

Social Aspects of the Ainu Linguistic Decline

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People may suppose, perhaps, that the history of the Ainus, or the past situations under which their language and oral traditions prospered and failed, hold much interest for Ainu linguists. Unfortunately, most Ainu linguists, including the present author, have not showed any deep interest in the actual history of this minority. We have been interested in the Ainu language only, particularly in its linguistic structure. Lately the present author has realized the necessity of getting more information about the historical processes during which the Ainu language lapsed into its present fatal state. Some aspects of this sphere of questions are dealt with below.

1. THE AINUS AND THE AINU LINGUISTS

Our linguistic and ethnological field work on the Ainu is still under way. During field work, one question never leaves our minds: how should we evaluate Ainu discourses, sentences, phrases and words which we hear from our informants? These utterances are, of course, true samples of present-day Ainu, because Ainus say them actually. Ainu linguists, however, have not always been looking after such phrases or words. At the period of Kyosuke Kindaichi (1882-1971) and Mashio Chiri (1909-1961), two pioneers of Ainu linguistics, they looked for "good speakers" and tried to collect *proper* Ainu utterances in order to describe the *traditional* or *correct* language. This was because they were certain that the language was decaying, and that language death was near at hand.

The present author and his colleagues, who began to study Ainu in the 1970's or 1980's, met some Ainus who belonged to the generation following Kindaichi's and Chiri's last informants. Most of the Ainus we met are now dead. Today we continue to keep contact with younger informants, born in and after the 1910s. Their speech is sometimes different from that of their parents' generation. However, there is no other way but to record all the Ainu words and phrases our last informants utter. Therefore, linguistic evaluation is important for us, as it was for our predecessors. Yet our purpose of evaluation is not the same.

Apart from various kinds of oral traditions, the present-day utterances of Ainu are words or phrases which are stored in the deepest layers of the informants' memories. The informants draw up their parents' or grandparents' utterances from their earliest experiences, stimulated by the questions posed, somewhat

insistently, by the researchers in Japanese. So our field notebooks are full of examples of the simple imperative construction related to domestic affairs, e.g. "Dig for water and bring it!" There are very few chances to hear Ainu utterances in natural situations. However, if we are not interested in the circumstances under which our informants once learnt the language, the utterances we get will become almost meaningless.

Linguistic acquisition is a lifetime work. The foundation of a language is laid in infant years, and this foundation continues to develop throughout the life of an individual. Language grows with age. Our informants, however, have acquired Ainu under extremely disadvantageous circumstances. Their linguistic development in Ainu has been impeded. We should, indeed, be more interested in the linguistic careers of our informants. Up to now, we have often not checked sufficiently carefully, whether they lived with grandparents in their infant years, whether their parents still spoke Ainu at home, whether they themselves spoke Ainu with their siblings, when and how they stopped speaking Ainu at home, etc. What on earth do we get, if we only continue write down Ainu phrases or words in our notebooks while being indifferent to such important matters?

In this paper we will survey the history of the Japanese policies toward the Hokkaido and Kuril Ainu following Takakura's *History of policies on the Ainus* [TAKAKURA 1972]. We will then explain in what situations our informants acquired Ainu referring to the Ainu population statistics from the time preceding World War II.

2. A HISTORY OF AINU LANGUAGE POLICIES

The early policies adopted by the Japanese with regard to the Ainus reflect the feudal system. In the mid-fifteenth century, a branch of the Ando clan which had ruled Tsugaru, the northernmost part of Honshu, was defeated by another clan and moved to the southern part of the Oshima Peninsula on Hokkaido, then known as the Island of Ezo. Many Japanese presumably followed suite with no control during the Warring States period (1467-1568), a period of disunity of the Japanese nation. The Japanese invasion to the Oshima Peninsula caused many conflicts between the Ainus and the Japanese. The confusion continued until 1536. Then, the Kakizaki clan, who were under the Ando clan, gained power and were established as rulers of the southern part of the peninsula. In 1593, the regent Toyotomi-Hideyoshi, the *de facto* ruler of Japan at that time, gave the Kakizaki clan the privilege of ruling the whole of Hokkaido. The Kakizaki were given a monopoly to collect taxes from any merchants who came to Hokkaido in order to trade with the Ainus.

