This meant a near-complete erasure of Ainu culture, from the exclusion of Ainu language in institutions to the ban of Ainu cultural practices such Men's piercings

and Women's tattoos, citing such practices as remnants of barbarian past with no place in modern Japan. (Mason, 2012)

Through Colonial administration, The Meiji government "manages to disrupt in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people", driving the Ainu people to the periphery. (Fanon, 1967)

### **2.3. Enacting the Census Registration Act of 1871:**

Another marker in the history the Ainu under the Meiji government was enactment of the Census Registration Act of 1871. Under the provisions of this Act, once the registration process was completed the Ainu could now be formally recognized as Japanese citizens under the classification: Kyudojin (meaning Former Aborigine). (Uemura, 1997) However, this recognition came at a cost, as the Hokkaido Development Commission made it mandatory for Ainu people to adopt a Japanese family name before being registered in the census. The Ainu traditionally did not have any family names, this was yet another foreign concept forced upon them as part of the Meiji government's assimilation campaign. In the long run, it became apparent that the government's designation of the Ainu as Kyudojin was simply a tool for othering, as they were treated as second class citizens in their own ancestral homes. (Emori, 2008; Mason, 2012)

### **2.4. Introducing the Land Regulation Ordinance of 1872:**

In a bid to seize control of Ainu land and create a conducive environment for Japanese people to immigrate to Hokkaido, the Meiji government introduced a series of land control laws, starting with Land Regulation Ordinance of 1872. Under this ordinance, the vast Ainu traditional land was now considered terra nullius (literally meaning land that is null), vacant territory with no legally recognized owners and as such, open for appropriation and development by the government. Article 7 of the Land Regulation Ordinance prescribes that all the land previously used by natives for hunting, fishing, and logging would henceforth be under government control, asserting that native use of such lands did not constitute ownership. Thus, all the mountain lands, forests and rivers would be demarcated and allocated to new owners for private or collective use. (Mackie et al, 2000) With this law, the Meiji government had managed to enhance the Immigrant Support system which provided amenities to settlers, by including

the added incentive of land ownership and access to resources. This stimulated mass immigration of Japanese people and companies to Hokkaido, displaced the Ainu people from their traditional settlements and subsequently excluded the Ainu from any legal provision for land allocation. (Mason, 2012)

## **2.5. Passing the Hokkaido Former Native Protection Act of 1899:**

The influx of new settlers and the government's land control laws left the Ainu in state of dismay. With a large number of Ainu displaced from their dwellings and their primary means of subsistence namely hunting and fishing now under strict governmental regulation, Ainu lived in deplorable conditions for years prompting the passing of the Hokkaido Former Native Act. This Protection act was largely based on the Dawes Act of 1887, which sought to protect Native American landowners in the U.S.

Pursuant to the provisions of this act, pieces of land were allotted to the Ainu for agricultural purposes, continued ownership and control of such land was contingent upon significant yield within a fifteen-year period. This proved to be a shallow attempt to improve the lives of the Ainu, who were primarily hunters and fishermen and thus, were not adept at farming; causing a lot of them to lose control of the land and end up relegated as poorly paid manual labourers for the Japanese. (Uemura, 2008)

Education was also a major focus of the Former Native Protection Act. Under Article 9, the government established a number of Former Native schools to promote education in Ainu villages as part of its development premise. This meant discarding traditional forms of education which helped to pass down Ainu language and culture to younger generations and replacing it with a more formal education curriculum taught in Japanese. The government made attending the schools mandatory for all Ainu children, some of whom were selected and forced to attend segregated schools in Tokyo, where it became apparent that the standard of education for the Ainu children was widely disparate from that of the Wajin children. The mandatory education of Ainu children was nothing more than an extension of the Meiji government's systematic campaign of forced assimilation, which conditioned Ainu children to unlearn their culture and abandon their language and conform to the modern Japanese way of life. (Siddle, 2012; Yoshiaki, 2015)

## **2.6. The construction of the Nibutani Dam:**

Another major turning point in the history of the Ainu people, was the planned construction of dam in a small town called Nibutani situated along the Saru river, in the Hidaka region of Hokkaido Island. In 1970, the government announced its plans to construct Nibutani Dam on the Saru river, stating that this project would help meet the increasing water and energy needs of the rapidly growing urban population. Feasibility studies carried out a year later did not take into account the impact such a project would have on the nearly 500 inhabitants of Nibutani, 80% of whom were Ainu, making it the largest remaining Ainu population in Japan. (Shimazu, 2006)

