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Revitalizing the Relationship between Ainu and Salmon: Salmon Rituals in the Present

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INTRODUCTION

Until their contact with Japanese immigrants, mainly from Honshu, Ainu had maintained hunting and gathering as their main means of subsistence [Ainu Bunka Hozon Taisaku Kyogikai 1970; Batchelor 1900; Kohara 1999]. Subsistence activities based on such hunting and gathering of wild resources were an indispensable part of the economic, social, cultural and nutritional aspects of their lives. The immigration of Japanese into Hokkaido island threatened the Ainu traditional way of life, in that various restrictions were placed on fishing, hunting and gathering activities. Eventually the traditional subsistence fishing and hunting was banned by the Hokkaido Prefectural Government and the Ainu were forced to adopt agriculture in an attempt to assimilate into the mainstream of society. Such drastic changes imposed on the Ainu people's lives seriously affected the economic, social, and cultural aspects of the life of Ainu. Furthermore, nutritional and health problems resulting from such changes are reported in various archival materials [Batchelor 1900; Watanabe and Kono 1974]. This was the common pattern of change that affected every type of subsistence activity among the Ainu. Salmon fishing presents a typical case.

A hundred years or so since the banning of traditional salmon fishing, the Ainu have revitalized their "salmon rituals" in several communities in Hokkaido, as the recent cultural revitalization movement spreads. Such an effort to revitalize traditional rituals is seen as one of the ways for the Ainu to re-establish their relationship with salmon in the present society. Clearly, "the salmon rituals" which have been revitalized have a new meaning different from that of traditional times. In this paper, the changing patterns of the relationship between the Ainu and salmon resources will be examined in order to consider the significance of revitalizing "the salmon rituals" in contemporary society.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Numerous ethnographical accounts of traditional Ainu society have been

recorded by anthropologists specializing in Ainu studies and these records provide ample evidence to demonstrate the importance of salmon and deer, which were the subsistence basis of Ainu society and their culture [Ainu Bunka Hozon Taisaku Kyogikai 1970; Batchelor 1900; Chiri 1959; Inukai 1996; Sarashina 1976; Takakura 1966; Watanabe 1972; Watanabe and Saito 1998]. Furthermore, in interviews with Ainu of the present day, it is clear that they are aware that salmon once was “kamuy cep (divine fish)” and “sipe (true food)” and that it was traditionally a truly important food [Hokkaido Kyoiku Iinkai 1988-95].

According to the ethnographies of the Ainu, they established their settlements along the rivers which allowed easy access to salmon resources [Watanabe 1972]. They depended on salmon mainly for food but they also used salmon for daily necessities such as shoes. Ainu caught cherry salmon, pink salmon and chum salmon as they migrated back to the rivers. They preserved salmon by drying and salting them and used them as an everyday food during the non-salmon fishing season. Salmon was also important as a trade item, in that the Ainu traded preserved salmon with the Japanese [Watanabe and Saito 1998]. Furthermore, salmon played an important role in the spiritual life of the Ainu. It was offered to the Bear God during “iyomante” (ritual to send the bear spirit) in the past and also in recent years [Nomoto 1997]. Salmon, therefore, was indispensable in maintaining the spiritual as well as physical health of the Ainu.

The Ainu traditionally caught salmon using various fishing methods according to the conditions of the fishing grounds [Chiri 1959]. They used “tes” (weir) and “marek” (detachable spear-hook), fishing net, and “ra-oma-p” (fishing trap). They used a special fishing gear, called “chi-etaye-kanki” (hook with a curved handle) for night fishing. They also trained dogs to catch salmon. Although Watanabe



Photo 1. The altar for “iyomante”
Source: The Ainu Museum of Shiraoi



Photo 2. Salmon fishing using “marek”
Source: The Ainu Museum of Shiraoi

[1996] pointed out that there were regional as well as individual variations, he tried to estimate the annual consumption of salmon per household. He estimated that one household in the Tokachi region consumed 500-600 chum salmon and 600-800 dried pink salmon per year. According to Chiri [1973], who studied salmon fishing in Horobetsu region, approximately 300-1,000 salmon were consumed annually in each household.

The Ainu believed that a healthy relationship with the gods ensured a successful catch, and they were diligent about observing various taboos and conducting various rituals [Chiri 1959]. One important instrument in salmon fishing is “i-sapa-kik-ni” (the sacred stick). The Ainu hit the head of the salmon with this stick when they catch them in order to send the spirit of the salmon back to the land of gods. Keeping the river clean was crucial for a successful harvest of salmon, and washing clothes in the river was forbidden when salmon fishing season was near. Women, especially when menstruating, and children were kept away from the rivers. An Ainu man whose wife had a baby was not allowed to go fishing until the baby’s umbilical cord came off.

The Ainu also placed great importance on various rituals associated with salmon fishing [Ainu Bunka Hozon Taisaku Kyogikai 1970; Chiri 1959]. Review of ethnological accounts of such rituals reveals significant regional variations in how they were conducted. In the region where contact with the Japanese immigrants took place early, the rituals ceased to be held earlier than the other regions, or the rituals became significantly simplified [Ainu Bunka Hozon Taisaku Kyogikai 1970]. Records for many of these areas are lacking; however, there are

regions where records of such rituals were kept and are now available in archives. Among them are the three regions of Horobetsu, Kushiro and Shiraoi.