When Tokugawa-Ieyasu unified Japan and founded the Edo Shogunate (1603-1868), he authorized the Kakizaki's privilege again, and prohibited Japanese from entering Hokkaido or trading with the Ainus without the Kakizaki's permission. In an article of the Tokugawa credentials to the Kakizaki concerning the regulation

of Japanese commercial activities with the Ainus, we find the phrase "Let the Ainus go anywhere they like." The ruling class at the feudal period seems to have had no intention to govern the Ainus.

The Kakizaki then changed the clan's name to Matsumae. This is the beginning of a unique system, known as the Matsumae rule of Hokkaido. At that time, all the other clans under Tokugawa were based on agriculture, but the economy of the Matsumae clan depended on trading with the Ainus. The Matsumae clan defined an area where Japanese could reside and forbade them entering the Ainu area. The Japanese area was very small: from Kameda to Kumaishi on the south coast of the Oshima Peninsula (Figure 3). The rest, i.e. almost all of Hokkaido was still a territory that completely belonged to the Ainus.

To maintain the trade, the Matsumae clan set up trading posts mainly on the coast in the Ainu part of Hokkaido. At the end of the 18th century the number of such trading posts reached 88. Some of them were managed directly by the Matsumae clan, but the ownership of the rest was passed over on a perpetual basis to some influential vassals of the Matsumae clan. These vassals, or their representatives, went to the trading posts by ship once a year in summer and got from Ainus seafood, fur, hawk feathers, etc. Other merchants from Japan came to Matsumae city, the capital of the Matsumae clan, to buy these products.

The *samurai* of the Matsumae clan soon realized that it was profitable to entrust all the trading activities to merchants and to collect taxes from them. Such merchants—so-called *contractors*—were granted the right of trading with the Ainus at the trading posts, and they stayed there with their employees. They also organised fishing industries and employed Ainus for this activity. In order to monopolize the trading, around the end of 17th century, the Matsumae clan prohibited the Ainus from trading at any other places than the fixed trading posts. The direct contacts between the Ainus and the Japanese merchants at the trading posts caused many conflicts. The Matsumae clan could not fully control the unfair practices that occurred in the trading from the Japanese side. Battles at Shakushain (1669) and Kunashiri-Menashi (1789) were the most drastic responses to the injustice against the Ainus. During this period the contractors were the actual rulers over the Ainus.

Segregation from the Japanese and nonintervention were the principal policies adopted by the Matsumae clan against the Ainus. The Matsumae appointed influential Ainus to be the chiefs of the territories which belonged to the trading posts. In each territory, the chief was given the right to govern the Ainu population. The Matsumae also forbade the Japanese to speak Japanese with the Ainus, or to teach the Ainus how to read and write. At least officially, any direct oral communication between the Japanese and the Ainus was prohibited. For the purpose of communication, interpreters were prepared and dispatched to every trading post. We have still two Ainu vocabularies compiled by such interpreters, those by Moshigusa (1792) and Enkichi (1868).

Around the year 1770, Russian influence reached Hokkaido through the Kuril

Islands. In order to shut out this foreign influence, the Edo Shogunate took Hokkaido under its direct control (1799–1821, 1854–1868). This control was first established in eastern Hokkaido (1799), then also in western Hokkaido (1807). The Edo Shogunate believed that one of the most urgent measures for defending Hokkaido and the Kuril Islands against the possibility of Russian penetration was to keep the Ainus on the Japanese side, or, rather, to *make them Japanese*. For this aim, the Shogunate even built three Buddhist temples for the Ainus at Usu, Samani and Akkeshi. At the same time the Ainus were encouraged to adopt the Japanese diet, to follow the Japanese way of dress and hairdressing, and to use Japanese money. Agriculture and new ways of fishing were introduced.

These general measures were accompanied by the abolishing of the Matsumae language policy, which had prohibited the Ainus from speaking Japanese. Quite to the contrary, the central government ordered its officials to encourage the use of Japanese among the Ainus. The Edo Shogunate believed that the acquisition of fluency in Japanese would protect the Ainus against the injustices carried out by the contractors.

