

# RESEARCH ARTICLES

## Time and the Ainu: Japanese Nation-Building and the Conceptualization of Difference

*Justin P. Jacobson*

A discourse employing terms such as primitive, savage (but also tribal, traditional, Third World, or whatever euphemism is current) does not think, or observe, or critically study, the “primitive”; it thinks, observes, studies *in terms* of the primitive. *Primitive* being essentially a temporal concept, is a category, not an object, of Western thought.

- Johannes Fabian<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

During interviews that would later form key parts of John Lie’s 2001 book, *Multiethnic Japan*, Lie asked his interviewees to estimate the number of Ainu living in Japan. The Ainu, one of Japan’s ethnic minorities, have lived and continue to live in the extreme north of Japan, far removed from the interviewees’ homes in Tokyo, but Lie expected that the respondents could provide at least a rough estimate. To his surprise, no one mentioned a figure higher than 1,000, and many people claimed that there were no Ainu left in the country.<sup>2</sup> Commonly these interviewees thought of the Ainu either as a “virtually vanquished” people, or as an “already vanquished people.” According to Richard Siddle, a leading historian on the Ainu, these interviewees would be more or less typical of popular Japanese thought and the widespread belief that the Ainu are a “dying race.”<sup>3</sup>

Reports of imminent Ainu extinction, however, are greatly exaggerated. Ainu activists claim a figure of about 300,000 people of Ainu ancestry.<sup>4</sup>

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Justin P. Jacobson is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Geography at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. *Historical Geography* Volume 36 (2008): 163-181. ©2008, Historical Geography Specialty Group, Association of American Geographers.

Official estimates are much lower than that, as the government estimates that there are only about 25,000.<sup>5</sup> The discrepancy in estimates on the number of Ainu within Japan points to a significant issue of classification, as people of Ainu descent are reluctant to claim that descent due to the pervasiveness of discrimination towards Ainu in Japan. Indeed, there are many people in Japan with Ainu ancestry who do not know of their ethnicity: children were often, and sometimes still are, “protected” from the stigma of Ainu-ness by their parents.<sup>6</sup> The criteria used to define “Ainu” in the survey also contributes to the wide range in figures, as many Ainu people have intermarried with non-Ainu, and might thus qualify as Ainu in some surveys but not in others.

Although the number of Ainu is difficult to assess accurately, the perception of the Ainu remains that, though they may exist in small numbers, they are but living ghosts of a culture from the past. Meanwhile, Ainu activists continue to insist that they are not extinct. In the past twenty years or so, Ainu nationalism has grown, with louder and more frequent calls for an end to economic and social marginalization. In addition, some Ainu activists have called for governmental recognition as an “indigenous people,” that is, a separate ethnic group that inhabited the Japanese archipelago before the arrival of the “Japanese.” So far, the Japanese government has continued to insist that the Ainu belong to the Japanese race and are not a separate people within the Japanese citizenry. In a 1980 report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, the Japanese delegation declared that while Japanese law supported the rights of indigenous people, Japan had no indigenous people within its borders, rendering the issue moot.<sup>7</sup> This stance reflects a common attitude that Japan is a “homogenous nation-state,” as Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone famously declared in 1986.<sup>8</sup>

In the past twenty years, such ideas of Japanese ethnic homogeneity have been severely critiqued by historians as essentially national myths.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, Ainu activism has surged over the same time period, with ever-louder calls for recognition as well as an end to discriminatory status under the law.<sup>10</sup> Ainu activism has made an impact on national policy, notably with the promotion and passage of the Ainu Cultural Protection Act<sup>11</sup> of 1997, hereafter referred to as the ACPA. The intention of the act is to “realize a society in which the ethnic pride of the Ainu is respected and to contribute to the development of diverse cultures” in Japan, via the promotion of “Ainu Traditions” among the Ainu and in Japanese society as a whole. The Act mandates national, prefectural and local governments in Japan to advance the cause of respect for the Ainu as a distinct people within Japan, and is a clear departure from earlier official denials of ethnic heterogeneity within Japan.<sup>12</sup>

Challenges from academia and Ainu activists have thus succeeded in advancing official discussions of Japanese ethnic heterogeneity and Ainu culture beyond the problematic discourses still present as of the 1980s. As the quotes from Lie’s interviewees that began this paper show, however, there are

still many popular misconceptions regarding the existence of the Ainu and many ambiguities regarding their place in the Japanese polity. Moreover, the ACPA might be partially to blame, as it may have reinforced, rather than dismantled, problematic ideas of the Ainu as a “dying race.” In the evolving debate over Japanese multiculturalism and ethnic homogeneity, the relationship between the Ainu and mainstream Japanese thus remains open and contested, and is perhaps best summarized by one of Lie’s interviewees who simply said, “[the Ainu] are Japanese but they are not really Japanese.”<sup>13</sup> Whether 1,000, 25,000 or 300,000, the Ainu are generally regarded in Japan as a kind of asterisk to the idea that Japan is a nation-state of a homogenous ethnic group.