Chiri [1959] describes a series of rituals associated with salmon fishing in the Horobetsu region. In this region, the first ritual took place before salmon fishing began. The head man from each household in the village gathered near the lower reaches of a river and conducted a ritual called “pet kamuy nomi” (River God ritual). They set up an altar and offered “inaw” (sacred stick) to various gods associated with fishing. For this ritual, anyone could serve as a priest. The priest offered “inaw” to the gods of the river, praying that they allow many fish to come up the river so that the Ainu could catch them. They also offered “inaw” to the Fox God, who was thought to be the god of fishing and hunting, and prayed that the Ainu would have a good catch of salmon.

The Ainu in Horobetsu also conducted similar rituals when their catch was poor during the salmon season [Chiri 1959]. They made “tonoto” (sake) and “inaw”, and offered them to the gods, asking them to bring a good catch. In old days, this mid-fishing ritual used to be held, involving many people in the village. However, it became a private ritual to be held in each household.

According to Chiri [1959], the first catch of salmon for the season was treated with special respect in Horobetsu. The Ainu conducted a ritual to offer the first salmon of the season to the God of Fire and the God of the House. They placed the salmon on a long wooden bowl and placed it at the head seat with the fish head directed toward the hearth. They prayed, “Today, we went to the river and caught



Photo 3. Ritual near the river
Source: The Ainu Museum of Shiraoi

the first salmon. Please gods, enjoy the delicious meal” [Chiri 1959:16]. After the ritual, the salmon was shared among the villagers.

Kushiro is another region where detailed records of salmon-related rituals are available [Ainu Bunka Hozon Taisaku Kyogikai 1970]. One of the methods used to catch salmon in Kushiro was “tes” (fishing with a fence). Once the fence and the fishing net were set, Ainu placed two “inaw” at the bank of the river to offer to the two gods who ruled the river. They were considered to be a male and a female god. The Ainu prayed for a good catch and safe fishing. Ainu women were allowed to participate in this ritual. In Kushiro, the first salmon of the season was offered to the gods. When they began catching the salmon in their nets, they took the first one and followed a specific procedure for cutting it. The area around the throat between the head and the body were cut and placed in the fire, so that the God of Fire received the honor. Then they took a thin willow stick and put it through the salmon’s heart, stomach, and intestine, and placed it near the fire so that it would burn away. These were the offerings to the gods. After the first salmon ritual, the Ainu carried the rest of the catch home.

Salmon with a bent lower jaw was considered very special [Ainu Bunka Hozon Taisaku Kyogikai 1970]. It was cleaned first, and cut open to be dried with the head attached. After it was dried, and folded back into its original shape, it was stored at the altar. This special dried salmon was an important item at “iyomante” (the bear-spirit sending ritual), which is the most important ritual for the Ainu. This special salmon was placed under the head of the bear during the ritual after it was killed. Once “iyomante” was finished, the special salmon was put back at the altar and repeatedly used.

Inukai [1996] recorded the rituals associated with salmon fishing in the Shiraoi region. The Ainu in the Shiraoi region treated salmon with a special respect and conducted rituals especially for salmon. Before the beginning of salmon fishing in the fall, men from each household got together and made “inaw” and “nusa” (sacred sticks offered to a specific god). They set up an altar with “nusa” for the various gods of the river and the Fox God. They prayed to each god, according to their own feelings. However, there were common themes. One was that the Ainu asked the gods for a good catch of salmon, since they had tried to keep the river as clean as possible. The Ainu also prayed to the Fox God that they would have abundant salmon, and if not, it was the Fox God that would be blamed. The first salmon of the season was cooked and offered to the God of Fire and the God of the House. The Ainu took them to the river and offered them to the gods of the river, as well. They did not make “inaw” for this occasion, but were careful that a woman who had just given birth to a child would not touch the first salmon, nor the pot that the salmon was cooked in.

It is noteworthy that when the Ainu caught salmon for their subsistence needs during the time of salmon subsistence fishing, Ainu groups collectively had exclusive fishing rights to catch salmon in a given fishing ground [Ainu Bunka Hozon Taisaku Kyogikai 1970; Takakura 1966; Watanabe 1972, 1996]. Takakura

[1966] reviewed three cases of disputes among Ainu over fishing rights in the 1800s. He summarized five basic principles that determined fishing rights among the Ainu of that time. Firstly, a certain group was given an exclusive fishing right over a given area if they seasonally or continuously fished there. No other people were allowed to fish in the area. Secondly, the group was organized based mainly on kinship. Furthermore, to gain fishing rights, the group had to have occupied the area for a certain length of time or have used the resource before other people had advanced into the area. In that respect, the fact that the group permanently lived in the area made a good case. Fourthly, when the resource in the area become low, competition over fishing rights intensified, and thus a conflict was likely to develop. People other than members of the group could gain a share of the fishing rights by giving the rights owner a gift. In short, in the subsistence salmon fishing period, there was a fishing management system based on recognition of exclusive fishing rights to kin-based corporate groups among Ainu. This point is supported by Watanabe [1972] who conducted interviews in 1950 and concluded that a collective fishing rights system was functioning in the Ainu community.