The Edo Shogunate was overthrown in the Meiji Restoration (1868). The new government's principal policy was the rapid industrialization of Japan. Hokkaido was regarded as a source of supply of wood, coal and other minerals, as well as of marine and agricultural products. The exploiting of these resources contributed greatly to the success of the drastic industrialization of modern Japan. All of this required the opening of Hokkaido to immigration and industrial projects. The new system was organized through the Bureau of Hokkaido Development, founded in 1869.

Among the first tasks of the Bureau was the liquidation of the contract system and the trading posts. In a sense this was a positive development for the Ainus, for they were now liberated from the fetters of the contractors. However, the new system also involved an end of the traditional self-government of the Ainus. The Ainus were gradually absorbed into the host of Japanese colonists. No political organization of the Ainus into a coherent group could take place until after World War II when, finally, a unitary organization, the *Association of Hokkaido Utari*, was founded. (The general meeting of this Association decided in 1961 to introduce the term *Utari* as the official name of the people formerly known as the Ainus.)

Through the whole period of colonization and industrialization, the Japanese government was almost indifferent to the indigenous culture and language of the Ainus. Among the few exceptions that can be mentioned were the compilation of documents on Ainu customs during the Edo period by the Bureau of Hokkaido Development in 1882, and the publication of etymological notes on Ainu toponyms by Nagata Hosei under the auspices of Hokkaido Government Office in 1891.

3. THE DECLINE OF THE AINU LANGUAGE

A study of the dynamic trends in the Ainu population gives us a concrete image of how, and under what kind of circumstances, the Ainu language was gradually abandoned.

The most reliable censuses of the Ainu population were taken by the Edo Shogunate, the Bureau of Hokkaido Development (BHD or *Kaitaku Shi*, 1869–1882) and Hokkaido Government Office (HGO or *Hokkaidoo Choo*, 1886–1947), as well as Hokkaido Local Government (HLG or *Hokkaidoo*, 1947–). The demographic studies of Tsunekichi Kono (1862–1930) and Shin'ichiro Takakura (1903–1990) are also valuable [KONO 1911: 11–12, 1922: 25–29], [TAKAKURA 1972: 287–314, 509–524]. In the present paper we draw the statistical figures for the Edo period from [BHD 1884: 97–156], while the data for the years following the Meiji Restoration are from [KONO 1911, 1922] and [HGO 1922, 1926, 1926, 1933, 1936].

Table 1 and Table 2, which are based on [BHD 1884: 97–156] and [HGO 1926: 1–24] show the dynamic trends of the Ainu and Japanese populations in Hokkaido and the Kuril Islands from 1822 to 1925. Note that the figure 16,966 for the year 1877 [HGO 1926: 21, 23] is different from the figure of 17,084 in [BHD 1884: 156] and [KONO 1911: 11, 1922: 27]. For the year 1921 we find in [HGO 1926: 24] the figure 16,720; this figure probably refers to the year 1920. The corresponding number of the Japanese in the Japanese area of the Oshima peninsula during the Edo Period is not known. We refer to the years for which we have data [HLG 1980: 764, 768].