This paper investigates the reasons behind the asterisk, and argues that the ambiguous conceptualization of the Ainu today as quasi-Japanese stems from the ideologies developed in the mid-19th century and the transition from the feudal Tokugawa shogunate to the modern Japanese nation-state. This is not a work based on primary research, as the facts of Ainu discrimination, the process of Japanese nation-building and its relationship to the Ainu are already well established. It is further limited by a reliance on English-language sources, though this is by no means a rudimentary topic in Western scholarship on Japanese history. Exemplary works include the seminal work in this subfield, Tessa Morris-Suzuki’s *Reinventing Japan: Time, Space, Nation*, one of the first works to challenge conventional readings of Japanese ethnic homogeneity by examining the role of spatial and temporal conceptualizations of difference in the Japanese nation-building process. Mark Howell’s *Geographies of Identity in Nineteenth-Century Japan* is a more recent addition to this line of inquiry and is especially strong in detailing the Japanese policies towards the Ainu (and other marginalized groups) in the late 19th century. *Japan’s Modern Myths* by Carol Gluck is the standard work on the process of Japanese nation-building more generally, and is used here for its thorough discussion of the crucial ideology of the “family-state.” Additionally, this paper relies on available scholarship on Ainu history, especially Richard Siddle’s *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan* and *The Conquest of Ainu Lands: Ecology and Culture in Japanese Expansion, 1590-1800* by Brett Walker.<sup>14</sup>

Instead of adding a new set of facts regarding Japanese nation-building or Ainu marginalization to an already rich subfield, this paper is a work of synthesis that asks new questions and takes a new approach on already established knowledge. It should be considered preliminary research that sets the stage for future research into issues of contemporary Ainu identity. Meanwhile, it seeks to advance existing scholarship in two primary ways. First, it endeavors to connect the changes in conceptualization of Ainu difference in the nineteenth century to the contemporary marginalization of the Ainu, with special attention to the meaning of the ACPA and its role in either enabling/disabling Ainu marginalization. Existing scholarship accounts for ideological shifts in the nineteenth century, but is quiet on the relevance of those shifts to Ainu

marginalization today, while scholarship on Ainu marginalization does not pay sufficient attention to issues of modernity and temporal conceptions of difference that I suggest lay at the heart of such discrimination. Second, it seeks to enlarge the conversation on Ainu marginalization from one conducted mostly by Japan specialists to include non-Japan specialists interested in the broader issue of spatial and temporal conceptualizations of difference. The conceptual shifts enacted in nineteenth-century Japan have a particular set of implications for the Ainu and Japan at large, but this case also highlights issues of modernity and the transition between spatial and temporal conceptualization of difference more generally.

Building upon the work of Morris-Suzuki, Howell, Tanaka, Gluck, Siddle and Walker, this paper argues that the contemporary marginalization of the Ainu owes much to a new way of understanding temporality in the young Meiji state which enacted a shift in how the Ainu were thought to be different and transformed Ainu “barbarians” into Japanese “primitives.” In the process of inventing a nation to match the Japanese state, the Ainu served as fundamental parts of the Meiji state’s effort to legitimize itself, serving as stepping-stones in the narration of Japanese national emergence and racial identity. The result of this belief has been a sense of the Ainu as Japanese in spatial terms, but as not quite Japanese in temporal terms, or as Johannes Fabian would put it, a “denial of coevalness.” Ideological shifts in the nineteenth century about the way Ainu were thought to be different are still relevant for contemporary attitudes on Ainu difference and at least partially explain the uneasy position of the Ainu in Japanese society today.

### “Barbarians” of the North

The exact origins of the Ainu are unclear, and though some connections between the Ainu and other ancestral groups can be traced back to the beginning of the ninth century BCE, Ainu culture proper appears to have emerged by the end of the thirteenth century BCE.<sup>15</sup> By that time, the Ainu numbered about 40,000 and occupied most of Hokkaido, parts of northern Honshu and the Kuril Islands. Beginning in about the fifteenth century, traders and settlers from the south (or *Wajin*<sup>16</sup>) in search of pelts and salmon fishing grounds forced the Ainu northward, and gradually the Ainu lost territory on Honshu and became concentrated in Hokkaido.<sup>17</sup> According to Brett Walker’s seminal work on this subject, Japanese northern expansion farther and farther into Ainu territory predictably brought about violent conflicts between the Ainu and these southerners. The discovery of gold in Hokkaido in 1620 brought about acute pressure on Ainu lands and people, with Ainu resistance reaching its high point in 1699 with the widespread, but ultimately unsuccessful, Shakushain Rebellion.<sup>18</sup> Starting in the seventeenth century, euphemistic “pacification” campaigns by the dominant clan, the Matsumae,<sup>19</sup>

took revenge on Ainu communities that had supported the rebellion and enabled further concentration of the Ainu on marginal lands and increased servitude to *Wajin* traders and settlers. Military action was just one type of a broader process of Ainu subjugation. Unfair terms of trade and resource appropriation brought economic misery, while disease, especially tuberculosis, and hunger further decimated Ainu communities. By the end of the Tokugawa era in the mid-nineteenth century, the Ainu had effectively been reduced to paupers on land they had once controlled.<sup>20</sup>

