

## **Historical Dynamics of Ainu Society: The Social Structure of Hokkaido Ainu in Historic Documents in the Premodern Period**

Hideyuki Ōnishi  
*Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts, Japan*

### **ABSTRACT**

The Ainu lifestyle was fundamentally based on hunting, gathering, and fishing, even though they engaged in extensive farming to a certain extent. Further, they did not establish a relatively large-scale, complex society like chiefdoms or kingdoms. These circumstances of Ainu society, however, were not necessarily due to their own decisions; this situation was forced upon them under the strong influence of the market economy and political power in mainland Japan. This paper examines what kinds of mechanisms and processes arising from the relationship with the Japanese economy and politics prevented Ainu society from developing, and limited them as a small tribal community (as they were considered), primarily based on foraging activities.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Ainu are normally recognised as foragers, not only by the general public but also by academics concerned with anthropological and ethnographic studies. Even though they engaged in extensive farming to a certain extent, their society was primarily sustained by hunting-gathering-fishing in the northern part of the Japanese archipelago, mainly Hokkaido, the southern part of Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands, until the Edo period (1603–1868 A.D.), known as the early modern stage in the Japanese era (Figure 1).

Further, the Ainu did not establish a relatively large-scale, complex society such as a ‘chiefdom’ or ‘kingdom’. Such images of Ainu society were propagated by Japanese anthropological research, chiefly based on interviews with participants from older generations (e.g., Izumi 1952; Watanabe 1972). However, as a reconstructed model, this view of the Ainu (which ignores their historic transitions) has received various criticisms, not only from the field of anthropology but also from other fields such as history and sociology (cf. Fukasawa 1998: iv; Yamada 2003: 87–89; Ōnishi 2014: 279–281).

On the other hand, various findings from historical and archaeological studies

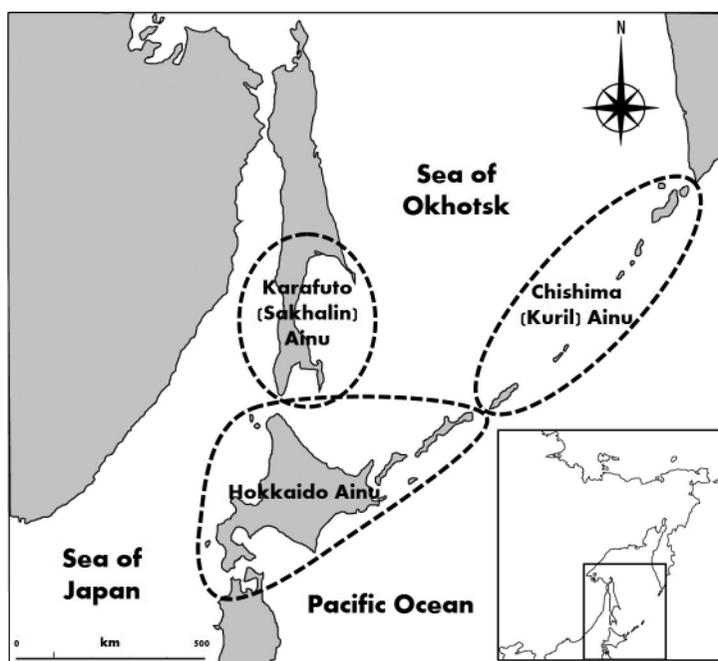


Figure 1 Original settlement areas of the Ainu (Created by Ōnishi)

since the 1980s have ushered in new perspectives that suggest the above perception and characterisation of the Ainu should be rethought. These new characterisations can be summarised as two points. The first is that the Ainu were not simple foragers forming a small, isolated community closed to the outside world, but traders who produced exchange commodities to acquire necessities for their daily social lives from neighbouring societies and nations by hunting or fishing, and who built a complex society (cf. Tezuka 1998, 2009; Sasaki 1999, 2009). The other point is that this subsistence strategy and social situation were not the result of independent and autonomous activities, but was formed by colonialist influences from mainland Japan, Chinese dynasties, and the Russian Empire, which strongly connected the Ainu to the prevailing world system in the premodern and modern era (cf. Deriha 1994, 2009; Kikuchi 1994: 149–194)<sup>1</sup>.

These revisions of our comprehension of Ainu history are verified by substantial data from current historical and archaeological examinations. Meanwhile, however, ethnographic models of Ainu society created on the basis of field research until the 1970s, concerned with subsistence strategies and social structures at the daily community level, have not necessarily been rejected. Additionally, in spite of widespread criticisms, such as inadequate consideration of the historical context, those models have even been utilised as a premise in recent studies. In particular, this kind of trend can be seen in historical studies showing new perspectives on the relationship between the Ainu and outside societies, or of their socio-economic

activities<sup>2)</sup>.

Such contradictions in Ainu studies might not simply be recognised as misunderstandings to be eventually eliminated. In fact, aspects of Ainu society, as described in ethnographic models, could be observed in some peripheral areas of Hokkaido until the Meiji period (1868–1912 A.D.), when the Japanese government increased direct control and development of their living areas (Takakura 1960; Ōnishi 2011: 231–26). In addition, examinations of various research fields based on historic documents and records have proved the correctness of some phases in the ethnographic models of Ainu society (Ōnishi 2008: 253–256). From these perspectives, we hypothesise that the Ainu were forced to revert to a small-scale forager society owing to strong colonialist influences from the outside world.