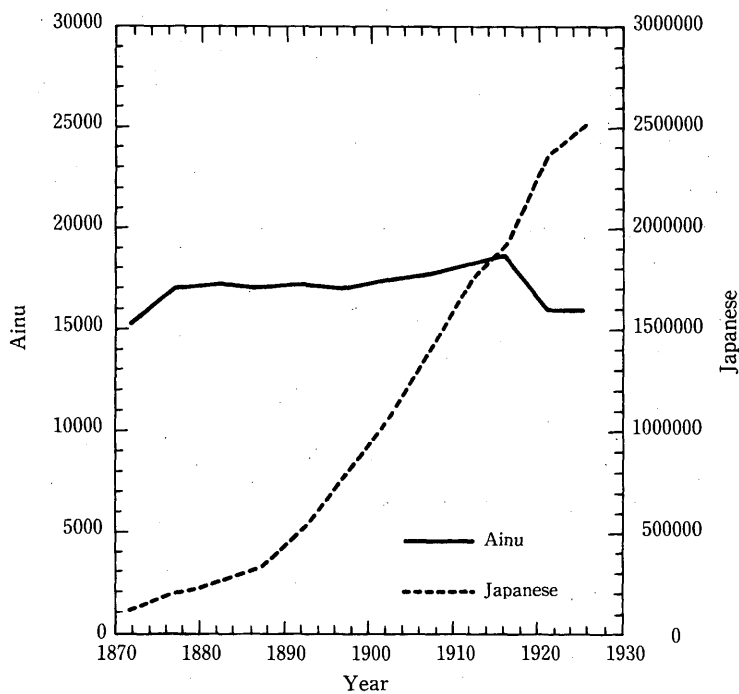
The population of “the Kuril Ainus”, who lived in the Northern Kuril Islands (Shumshu, Paramushir and Rasshua) and who were to some extent Russianized, seems not to have been counted in, at least, the years 1872 and 1877. In 1884, a group of 97 Kuril Ainus were moved to Shikotan, one of the southeasternmost of the Kuril islands [HGO 1929: 13], [TORII 1903: 70–106]. This was consistent with the policy of making them Japanese. The Nemuro Branch of the Bureau of Hokkaido Development counted 22 Ainus in “Shumushu District” in 1881 [BHD 1884: 155].

Table 1. Population of Ainus in the Ainu Area and Japanese in the Japanese Area in Hokkaido and the Kuril Islands during the Edo Period

Year	Ainu	Japanese
1701	—	20,086
1807	—	31,353
1822	21,678	—
1839	—	41,886
1853	—	63,834
1854	14,429	—

Table 2. Ainu and Japanese Population in Hokkaido and the Kuril Islands from 1872 to 1925

Year	Ainu	Japanese	Percentage of Ainus to the Population
1872	15,275	111,196	12.1
1877	16,966	191,172	8.2
1882	17,198	239,632	6.7
1887	16,962	321,118	5.0
1892	17,148	509,609	3.3
1897	16,972	786,211	2.1
1902	17,374	1,045,831	1.6
1907	17,715	1,390,079	1.3
1912	18,219	1,739,097	1.0
1916	18,674	1,911,166	1.0
1921	15,941	2,359,183	0.7
1925	15,942	2,498,679	0.6

**Figure 1.** Ainu and Japanese Population in Hokkaido and the Kuril Island from 1872 to 1925

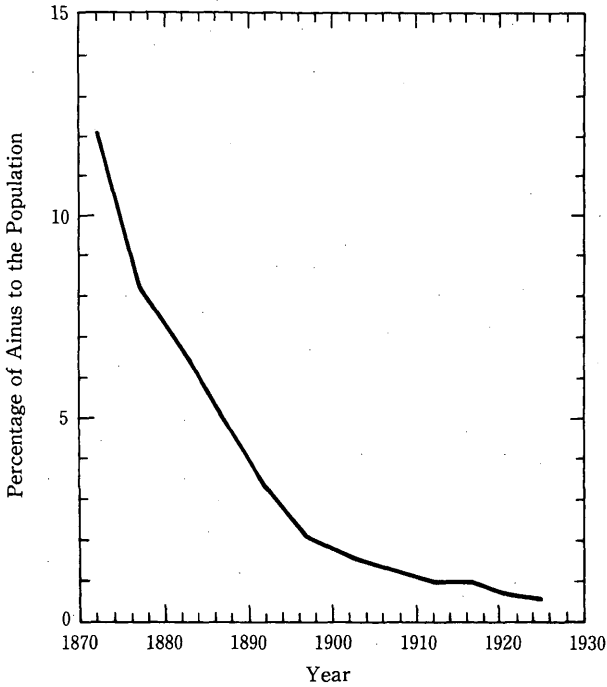


Figure 2. Percentage of Ainus to the Population in Hokkaido and the Kuril Islands from 1872 to 1925

In 1876, part of the Sakhalin Ainus, who lived along Aniwa Bay in the southern half of Sakhalin, were moved by the Japanese Government to Sapporo District of Ishikari County of Hokkaido [TAKAKURA 1972: 419–422]. This population was later counted together with the Hokkaido Ainu [BHD 1884: 113], [KONO 1911: 12, 1922: 27].