The Saru River holds great cultural significance to the Ainu, Nibutani itself situated at midpoint of the river is viewed as sacred land because it is believed to be the birthplace of the god: Okikurmikamuy. Ancient Ainu beliefs speak of harmonious coexistence of nature, man and gods. This harmony would be disrupted by the construction of a dam, the Saru river which has long served as the site for important Ainu traditions such as the festival honouring the return of salmon during spawning season, would be drained. The surrounding wildlife would inevitably be affected, notably the brown bear which the Ainu hold as the god of the mountains, would be displaced and worse, pushed to extinction if the river were to be dammed. The construction of this dam was viewed as an affront on the flickering remnants of Ainu cultural identity and vehemently opposed the government's decision. (Kayano, 1994; Uemura, 1990 cited in Edgington, 2003)

Despite Ainu protests and public outcry, the government went ahead with its plans and began purchasing land from Nibutani inhabitants, the same land that was allotted to the Ainu under the Former Natives Protection Act. Most landowners sold their land in order to settle large debts incurred from owning those allotted lands, however, in the case of landowners: Shigeru Kayano and Tadashi Kaizawa, whose land was seized pursuant to the Land Expropriation Act after they turned down the government's offer.

In response to this, the landowners sued the government in a landmark case (1993 to 1997) which brought to the fore the plight of the Ainu in modern Japanese society. Even though the dam was completed in 1996, through litigation, the Ainu won an important victory in the Superior Court's decision that such land

seizure was in fact a violation of Ainu's minority rights under Article 13 of the Japanese constitution and Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Nibutani Dam case garnered national and international attention and the Japanese government had to acknowledge the Ainu's rights as indigenous people in future. (Tahara, 1999)

### **3. The Japanese Government and its strides towards Demarginalization of The Ainu.**

This section covers a chronology of major events and legislation relevant to the demarginalization of the Ainu people in Japan.

#### **3.1. Implementing the Utari Welfare Measures in 1974**

The Japanese government began facing heightened social mobilization against the marginalization of the Ainu around the early 1970's, this wave of activism spurred from the declining standard of living, growing rate of unemployment, poverty and low level of education rampant in Ainu communities. (Tsutsui, 2018)

In response, the Hokkaido government carried out a survey to assess Ainu living conditions in 1972. Based on the results of this survey, the Hokkaido government set up a committee comprising of both Ainu and Wajin members and held a round table to devise Utari welfare measures. The committee's proposal was later approved by the central government, leading to the introduction a set measures aimed at improving Ainu welfare by raising the standard of education, providing job security, stabilizing income and promoting local businesses. (IWGIA Newsletter, 1986)

The implementation of these measures was jointly funded by Central government and the government Hokkaido. In order to track the progress of this joint expenditure, the government continued to carry out periodic surveys to assess the Ainu standard of living. Based on findings of the 1993 survey, the Japanese government asserted that "The living standard of the Ainu people has improved steadily, but the gap between the living standard of the Ainu and that of the general public of Hokkaido has not narrowed". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019.)

#### **3.2. Parliament passing the Ainu Cultural Promotion Act of 1997**

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, 1997 parliament passed the Ainu Cultural Promotion Act, officially known as the Law Concerning the Promotion of Ainu Culture together with the Dissemination and Enlightenment of Knowledge about Ainu Tradition. The law came into being as a result of collective effort spanning nearly three years. Pivotal players such as the Hokkaido Utari Association (now the Ainu Association of Hokkaido) and Shigeru Kayano (notable plaintiff in Nibutani Dam case, turned politician), lobbied the parliament, proposed new Ainu laws, sent delegates to conferences for the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, carried out research and created awareness, all culminating in the passing of this law. (Siddle, 2002)

The 1997 Ainu Cultural Promotion Act effectively abolished the Former Natives Protection Act of 1899, changing the national level focus from protection to promotion. This new law sought to restore the “ethnic pride” of the Ainu by promoting its language, “music, dance, crafts, and other cultural properties”. (Ainu Cultural Protection Act, 1997, Art. 1, Art. 2.) Under the auspices of this new law, the government established the Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture (FRPAC), a public service corporation tasked with implementing all aspects of cultural promotion and thus, it set up offices in Hokkaido, Sapporo, and Tokyo.