The Ainu continued fishing salmon for their subsistence until the mid-1800s [Watanabe and Saito 1998]. Efforts were made to protect fishing grounds for the Ainu at that time. For example, salmon fishing grounds for the Japanese were limited to the mouths of the rivers, so that the fishing grounds for the Ainu were secured [Ainu Bunka Hozon Taisaku Kyogikai 1970; Seki 1998; Watanabe and Saito 1998]. Building any facilities which might have had a negative effect on the return of the salmon to the Ainu fishing grounds were prohibited. However, as the salmon fishing at the mouth of the river expanded, the negative effect on the Ainu salmon fishing grounds became more serious, since the increased salmon catch at the mouth of the river began to negatively effect the reproduction of salmon. Soon, various restrictions on salmon fishing were implemented in order to enhance the salmon resources. The government banned the use of the bag net, basket trap and weir. It was at this time that salmon hatchery operations began, but the salmon resources did not recover until recent years.

In the early Meiji era, salmon fishing in the rivers was banned for the purpose of enhancement of salmon stocks [Ainu Bunka Hozon Taisaku Kyogikai 1970; Watanabe and Saito 1998]. Consequently, the Ainu lost their access to their traditional fishing grounds. Subsistence salmon fishing by the Ainu was not allowed, and any salmon fishing in the rivers was considered illegal. Anyone who engaged in such fishing was arrested. As salmon fishing had traditionally provided their everyday food, the way of life among the Ainu began to drastically change. Furthermore, the government implemented a fishery management system in which the fishing rights for salmon were allocated to individual fishermen, and a policy to persuade the Ainu people, who were originally hunters, to take up farming [Ainu Bunka Hozon Taisaku Kyogikai 1970]. This was part of the powerful government assimilation policy. Ainu who lost their traditional subsistence means of life began to work for Japanese fishermen as laborers. Consequently, the traditional social

organization among Ainu became gradually dismantled. The transition from a traditional diet based on wildlife such as salmon and deer to a vegetable-based diet seriously effected health among the Ainu. Batchelor [1900] recorded the life of the Ainu during this transitional period, and concluded that such dietary changes not only caused a drastic decrease of the Ainu population but also seriously damaged their dignity as human beings. Similar observations were recorded by many researchers [Takakura 1972; Watanabe and Kono 1974].

REVITALIZATION OF AINU CULTURE AND SALMON RITUALS

Has the Ainu salmon culture totally disappeared over the hundred or so years since the banning of salmon fishing in the rivers? Presently, a small number of Ainu have acquired fishing rights as commercial fishermen and operate set-net salmon fishing for commercial distribution. However, the Ainu were not allowed to catch salmon for their everyday food. Even now, many elderly Ainu recall the anger of being punished for catching salmon for their own food, which was considered illegal [Kayano 1998]. Obviously, the relationship between Ainu people and salmon has qualitatively changed over the hundred years.

Even during the time when Ainu were prohibited from fishing salmon for their food, they continued to hold salmon rituals and cooked traditional salmon dishes [Hokkaido Kyoiku Iinkai 1988-95; Nomoto 1997]. One young Ainu recalls “dried salmon” and “frozen salmon” that he ate at his grandparents’ home as a snack. He also remembers with a special feeling eating the first salmon of the season that his neighbor fisherman brought.

In recent interviews, different forms of rituals were recorded. An elderly woman in Chitose recalls the family ritual for the first salmon [Oda and Tomo 1998]. The Ainu put the salmon on a “nima” (a cutting board that has been hollowed out) and brought it into the house. They passed the fish on the board into the house through the god’s window, carried it to the seat of honor beside the hearth, and then placed it in the sacred place in the room next to the seat of honor and closest to the god’s window. The Ainu made an offering for the first salmon to be taken back to the gods. This was rice and malt for brewing sake, wrapped up in a bamboo leaf, and tied up nicely with a shaved wood decoration. They put two small piles of rice and the shaved wood decorations next to the head of the fish on the carved board. They put a lot of the shaved wood decorations on the fish when its spirit was sent off through the god’s window, and placed it on the altar outside the house. The Ainu prayed that the salmon would go back to the land of the gods. The elderly woman said:

. . . so it probably traveled from there up to where the gods are. And that was how we made sure that we would get lots of salmon to catch. [Oda and Tomo 1998:129]

Another form of the recent ritual to celebrate the first salmon of the season is reported by a young Ainu man in Shiraoi, who remembers his grandfather placing a piece of the first salmon into the fire in the stove [Nomoto 1997]. It was only many years later when he recorded the various rituals practiced among the elderly Ainu that he realized that what he saw as a child was the ritual to welcome the first salmon of the season. One elderly Ainu woman in Shizunai demonstrated how the first salmon was treated when she was younger: A salmon was brought into the house through the sacred window of the house on a tray, which was made especially for this occasion. An Ainu carried the tray, praying “o-nonno o-nonno” to express their thanks to the gods and took it to the important seat by the hearth, and offered a portion of salmon to the God of Fire. She recalls that salmon rituals were different from the more social rituals such as “iyomante” (the bear spirit sending ceremony), which included invited guests from other communities. In the old days, salmon rituals were held privately only with those who engaged in salmon fishing. These examples show that the Ainu maintained their unique ways to utilize salmon, to treat salmon, and their unique relationship with salmon.

