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**AN ORAL HISTORY OF A YOUNG AINU MOTHER:  
TOMOYO FUJIWARA TALKS ABOUT HER EXPERIENCES IN  
CONTEMPORARY JAPAN**

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**Overview**

Tomoyo Fujiwara is an Ainu woman married to a *wajin* (non-Ainu Japanese). She is 30 years old, the mother of two small children, and lives in a rural area in Southwestern Hokkaido. The Ainu are an indigenous minority group of Japan, but the number of full-blooded Ainu is decreasing due to exogamy to non-Ainu Japanese, a practice that the Ainu traditionally promoted to reduce prejudice and discrimination. Tomoyo is a working mother and, unlike her ancestors who had to endure many hardships due to exploitation and oppression by the Japanese government, her life has been very comfortable. However, many Ainu people say that they still suffer from prejudice and discrimination at school, at work, and in marriage. This case study is based on the senior author's interviews with Tomoyo Fujiwara in 2012 and 2014, and it examines her life, especially her identity, sense of self, and her family in contemporary Japan. As with all ethnographic research, this insight into her life and history paints both a rich portrait of larger human experience and a significant map of a unique and rare culture. The authors hope that this case study benefits the collective goal of better understanding the Ainu and promoting equity and opportunity.

**Introduction: A Brief History of the Ainu People**

The Ainu are an indigenous, ethnic minority of Japan. The ancestors of today's Ainu lived in Hokkaido and the Northeastern region of Honshu. They also inhabited Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, which are now territories of Russia. Thus, the Ainu are not a monolithic group, and there are geographical and cultural diversities among them in regard to their dialects, customs, and manners (Poisson 2002).

Europeans and North Americans first learned of the Ainu around the end of the nineteenth century, and were curious because the Ainu did not look Japanese. John Batchelor, a British missionary to Hokkaido who lived with the Ainu for many years, referred to the Ainu as "this strange race" (1892, 8) and "this ancient race" (14). Indeed, Ainu racial classification has been contentious. Some theories claimed that the Ainu

were a proto-Caucasoid people who came to Japan through Siberia, while other theories tried to relate them to the aborigines of Australia. The Tripartite Pact in WWII between Japan, Italy, and Nazi-controlled Germany in 1940 was predicated on Nazi conclusions that the Ainu were the original Japanese, a white race. However, contemporary Japanese research and technological developments in the methodologies of physical anthropology, computer science, and statistical analysis flatly disprove early surmises that the Ainu have Caucasian origins. In fact, they are identified as Mongoloid (Hilger 1967; Ogasawara 2004, 11–16), something that sequencing Ainu DNA has supported. Recent research indicates that “the Jomon people bore considerable similarity to the present day Ainu of Hokkaido” and that “the Ainu are unmistakably descended from Jomon people” (Henshall 2004, 11). The Jomon people lived in Japan from around 10,000 BCE and engaged in primitive hunting, fishing, and gathering (Reischauer 1990).

Mongoloid and Jomon physicality racially distinguishes many of today's Ainu from today's Japanese. According to Mary Inez Hilger, who studied the Ainu in the 1960s in Hokkaido, a full-blooded Ainu has fair skin, a long nose, prominent eyebrows and cheek-bones, round, dark-brown eyes, rather long earlobes, high forehead, curling eyelashes, and “an abundant head of hair, often with a slight wave” as well as body hair (1967, 272). Full-blooded Ainu are also “strong, thick-set, squarely-built and full-chested” (Batchelor 1892, 18).

Notable also are descendants of *wajin*, who were adopted by the Ainu people as infants or children, often when abandoned by would-be settlers and immigrants to Hokkaido. Despite physically identifiable as Japanese, many *wajin* considered themselves Ainu. Their descendants continue to preserve the Ainu tradition and culture by performing Ainu religious ceremonies, lecturing to students on field trips to Ainu museums, and teaching traditional Ainu crafts (Kawanano & Kayano 2011).