Elucidating the historical factors and processes that forced the Ainu to become a small-scale forager society would help in assessing the validity of this hypothesis. With this in mind, this study attempts to clarify the historic transition of Ainu society during the premodern period, focusing on the relationship between Hokkaido Ainu and a neighbouring society, namely the Tokugawa Shogunate system on mainland Japan. The reason for this focus is the ready availability of historical documents and records examining their relationships, along with accumulations of data from numerous research fields concerned with this theme. Through this examination, the historic background of the formation process of Ainu society, as described in ethnographic models since the Meiji period, can be clarified.

## ETHNOGRAPHIC MODEL OF AINU SOCIETY

### 1) Basic Information

Prior to examining the historical background of the relationship between the formation of Ainu society and outside influences, basic information about Ainu society, as described in ethnographic models, will be briefly outlined. The ethnographic model chosen for this is ‘The Ainu Ecosystem’ designed by Japanese ecological anthropologist Hitoshi Watanabe (Watanabe 1972). This is selected because it was constructed by integrating major anthropological findings up to that point, and is still the best-known model worldwide for understanding Ainu society<sup>3)</sup>.

In general, it can be assumed that the prevalent ethnographic model of the Ainu society was constructed by conducting research in the Tokachi River basin in eastern Hokkaido and the Saru River basin in western Hokkaido (Figure 2). In his research, Watanabe depicted the Ainu ecosystem model in inland zones of the Tokachi River<sup>4)</sup>. Meanwhile, the Saru River is an important area<sup>5)</sup> for Ainu history, and it is where Japanese cultural anthropologist Sei’ichi Izumi created a famous ethnographic model on the relationship between Ainu territorial groups and their traditional living habitats, known as *iwor* (Izumi 1952). This finding had a profound influence on Watanabe, which he absorbed in creating the Ainu

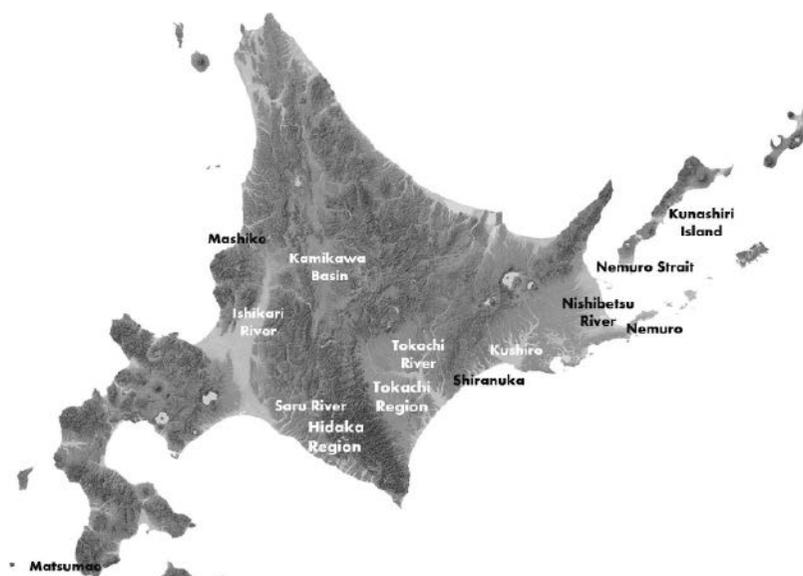


Figure 2 Sites concerned this study (Created by Ōnishi)

ecosystem.

In discussing this Ainu ecosystem, the anthropological model of Ainu society is roughly equivalent. In fact, this model has been referred to in Ainu studies in other fields, including history and archaeology, until the present (Hudson 2014: 123). Further, as described later, the realities of the basic phases shown in the Ainu ecosystem have been clarified, not only for the modern period but also for the premodern stage, mainly during the Edo, by various, thorough examinations based on substantial data from historical, archaeological, and other sources (Ōnishi 2008: 253–256).

In particular, aspects such as subsistence activities, resource management ritual practices, and the political roles of each social unit described in that model can be verified through critiques of historic documents and analysis of archaeological data, although exceptional cases are found partially in some limited times and areas (e.g., Endo 1997; Irimoto 1987; T. Segawa 2005; Ōnishi 2008). In addition, the data for the late Edo period (the early 18<sup>th</sup> century AD to 1869 AD)—when the Tokugawa Shogunate changed its policy towards Ainu society from indirect to direct rule, and carried out the colonial management of Hokkaido, called *Ezo-chi* (蝦夷地), were recorded by samurais working as the administrator sent from the Shogunate, and by traders on mainland Japan working with Ainu immigrants for fishery management<sup>6)</sup>—are more reliable.

## 2) Social Organisation

To begin with, we survey the social organisation described in the Ainu ecosystem.

This can be categorised into five units: *chise* (a single household), *kotan* (a settlement), the local group, the *Shine-Itokpa* group, and the River group (Watanabe 1972: 7–18). These units were originally scientific concepts and terms established through ethnographic research by Watanabe and other researchers of Ainu studies, but have now been disseminated as common knowledge outside the realm of academia, including the Ainu themselves.