While clearly one-sided (and all too sadly familiar), the history of the Ainu vis-à-vis the *Wajin* up to this point is essentially one of struggle for land, resources and trade privileges between two distinct groups. Although dominated by the Matsumae domain under the aegis of the Tokugawa Shogun,<sup>21</sup> the Ainu were outside the *Wajin* polity and government and dealings with them fell under the category of foreign relations. Geographic terminology is telling in this regard, as *ezochi*,<sup>22</sup> the name for Hokkaido prior to 1869, was considered an *iiki*, or “foreign region.”<sup>23</sup> “Domestic” matters, meanwhile, were limited to the areas directly controlled by the central shogunate and the subordinate, though still semi-autonomous, clans like the Matsumae. This feudal system, similar to that of many places in Europe at about the same time, had been in place since the end of the twelfth century and was initially highly volatile. By 1603, however, the Tokugawa clan emerged as the strongest of all and gained a dominant position among the clans. A series of Tokugawa Shoguns ruled as *primus inter pares* over a loosely connected but stable feudal system until 1868, when they were displaced by the Meiji Restoration.

For the local rulers (the Matsumae), every further incursion into Ainu lands represented an increase in territorial control and resource revenue, with predictable results for the Ainu. What made these relations particularly brutal, however, was a fundamental conceptualization of civilization and barbarity based in spatial terms. As a result of being outside the periphery of what was considered settled territory, the Ainu were a particular target for domination since they were held to be culturally inferior. As Morris-Suzuki chronicles in her 1998 book, elite thought during the Tokugawa regime conceived of cultural similarity and difference in concentric terms, called the *ka-i* system in Japanese.<sup>24</sup> This idea emanated from China and held that barbarism (*i*) increases the farther one moves away from the civilized center (*ka*). Thus, the “civilized” were those who used Chinese characters, ate rice with chopsticks, and lived close to the center, while the “barbarians” were people who did not use Chinese characters, ate different foods, and lived far from the center. This world was not completely dichotomous, though, as there were degrees of both civilization and barbarism, with the latter defined as the distance, in both the Cartesian sense and the cultural sense, from the former. In speaking of a popular map from 1712 that illustrates this worldview, Morris-Suzuki writes, “The feeling conveyed by this work is of a world made up of concentric circles of in-

creasing strangeness, stretching almost infinitely outward from a familiar center."<sup>25</sup> Pictorially, the Dutch, perhaps the most distant people that the Tokugawa regime had contact with, were portrayed as devilish looking men with flaming red hair and were placed on the edges of the maps, just inside of the drawings of the Land of Dragons inhabited by creatures with six legs and four wings.

According to the *ka-i* system, the Ainu were represented somewhere in the middle, between the outer edges of complete savagery and the inner core of civilization. The Ainu were perceived as barbarians, but not irredeemably foreign since a certainly level of familiarity existed between the Ainu and *Wajin*. There were differences between Ainu and the *Wajin* as well, as the Ainu spoke a completely different language and practiced a radically different type of agricultural system.<sup>26</sup> Still, the Ainu were not nearly as strange as the Dutch or the Russians were, given their relative proximity to the "civilized" core. The crucial point for understanding later changes in their relationships, though, is that differences between mainland *Wajin*, led by Tokugawa shogunate, and Ainu were based on spatial terms. The Ainu were not considered part of the pre-Japanese polis but members of a separate group that existed just beyond the fringe of the Shogun's political reach.

While the archipelago was marked with a high degree of spatial fragmentation and differentiation throughout the Tokugawa era, thoughts about time and history were quite different. Until the Meiji Restoration, the temporal conceptualization among commoners and elites of the Japanese archipelago was one in which past and present were not rigidly divided. Instead, elite Tokugawa thought conceived of a world that stressed temporal stability and universal order. This is not to suggest that pre-Meiji Japan was stagnant or "timeless" as Western thought has sometimes represented the East,<sup>27</sup> but rather that the notion of a discrete past leading to a discrete present is a modern conceptualization of temporality that the Japanese did not hold until after the Meiji Restoration. Prior to and then throughout the Tokugawa era, there was no qualitative distinction between past and present. Instead, based on the principle that there was a natural order to all things, the past and the present were mere backgrounds for the natural order to manifest itself, and this could occur as easily today as it could one thousand years prior. This principle of natural order, called *ri*, was an idea brought from China that held that there was a proper relationship for each of the five social relationships: father-child, husband-wife, friend-friend, sibling-sibling and ruler-subject.<sup>28</sup> In each, every participant had a specific set of duties towards the others. For example, a wife would be required to be faithful to a husband, who likewise would be responsible for her protection and livelihood. When each of these five relationships was in order, the proper relationship between earth and heaven would follow.<sup>29</sup> For the fifth relationship, that between ruler and subject, there was a natural order that resembled the *noblesse oblige* of feudal Europe in which lords were

required to look after their peasants and the peasants to be obedient towards their lord.<sup>30</sup> The task of rulers who believed in this political/moral philosophy was to see that the five proper relationships were maintained, especially the one between rulers and ruled, and if they were not, to reinstate them. At the root of this task, according to Harry Harootunian in his book on political thought in the early Tokugawa period, was the “conviction that past and present were the same; ancient principles of authority could be restored in the present because they were timeless and universally valid.”<sup>31</sup>