Hokkaido was once called *Ainu Mosir* (Quiet Human Land), where the Ainu engaged in hunting, fishing, and gathering. The fifteenth century marked a substantial increase in Japanese immigration to Ezochi (today's Hokkaido) and threatened the Ainu's peaceful way of living. Since the Matsumae domain in the southernmost part of Hokkaido could not grow rice to sustain its obligations, the central Tokugawa Shogunate encouraged Matsumae to trade with the Ainu. The Japanese quickly established exploitative and violent trading practices, instituting harsh realities for the Ainu. Further exploitation of the Ainu and their homes took place when the Tokugawa Shogunate co-opted eastern Ezochi in 1799 and western Ezochi

in 1807 in order to capitalize on the international shipping trade. In his 1785 book *Sangoku Tsūran Zusetsu*, Sendai (in Honshu) samurai Shihei Hayashi argued for the necessity of looking outside of Japan to its closest neighbors (Korea, Okinawa, and Hokkaido) to establish trade and military defenses. *Sangoku Tsūran Zusetsu* evidences not only Hayashi's beliefs about Hokkaido, but also suggests wider opinion and policy.

In 1869, the Japanese government institutionalized and promoted its exploitation with the Hokkaido Colonization Board, providing new immigrants with travel money, housing, agricultural tools, and food. Great numbers of Japanese answered the call, taking advantage of the Ainu's ignorance of private landownership and resource control. The natural environment that enabled the Ainu's unique way of life rapidly decayed due to farming and over-harvesting. In 1870, for instance, the government prohibited the Ainu from fishing salmon (an Ainu staple) by using their traditional method, and in 1889, the government outlawed Ainu from hunting deer. Expectantly, the Ainu suffered periods of famine during the 1880s and had to fight for survival.

Beyond survival, the Japanese government pushed an ethnic cleansing campaign, including prohibitions on Ainu traditions, including women's mouth tattoos and men's earrings, and mandated learning and use of the Japanese language. The assimilation policies also included creation of Ainu family names. Government officials were sent to *kotan* (Ainu communities), and gave them new surnames such as Hirame, Hiranuma, Kaizawa, Kawakami, Kawanano, Kayano, Kurokawa, and Nabesawa that were based on geographical characteristics (Ainu 2009; Hilger 1967; Ito 2014; Kayano 2009; Namikawa 2010; Poisson 2002; Sekiguchi 2007; Uemura 2008).

In the years since, the Ainu have continually suffered prejudice, discrimination, injustice, and poverty. Institutional racism has systematically oppressed the Ainu, who have fewer educational and employment opportunities than the Japanese, and who face discrimination in dating and marriage. In 1986, the Japanese government reported that 2.19% of Japanese depended on social welfare, while 6.09% of Ainu did (Nomura et al. 1996, 44). In Hokkaido in 1999, the rate of Ainu on social welfare was about five times as high as that of non-Ainu Japanese, and in 2006, the rate remained about four times as high (Uemura 2008, 90–93). Ninety-four percent of Japanese attended senior high school, but the Ainu attended at a rate of only 78.4%, even with scholarships from the Japanese government. Only 8.1% of Ainu attended universities, but 27.4% of

Japanese did (Nomura et. al. 1996, 44). A 1993 survey in Hokkaido found nearly the same data – where 87.4% of the Ainu went to senior high school and 11.8% attended universities, while the rates for non-Ainu Japanese were 96.3% and 27.5%, respectively (Ogasawara 2004, 193). A 2006 survey by Hokkaido Prefecture found that 38.5% of non-Ainu Japanese in Hokkaido attended two-year junior colleges and four-year universities. The national average was 53.7%. As for the Ainu in Hokkaido, the number was only 17.4% (Uemura 2008, 90–93). Another survey from 2013, reported in the Hokkaido Government official site, found that 92.6% of the Ainu attended high schools, and 25.8% of them entered universities; moreover, 27.3% reported that theirs is a scanty livelihood, 50.3% find their lives somewhat difficult, and only 17.7% feel that their lives are somewhat easy (data from <http://www.pref.hokkaido.lg.jp/>).