The relationship from single household to River group, except for the *Shine-Itokpa* group, is a spatially and socially stratified continuous component. The important thing here is that, while a *chise* forms the most basic unit and a *kotan* is made up of those *chise*, the local group administers the social and political territories in the everyday lives of the Ainu. The River group, consisting of several local groups, is ordinarily the largest socio-political unit, and therefore represents social integration at the highest level in Ainu society (Watanabe 1972: 16–17).

Incidentally, the *Shine-Itokpa* group is not a physical unit, but the socio-ideological organisation constituted by patrilineal kinsmen<sup>7</sup>. Thus, this structure stands alongside the other four physical units, and can be regarded as an ideology that binds human relationships (Watanabe 1972: 15–16).

### 3) Socio-Political Function

These social units in the Ainu ecosystem constituted a socio-political and economic organisation. In particular, each unit functioned as an entity of territory and resource management. Each *kotan* or local group, which had belonged under the River group, possessed and used *iwor* as territory or living space<sup>8</sup>. When looking at individual subsistence activities by the Ainu, they used and managed diverse resources in a wide-ranging area in many different ways; for example, bear hunting in more distant mountains, or deer hunting in areas closer to the edges of mountains (Watanabe 1972: 58).

On the other hand, the River groups were able to maintain their exclusive rights against other groups, and to control everything concerned with territory and resource management (Watanabe 1972: 56–59). In other words, it is not assumed in the Ainu ecosystem that there is any ordinary, larger unit than River groups in daily life. This means that, in Ainu society, local groups and individuals under River groups engaged in their activities in numerous ways to take advantage of resources<sup>9</sup>. Then, if some socio-political or economic conflicts between River groups occurred, both groups had to mediate the situation themselves due to the absence of any superstructure.

This socio-political structure of the River groups can be seen in some historical documents recorded by migrants from mainland Japan. As an example, records of three conflicts concerned with resource or territory between Ainu communities, assumed to be River groups in the eastern part of Hokkaido, were found in the archives of local agencies (named *Kaisho* [会所]) founded in the late Edo period by the Tokugawa Shogunate for colonial control of the Ainu (Takakura 1966: 212–217; Iwasaki 1998a: 227–229; Ōnishi 2008: 256–259). These records confirm

that at least in the late Edo period, the River groups held the position and role as the highest forms of socio-political organisation.

### ANOTHER PHASE OF AINU HISTORY

The household, as the smallest social unit, and River groups, as the largest, are each positioned in the Ainu ecosystem. As for historical fact, the Ainu never had one integrated society throughout Hokkaido, like a nation-state, until the modern period. Thus, ethnographic models demonstrate that the chief of a River group was positioned as the highest political entity in daily social life.

Incidentally, as a case study to examine social development level by the phases of formation, organisation and structure, four stages of social development are often referred to: band, tribe, chiefdom, and state, as defined by Elman Service (Service 1962). As is well-known, although social evolutionism is usually harshly criticised by various research fields, including anthropology and history, these stages are often used as a popular conceptual model to estimate the socio-organisational level. Through overviews of an anthropological model, namely the Ainu ecosystem, Ainu society can perhaps be regarded as being at a ‘tribal’ stage, if we apply the four stages defined by Service.

In historical documents recorded in the early and middle Edo periods, however, different Ainu chiefs called *sō-daishō* (惣大将) or *sō-otona* (惣乙名) can be identified. These chiefs were able to exert political influence over a large area, including many River groups. *Sō-otona*, the leader of some River groups, had still existed during the Meiji period in some areas such as the Kamikawa basin, where colonial development by mainland Japan took place relatively late (Harada 1994: 764–766). Nevertheless, they normally held no substantive power at the time Japanese anthropologists were conducting their research.

Meanwhile, in the early and middle Edo period, *sō-daishō* and *sō-otona* sometimes showed extensive substantive political leadership. In particular, this kind of leadership can be clearly recognised in extraordinary situations such as Shakushain’s revolt and the Menashi-Kunashir rebellion.

Shakushain’s revolt was the largest Ainu rebellion against Japanese authority, carried out by the Matsumae clan, which had been granted the area around Hokkaido as a fiefdom<sup>10</sup> under the Tokugawa Shogunate system in the early Edo period (1669–1672). During this rebellion, powerful chiefs called *sō-daishō*, including Shakushain as the ringleader of this battle, influenced huge zones based on their socio-political leadership (Figure 3), and asserted their own independence against the Matsumae clan. In particular, *Haukase* of *Ishikari* in the central Hokkaido region, who was regarded as the most influential *sō-daishō*, possessed 40 to 50 matchlock guns, more than the Matsumae clan (Kaiho 1974: 235). Japanese historian Mineo Kaiho assumed from the existence of these chiefs that the Ainu originally had the ability to grow into a complex-ranked society led by *sō-daishō*, with influence over a relatively huge area, larger than River groups’ territory