In this temporal conceptualization, there was no belief that society was progressing, that is, emerging from the past and headed towards any particular goal because the important issues were not society’s development and growth but stability and consistency with the natural order.<sup>32</sup> In terms of the Ainu, this temporal conceptualization meant that, though they were on the periphery spatially, there was no difference in how they were perceived temporally. In the Tokugawa worldview, it was impossible to think in terms of one group being behind or ahead of another, since all groups and regions were governed by consistent and eternal principles of universal harmony. Distinct groups may have had their own places within this eternal harmony, but the concepts applied to all. While the concept of difference between the Ainu and pre-national Japanese was certainly present, it is important to keep in mind that it could *only* be understood in spatial terms as insider vs. outsider, since an idea of time that would enable thinking in terms of modern vs. primitive had yet to arrive.

### The Arrival of Modernity

The stable system of the Tokugawa shogunate and its spatial and temporal conceptualizations began to unravel in the mid-nineteenth century with the arrival of Western warships seeking trade privileges and concessions in the archipelago. The sudden appearance of the American Commodore Matthew Perry in Edo Bay on July 8, 1853, is the most famous of these incursions, and is generally regarded as the defining event that signaled the transition from a feudal society to a modern nation-state. Symbolically, at least, Perry’s “Black Ships” were a visible and formidable challenge to the Shogun’s claim to supreme power. At the same time, the Tokugawa system was beset by internal challenges, including competing claims for political power plus the rise of a commercial class with considerable economic strength but no political voice. With these harbingers of Western modernity anchored just off the coast and considerable discontent within waiting for political opportunity, a worldview in which the Shogun was the supreme military power and ultimate political authority was no longer tenable.<sup>33</sup>

A new political model ascended out of the decline of the Tokugawa system: to transform the feudal Tokugawa system into a nation-state along the

lines of the Western model. Of course, this was a difficult undertaking and involved the adoption of a completely new form of government, the modernization and expansion of its bureaucracy, new laws and establishing entirely different relationships between the rulers and the ruled. The renovation of the state, as complex as it was, proved relatively easy, and elites of the day deftly managed the transition. By 1868, a new government with the broad consent of elites took power, without any bloodshed in the process. The other half of the term “nation-state” still lagged behind, however. As one of the “Founding Fathers” of modern Japan, Yukichi Fukuzawa, wrote in 1875, “In Japan there is a government but no nation.”<sup>34</sup> Fukuzawa recognized that the fundamental challenge to becoming a modern nation-state was not learning and implementing new ways of statecraft, but rather, developing a national way of thinking.

### Imagining Japan

How, then, did the Japanese come to think of themselves as a nation? In short, this process depended on massive transformations in the way people of the archipelago, both elites and non-elites, thought about time, space and difference, with significant consequences for the Ainu both at the time and even today. In advancing this argument, I follow Benedict Anderson and his argument that “nations” as political entities are only possible with modernized forms of consciousness, particularly a profound shift in the conceptualization of time from the medieval age to the modern age.<sup>35</sup> In the pre-modern era, time was characterized by universal simultaneity without the idea of progression or development. Time was determined by reference to a common and fixed point such as biblical events in the case of Christian Europe.<sup>36</sup> In contrast, the sense of modern time is one divorced from a universal referent and instead treated as a kind of background in which different events can occur, enabling the idea that different societies can progress collectively and at different speeds from other societies. Only by being able to imagine itself as occupying a separate path within the empty backdrop of time can a group be able to imagine itself as distinct. As Anderson writes, “The idea of a socio-logical organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history.”<sup>37</sup>

The Meiji state had to overcome two conceptual obstacles in order to establish the idea of nationhood. The first involved popularizing the spatial sense of Japan as a nation. For the common people of the archipelago, allegiance and identity in the Tokugawa era were defined on scales no larger than that of the local fiefdom, and they likely had little awareness of the shogunate or any sense of commonality across the archipelago.<sup>38</sup> Meiji era elites needed to unify the islands and create a cohesive national space that could connect geographically distant people throughout the extensive, mountainous archipel-

ago. The second obstacle was more significant. Since the ability to think in terms of the nation involves a new way of thinking about time, as Anderson argues, the Japanese nation-building project involved the establishment of a “national” sense of time. The new concepts of temporality introduced with the arrival of the West in the 1850s supplanted pre-Meiji emphases on temporal stability and maintenance of natural/social order. The modernist view of time in which past and present were separate, with the former leading to the latter, took its place. Working within this sense of the time, people from all over the archipelago could begin to think of themselves as sharing a common history and future trajectory with other “Japanese,” even though they had never met them.