The Ainu culture, which was rapidly dismantled under the assimilation policy of the Meiji Government, and came close to becoming extinguished, has been slowly revitalized [Otsuka 1995]. There have been efforts to preserve Ainu language, songs and dances, and to revitalize the skills to make Ainu traditional tools and crafts. In the early 1980s, Kayano Shigeru, Ainu ethnologist and a former parliamentarian, started Ainu-language classes in Nibutani. Around the same time, the Ainu group in Kushiro began their efforts to revitalize the skills needed to make a traditional dugout boat, which prompted the revitalization of the series of rituals involved in making a boat and launching it. This provided a background for the Ainu group in Sapporo to begin their efforts to renew their relationship with salmon. Salmon used to be abundant in the Toyohira River, running through the center of Sapporo, but were depleted at that time because of the closure of the fishway that allowed salmon to come up the river and because of the pollution of the river. Salmon provided a ritual symbol for the Ainu group who had shared a similar fate to the salmon. Leading up to the revitalization of the salmon rituals, there was an increasing effort among the more politically active Ainu to promote support for a restoration of various rights for the Ainu [Shinya 1977; Suddle 1999]. For this purpose, salmon was symbolic of the oppression under which the Ainu became victims of government policy.

In 1997, efforts to revitalize and maintain the rich Ainu cultural heritage were enhanced by the passage of the Ainu Cultural Promotion Law which replaced the century-old Hokkaido Former Aboriginal Protection Act [Fitzhugh 1999; Tsunemoto 1999]. Under this new law, the government of Japan officially recognized Ainu culture and language for the first time and provided a modicum of funding for the preservation and promotion of Ainu language and culture. In this section, the processes and the patterns of revitalization of salmon rituals in four communities will be examined. Each case demonstrates distinct characteristics in

terms of the significance of the ritual, which is the result of historical and socio-political conditions in each community: the cases of Sapporo, which was the first community to revitalize the salmon ritual, and those of Noboribetsu and Chitose where, with the help of the Ainu in Sapporo, the local Ainu succeeded in revitalizing the salmon ritual (Figure 1). The last community is Shiraoi, with its different social and historical background, leading up to the revitalizing of its salmon ritual.

REVITALIZATION OF SALMON RITUALS IN SAPPORO

The Toyohira River, which runs through the center of Sapporo, was known for its abundant salmon in the old days. It was at the bank of the Toyohira River where the salmon ritual was held for the first time since the Ainu subsistence salmon fishing was banned over 100 years ago [Iwasaki-Goodman, 1982].

There was also another aspect that added a special meaning to the revitalization of the salmon ritual in Sapporo. While the salmon provided a ritual symbol for the Ainu, it also became a symbol of the environmental movement that was initiated as a grass roots movement to bring the salmon back to the Toyohira River [HTB 1982]. This environmental movement, called the “Salmon Return” campaign, had as its main theme the improvement of the salmon habitat in the Toyohira river, thus providing for enhancement of the salmon stock. This campaign was led by a local group named the “Sapporo Sake no Kai (Sapporo Salmon Association)” and the City of Sapporo. The main activity of this campaign was to direct the citizens’ attention to the Toyohira River, which has been an important salmon habitat. By bringing salmon back to this river, it aimed to educate the general public about the importance of environmental protection. It was the fall of 1982 when the salmon fry that had been released by local elementary school children a few years previously were supposed to return to the Toyohira River.

In preparation for the salmon ritual, the Ainu group in Sapporo had to study their own traditional culture [HTB 1982]. Those who played the key roles in conducting the ritual visited elderly Ainu throughout Hokkaido, asking various questions relating to salmon fishing and rituals. Through these efforts, the Ainu themselves reconfirmed their ties with their ancestors, learned the procedures of the rituals, and the Ainu language needed for ritual. They also revitalized dances and songs that are part of the ritual, and cooked salmon dishes to share at the ritual. Such a learning process was indispensable in revitalizing salmon rituals in every case throughout Hokkaido. As the rituals were repeated year by year, the Ainu groups further studied their traditional culture. It is important to note that such active efforts in learning their own culture gave a special significance to this revitalization.

For the first salmon ritual held at the bank of the Toyohira river, many Ainu people gathered from different parts of Hokkaido [HTB 1982; Iwasaki-Goodman 1982]. On the day of the first “kamuy chiepi nomi” (ritual to welcome the first