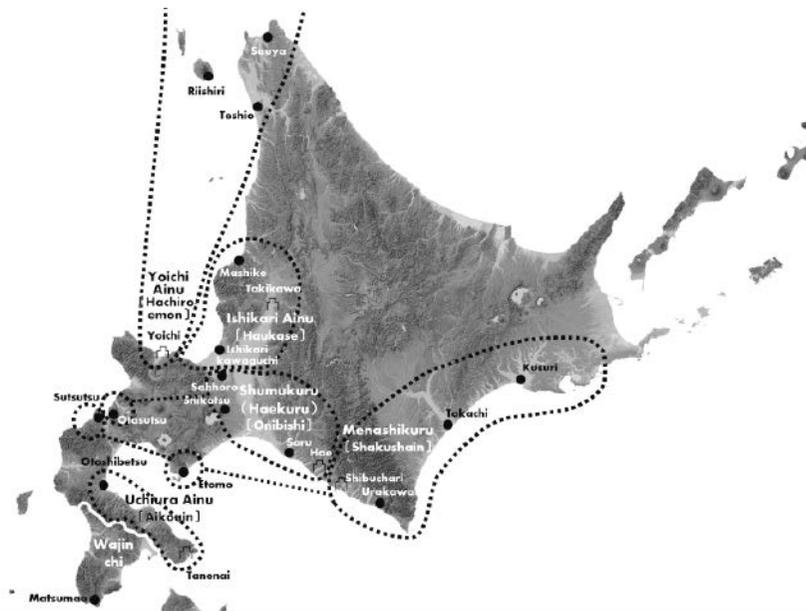
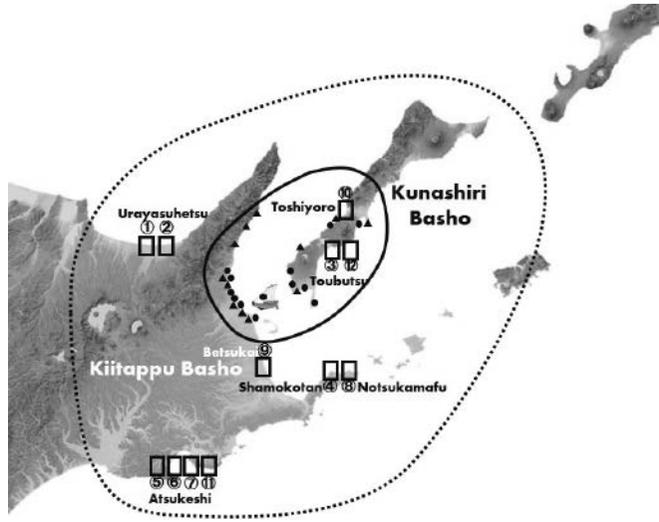


Figure 3 *Sō-daishō* and their spheres of influence concerned Shakushain's revolt  
 ● important site ◻ residence base of *sō-daishō* [ ] name of *sō-daishō*  
 ..... *sō-daishō* sphere of influence  
 (Modified from Kaiho 1974; 1984)

(Kaiho 1974: 72–78), but this possibility and ability was gradually restricted after Shakushain's revolt, and was finally dissolved by the Matsumae clan representative of the Tokugawa Shogunate system (Kaiho 1984: 303–311).

On the other hand, the Menashi-Kunashir rebellion was a battle in the late Edo period (1789) between Ainu and Japanese migrants, who were employed as fishery labourers or managers by the trader on mainland Japan, namely *Hida-ya* (飛驒屋), around the Nemuro Strait in north-eastern Hokkaido (Figure 4). In this battle, powerful chiefs called *sō-otona* and *otona*, who were very similar to the *sō-daishō* in Shakushain's revolt, were also depicted in official documents of the Japanese authorities. Remarkably, they made independent contact with Russian traders and set up trade relationships outside the control of the Tokugawa Shogunate system (Kikuchi 1994: 158–161; Otsuka 2011: 101–102). This situation is directly represented by 12 chiefs' portraits, wearing Russian military uniforms or official Chinese costumes, called *Ishū-retsuzō* (夷酋列像) (Figure 5)<sup>11</sup>, drawn by the Matsumae clan's samurai Kakizaki Hakyō (蠣崎波響). Needless to say, these kinds of clothes were imported by the Ainu through trade with the Russian Empire and Chinese dynasties, and were particularly rare items in each homeland (Otsuka 2011: 99–102). Incidentally, the Menashi-Kunashir rebellion is known as the final large-scale Ainu revolt against Japanese authority. In addition, some historians have assumed that the Ainu in this area, located at the east end of Hokkaido, sustained



**Figure 4** Outline map of Menashi-Kunashir rebellion  
 ● raid site ▲ Ainu *kotan* of the participation in this rebellion  
 □ residence base of *sō-otona* and *otona*  
 ①~⑫ *sō-otona* and *otona* depicted in *Ishū-retsuzō*  
 — conflict area  
 ..... *sō-otona*'s and *otona*'s spheres of influence  
 (Modified from Otsuka 2011)



**Figure 5** *Ishū-retsuzō* : Ikotoi and Tsukinoe (Owed by National Museum of Ethnology)

their social organisation up until this battle. This helped the Ainu to resist the control of Japanese traders, because theirs was the last territory to receive any colonial influence from mainland Japan (Emori 1987: 92–93; Kikuchi 1994: 126–127; Iwasaki 1998b: 121–136).