### The Family-State

There were numerous practical challenges in developing a modern Japanese nation-state, including the challenge of establishing a more direct relationship between the rulers and the ruled than was the case in the Tokugawa era. Several initiatives were advanced to accomplish this, including changes in land tenure and taxation, the establishment of a national military and universal public education. These developments were significant in creating the institutions necessary for Japan’s emergence as a modern nation-state, but even more important was the lynchpin ideology that helped create the sense of Japan as a spatially unified and temporally progressive whole. The family-state ideology, or in Japanese, *kazoku kokka*, met these requirements perfectly by promoting the idea that Japan is a spatially unified nation of one extensive family on a cohesive and progressive march through time.<sup>39</sup> According to this ideology, the supreme head of this family-state was (and is) the Emperor, who was seen as not just a mere conduit to divinity but as divinity in human form and whose predecessors descended from heaven to give birth to the Japanese people.

Much conservative scholarship on Japan has understood the family-state ideology as an enduring, if not eternal, feature of the Japanese nation throughout its history.<sup>40</sup> More critical historians such as Gluck and Morris-Suzuki have challenged this view, clearly demonstrating the recent origins of the family-state belief system as a product of the Meiji state and not its ideological precedent.. The family-state ideology encapsulated various invented traditions to form a profound sense of national identity in which political belonging, loyalty to the Emperor, and religious belief became coterminous with shared racial kinship as Japanese. Political belonging based on shared cartographic boundaries or common allegiance to ideological principles have proven effective rallying points for national identity for some nations, but in the Japanese case national identity went beyond these to include a shared sense of racial, familial and religious kinship. The emphasis that the Japanese nation-build-

ing process placed on race stems from two key arguments by Meiji era nation-builders. First, racial homogeneity, when aligned with the other aspects of Japanese “national” identity, was considered the deepest and most cohesive bond between the various people of the archipelago. This sense of “racial homogeneity” did not exist prior to the Meiji Restoration, as Gluck convincingly shows, but if it could be established, then racial homogeneity could provide a deeper sense of nationhood than the other alternatives. Meiji elites were aware of the problems that were then plaguing the British Empire and the United States and sought a more comprehensive and enduring national ideology.<sup>41</sup>

Second, the “race as family” ideology allowed for the suppression of agitation from below. The American and French Revolutions had shown Meiji elites that burgeoning national sentiment could open the door for too much change and even result in the toppling of existing power structures. Positing that all Japanese people belonged to one big, extended family maintained the hierarchical idea that within the family there were “parents” and “children.” The Meiji Restoration was in no sense a democratic revolution, but rather an aristocratic one that allowed for political change without upsetting the dominant position of elites as governors of the masses. Placing the Emperor as the supreme Father of the united Japanese polity, and then ruling through that Emperor, was a strategic choice that allowed Meiji era elites to maintain their positions despite the upheavals caused by the arrival of American warships, and by extension, the West.

### The Ainu Refashioned

To facilitate national political unity, this sense of racial homogeneity in a Japanese family-state was promoted with great vigor. Any acknowledgment that the Japanese racial body was not united would have undermined the ideological foundation on which the Japanese state depended on to articulate its “nation.”<sup>42</sup> For the young Meiji state, the presence of the Ainu in Japan’s far north could have done just this. After all, the Ainu definitely were different from “mainstream” Japanese in pre-Meiji thought, and the existence of these culturally and racially “different” people living within Japanese political space posed a problem. Namely, if the Japanese nation-state was the modern form of the culturally and racially homogenous race, then what was the status of the Ainu in the nation? While apparent contradiction between Ainu distinctiveness and Japanese racial homogeneity was not necessarily understood explicitly at that time as a “threat” to the ideologies under construction, the previous explanation of the Ainu as a separate race living within the boundaries of Japan no longer made sense in “modern” Japanese thought, since an understanding of the nation meant the racial homogeneity inherent in the family-state ideology.

The ideological constructions at work in the early years of the Meiji

era thus initiated a new way of understanding Ainu distinctiveness. As Morris-Suzuki and Howell demonstrate, differences between the “mainstream” Japanese and the Ainu in the Tokugawa era were perceived solely in spatial terms. After the Restoration, the Ainu became “primitives,” or “slow” Japanese who were members of the Japanese race but who had, for various reasons, failed to progress at the same rate as everyone else. Obvious differences, then, were markers of a different stage in the progressive narrative, of things that all Japanese had done in the past but did no longer. Most importantly, in the transition from the Tokugawa era to the Meiji era, the Ainu had become Japanese, just ones that were mired in an earlier stage of national history.