The figures show that the Ainus encountered a serious population crisis under the new colonial policy of the Japanese Government.

The sharp decrease of the Ainu population from 1916 to 1921 seems, however, difficult to explain, for we do not know of any drastic changes in the circumstances of the Ainus during this period. Tsunekichi Kono [KONO 1922: 27] attributed this decrease to a change in the census methods: “The decrease in population in the year 1921 was the result of the minute examination in that year.” This explanation is rather unconvincing, but, in any case, we can realize from it that there were many technical problems involved in carrying out the census of the Ainus.

The preface to a census report by Hokkaido Government Office (largely 1917) reveals something of the methods by which censuses were taken in those days. We can easily understand that it was virtually impossible to grasp the exact number of the Ainus [HGO 1922: 25]:

Even recent censuses, other than the very latest ones, were not exact, for they were not conducted on well-established criteria. We cannot be certain whether the examiners checked their data face to face, or just looked into the local census registers. Many Japanese children were adopted into Ainu families, and many Ainu women got married to Japanese. If the examiners checked their data just in the census registers, they might have included Japanese children adopted by Ainu communities and excluded Ainu women married to Japanese. Consequently, they could not possibly have reached any accuracy in their counts. On the other hand, we cannot tell the exact number of pure Ainus, for there are many persons of mixed blood who are believed to be Ainus by those around them... They themselves can be married either to Ainus or to Japanese, which further complicates the matter. In conclusion, it is really difficult to take a census of the Ainu population with any exactitude.

Note that the census registers referred to in the above passage have been very important in the Japanese society during the whole period following the Meiji Restoration. The date of birth, address and parents' names are registered for every individual soon after birth, while any changes of address, as well as data on marriage, adoption and death are added in due course. Even today, all government functions are based on these registers, which are being kept perpetually in local government offices.

Although this government report indicates that adoption and marriage between Ainus and Japanese were the chief hindrances to establishing the exact number of the Ainu population, another report published seven years later is more plain and explicit on these points, as if the whole confusion had been resolved. The latter report includes the number of "Japanese who were members of Ainu families" (altogether 872, among whom there were 359 males and 513 females) as well as the number of "Ainus who were members of Japanese families" (628, with 330 males and 298 females), both figures referring to the end of the year 1927 [HGO 1929: 1-3]. Some of the Ainu informants used by linguists today must have been included in the category of "Japanese who were members of Ainu families".

The following phrase, found in an explanation supposed to give the cause for the low rate of increase of the Ainu population, illustrates one factor which affected the census data at that time. It also suggests that the examiners often regarded mixed blood individuals as Japanese, implying that ethnic assimilation had taken place [HGO 1929: 1]:

Although Ainu women who have become members of Japanese families are counted among the Ainus, the children they have are counted among the Japanese in the most recent censuses.

In the last government report preceding World War II we again find an explanation, or an excuse, for the fact that the Ainu population did not increase [HGO 1936: 3]:

The Ainus are not what [can be] called a dying race. In actual fact, the Ainu race is developing through melting into the Japanese.

Takakura [TAKAKURA 1972: 511] describes the difficulties encountered in taking a census of the Ainu population as follows:

A census was usually taken on the basis of census registers... Government officials, however, could not establish these registers in any precise way, for most Ainus did not willingly inform them about the birth of their children... From the administrative point of view, Ainus were recognized as commoners and treated in the same way as Japanese commoners. But for the purpose of welfare work among the Ainus, the officials of towns or villages had nevertheless to keep the registration sheets referring to Ainus separate from those referring to Japanese. Within each local administrative unit, this separation may have been carried out on the basis of blood, mode of life, observations concerning customs, or simply common sense. Such judgements can hardly be considered to have been objective or reliable, since assimilation was going on with an increasing speed and pervasiveness. An exhaustive and exact examination was impossible.

Concerning the category of *commoners* mentioned by Takakura, note that before the end of World War II social castes were strictly separated in the Japanese system of administration. People were classified either as aristocrats, (ex-)samurais or commoners, depending on their ancestry. By contrast, many other social parameters, like ethnicity or religion, were not registered administratively.