The Ainu as a whole suffer from *existential inequality*, an inequality that “allocates freedom and unfreedom [*sic.*] in the pursuit of personal life projects, rights, and prohibitions to act, and distributes affirmations and denials of recognition and respect” (Therborn 2006, 7). Many Ainu who can physically pass as Japanese avoid revealing their heritage due to stigmatization that produces existential inequality. Racism has been one of “the main, stark, classical forms of institutionalized existential inequality” (Ibid.), and Ainu continue to experience racial harassment. The 2006 Hokkaido prefecture survey on the state of Ainu life reported that the Ainu still suffer from substantial gaps in standard of living, economic prospects, well-being, and higher education. Broadly, about 17% of the Ainu people reported that they were discriminated against by government administration, in obtaining employment, at work and in school, and in dating and marriage. Notably, however, Hideaki Uemura argues that these statistics do not include indirect and structural discriminations that arise from misunderstanding and ignorance (2008, 90–93).

In response to racism, exploitation, and existential inequality, Ainu communities have promoted exogamy, the practice of marrying outside of one's racial/cultural group, especially to alter the experiences of future children. Exogamy and other practices explain why, in 1967, Hilger observed that “now the Ainu, who stood apart for millenniums, face complete absorption by the Japanese” (268). The Ainu population was estimated at 23,782 in 2006 (Hokkaido Ainu Association 2012), but according to Barbara Aoki Poisson, the actual number “remains a mystery” (2002, 5). The number reported by the Hokkaido Ainu Association reflects only those who classify themselves as Ainu and are willing to cooperate

with the surveyors (Uemura 2008). There are mixed-race Ainu people who have Japanese ancestors, or ancestors who are members of other groups. And, of course, many Ainu prefer not to reveal their heritage due to racism, discrimination, and prejudice.



**Figure 1. Tomoyo Fujiwara**

### **Tomoyo Fujiwara – A Young Ainu Woman's Story**

Tomoyo Fujiwara was born in 1985 in a district of a small town in Hokkaido where the Ainu population is larger than that of the *wajin* (non-Ainu Japanese) and where many are of mixed origins. The word *wajin* is generally used in everyday conversations only in Hokkaido and among the Ainu communities in metropolitan cities in Hokkaido, Tokyo, and its vicinities. The senior author, Kinko Ito, was surprised to hear the word *wajin* very often in their conversations among both the Ainu and *wajin* in the town. The *koseki*, or Japanese family registration system, is comparable to the practice of issuing birth certificates in the United States: one must fill in the baby's name, the birth order, and the names of the father and mother.

However, the *koseki* does not require one's race. Whoever was born to a Japanese parent is Japanese. All Ainu people are Japanese, but in communities where both the Ainu and non-Ainu reside, they use *wajin* to refer to non-Ainu Japanese. In Tomoyo's community, it seems that the Ainu/*wajin* dichotomy is very prominent in regards to their notion of identity and social status, as well as social types (Sekiguchi 2007; Simmel 1971).

Tomoyo's parents had known each other since childhood, but since her father was several years older than her mother, they did not play together. A mutual friend introduced them when her father was out of school and working, and her mother was in senior high school. They fell in love, got married, and had three daughters. Tomoyo's father was born in 1963, and her grandfather on her father's side is a full-blooded Ainu; her grandmother is half Japanese and half Ainu. Her grandfather on her mother's side was half Ainu and half *wajin* and her grandmother was *wajin*. According to Tomoyo, her father is "three quarters Ainu" while her mother is "one quarter." She said these numbers with a smile as she tried to think about her family tree.