Ethnographic and archaeological accounts of the late nineteenth century helped provide the “proof” that the Ainu were Japan’s Stone Age ancestors.<sup>43</sup> According to Morris-Suzuki, these studies, however specious, were necessary to give “substance to [the] idea, not simply that the Ainu and the people of the Ryukyu Islands [Okinawa] were Japanese now, but they *had always been* Japanese, but had been marooned in some earlier phase of national history.”<sup>44</sup> For example, Ryōzo Torii embarked on a project to link the material culture of the Ainu with that of the earliest inhabitants of the mainland (the Jōmon, of the era from the same name, roughly 10,000 BCE to 300 BCE), and with the Ryūkyūans (Okinawans). This was part of the mania for finding the “racial origins” of the Japanese—if the material culture of the Jōmon, the Ainu, and the Ryūkyūans could be proved to have a common origin, then the nation stretching from Okinawa in the far south to Hokkaido in the far north could be linked as well.<sup>45</sup> Investigating the link between Ainu and the Jōmon was not controversial in and of itself, and recent scholarship on the Ainu by Mark Hudson argues that the Ainu do share some things in common with the Jōmon.<sup>46</sup> What was significant was the attempt by Meiji era anthropologists and historians to argue that the different peoples of the archipelago shared the same space but not the same time. Torii, for example, argued that only the Japanese had managed to descend all the way into the modern era, while the Ainu and Ryūkyūans had not progressed much, if at all, since those early days.

Torii’s contemporary, Yoshikiyo Koganei, used skeletal remains to argue that the Ainu *were* the Jōmon, ones that had somehow managed to survive up to the present day. This argument placed the Ainu even further back on the temporal continuum of Japanese development, and denied that the Ainu had changed at all in 10,000 years.<sup>47</sup> Both of these views on the origins of the Ainu implied that the ancestors of the Japanese race and its contemporary members shared the same territory, and had always shared the same territory, and that all were members of the Japanese family-state. Ideas of Ainu inferiority had not changed, despite their new standing as Japanese, since what these anthropological studies “confirmed” was that though the Ainu might be part of the Japanese nation, they were not equal members since they differed temporally.

The scholarship of these two men, and others like them, relied on evidence of questionable authenticity and advanced improbable theses in order to “prove” the links between the Japanese, the Ainu and the Ryūkyūans.<sup>48</sup> On the subject of agriculture, for example, mainland Japanese anthropologists declared that the Ainu did not know how to grow crops, and that they were stuck in the “hunter-gatherer” phase of human development. Unable and unwilling to understand Ainu agriculture on its own terms, anthropologists seeking to prove national unity shoehorned Ainu agriculture into the narrative of the development of Japanese agriculture and declared that the Ainu exemplified what all Japanese did thousands of years ago. This ignored the Ainu’s cultivation of various crops, especially the sweet potato, and overlooked the qualities of Hokkaido’s climate and soils that made rice cultivation next to impossible. Since the Ainu did not cultivate rice, and rice implied “civilization” in the civilized-barbarian dichotomy, mainstream Japanese further assumed that the Ainu did not grow rice because they were not civilized enough to do so. Siddle writes that this belief that the Ainu could not cultivate land became a self-fulfilling prophecy when settlers from the mainland, who viewed the Ainu as primitive savages, pushed Ainu off their lands and into infertile, marshy areas.<sup>49</sup> This reinforced ideas of innate Ainu inferiority in agriculture and furthered their subjugation.

As Mark Howell demonstrates, there was a small degree of material support for the Ainu starting in the 1870s, but this too had terrible consequences for the Ainu.<sup>50</sup> Support included agricultural training, some public health measures and establishing public schools in Ainu areas. From the perspective of the young state, the concern was on “protecting” the Ainu from their presumed primitive behavior and helping them assimilate to modern Japan.<sup>51</sup> In practice, however, agricultural promotion meant that the Ainu were forced to abandon traditional practices, including hunting, in order to pursue rice farming on marginal plots. Public health services were meager and could not keep up with the epidemic tuberculosis that came in the wake of Japanese expansion.<sup>52</sup> Education, meanwhile, consisted of training in the Japanese language and in Emperor worship as befitting the young subjects of the new nation-state. Meanwhile, officials banned numerous Ainu cultural practices, such as tattooing and funeral rituals, that were thought to retard Ainu assimilation.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the official pronouncements of concern for Ainu welfare, settlers, anthropologists and Japanese politicians exhibited remarkably little sympathy for the obviously worsening situation of the Ainu in the early Meiji era. As Siddle shows, many acknowledged that the Ainu were Japanese, but at the same time, given dominant discourses of Social Darwinism, saw the impoverishment of the Ainu by the hands of Japanese settlers and the negative consequences of official policies as a “naturally” occurring phenomenon.<sup>54</sup> Around the time of the Meiji Restoration, ideas of “survival of the fittest” among groups

of humans became very popular in Japan and were widely known in academic and government circles.<sup>55</sup> For the Japanese, this meant competition with various European races in the international arena, and a desire to improve the Japanese race by encouraging the demise of temporally retarded anachronisms like the Ainu. As Gluck states, outlawing the Ainu language and prohibiting traditional agriculture were seen as steps that would uplift the Japanese race by eliminating its inferior elements.<sup>56</sup> Such harm to the Ainu was also seen as inevitable. That the Ainu might die in huge numbers to tuberculosis and have their land stolen by Japanese settlers only “proved” to them what was already assumed—that the Ainu had not evolved as much as their southern Japanese counterparts and were destined to become extinct.