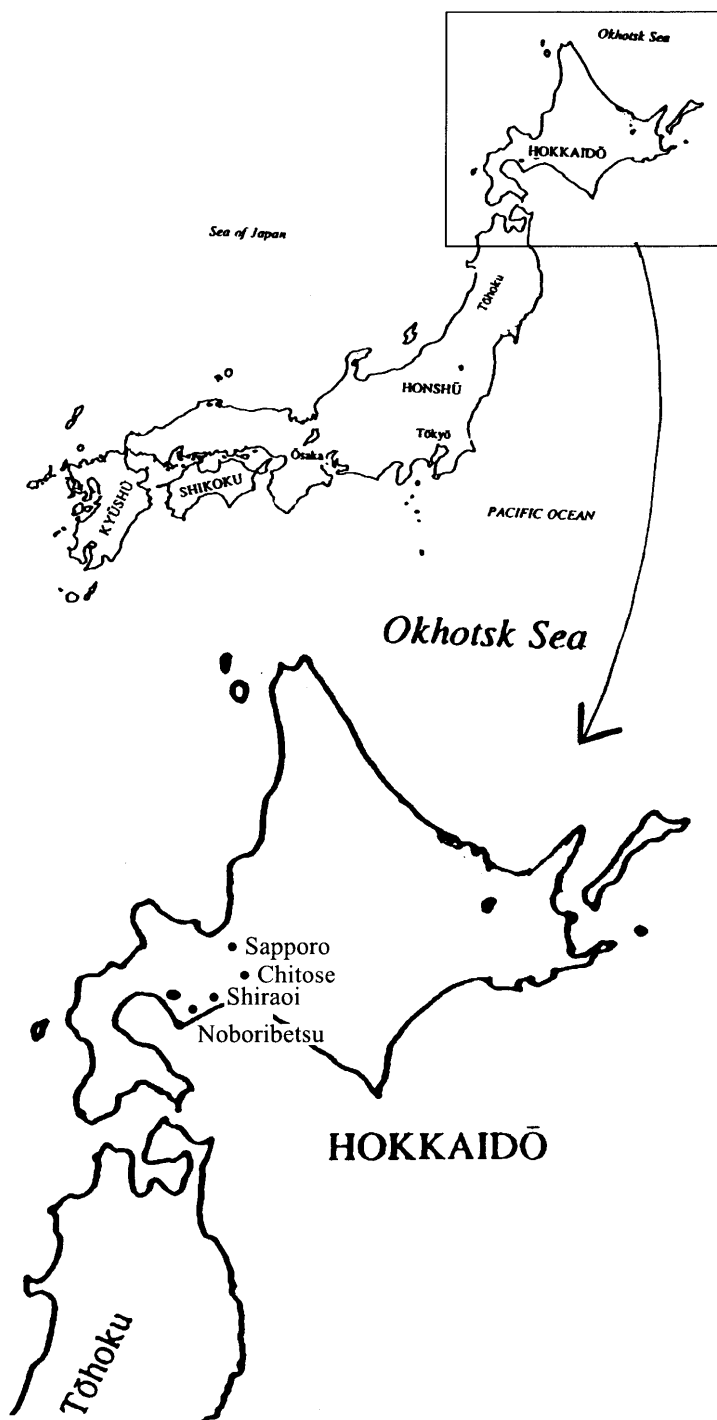


Figure 1. Location of Sapporo, Chitose, Noboribetsu and Shiraoi

salmon of the season), 600 people, including both Ainu and non-Ainu participants, gathered at the bank of the Toyohira River. An altar was set up at the side of the river. The Ainu in traditional robes and headbands sat around the hearth and the prayer began. The visitors sat behind them and the press were there, reporting the ritual as it proceeded. The Ainu elderly men sat in the first row around the hearth and offered “tonoto” (sake), to the God of Fire and prayed:

Dear God of Water, from olden times, people have lived a wealthy life with abundant salmon returning to the Toyohira River. Wajin (Japanese) came into the area, and the rivers became polluted and salmon stopped coming back to the river. We promise the gods that we will clean up the rivers. And we ask that we will be blessed with many salmon. [HTB 1982]

In an interview, the representative of the Sapporo Sake No Kai stated:

It was the Japanese that took salmon fishing away from Ainu in the old days. By improving the salmon habitat in the Toyohira River, we will be able to enjoy a cleaner environment where the salmon come back and we can pass the clean environment along with the Ainu culture to the next generation. [HTB 1982]

After the ritual, salmon dishes were shared among those who were present. The salmon ritual, which was held for the first time at the Toyohira River, became known to other Ainu communities, which later conducted their own salmon rituals in their own communities. Presently, the salmon ritual at the Toyohira River is organized by the local branch of the Utari Association as a part of the Ainu cultural heritage program in September and October every year. Also, the Ainu group in Sapporo has been making continuous efforts in conducting salmon rituals to the present.

In the fall of 1999, “asir chiep nomi” was held at the same site. Twenty live salmon were released into the river, and were caught with traditional fishing spears as a part of the ritual. About 50 Ainu from throughout Hokkaido gathered and took part in the ritual. There were also 11 aboriginal people from Sakhalin, Russia, invited to take part in the ritual. In addition, about 300 spectators gathered around to witness the event [Hokkaido Shimbun 1999].

SALMON RITUALS IN NOBORIBETSU AND CHITOSE

An effort to reconstruct the traditional fishing trap, called “ra-oma-p”, led the revitalization of the salmon ritual in Noboribetsu. The attempt to catch salmon using traditional fishing gear was the first step toward Ainu cultural revitalization in this area [NHK 1996; Nomoto 1997]. The first salmon ritual was conducted in 1986. As with many Ainu communities, such efforts prompted a more general

cultural revitalization in Noboribetsu. Since the artifacts of the traditional crafts, tools and clothes were scarcely available in Noboribetsu, the local Ainu group had to ask for cooperation from those in Muroran, Shiraoui and Biratori and they also used old pictures to reconstruct new ones. These efforts to study their own traditional culture were indispensable in revitalizing the salmon ritual in Noboribetsu.