Tomoyo attended a local elementary school, a junior high school, and a senior high school. Upon graduation from senior high school, she went to Sapporo, the capital city of Hokkaido. She went to a beauty school to earn a beautician's license issued by the government. She was encouraged by her parents to get out of their small town and go and study in Sapporo on her own. Tomoyo said, "I think my parents consider it a social learning to get out of the cozy home and live on your own in Sapporo." Her parents also urged one of her sisters to leave town to get some occupational training like Tomoyo, who had earned two occupational licenses: beautician and kindergarten teacher. Tomoyo said:

"You can't obtain beautician or kindergarten teacher's licenses in my home town. My parents only have girls, and I think they encouraged us to get national licenses, which would help us find jobs after having children, or in case we get married but get divorced later. There might be other reasons, but I think these are the primary reasons why they wanted us to get licenses."

In a few years, Tomoyo graduated from the beauty school, became a beautician, and worked in a beauty salon in Sapporo. She said:

“When I was working in the salon, it was tough sometimes, and I wished I could quit so many times. However, there were lots of happy times as well. I would like to work in a beauty salon again if I have a chance. I used to see Takeshi in those days, but since I had to work on Sundays, it was a problem when to see him.”

Tomoyo worked in the salon for two years before she got married to Takeshi, a non-Ainu Japanese who is also from her home town. They went back home to live. She explained how she met Takeshi:

“My husband and I are very distant relatives, even though there is no blood connection. My father's cousin married Takeshi's aunt. I only knew of my husband's name when I was in elementary school. We went to different elementary schools but the same junior high school. He was very good at baseball, and I belonged to a volleyball club. We used to go to school together or hang around with our friends talking in the neighborhood parks and playing games. Takeshi and I went to the same senior high school, but he soon dropped out and transferred to a senior high school in Sapporo. In our sophomore year, we 'dated' a little bit. Actually there are not many places where we could have dates in Three Rivers Town, so when he was home from school I used to go to his house. Since he was in Sapporo, we could only get in touch via cell phone and texting, and when he came back home, we saw each other.”

When Tomoyo and Takeshi wanted to get married, they did not have any problems. However, Takeshi's family had opposed the marriage of his relative to an Ainu man before. Tomoyo said:

“When my husband's aunt, that is, his father's younger sister, wanted to marry an Ainu man, there were a lot of family disputes. The disputes were just terrible, and his family did not like that. I suppose Takeshi's grandparents did not like Ainu people. I wonder if they did not like

Takeshi's aunt's husband regardless of his being Ainu or not, I don't know. Luckily, even though I am an Ainu, his family did not oppose our marriage. Maybe it is because we dated for a long time, and I don't think Takeshi's father does not dislike the Ainu. I know a man who is one year younger than I and a son of a very influential Ainu in Three Rivers Town. We went to the same high school and he dated a *wajin* girl, but the girl's parents were opposed to their dating saying, 'No Ainu boys!' I think that if a person does not like the Ainu, he would not like his child or grandchild to marry an Ainu. Or, perhaps you do not dislike the Ainu, but when you see their current situation, you might oppose the marriage. With Ainu blood, there might be occasions in which your child or grandchild might be hurt or have a very difficult time. I know a *wajin* woman in her 60s who told me that just because she married an Ainu, her children and grandchildren sometimes have hard time. She felt very sorry for them. I think her daughter was discriminated against because her father is an Ainu.

“My father says that there are Ainu people who are very talented in a particular field and can do a great job. However, some of them cannot last long in the work place. They quit the job too soon. Some Ainu might be a bit rough and violent, or say or do nasty, inappropriate things to the non-Ainu Japanese. Their behavior might have contributed to the negative feelings some people have for all Ainu people. An Ainu individual might work very hard, and be very diligent, patient, and non-violent. However, when there are Ainu people who fit the negative stereotypes very well, the individual Ainu who does not fit it also suffers.”

When Tomoyo said, “My husband is *wajin*,” with a big smile, she almost looked relieved, very happy, and even proud that she found a nice non-Ainu Japanese man. The senior author asked her what kind of identity she has and she said:

“I have thought of myself as an Ainu since my childhood. My parents do not hide that they are Ainu. My father is the head of the local branch of the Hokkaido Ainu Association, and my mother loves Ainu dances and embroidery. They always tell me and my sisters to be proud of our heritage.”