Beyond the issue of the accuracy of the studies, or even the use of Social Darwinist ideas to justify Ainu subjugation, lies a deeper issue. Whether they were strictly accurate or not, all of the studies took as a starting point the “knowledge” that the Ainu were Japanese, and then offered various explanations as to why they were different. Under the family-state ideology, perceiving the Ainu as outside of the family-state became impossible, and thus, the Ainu were no longer outside of Japan, just behind it. This conclusion served a political purpose. To create a Japanese nation that coincided with the territory of the state, the issue of other people inhabiting parts of the archipelago was problematic. For Hokkaido to be considered naturally a part of Japan, its Ainu inhabitants had to be recast and their differences re-explained. By incorporating the Ainu within the racial body of the entire Japanese nation, the Meiji state maintained the idea that the nation was spatially unified and ethnically homogeneous. Thus, political boundaries of Japan were coterminous with racial ones, which in turn were coterminous with the nation under the sovereign control of the Emperor. Adoption of the Ainu within the Japanese race was consistent with, and indeed strengthened by, the idea that the Japanese had always been a distinct people and that the Meiji state came out of the eternal nation’s quest for modern nationhood.

Anthropologists and the Meiji state furthered the creation of the idea of a modern and distinct Japanese nation through fabricated discovery of Japan’s ancient past in the form of the Ainu. With evidence of aboriginal inhabitants supposedly in hand, the modernity of Meiji Japan became more obvious and tangible. Moreover, since those aboriginal inhabitants were Japanese aborigines, and not Russian, for example, the placement of the Ainu into Japan’s historical narrative helped to support what Stefan Tanaka calls Japan’s “narrative of emergence”—the idea of a separate and unique Japanese race with its own line of descent.<sup>57</sup> The Ainu in Hokkaido became the “historical reality” of Japan’s past, and city dwellers in Tokyo and Osaka the quintessential examples of Japan’s modern present. Differences between the two groups further reinforced the idea that Japan was a progressive nation headed towards the future, as the relative material advancement of people in Tokyo showed

the Japanese as a dynamic nation.<sup>58</sup>

The shift from a spatial conceptualization of Ainu difference in pre-Meiji Japan to a temporal one in Meiji Japan and after was no mere coincidence or unintended consequence of Japanese historical development. Instead, the reconfiguration of Ainu difference played a crucial role in establishing the idea of a unified Japanese racial family, an ideology upon which the emerging structure of the nation-state depended. For the Ainu, these shifts had terrible consequences and underlie the status as “asterisk” Japanese who are not really Japanese. They have been denied independent space outside of the Japanese imaginary since leaving any group spatially external of the Japanese nation-state at its formation would have undermined the effort to link political citizenship and racial belonging within a cohesive political space. Simultaneously, they have been denied equal status and thrust into the role of temporal inferiors in the Japanese nation-state since ideas of Ainu inferiority were essential to emerging notions of Japanese modernity. Extending the arguments of Morris-Suzuki and others, I suggest that, neither outside of the nation-state nor contemporary with it, the Ainu are still confined to this ambiguous position, uncomfortably within and behind the Japanese nation-state.

### Coda

The shift in conceptualizations of difference between the Ainu and mainstream Japanese from spatial terms to temporal terms is similar to that of other marginalized peoples in other parts of the world. Johannes Fabian describes a consistent pattern in which Western anthropologists’ work on non-Western people places them in a separate and inferior temporal position. Fabian calls the inability to acknowledge that the researched, or Other, inhabits the same timeframe as the researcher, or Self, the “denial of coevalness” in which difference between the Other and the Self is predominantly understood in temporal terms.<sup>59</sup> This conceptualization was crucial to the ideology of colonialism, and supported the belief that Western superiority and non-Western inferiority were “natural,” that is, explained by the different paths and rates of progress by different peoples.<sup>60</sup>

Fabian’s concept of the “denial of coevalness” greatly explains the Ainu’s ambiguous status in notions of Japanese identity, a contradiction reflected in current political debates surrounding the place of the Ainu in Japanese society today. There is a wide range of debate among the Ainu regarding their relationship towards the Japanese state, with some arguing for accelerated assimilation into Japanese society and an end towards discrimination between Ainu-Japanese and mainstream Japanese. There are also some Ainu arguing for the opposite position, that of a reassertion of Ainu distinctiveness and a rejection of the notion of assimilation. Pressure from Ainu activists regarding a new role for the Ainu in national politics in the 1990s and continu-

ing today has coincided with an upsurge in debates over the notion of Japanese identity, in an era of economic hardship, increased immigration and anxiety over Japan's future.