The third salmon ritual was held in 1988, three years after the first ritual was held. The record of the third salmon ritual presents an interesting set of messages by the invited guests. [Noboribetsu Utari Kyokai 1988] In front of the altar, which was set up at the bank of the Boribetsu River, the guests from Noboribetsu, Muroran and other places sat. Prior to the prayer, a few guests made speeches. One elderly Ainu, who is also a political leader in the neighboring community stated:

. . . Ainu were catching salmon freely and the people who moved in (into Hokkaido) took away our right to fish with the law that they made. I am requesting, as a part of the Nibutani Dam court case,¹⁾ that the blockade in the Saru River be taken off and that salmon come up the river, so that the Ainu share, the Crow share and the Fox share of salmon will be freely available. [Noboribetsu Utari Kyokai 1988]

Following the first speech, the representative of the Sapporo Utari Association gave a speech to celebrate the occasion:

. . . Ten years ago, it was inconceivable to have a salmon ritual here. To be a part of the ritual gives me a special joy. I hope that the day will come when the Ainu can eat salmon freely. . . . This is also a good opportunity to promote an understanding of the Ainu culture. . . . [Noboribetsu Utari Kyokai 1988]

The next speech was given by the mayor of Noboribetsu:

. . . (the previous speeches) make it difficult for me to give my speech. However, I looked forward to seeing the traditional salmon fishing. It will be a great benefit for us if we can use Ainu tradition as resources for (local) tourism. . . . [Noboribetsu Utari Kyokai 1988]

Following the mayor, the director of the Hokkaido Government Regional Office gave a speech:

. . . I came today to see the demonstration of traditional Ainu salmon fishing and to participate in the ritual. . . . I hope that the Ainu traditional culture will be preserved. . . . [Noboribetsu Utari Kyokai 1988]

The member of the Noboribetsu Utari Association, who is responsible for cultural affairs stated:

. . . we had to work really hard to get permission to try out the raomap, the Ainu traditional fishing trap. With the help of many people, it became possible. We would like to continue to hold such a traditional event. . . .
[Noboribetsu Utari Kyokai 1988]

These speeches reflect the differing and sometimes conflicting views of Ainu culture among Ainu people and the non-Ainu local officials. Obviously, there are conflicting views concerning revitalization of the “salmon ritual” in Noboribetsu: one view being that the revitalized salmon ritual presents a movement toward revitalizing overall Ainu culture, including restoration of salmon fishing rights. The other view is that it presents an opportunity for local tourism.

For the Ainu people in the Chitose area, revitalization of the salmon ritual provided the foundation for an intensification of Ainu cultural revitalization efforts [Nomoto 1997]. Although some researchers recognized Chitose as an area with native speakers of the Ainu language, there had been only limited efforts by the community to preserve Ainu culture. In 1990, the young Ainu people in Chitose revitalized the salmon ritual. Their aim was to reestablish their cultural tradition that has been long suppressed. Some members of the Utari Association Sapporo branch helped the Ainu group in Chitose to conduct the salmon ritual for the first two years. However, the elders in Chitose began to speak out about the details of the rituals that they were familiar with, and assisted the young Ainu to revitalize their own salmon ritual that was practiced in this area. It is significant that the key people playing the leading role in this effort were the young Ainu group. The revitalization of the salmon ritual was followed by a series of cultural revitalization efforts, such as the opening of Ainu-language classes and an active effort to revitalize traditional dances.

REVITALIZATION OF SALMON RITUALS IN SHIRAOI

Shiraoi is unique, in that it has long been established as a tourism community with Ainu tourism as a main attraction. Such historical and social characteristics are observable in the process of revitalizing the salmon ritual. In 1987, the young members of the Utari Association Shiraoi branch organized a “chep festival” in order to preserve Ainu culture and to promote understanding of Ainu culture among the local people in Shiraoi [Nomoto 1997]. When this ritual was first revitalized, the organizers were given special permission from the government to catch five salmon and demonstrated the traditional fishing method using “marek”, a fishing hook. The ritual was held near the mouth of the river, where such rituals were traditionally conducted. While in the early years after the “salmon rituals” were conducted for the first time, there was more emphasis on revitalizing Ainu cultural

tradition, the salmon ritual gradually lost its original purpose as it was incorporated into the local port festival. The Ainu group began to coordinate the salmon rituals with the fishery cooperative association as a part of the “Chep Port Festival”. Needless to say, the salmon ritual became more festival-like with participation of the citizens of Shiraoi. However, the original purpose of revitalizing Ainu culture became less important with this change.