As in many other Ainu homes today Tomoyo's family speaks only Japanese, but their conversation is peppered with Ainu words. Her father often uses Ainu words such as *pirika menoko* (beautiful woman), *wakka* (water), *tuki-pasuy* (a spatula-like Ainu tool for transmitting one's wish to God), and *kamuynomi* (prayer for God). Tomoyo said:

“My family uses some Ainu words jokingly in our conversation, but to me, the Ainu language is an ancient language that people do not use in the modern era. The Ainu words are from the past. When I hear certain Ainu words I understand the meanings, but I do not use them often except when my mother, myself, and my sisters use them just for fun. Someone says 'Can you pass me those *pasuy*?' and I know he or she is talking about chopsticks. *Tuki-pasuy* is an Ainu's ceremonial spatula, but today *pasuy* only refers to chopsticks. The other one might say, '*Iyayraykere*' (Thank You) in return when they are passed. Once there was a stray dog near our house, and my father said, 'Whose *seta* is it?' When our father uses Ainu words, we sisters sometimes may look at one another and say, 'Why is he using an Ainu word?'“

Regarding her identity, Tomoyo said that she is ambivalent about being an Ainu. She said:

“I am very happy I am an Ainu, but at the same time I feel ashamed...I don't understand the system very well, but when I was in senior high school, I got a scholarship. When I went to the beauty school in Sapporo, I went to the Department of Ainu Policies and registered myself. I got money from the Hokkaido Ainu Association, and my parents also helped me financially for two years while I

was in Sapporo. When your parents belong to the Ainu Association, you automatically are entitled to a scholarship.

“I had attended the Ainu Language School in town since my first grade and went abroad because of this connection. I went to the language classes offered by a *wajin* professor once a week for about two hours. I really enjoyed the class sometimes, but at other times I thought I would rather not go, like when I had difficulty memorizing certain Ainu words, which I felt was a nuisance. I like the sound of the voices of the old men and women talking in Ainu in a certain manner. However, they seem to speak with special mannerisms, using unique voices and idioms, and I do not understand them. I just love the sound though. I went to the language school from the first grade to the 9th grade, but I cannot remember all the words now. I can still sing Ainu songs for dancing or say tongue twisters. We did not have textbooks at the school. Our teacher gave us handouts each week, and we studied them.

“Not all children living in my community went to the language school. Their parents wanted to hide their Ainu identity. They have not 'come out,' and if the kid didn't know that he or she was an Ainu, the parents wanted to keep it that way. It is seldom the case that a person in this community would volunteer and say 'I am Ainu.' Even when others are talking about the Ainu, I wouldn't say 'I am Ainu,' either. I am proud of being an Ainu, but I have mixed feelings about making my Ainu identity public. There are many Ainu people living in the community, and there is not much prejudice toward the Ainu here. However, there are people who have prejudice. For example, there are *wajin* students who might say, 'You are an Ainu, aren't you?' as a joke to another *wajin*. If they say the same to an Ainu, it is considered as bullying. There are situations in which I can comfortably say 'I am an Ainu' though.

“Sometimes the *wajin* say things that insult the Ainu. They are kids, and they may not really know who the Ainu are, but they make condescending comments. I have never been exposed to that, but I think it was during my puberty, when I was in junior high school, that I felt ashamed of being an Ainu. Like, I am very hairy. ‘Why was I born an Ainu?’ I would ask my parents, and they would say ‘You are cute because you are an Ainu.’”

The senior author, when she felt that Tomoyo was comfortable talking about more private matters, asked her how she deals with her hairiness. She said:

“I shave my arms. You can bleach the hair, but that makes it glittery and stands out against your skin color. As for my face, I shave my face including my eyebrows, which tend to become a uni-brow. I love my thick eyelashes, but I do not like my body hair too much. My body hair grows really fast, and I have to shave once every three days or so. My sister has two strands of hair on her big toes, you know, just like those Japanese men who have hair at the bottom of the big toes. I do not have that hair and I boast about it to my sister,” Tomoyo laughed.