### **3.3. The United Nations Declaration on The Rights of Indigenous People (2007)**

With the rise of Indigenous people’s rights activism in 1980’s, the UN Working Group on indigenous Population was formed with the mandate of giving “special attention to the evolution of standards concerning the rights of indigenous populations”. (ECOSOC, 1982) The Working Group began holding annual conferences, first regionally based then more globally and it attracted representatives of indigenous populations from all over the world. Membership rose from about 30 members in 1982 to over 1000 members in 2000 and the working group intensified their advocacy efforts gaining traction over the next few years, eventually culminating in the 2007 adoption of United Nations Declaration on The Right of Indigenous People. (Irvine and Saunier, 2016)

United Nations Declaration on The Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) is the framework of internationally recognized and accepted minimum requirements

for social welfare and legal rights of Indigenous peoples across the world. While not legally-binding, it serves as yardstick to determine the welfare conditions of indigenous people and falling short of these minimum requirements can be damaging to a nation's reputation in the international community. As was the case in Japan, it was brought to the government's attention that their current Ainu policy fell short of UNDRIP standards, and it became a priority to rectify this issue.

### **3.4. Japan's Official Recognition of the Ainu as Indigenous People (2008)**

After the Declaration on The Rights of Indigenous People was adopted by the UN General Assembly, Ainu activist groups remobilized and garnered support locally and internationally and the Japanese government faced increasing foreign pressure to alter current Ainu policy to reflect modern times. (Hudson and Watson, 2013)

In 2008, Japan was set to host the G8 Summit in Hokkaido and with that came more international attention, in order to focus that international attention on central themes of the summit and away from indigenous rights' activism, the government held a number of nonpartisan meetings to review drafts of Ainu rights resolutions. On 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2008, just prior to the G8 Summit, one of these meetings ended with the Japanese Diet unanimously adopting a resolution to recognize the Ainu as "an indigenous people with a distinct language, religion and culture". (Minority Rights Group International, 2008) This was monumental for the Ainu, for the first time they were recognized as indigenes and the government pledged to create new legislation to ensure their welfare, rights and culture was protected.

### **3.5. Formally Establishing the Advisory Council for Future Ainu Policy**

In the wake of the Japanese Diet's historic vote to recognize the Ainu as Indigenous people, there was a need to strategize and put forth tangible efforts at changing Ainu policies. To that end, the Japanese government established the Advisory Council for Future Ainu Policy (ACFAP) in August 2008. The council had eight members, comprising of legal experts, professors, Ainu rights advocates and the Governor of Hokkaido. The council began meeting on a monthly basis, often taking fieldtrips to assess local Ainu populations and in July 2009, the council submitted their final report. (Watson, 2014)

In the report, the council recommended policies geared towards promoting “public understanding”, as many years of subversive policies from education to social services had rendered the Ainu a distant memory to the majority Japanese populace, it was crucial for the history of the Ainu to be introduced to schools and other public spaces. In addition to socio-political education of the masses, the ACFAP homed in on the need to emphasise Ainu culture “in a broader sense”, it recommends policies to promote Ainu language, beliefs, literature, art, clothing, dance, music, etc in public spaces. The report also emphasized the need to establish an “organizational framework for future Ainu policy,” legitimate governmental institutions to cover everything from the formulation stage to the follow-up and monitoring stages as this would ensure transparency and accountability. Thus, the Department of Comprehensive Ainu Policy was created by Japanese government to operate as part of the Cabinet Secretariat. (ACFAP, 2009)

### **3.6. The Law for The Promotion of Ainu Policy of 2019**

In April 2019, The Japanese Government enacted the Law for the Promotion of Ainu Policy, effectively repealing the 1997 Law for the promotion of Ainu culture. This broader and more inclusive legislation: ‘The Act on Promoting Measures to Realize a Society in Which the Pride of the Ainu People is Respected’ enhanced and improved upon the impetus of the 1997 Ainu culture promotion act which had a more narrow scope of culture. (Ainu Policy Promotion Act / APPA Act No. 16 of 2019)

Through this new law, the Ainu ethnic minority of Japan have been recognized by law as ‘indigenous’ people with their own unique culture and are protected from discrimination. (Article 4) The state also commissioned numerous projects spearheaded by local government agencies aimed at reviving Ainu culture and reconsolidation of cultural artefacts and remains located across the country. Per the Ainu policy advisory council’s recommendations, a major focus of this new legislation establishment of “a symbolic space for ethnic harmony” and this took shape as the National Ainu Museum and Park (NAMP) in Shiraoi otherwise known as ‘Upopoy’, was opened in July 2020. (Tsunemoto, 2019)

## **4. Cultural Significance of Demarginalizing the Ainu**

This is a section that assesses what has been achieved so far and extrapolates the likely effects in the future if they are not upheld.

The Ainu society is still in a fragile condition and continues to struggle to accept their own identity as well as their cultural legacy. Although the last fifty years have seen substantial progress, there continue to be shifts in government policies and reception of these policies across Japan.