Through the above cases, a polemic resulted whereby powerful chiefs called *sō-daishō* in Shakushain's revolt and *sō-otona* in the *Menashi-Kunashir* rebellion were in an ordinary or non-ordinary state. Because they ordinarily held leadership positions regarded as a 'chiefdom' level until the middle Edo period, such socio-political powers were not only limited in two emergency events. In other words, can Ainu society before the late Edo period be positioned as being at a 'chiefdom' level? If so, why did the Ainu after the late Edo period transform from a 'chiefdom' to a 'tribal' level?

### HISTORIC BACKGROUND OF AINU CHIEFS

To elucidate the possible transformation of Ainu society after the late Edo period, we first examine the arguments between Japanese historian Mineo Kaiho and Japanese archaeologist Haruo Ohyi over the evaluation of the Ainu chiefs' leadership in Shakushain's revolt. Kaiho pointed out that the Ainu societies commanded by the *sō-daishō* in Shakushain's revolt can be seen as representing the stage of the early state (Kaiho 1974: 78). Ohyi, however, criticised this assessment, and showed that the actual socio-political state of Ainu society never extended beyond one river basin and that too was controlled by one River group, even in the early Edo Period (Ohyi 1984, 1992).

Ohyi re-examined historical documents concerning Shakushain's revolt using archaeological data and ethnographic records, and concluded that the depictions of Ainu society in these documents are exaggerated due to propaganda or factual errors of the suppression unit commanded by the Japanese authorities, including the Matsumae clan and the Tokugawa Shogunate (Ohyi 1992: 64–66). In addition, he expressed that the status held by the *sō-daishō* leaders in Shakushain's revolt was a temporary result of the state of emergency, and was not subsequently normalised (Ohyi 1984: 160–161).

While Ohyi's criticism includes interesting and significant perspectives, his discussion only focuses on the prior condition of leaders and their societies before the revolt. Further, it is glaringly clear that Shakushain commanded a huge region from eastern to northern Hokkaido, which included various River groups, and resisted Japanese authority, even if his leadership was specifically a response to the emergency. Conditions similar to those of Shakushain's revolt can be seen in the leadership of the *sō-otona* in *Menashi-Kunashir* rebellion; the Matsumae clan exercised authoritarianism for the utmost suppression of this revolt (Kikuchi 1994: 122–127; Iwasaki 1998b: 189–201; Otsuka 2011: 111–120)<sup>12</sup>. Considering these facts, it is difficult to suppose that the leadership of Ainu chiefs, at least for these two events, never extended beyond one river basin and was controlled by one

River group.

Moreover, attempts to characterise Ainu society before the middle Edo period using ethnographic models reconstructed in the modern era should be criticised as essentialism based on a disregard for historical transition. Therefore, we will examine whether the size of the Ainu society depicted in the ethnographic model including the Ainu ecosystem, in terms mainly of socio-political leadership, changed before and after the middle Edo period. Such an analysis would also test the veracity of Ohya's opinion, which has grossly downplayed the sphere of influence of the Ainu leaders' named *sō-daishō* or *sō-otona*.

First of all, if Ainu society before and after the middle Edo period was different, the factors chiefly responsible need to be clarified. Natural environmental factors seem unlikely, as no drastic natural transitions that caused changes in Ainu society during the Edo period can be found, other than resource depletion by human factors (Tabata 1980; Walker 2001: 82–85)<sup>13</sup>.

This means we need to look at socio-cultural factors as outside influences that triggered changes in Ainu society. The Tokugawa Shogunate's drastic policy shift in relation to Ainu society is one possible factor. The Shogunate's original policy of indirect rule to control the Ainu was represented as a word and concept '*Ezo-Shidai*' (夷次第), which means 'self-decision' according to the Ainu (Kikuchi 1994: 77). Under this rule, Ainu society was able to sustain independence and autonomy, at least in their daily living areas (Kikuchi 1994: 77–82).

The Shogunate, however, changed its policy in 1799<sup>14</sup>) to one of direct rule as a defence against the colonialism of the Russian Empire. Colonial offices called *Kaisho* (会所) were established in various parts of Hokkaido<sup>15</sup>) to directly control the Ainu people. Due to this policy change, Japanese migrants of the samurai class, as colonial administrators, invaded the Ainu living areas and implemented an assimilation policy that radically influenced their society. Finally, Ainu society lost its independence and autonomy (Takakura 1966: 142–151; Kikuchi 1994: 137–147; Ōnishi 2008: 249–252).

The conversion of the trading system from *Akinaiba-chigyōsei* (商場知行制) to *Basho-ukeoisei* (場所請負制) was another factor that can be identified as having had a massive impact on Ainu society. *Akinaiba-chigyōsei* was the monopolistic trade system with the Ainu established by the Matsumae clan, whereby the feudal lord and higher retainers visited each trading post as their fief once or twice a year, and carried out exchanges. Under this system, the Ainu were prohibited from trading with any other group except for the Matsumae clan, who determined exchange rates and other matters related to trade with mainland Japan unilaterally (Kikuchi 1991: 100–101; Kobayashi 1998: 46–51; Ōnishi 2008: 249–250). However, although they were barred from any wider trading initiatives, the Ainu did retain independent control of trade and commodity exchanges within their own living areas<sup>16</sup>).