Tomoyo became more aware of her Ainu identity when she went abroad for the first time in an elementary school. She said:

“When I was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I had an opportunity to visit Canada for 10 days with the teachers and junior high school students from the Ainu Language School. There were 15 children who were in the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I think there were 5 elementary school children. There were several adult leaders and translators. We drove to Sapporo, and flew to Narita (Tokyo International Airport) and then to Vancouver, which was extremely beautiful. From Vancouver, we flew in a very small propeller airplane to a place where there were many small islands. We did a homestay there for a few days and did cultural

exchange. I stayed in a home that included the oldest man on the island. I played with the children in the neighborhood, and we also rode boats. We went to a school on our last day and visited with the indigenous people. I was really impressed with their dynamic and energetic dances, and then we performed our Ainu dances. I think it was the very best performance we had ever done. Until then I did not have any feelings about whether I was happy as an Ainu or not. To tell you the truth, I had felt a bit shy about being an Ainu and was even embarrassed with our dances until I went to Canada. Those young people said to me, 'I am a native Canadian who belongs to such and such indigenous tribe' with so much pride that I thought that they were really cool. I thought, 'I need to be proud as an Ainu as well.' They taught me that it was not an embarrassing thing to be an indigenous person. It was rather cool, a wonderful thing to be proud of."

Tomoyo became more self-consciousness when she became a teenager. She said:

"When I was in my puberty, I started to dislike myself as an Ainu because of my hairiness. An Ainu cultural festival is held in the town auditorium every year, and our Ainu language school would present traditional dancing and singing, and perform a play. I was worried that my classmates from my junior high school might notice me perform Ainu dances or participate in the play. The dances and play give the Ainu their identity, they brand them as Ainu. I also didn't want my classmates to know that I was going to the Ainu language school. I did not want to perform in the cultural festival. My teacher would not insist that I should perform. She said, 'If you don't want to join us, it is okay.' I hardly participated in the cultural festival when I was in junior high school.

"I had not experienced prejudice, insult, or bullying myself, yet I did not want to be labeled as an Ainu. In those days there were people who looked down on the

Ainu as a whole. Once I am labeled as an Ainu, I would be put into that category and could become a target of prejudice, discrimination, and bullying.

“I really have mixed feelings about the Ainu. I need to do something for the Ainu, but I can do this only when I make it public that I am an Ainu. I can't do that because of my worries about how people see me. I don't want my children to have these same worries about this identity problem. I had an Ainu friend, a boy whom I was interested in when I was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. My parents warned me that if I wanted to marry this Ainu boy, my children would have problems. My parents know his parents, too. My parents have a pride in their heritage, but did not want me or my sisters to marry an Ainu. This sent me a mixed message and gave me mixed feelings about being an Ainu. If you marry an Ainu, your children might not like being Ainu, but they have to live with it for the rest of their lives. You cannot get away from your blood.”

**Discussion: Then and Now**

Tomoyo's experiences as an Ainu are quite different from those of her distant ancestors, and they also differ from her grandparents' experiences in a more contemporary Japan. For instance, Ainu men in their 80s in her town told the Kinko Ito that their lives were harsh when they were younger. For example, the men experienced persistent prejudice, discrimination, and bullying at school and at work in those days. One elderly man told Ito, “When we kids had a fight, my *wajin* teacher used to scold and blame me all the time just because I am an Ainu.” Another said, “I quit junior high school due to [my bad experience with] this female *wajin* teacher.” Yet another explained, “There were 47 students in my class, and four of us were Ainu. The Ainu were not considered human beings. Yet there were 50 to 60 young Ainu men from town who went to war and died for Japan.” The non-Ainu Japanese women who married Ainu men also told Kinko Ito about their problems with both their in-laws and with people in the communities where they lived.