In view of all this, we may conclude that the concept of "Ainu" is impossible to delimit exactly, not only from the scientific but also from the administrative point of view. The population statistics tell only part of the truth. We cannot, however, ignore the statistical figures entirely, for they do give us a rough idea about how the ethnic and linguistic status of the Ainus evolved during the historical period.

4. A REVIEW OF AINU POPULATION STATISTICS

We may now look more closely at the trends revealed by the population statistics available for the various local groups of the Ainus. The general picture is visible from Table 3, which is based on the following sources:

year (s)	source (s)
1806–1811, 1822, 1854	[BHD 1884: 97–156]
1877, 1907	[KONO 1911: 11–12, KONO 1922: 26–27]
1921	[KONO 1922: 26–27, HGO 1922: 19–24]
1925	[HGO 1926: 14–18]
1935	[HGO 1936: 3–9]
1993	[HLG 1994: 4]

Note that the actual administrative districts were different for the different historical stages. The present author has rearranged the local populations following the first administrative division (with 11 separate domains), as defined by the Bureau of Hokkaido Development in 1869 (Figure 3). The local populations in the year 1993 could not be rearranged, however, for the census of that year does not present

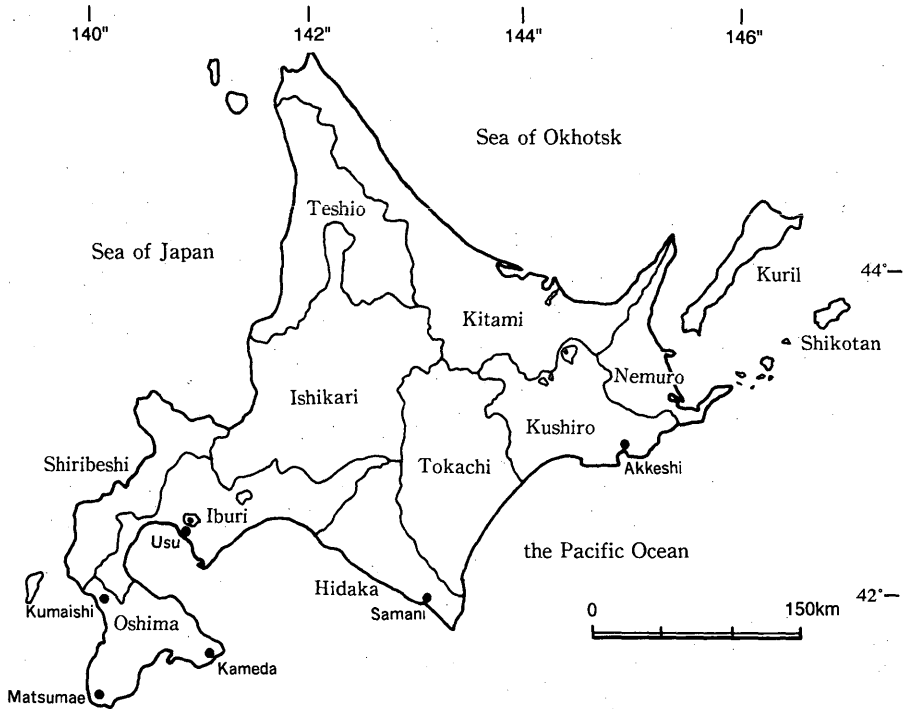


Figure 3. The Eleven Domains in Hokkaido in 1869

Table 3. Local Population of Ainu in Hokkaido and the Kuril Islands from 1806 to 1993

Year	1806-1811	1822	1854	1877	1907	1921	1925	1935		1993
Total	16,872	21,678	14,429	17,084	17,715	15,941	15,941	16,324		23,830
Kuril	1,411	1,196	99	457	635	531	648	362		
Nemuro	1,219	891	586	455	450	350	265	99	Nemuro	1,154
Kushiro	2,258	2,153	1,468	1,486	1,597	1,410	1,277	1,489	Kushiro	1,765
Tokachi	1,034	1,099	1,172	1,482	1,692	1,573	1,462	1,339	Tokachi	896
Hidaka	2,861	2,950	3,060	5,310	6,263	5,200	5,298	6,396	Hidaka	9,299
Kitami	—	3,297	1,115	1,411	919	709	645	617	Abashiri	256
									Soya	66
Teshio	—	1,538	769	436	271	304	291	253	Rumoi	2
Ishikari	2,603	2,054	978	1,390	992	678	593	734	Kamikawa	209
									Sorachi	41
									Ishikari	2,176
Iburī	3,085	3,741	3,613	3,502	3,930	4,431	4,570	4,466	Iburī	7,330
Oshima				242	344	251	386	143	Oshima	633
Shiribeshi	2,401	2,759	1,569	913	622	504	506	426	Shiribeshi	3
									Hiyama	—