The relationship between Ainu society and mainland Japan that existed under *Akinaiba-chigyōsei* was dramatically changed by the shift towards *Basho-ukeoisei*

in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Under *Basho-ukeoisei*, management of Ainu society in Hokkaido, including the control of trade commodities, was transferred from the Matsumae clan to the commercial centres of mainland Japan. As a result, management of trading posts was transferred from samurai to merchants. In addition to the changes in trade, fishery operations that exploited the Ainu as a labour force were implemented. Under this system, the Ainu were driven into subordinate positions, not only in trade, but also in other productive activities (Kikuchi 1994: 112). Further, this system forcibly displaced Ainu people as labourers from their original residences (*kotan*) to *gyoba* (漁場) trading posts and fishery operation bases. Hence, the adult male population of each *kotan*, the main workforce for various subsistence activities, rapidly decreased (Kikuchi 1994: 144–146; Ōnishi 2011: 221). Finally, many Ainu *kotan* found it impossible to sustain daily social life (Takakura 1966: 143–151; Kikuchi 1991: 103, 313–325). Incidentally, discontent with (and even hatred of) the cruelty associated with fishery operations was the main cause of the Menashi-Kunashir rebellion.

Additionally, *Basho-ukeoisei* had an enormous influence on the ecological environment, the foundation of a sustainable Ainu society, and caused some artificial exhaustion of resources. For example, large-scale seine fishing around rivers and estuaries by Japanese merchants dramatically reduced the populations of salmon and trout swimming upstream, so that *kotan* in the upper reaches of those rivers suffered famines (Tabata 1980). Some conflicts among Ainu communities in eastern Hokkaido over fishing rights, recorded in the late Edo period, were triggered by declines in salmon and trout catches due to seine fishing by Japanese merchants (Takakura 1966: 196–199; Ōnishi 2008: 257).

This analysis shows that the conditions of Ainu society after the late Edo period, as a basis for ethnographic models, were not static, with major impacts and social changes following the Tokugawa Shogunate's Ainu policies and the influence of mainland Japan's commercial centres. In particular, conversion to direct rule and the fishery operations under *Basho-ukeoisei*—which modified the socio-ecological environment as a foundation for sustaining Ainu society—deprived the Ainu of independence and autonomy, and drastically reconstructed the basic structure of their society. At the very least, in considering the historical background of politics and the economy in Ainu society, it is impossible to accept Ohyi's opinion based directly on ethnographic models for an evaluation of the *sō-daishō* leadership in Shakushain's revolt. This is because, having lost independence and autonomy after the late Edo period, it would have been difficult for Ainu society to reassert such qualities, even though the considerable leadership of *sō-daishō* and *sō-otona* on two occasions was merely a temporary status under emergency conditions.

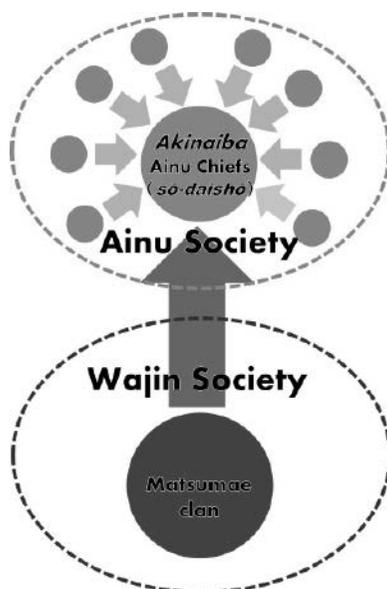
## THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ETHNOGRAPHIC MODELS

An examination of the historical processes from the early to the middle Edo period

show that Ainu society experienced a remarkable loss of independence and autonomy due to the impact of major changes in political and economic structures under the Tokugawa Shogunate. This meant the Ainu could not re-establish the considerable leadership that gave them socio-political influence over the River groups across vast areas, even though that itself had only been a temporary status in situations of emergency. With these aspects in mind, we will investigate an element of Ainu society in the middle Edo period which is the ability to sustain the leadership of *sō-daishō* in Shakushain's revolt or *sō-otona* in the Menashi-Kunashir rebellion.

One reason for the emergence of leaders such as the *sō-daishō* or *sō-otona* before the middle Edo period could be the trading system in effect at that stage. Ainu society had controlled the production activities of exchange commodities, at least up until when they were forced to engage in fishery operations under *Basho-ukeoisei*, even if trade was subordinated to the Matsumae clan and traders of mainland Japan. In particular, under *Akinaiba-chigyōsei*, the feudal lord and higher retainers of the Matsumae clan only visited each trading post as their fiefs once or twice a year, consequently leaving production activities to the Ainu's discretion (Kobayashi 1998: 45–47). Additionally, in the nature of things, the Ainu also distributed exchange commodities to trading posts.