Since the salmon ritual was incorporated into the local port festival, various aspects of the ritual began to change [The Ainu Museum of Shiraoi 1995; Nomoto 1997]. Firstly, the fishery cooperative association, one of the sponsoring organizations of the festival, donated 400 salmon, which were cooked and sold during the festival. Secondly, the salmon ritual came to be conducted on stage as a part of the opening ceremony of the festival. The opening ceremony began with the speeches by the mayor of Shiraoi and the guests. The Ainu group sat around the hearth in front of the altar, which was set up on the stage. Eight Ainu men, including the staff of the Ainu Museum, and one Ainu woman conducted the ritual on the stage, as the spectators watched them. Three of the five men were non-Ainu. They offered prayers to the gods, and the woman poured “tonoto” (sake) into the bowls that the men were holding. The master of the ritual offered prayers to the God of Fire and the other men each gave prayers to other gods, following the traditional procedure. After the ritual, instead of catching salmon in the river, they caught salmon in a pool that was specially set up at the festival site. It is apparent that the salmon ritual has become a tourist attraction, which was not the original purpose when it was first conducted in 1987. A local Ainu analyzes this transition

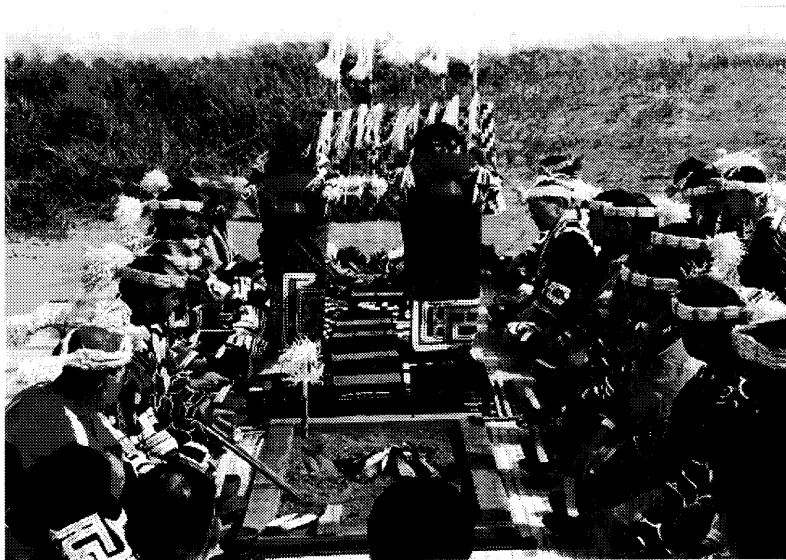


Photo 4. Salmon ritual in Shiraoi, 2000
Source: The Ainu Museum of Shiraoi

and states:

It is a demonstration of the power battle between Ainu and non-Ainu, which is typically seen in the history of Ainu tourism in Shiraoi. [Nomoto 1997]

The process by which a certain Ainu ritual becomes revitalized and then gradually integrated into a community-wide local festival demonstrates how Ainu culture can easily be used by a non-Ainu group. This is so despite the fact that Ainu culture has been recognized as an established cultural tradition with distinct characteristics in Shiraoi.

In 1997, due to the insistence of the Ainu group, they regained control of the salmon ritual by separating it from the port festival and moving it back to the river bank, where such rituals had traditionally been conducted [Nomoto 1997]. In addition, an aboriginal group from Sakhalin was invited to participate in the ritual. After the salmon ritual, the local Ainu people demonstrated how salmon were harvested in the old days, using a dugout boat and a "marek" (detachable spear-hook). At the ritual site, they prepared traditional Ainu dishes using salmon, which were sold to the visitors. The salmon ritual provided an opportunity for the local non-Ainu people to learn about the special relationship that Ainu people traditionally had with salmon. Local non-Ainu people visited the ritual site to enjoy the festive atmosphere and to buy fresh salmon and salmon dishes. As for the local Ainu people in Shiraoi, the salmon ritual provided them with an opportunity to gain an economic benefit by selling their salmon and salmon dishes, as well as an appreciation of their ancestors' traditional ties with salmon.

It is significant to explain that the "iyomante" (bear-spirit sending ceremony) which is conducted without being open to public, has been of primary importance in preserving Ainu culture in Shiraoi. That is, young Ainu people examine their relationship with Ainu culture through the experience of participating in "iyomante". In Shiraoi, the salmon ritual, which was originally revitalized for the purpose of preservation of Ainu culture, became a tourism item after it was opened to public. It has been oscillating between two purposes: preservation of Ainu culture and promotion of local tourism. This very point presents a clear difference from the cases where the salmon ritual provides the primary source of preservation of Ainu culture as seen in other Ainu communities such as Sapporo, Noboribetsu and Chitose.

SIGNIFICANCE OF REVITALIZATION OF SALMON RITUALS

Revitalization of the salmon ritual has been carried out in different forms following different procedures in Sapporo, Noboribetsu, Shiraoi and Chitose. Table 1 shows a comparative summary of various elements: motivations, organizers, funding, and the relationship with other Ainu cultural activities in the four cases.