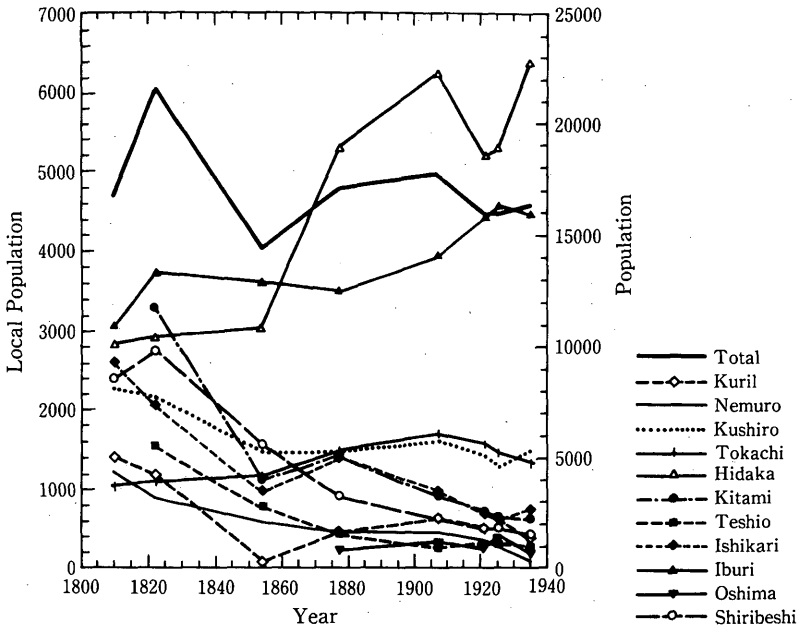


Figure 4. Local Population of Ainus in Hokkaido and the Kuril Islands from 1806 to 1935

population data for the lower-level administrative divisions.

There are no data for the areas of Kitami and Teshio for the period between 1806 and 1811. We therefore base our estimates on the data for the year 1822, assuming that no great fluctuation in the total population took place from 1806 to 1822. A drastic decrease is observed in the populations of Kitami, Teshio, Ishikari and Shiribeshi, as well as of the Kuril Islands, i.e. in the coastal areas along the Sea of Okhotsk and the Sea of Japan, between 1822 and 1854. On the other hand, during the same period the populations at the Pacific Ocean maintained their past levels, or even increased. This inclination continued after the Meiji Restoration. As a result, Hidaka, and then Iburi, gradually surpassed all other domains as centers of Ainu population. This geographical maldistribution was presumably a rather new phenomenon. We do not know its cause, but it had the natural consequence that Ainu linguistics developed with Kindaichi's and Chiri's studies on the dialects of Hidaka and Iburi Counties.

The latest census was taken in 1993. On this occasion, the Hokkaido Local Government defined "Ainu" as "a person who seems to be of Ainu blood, or anyone who by marriage or adoption is a family member of such a person. Anyone who denies his or her identity as an Ainu is excluded in this census, even if he or she can be inferred to be of Ainu blood." [HLG 1994: 1] The Association of Hokkaido Utari supported this interpretation.