In other words, the *Akinaiba-chigyōsei* system required that commodities be gathered from production areas and brought to trading centres as *Akinaiba*<sup>17)</sup>, raising the possibility of elements in Ainu society establishing leadership over River groups (Figure 6). At the same time, Japanese traders probably recognised



**Figure 6** Relationship with Ainu society and Tokugawa Shogunate from the early to middle Edo period (Created by Ōnishi)

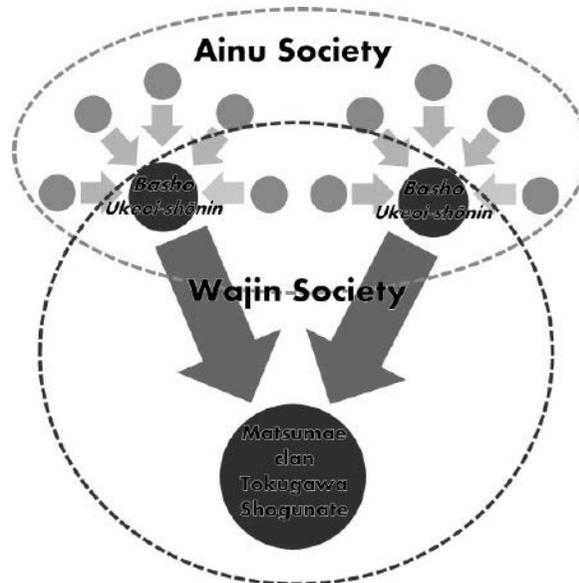
such leadership as a potential threat; however, they had to tolerate (and even positively utilise) such leadership in considering costs and benefits. Such a hypothesis plausibly explains how the Ainu leaders named *sō-daishō* at Shakushain's revolt could have emerged from the specific socio-historical background of that period<sup>18</sup>.

In the Menashi-Kunashir rebellion, fishery operations by Japanese merchants in the *gyoba* had already started, and the Ainu people were subordinated as labourers. However, until the Tokugawa Shogunate converted to a system of direct rule for the Ainu, indirect rule, as represented by the word and concept '*Ezo-Shidai*', had not been completely revoked, and the Ainu living areas in Hokkaido were recognised as 'foreign' lands where the rule of the Shogunate system in mainland Japan did not necessarily apply (Kikuchi 1994: 77; Ōnishi 2011: 217–218). Under these conditions, the Ainu in northern and eastern Hokkaido, the boundary region with the Tokugawa Shogunate's territory, had been able to trade with the Qing dynasty or Russian Empire. Ainu trade with these countries was an important route whereby Japanese society could import foreign goods called '*Ezo-nishiki*' (蝦夷錦), especially silk fabrics produced in China that were mainly used as the raw material for official uniforms (Takakura 1966: 257–262; Sasaki 1999). This is presumed to be the socio-historical background that sustained the Ainu leaders called *sō-otona*, as depicted in the *Ishū-retsuzō* (Figure 5). In fact, the Ainu leaders in eastern Hokkaido were independently trading with Russian colonialists and merchants, even though they were mainly subordinated to fishery operations by Japanese merchants.

Hence, Ainu leaders, in the form of *sō-daishō* and *sō-otona* before the middle Edo period, were created due to their society's role in trading systems established by the Matsumae clan and the Tokugawa Shogunate. One fact supporting this conclusion is that such a role in Ainu society became unnecessary from the late Edo period onwards, when all Ainu in Hokkaido were controlled by direct rule under the Shogunate system, and substantial socio-political leaders with authority over River groups disappeared. In other words, the Ainu were deprived of their independence not only in trade, but also production, and were subordinated as labourers to produce exchange commodities in the service of the market economy and political power of mainland Japan. As a consequence, it was no longer necessary to sustain the large social organisation in living areas of River groups as a production unit (Figure 7).

Further, *kaisho* (local agencies) for colonial control of the Ainu had been established, and were permanently occupied by officials dispatched by the Tokugawa Shogunate. This could also lead us to posit that the *kaisho* functioned as the highest form of political organisation for Ainu society, even though it was an outsider agency, so that the significant level of leadership integrated into some River groups lost the socio-political importance that justified its existence (Ōnishi 2008: 256–259).

Taken together, these analyses assert that, the Ainu built a ranked society based



**Figure 7** Relationship with Ainu society and Tokugawa Shogunate since the late Edo period  
(Created by Ōnishi)

on a relationship mostly determined by trade under the Shogunate system; they also had a possibility to develop to the chiefdom stage, even though that was a temporary response to an unexpected emergency. Meanwhile, their relationship with mainland Japan finally led their society to lose independence and autonomy, and to become subordinate. The fundamental reason for the drastic shift between development and subordination, originating in their relationship with the outside world, is that the Ainu had fundamentally never been living in a ‘cold’ society, relying purely on self-sufficient subsistence activities, but were rather part of a ‘hot’ society that incorporated a division of labour based on a capitalistic trade network covering Far East Asia (Ōnishi 2014: 290–291). In fact, Ainu studies in various fields pointed out—through examination of archaeological materials, ethnographic records, and historical documents—that the Ainu had never been able to sustain daily life and rituals without imported goods from mainland Japan (Takakura 1972: 32–34; Ohyi 1984: 145; Walker 2001: 87–94). It might be assumed that this kind of social situation was true not only for the Ainu, but also for foragers from Northeast Asia to the North Pacific Rim affected by colonialism and capitalism (cf. Sasaki 2009).

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP17K03301, JP19H05735, JP19H05731. And I am deeply grateful to Prof. Kazunobu Ikeya for insightful comments and suggestions.