There are three broad themes that have emerged from the implementation of these Ainu promotion policies:

- 1) greater recognition of the Ainu as an indigenous people,
- 2) a shift in attitudes and perceptions towards traditional Ainu lifestyles; and
- 3) a greater awareness of the significance of the Ainu people for Japanese history.

Firstly, there is now a much greater awareness of the Ainu in Japan and across the world than there was prior to the passage of the Ainu Act. As a result, the Ainu have become a hot topic of discussion in the media and public debates across Japan. This increased awareness has led to a greater understanding of the importance of the Ainu people in Japanese history and of their distinctive culture and customs. In addition, the Ainu themselves are learning to embrace their cultural identity and take pride in it. They now have a much stronger sense of pride in their traditions and customs, and they are determined to preserve them for future generations. This has a positive impact on the Ainu community as a whole and has contributed to improving their quality of life and bringing prosperity to their villages. In fact, the level of interest in learning more about the Ainu continues to grow every year. This interest is reflected in the number of visitors to the villages and the growing number of tourists who go there to explore the culture of the Ainu. It is therefore hoped that this increased awareness will lead to a lasting improvement in the economic and social conditions of the Ainu people.

Secondly, the new educational curriculum that has been introduced in schools in Hokkaido has made greater efforts to educate students about the history and culture of the Ainu. As part of this program, pupils are now given lessons about the Ainu's history and culture as part of their regular curriculum. This includes teaching them about the unique customs and traditions of the Ainu people and about their unique language. These lessons should help to raise awareness of the Ainu culture and identity among future generations of Japanese school children. The introduction of

this new curriculum is an important step forward in promoting a better understanding of the Ainu culture and identity among the younger generation.

In addition, there have been a few measures taken by the authorities in recent years to promote tourism to Ainu communities and enhance the economic well-being of the community. For example, there are several hiking trails that have been created across Hokkaido that allow visitors to experience the natural beauty of the area. These trails also enable visitors to find out more about the history of the Ainu people and to learn about their unique cultural traditions and customs. It is important that local people continue to maintain and promote these trails in order to promote tourism and the local economy.

Finally, in recent years the authorities in Hokkaido have introduced schemes aimed at promoting tourism to the Ainu region. These include an initiative called Hokkaido – One Country Two Cultures that aims to promote the coexistence of Ainu and non-Ainu cultures in the region. The scheme aims to raise awareness about the Ainu culture both within Japan and around the world by encouraging visitors to experience the culture of the Ainu for themselves by visiting the region and taking part in the activities of the local communities. It is hoped that the scheme will help to promote the economic development of the region by encouraging tourists to visit Hokkaido and boosting the local economy through increased spending by tourists in the region.

## **Conclusion**

It is evident that Japan has changed its policies regarding the Ainu community in recent years in an effort to improve the economic and cultural status of the community. There has also been a growing recognition of the Ainu's contribution to the history and culture of Japan, which has led to greater respect for the traditions and values of the Ainu community and increased awareness of the Ainu's plight as indigenous inhabitants of Hokkaido. These recent changes in Japan's cultural policy toward the Ainu have been driven by several factors including the recognition of the rights of indigenous people in other countries and the need to protect the Ainu culture and heritage in the face of cultural and linguistic erosion due to assimilation into Japanese culture. (Siddle, 2012)

There are strong reasons for the Japanese government to continue to promote and protect the rights of the Ainu people with regard to their culture, language and

traditions. This is because failing to preserve the identity and cultural heritage of the Ainu could have serious consequences for the wider Japanese society, including the potential erosion of its social cohesion and national unity. (Tsunemoto, 2019) UNDRIP Article 2 states that indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and develop their own distinctive spiritual and religious traditions, customs, and ceremonies. However, given the close relationship that exists between the Ainu and Japan's history and identity, these attempts to protect and promote the distinct culture of this community have been met with resistance from some of the members of mainstream Japanese society. Despite this growing opposition, Japan's decision to honor its commitment to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and support the protection of the rights of the Ainu was welcomed and supported by the international community.

The new Ainu policy has yielded the most tangible results in the form of several initiatives designed to enhance the cultural preservation of the Ainu people, including the Ainu Museum Project and the development of walking trails to encourage tourists to explore the cultural heritage of the Ainu. However, the impact of the new policy has been limited so far due to the lack of coordination between the various government agencies involved in the implementation of the new policy and the lack of support from the local population. It is therefore hoped that the introduction of more coordinated and integrated policies aimed at promoting a better understanding of the Ainu culture and history can help to ensure that the Ainu culture survives and continues to thrive for future generations to come.

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