In comparing the motivations which led to the revitalization of the salmon

Table 1. Salmon rituals in Sapporo, Noboribetsu, Shiraoi and Chitose

Community	Year	Motivations	Organizers	Funding	Other Ainu cultural activity
Sapporo	1982	Environmental movement & Ainu cultural revitalization	Local Ainu groups (in association with local environmental group)	City & prefecture & national gov. (since 1998)	Language, dances, crafts
Noboribetsu	1986	Ainu cultural revitalization	Ainu group	Ainu group, national gov. (since 1998)	Language, dances, crafts (on small scale)
Shiraoi	1987	Ainu cultural revitalization & tourism	Ainu groups & Shiraoi city & fishery coop & Ainu Museum	City & national gov. (since 1998)	Language, dances crafts, Iyomante (bear ritual)
Chitose	1990	Ainu cultural revitalization	Ainu group	Ainu group, national gov. (since 1998)	Language, dances, crafts (on small scale)

rituals, the cases of Sapporo and Shiraoi demonstrate that the salmon ritual was revitalized in response to wider local needs, rather than solely Ainu cultural revitalization. On the other hand, the salmon ritual was held with the sole purpose of promoting Ainu cultural revitalization in Noboribetsu and Chitose. This vital difference consequently determined those who were involved in preparing and hosting the salmon ritual. In Noboribetsu and Chitose, it was the local Ainu associations who were the organizers of the salmon ritual. They used their own funding until 1998 when they gained access to national government funds, allocated legally under the Ainu Cultural Promotion Law. In Sapporo, the local interest group Sapporo Sake no Kai played an important role in supporting the revitalization of Ainu culture, in which the salmon ritual had a symbolic meaning. In the case of Shiraoi, promotion of local tourism had a serious effect on the details of the salmon ritual, particularly when, within a few years from the first time the revitalized salmon ritual was held, it became just a part of the local port festival. Later, as described above, the salmon ritual was made separate from the port

festival; however, it was still influenced by tourism. Furthermore, Ainu people in Shiraoi had maintained various other elements of Ainu culture, including “iyomante”, which served as a central cultural institution. The Ainu people of Shiraoi, therefore, seem to have depended less on the revitalization of the salmon ritual as a basis for restoration of their culture. The salmon ritual became a common resource for local tourism among Ainu and non-Ainu members of Shiraoi city. The cases of Noboribetsu and Chitose, on the other hand, demonstrate how the salmon ritual served as a central activity in revitalizing and preserving their culture.

While different elements are found in the four cases, there are certain elements that are common to all the cases. Firstly, in all cases, it was the Ainu people that played a major role in revitalizing the salmon ritual. In the communities where motivations for holding the salmon ritual were diverse, the Ainu provided the symbolic theme for overall activities such as the environmental movement and tourism. Furthermore, revitalization of the salmon ritual made it necessary for Ainu people to study their own culture prior to the initial revitalization effort. They continued to further their understanding of their own culture as they held salmon rituals after the initial revitalization, thus promoting an awareness of Ainu culture among Ainu as well as non-Ainu.

The salmon rituals that were revitalized in the 1980s were not the same as those conducted during the subsistence period of the 1800s. In terms of form and procedure of the ritual, the modern-day salmon rituals are commonly a combination of two separate traditional rituals, “pet kamuy nomi” (rituals to pray to the god of river) and “ashir chiep nomi” (ritual to celebrate the first salmon). Furthermore, these rituals traditionally involved only those who were engaged in them and were conducted privately. However, the rituals, when revitalized, are conducted openly for the general public, and in some cases, even for the mass media.

The four cases of the salmon ritual clearly demonstrate the dynamic nature of the revitalization process of culture. Obviously, “revitalizing traditional culture” does not refer to reconstructing a culture that is frozen in the past. Rather, it is a process in which people learn the culture of the past and take some aspects of it, creating a culture that is functional in the present environment. This approach to examining culture has been prominent in anthropology since Hobsbawm and Ranger’s book “The Invention of Tradition” [1983] was published. In that book, Cannadine [1983] examined changes in the meaning of royal rituals in the British monarchy around the turn of the century and stated:

So, in order to rediscover the ‘meaning’ of royal ritual during the modern period, it is necessary to relate it to the specific social, political, economic, and cultural milieu within which it was actually performed. [1983: 105]

Similar accounts are reported by various anthropologists. Hanson [1989], who studied the case of Maori culture, demonstrated how certain aspects of Maori culture were invented in response to social needs. Atsumi [1996] examined the

current cultural revitalization effort among the Canadian northwest coast native groups. His conclusion also reflects the nature of creativity imbedded in “revitalizing traditional culture”. The “new traditions” among Yup’ik Eskimo, as Fienup-Riordan [1990] called them, are another case in which people creatively changed their culture and succeeded in maintaining it in the modern society. Tanabe [1997] focused on the use of rituals to meet certain political needs of the group in modern society, and concluded that people would organize rituals in order to make public statements.

Evidently, “traditional culture” is not static. It is not something frozen in time, but rather “preservation of traditional culture” is a process in which people creatively utilize traditional knowledge in the present society, giving it new meaning. The Ainu people are attempting “to recreate a ritual”, making a statement about their cultural survival. Based on knowledge of what the salmon ritual meant for their ancestors, they celebrate their relationship with salmon in the present day and renew the relationship with salmon through the creation of a modified ritual. Revitalization of the salmon ritual is a process of endogenous effort to creatively preserve traditional culture and establish an ethnic identity as Ainu in the present society.

NOTE

- 1) Nibutani Dam Court Case: In 1996, ignoring the protests of the Ainu and other local residents, the government constructed a dam on the Saru River in the district of Nibutani, which has the largest Ainu population in Hokkaido. Although the dam’s efficiency had been questioned, and the Sapporo District Court had mandated compensation to the Ainu because their lands and rights were violated by the construction, the existence of the dam is a modern example of continued Japanese violence against Ainu lands and culture. [Kaizawa 1999: 356]

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