## NOTES

- 1) These new findings and perspectives on Ainu society before the modern era come mainly from historical studies (e.g., Hokkaido-Tohokushi kenkyukai 1998; Kikuchi 1994, 2003; Walker 2001).
- 2) The Ainu could not record their own past with documents until the Meiji period due to being a pre-literate society, although they have rich oral traditions. Unfortunately, those texts were mostly recorded by outside researchers representing the majority population of Japanese society, even though the reciters and tellers were old Ainu people. This represents a deplorable situation for the Ainu because any examination of their own history and culture has to use historical documents and archaeological data compiled and recorded by outsiders. Fixing this situation requires having Ainu people learn the necessary skills to investigate their own history and culture. Such attempts have already been carried out in various fields, but they are inadequate.
- 3) Before the publication of 'The Ainu Ecosystem', comprehensive integration models of Ainu society were rare, except for a few case studies that were known and shared in specific research fields. Additionally, Watanabe's model of Ainu society has been the most famous internationally up to now because of its reporting in the 1966 publication 'Man the Hunter'.
- 4) He assumed that in this area, the Ainu's original social form and lifestyle had been maintained since the Meiji Era. This kind of assumption was strongly criticised in various fields as an illusion neglecting the actual historical situation of the Ainu (e.g., Fukasawa 1998). As described later, however, Watanabe was quite knowledgeable about the historical transition of Ainu society, so his approach to the Ainu ecosystem has to be seen as one perspective in rebuilding the basic structure of Ainu society.
- 5) The *Saru* River is the main location of the historic event called Shakushain's revolt. Moreover, in this area, many people with Ainu ancestry are still living today. Thus, this is known as a specific zone for the Ainu.
- 6) The details of Ainu policy under the Tokugawa Shogunate will be explained later.
- 7) Members of this group are believed to share the same patrilineal ancestors. If their origins are traced, one common ancestor will be eventually reached. Oftentimes, several local groups sharing the same ideology are integrated under this patrilineal kinship. On the other hand, Ainu society has matrilineal groups based on a different principle from the *shine-itokpa* group (K. Segawa 1952). Thus, the Ainu can be considered a bilateral society (Sugiura 1952). The relationship of both groups, however, has not yet been explained.
- 8) *Iwor* is a spatial social unit that surrounds one *kotan*. Incidentally, until recently, it was commonly regarded as a rigidly defined territory owned by each *kotan* (Izumi 1952). However, recent linguistic research has revealed that *iwor* originally represented a living space that does not always carry the meaning of a territory (Okuda 1998).
- 9) What is important here is the fact that no one was entitled to certain resources throughout the year, but rather individuals or households joined together to take advantage of certain resources that were available for a certain time of year. Hence, rights to use each resource in various places changed seasonally.
- 10) The territory of the Matsumae clan, as officially approved by the Tokugawa Shogunate, was limited to the southern part of Hokkaido, called *Wajin-chi* (和人地), which denoted a living area for the a Japanese majority population. Incidentally, *Wajin* (和人) is the name for Japanese immigrants in Hokkaido. On the other hand, the Matsumae clan had been entrusted with superintendence of the Ainu people and the management of *Ezo-chi* (蝦夷地) as their living area from the time of the Tokugawa Shogunate until the middle Edo period.

Incidentally, the Tokugawa Shogunate governance policy for Ainu society was fundamentally indirect rule until the middle Edo period (Ōnishi 2011: 217–218). However, after the late Edo period, this policy was changed to direct rule that presented as an opportunity to defend against Russian colonialism (Ōnishi 2011: 219–220).

- 11) One criticism of this portrayal points to the possibility of propaganda by the Matsumae clan (Otsuka 2011: 120). In other words, it can be hypothesised that they tried to avoid their responsibility for the Menashi-Kunashir rebellion by asserting the influence of Russian colonialism as a background to this event. However, regardless of the validity or otherwise of this hypothesis, there is no place for doubt that these foreign products were acquired through the Ainu in this area.
- 12) Matsumae clan let *sō-otona* and *otona* in this area call for surrender of the rebels and prevent their escape. As a result of such collaboration, Matsumae clan was able to repress the revolt in a short period.
- 13) Some researchers, mainly geologists, have proposed that volcanic eruptions in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Hokkaido affected the ecological environment with a knock-on effect on Ainu subsistence activities, leading to conflicts between Ainu societies over food resources (Tokui 1989). However, such events, even if they did happen, would be limited to the early Edo period. Additionally, other than local disasters, no environmental event leading to social changes among the Ainu between the middle and late Edo period has been identified (Endo and Doi 2013).
- 14) The northern half of Hokkaido (*Nishi-Ezochi*, 西蝦夷地) came under the direct control of the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1799, followed by the southern half (*Higashi-Ezochi*, 東蝦夷地) in 1807.
- 15) Basically, *kaisho* were established to replace *unjo-ya* (運上屋), which were used as trading posts and fishery operation centres under *Basho-ukeoisei*.
- 16) It can be seen from historical records, before the establishment of *Akinaiba-chigyōsei*, the Ainu autonomously visited some northern areas in mainland Japan and pursued trading activities (Kikuchi 1999). After enforcement of that system, however, they were limited to trade at *Akinaiba* with Matsumae clan only.
- 17) *Akinaiba* is the generic name of a trading post to carry out exchanges with the Ainu.
- 18) The Ainu had sufficient potential to establish a ranked society due to a socio-political surplus based on rich ecological conditions, including aquatic resources (Watanabe 1983, 1990: 24–25, 60, 68–69).

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