Table 4. Number of Ainus who could not speak in Japanese, 1917

Country	District	A Number of Ainus who cannot speak in Japanese	B Number of Ainus who can speak in Japanese
Nemuro (Chisima)	Nemuro	Few people speak in Ainu in everyday life.	Almost all.
Kushiro	Kushirokoku	2 (80 year-old women, greetings are in Japanese.)	All [other than the left column]
Tokachi	Kasai	Very few.	447 (older than 40) 183 (younger than 39) Total 633
Hidaka	Urakawa	87 (older than 40) 145 (younger than 39) Total 232	1556 (older than 40) 4902 (younger than 39) Total 6458
Kitami	Abashiri	3 (older than 40, in Abashiri Town)	All [other than the left column]
	Soya	[No mention]	
Teshio	Rumoi	—	Almost all. 64 (older than 40) 67 (younger than 39) Total 131
	Kamikawa	1 (64 year-old woman)	All [other than the left column]
Ishikari	Asahikawa City	3 (older than 70)	All [other than the left column]
	Sorachi	—	All
	Ishikari	Nobody	—
Iburi	Iburi	93 (old men and women)	949 (older than 40) 2456 (younger than 39) Total 3405
Oshima	Oshima	12 (who have difficulties in speaking Japanese)	114 (older than 40) 311 (younger than 39) Total 425
Shiribeshi	Shiribeshi	—	All
	Hiyama	—	All

A kind of linguistic census was taken, presumably under the direction of Tsunekichi Kono, by the Hokkaido Government Office in 1917. This census, the results of which are elaborated in Table 4, indicates the number of "Ainus who cannot speak Japanese". This was a unique and original attempt to gather ethnically and linguistically significant information, and the whole investigation may be regarded as a solitary achievement by a man who was much ahead of his time and who had a rich experience of work with the Ainus. We must bear in mind that very few people

were interested in the Ainus in those days.

Of course, it is difficult to measure linguistic ability. The present author has had many chances to meet Ainu individuals who at first denied their Ainu language ability, but who nevertheless recalled many words and phrases when submitted to patient and persistent questioning. After several sessions of work, some of these persons have even begun to speak Ainu. In a similar way, some of the individuals listed as "Ainus who cannot speak Japanese" may actually have been latent speakers of Japanese. However, although we cannot regard the figures as strictly scientific, we may assume that they do reflect rather closely the linguistic situation in the year 1917.

It is, consequently, certain that a considerable number of Ainus, about 350 altogether, were still monolingual in the Ainu language in the year 1917. Also, there is no doubt that around these last monolingual individuals, there was a large number of persons bilingual in Ainu and Japanese. From this information we may conclude that Ainu as a language was still rather vigorous at that time. Most of our present informants were born during this time and in such linguistic surroundings.

We know, for instance, an Ainu woman who was born in Abuta, Ihuri domain, in 1910 and was brought up by her grandmother. After she got married to a Japanese fisherman at the age of 18, she never spoke Ainu in front of her husband or children. Probably, even in her infancy she had few chances to speak Ainu with anyone except her grandmother. In fact, talking about her school days, she said that one of the amusements of the Ainus in her village was to listen to her reading of Japanese novels published in serial magazines. Although her linguistic career in Ainu had come to an end very early, we started working with her. Although she was able to recall just a few Ainu words during our first session, she gradually remembered many of her grandmothers' utterances and gave us a lot of valuable ethnolinguistic information [WATANABE et al 1989: 87-129].

The Hokkaido Local Government has recently made another linguistic inspection of the same type in areas with relatively many Ainus [HLG 1994: 45]. Questionnaires were issued to 642 Ainus out of the total population of 23,830. Five Ainus took the choice "I can speak Ainu." on a multiple-choice test; 35 took "I can speak Ainu a little."; 238 took "I cannot speak Ainu, but I know some words."

Today, there may still be relatively many Ainus similar to the woman in Abuta. These people had been bilingual in Ainu and Japanese until a certain point of time, but their linguistic development in Ainu came to an end and has later remained latent. The people around them and even they themselves believe that they are monolingual speakers of Japanese. Nevertheless, we know that they once must have acquired the basic grammar and vocabulary of Ainu. This means that they also must have learnt the foundations of the Ainu culture. Any individuals who can still recall some traditional technical terms in Ainu are, of course, promising informants for ethnological research.

Language death is a completed fact only when we know that the last individual who learnt the language as his or her mother tongue has passed away. Therefore,

we cannot yet declare the death of the Ainu language. The Ainu language will live as long as we have persons such as the woman in Abuta among us. The exact point when the Ainu language ultimately dies will never be known to us.

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