Tomoyo said that she enjoyed hanging around with her friends, and she had not experienced any bullying at school. This is partly due to anti-bullying efforts on the part of teachers and the PTA, and the small

student population in the 1990s. There were only six students who were in the same grade in her elementary school. Her junior high school had students from three different elementary schools in town, which exposed her to more *wajin* students. In puberty she became more conscious about her heritage. However, Tomoyo is beautiful, attractive, and can pass as non-Ainu Japanese easily, and this could be one of the reasons why she did not feel so alienated.

Additionally, Tomoyo benefitted from recent social policy initiatives that were unavailable to older Ainu, which certainly explains some of the disparity in perspective. Government programs to assist those of Ainu ancestry include low-interest (2%) mortgages, scholarships for high school and university students, infrastructure programs aimed at improving roads and sewage disposal facilities in communities where Ainu live, salaries to those who teach Ainu crafts, and more (Kawanano 2012). Yet Tomoyo also benefitted from living in a rural community where the Ainu outnumbered non-Ainu Japanese. The community was characterized by *Gemeinschaft*-like associations in that people share the same ancestry, common values, norms, and mores; everybody knows everybody. However, the ascribed status in her town entails the entrenched dichotomy of Ainu vs. *wajin* (non-Ainu Japanese) that can be traced to the 1700s and earlier.

“Who is an Ainu? Is it blood or culture that makes one an Ainu?” the senior author asked Tomoyo. “I think both,” she reasoned. Yoshihiko Sekiguchi, who studied the Ainu in the Tokyo metropolitan area, states that “their existence as human beings cannot be framed by a single identity” because the boundaries between the Ainu and *wajin* could be ambiguous (2007, 238). Due to the systematic and constant promotion of exogamy, the racial boundaries are indistinct, as Tomoyo showed in her struggles to identify race in her ancestry. Sekiguchi's interviewee, Mr. H, moved to Tokyo when he was in the fifth grade. Sekiguchi states, “Mr. H identifies as an Ainu because of his blood. He does not know the 'culture'; but because of his 'blood' he considers himself an Ainu” (2007, 145–146). He continues, “Let's suppose that the mixed blood is a common occurrence among the Ainu: then the categories of Ainu vs. *wajin* do not have lucid boundaries, and his identity is ambiguously situated” (2007, 145–146).

Tomoyo's self-conception fluctuates between being an Ainu and being a non-Ainu Japanese. Sometimes she feels more of an Ainu, and she is proud of her Ainu heritage due to her socialization at home, while at other times she does not think about her Ainu identity. Her sense of self changes in different social settings, among different groups of people, and it

depends on how she defines herself. According to Eshun Hamaguchi, a Japanese social psychologist, one's notion of the self is *kanjin*, or "a situated self" that exists among the whole (e.g., groups of individuals) and is dependent on the context of one's social relationships. Hamaguchi calls *kanjin* "the contextual," a subject who always behaves in relation to other subjects in the shared and mutual life space. One's self is found and confirmed only within one's relationship to others, a phenomenon Hamaguchi argues is shown more commonly and strongly in Japanese than in other nationalities. Japan's social attributes stress interdependence, mutual trust and reliance, and human relationships (as opposed to egocentricity, self-reliance), and human relations as a "means" rather than as an "end" (Hamaguchi 1996).

The Ainu vs. *wajin* dynamic may be best explained by Georg Simmel's notion of social types. Just like "the stranger," "the mediator," and "the adventurer," the Ainu is a particular social type that is characterized by attributes of the social structure and interactive relations. In other words, the Ainu are given assigned positions and expected to play certain roles. They are viewed through the lens of what gets done to them by society (Simmel 1971). Tomoyo benefited from scholarships given to the Ainu students, attended the Ainu language school, and went to Canada to do cultural exchange with the native people near Vancouver. Certain numbers of Ainu are on social welfare, and there are also many Ainu who are engaged in tourism, selling Ainu crafts and performing Ainu dances and singing (Kayano 2009).

### **Growing Up and Performing Ainu**

When she was a teenager, there were certain tender moments when Tomoyo felt ashamed of being an Ainu. Her junior high school had more *wajin* than Ainu students. In her puberty, her hairiness reminded her of her ancestry, and she did not like it. She went to the Ainu language school but did not want her new classmates to know it, nor did she want to appear in Ainu cultural festivals. For her, performing Ainu dances and Ainu plays equaled Ainu identity, and put one in a particular social category. What Tomoyo thought other non-Ainu Japanese classmates thought of her participating in Ainu performance, influenced how she felt about herself as an Ainu. This is an excellent example of *the looking-glass self*: Tomoyo imagined the ways her classmates perceived her performing the Ainu dances, she imagined how they evaluated her and label her an Ainu, which would peg her in a certain social category and social situations, and she felt

bad and withdrew from the activities (Cooley 1964). However, in her elementary school days, her experience with the native people of Canada and the Ainu dances she performed there made her feel proud of being an Ainu.

Tomoyo's mixed feelings about being an Ainu might come from her socialization, especially from her interactions with her parents who told their daughters to be proud of being Ainu, but warned them against marrying an Ainu. As Tomoyo said, "You cannot get away from your blood." Having an Ainu parent ascribes one Ainu status, yet in one's *koseki* paper (the Japanese family registration system), there is no mention of one's race. Because most contemporary Ainu are of mixed origins, being an Ainu seems to depend solely on one's personal definition.

Being an Ainu always made Tomoyo feel ambivalent about her identity, particularly during puberty. She loves the Ainu, but she does not like certain Ainu. She is proud to be an Ainu, but she felt embarrassed about belonging to a subculture. She loves Ainu dancing, but she did not want to perform Ainu dances in front of her non-Ainu classmates at a cultural festival.

Tomoyo told Kinko Ito that she loves Ainu culture and wants to embrace it fully. She said:

"When I am dancing an Ainu dance, I feel very excited and happy. When I am watching an Ainu dance, even when I do not join it, my body starts to move to the music by itself. When my children are bigger, I would like to join the adult section of the Ainu language school and learn traditional Ainu ballads. I want to embroider traditional Ainu embroidery, make kimonos -- there are so many things I want to do."

The young mother wants her small children to experience the Ainu culture firsthand. She always tries to bring them to cultural events held in her hometown. At the age of 30, she feels happy about being an Ainu and wants to do something for the preservation of the culture in the future. When the senior author was leaving town, she said, "I am very happy you are studying the Ainu. I really appreciate your interests." Tomoyo is currently pregnant with her third child, who is a girl, and she is very excited about the baby.

**Conclusion**

The Ainu culture has a long history. Its religious rituals, oral literature, music, fashion, and dances are unique and rich. Yet throughout history, the Ainu's human rights have been stripped. *Ainu Mosir*, the peaceable land of the Ainu, was co-opted as government land. Fishing salmon, hunting deer, men wearing earrings, and the tattooing of women were prohibited. Traditional Ainu names were replaced by Japanese names, and the Ainu were forced to speak Japanese. Their ecological way of life was threatened and ruined in the process of modernization. Japan's assimilation policy was basically a process of an ethnic cleansing (Kayano 2009; Namikawa 2010; Nomura et. al. 1996; Ogasawara 2004; Uemura 2008).

The Ainu continue to suffer from prejudice and discrimination in education, marriage, and employment, but are not alone in modern Japan. Other groups include *burakumin* (a group of people who descended from an occupational caste during the Tokugawa Period), the handicapped, the elderly, and residents who are descendants of Korean and Chinese immigrants. While policy and culture change to understand, compensate, and make equitable the experiences of the groups the ruling classes have historically oppressed, that same legacy of oppression works to eliminate the groups. Like many indigenous populations around the world, there is great concern that we have a narrow and closing window from which to understand and study full-blood Ainu and lived Ainu experiences.

The authors of this paper hope that Tomoyo's story will promote the equity projects associated with the Ainu and preserve the Ainu culture. Ultimately this paper answers the call of the Japanese government, its programs, human rights groups, and international scholars to chronicle and disseminate research, and we hope that work of this sort will improve the Ainu quality of life, opportunity, and freedom.

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