A significant development in the debate over contemporary Japanese identity and Ainu identity was the passage of the Ainu Cultural Promotion Act (ACPA) in 1997. The ACPA has been hailed by some Ainu as marking a new step in Ainu-Japanese relations in that it represents the first step in establishing a more equal relationship between the Ainu and the Japanese state.<sup>61</sup> Supporters hold that the ACPA is the first instance of formal recognition of an indigenous minority with Japanese political borders, though they acknowledge that it is not an explicit recognition. They maintain that the spirit of the Act points towards the Japanese government eventually departing from its rigid insistence on Japanese racial homogeneity, as it confirms the existence of a separate Ainu culture outside of mainstream Japanese culture. Opponents of the ACPA argue that by sidestepping the issue of whether the Ainu are indigenous, the various "cultural protections" are mere repeats of the failed measures of the past. Siddle argues that, "rather than reflecting a new relationship between the Ainu and the state, [the ACPA shows] instead that the paternalistic control and management of the Ainu people remains a basic premise of Ainu policy in a way little changed since the Meiji period."<sup>62</sup>

The specific policies attached to the ACPA mainly involve the expenditure of public money in the form of a "Foundation for the Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture," whose role is to distribute funds, to both Ainu and non-Ainu alike, for various activities, including the revitalization of traditional dances, the production of traditional handicrafts, the teaching of the Ainu language, and for academic research on the Ainu. While on the surface this may seem like a windfall for those interested in "revitalizing" Ainu culture, what is most important is that it defines Ainu culture in "traditional" terms that simultaneously denies a recognition of *contemporary* Ainu society. The elements of Ainu culture to be protected are cultural practices of a century or two ago, not the ones of the Ainu of today. The denial of the possibility of a modern Ainu society reaffirms the discourses of Ainu society as a part of Japan's past, not one of its present.

The near future offers both opportunities and obstacles for the establishment of a "modern" understanding of the Ainu and an end to discrimination. On the one hand, transnational linkages with other indigenous groups and a shifting sense of what "national identity" means in an era of increasing globalization offers potential for Ainu activists to assert themselves outside of the confining framework of Japan's still extant family-state ideology. As the sense of Japan as a nation is itself undergoing change with ever-greater transnational cultural, economic and political flows, there is potential for an alternative assertion of their identity vis-à-vis Japanese identity at large. Changing ideas of nationalism in Japan could provide room for an "assertion of coeval-

ness” that takes advantage of a Japanese identity in flux. Similarly, deepening solidarity with other marginalized groups within Japan, including Ryūkyūans, ethnic Koreans and *burakumin*<sup>63</sup> offers potential for challenging dominant cultural nationalist narratives.

On the other hand, the recent resurgence of the Far Right in Japanese politics suggests that those same problematic narratives might be on the up-swing. Often this resurgent nationalism appears directed towards an international audience, say in denials of the existence of Korean “comfort women” or of the Rape of Nanking, but there is an important domestic component as well in the rewriting of school textbooks to promote patriotism and instill a greater level of respect for Japanese “traditions.”<sup>64</sup> Part and parcel of this movement is a reassertion of the “family-state” concept and a renewed level of support for the Emperor, which could have troubling consequences for the Ainu. The future of Ainu identity, temporal conceptualizations of difference and marginalization in an era when Japanese identity itself is in question remains unsettled and would be a fruitful avenue for future research.

If the Ainu are to overcome their “asterisk” status as quasi-Japanese, they will do so by asserting their place in modern Japanese society as spatial *and* temporal equals. This will likely entail addressing the larger concepts of Japanese nation-building, the family-state and the origins and implications of a temporal conceptualization of difference. In this light, the ACPA, rather than being hailed as a victory, should be interrogated for its role in maintaining the temporal worldview on which Ainu marginalization is based. In the end, perhaps the ACPA will be regarded as the last ditch effort of a state to prop up a failing ideology of racial homogeneity, to be replaced by a new idea of Japanese identity that finally recognizes the ethnic multiplicity that has always been present.

## Notes

1. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, second edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): 18. Italics in the original.
2. John Lie, *Multiethnic Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001): 46.
3. Richard Siddle, *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan* (London: Routledge, 1996): 77.
4. Lie, 4.
5. S.C. H. Cheung, “Ainu Culture in Transition,” *Futures* 35:9 (2003): 951-959.
6. Lie, 91.
7. Richard Siddle, “Ainu, Japan’s indigenous people.” In *Japan’s Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*, Michael Weiner, ed. (London: Routledge, 1997): 34, 40.
8. Richard Siddle, “An Epoch-making Event? The 1997 Ainu Cultural Promotion Act and Its Impact.” *Japan Forum* 14:3 (2002): 405.
9. See Peter Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (London: Croom Helm, 1986); Michael Weiner, ed., *Japan’s Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity* (London: Routledge, 1997); Harumi Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity* (Melbourne, Australia:

- Trans Pacific Press, 2001); and Eiji Oguma, *A Genealogy of "Japanese" Self-Images* (English translation by David Askew of *Tan'itsu minzoku shinwa no kigen: "Nihon-jin" no jigazō no keifu*) (Melbourne, Australia: Trans Pacific Press, 2002).
10. Siddle (1997).
  11. The full name, translated into English, is the "Law for Promotion of the Ainu Culture and for the Dissemination and Advocacy for the Traditions of the Ainu and the Ainu Culture." The full text is available via the Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture (FRPAC), "Law for Promotion of the Ainu Culture and for the Dissemination and Advocacy for the Traditions of the Ainu and the Ainu Culture," English page in The Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture [database online]. (Sapporo, Japan, n.d.) [cited November 23 2006]. Available from <http://www.frpac.or.jp/eng/index.html>.
  12. *Ibid.*
  13. Lie, 46.
  14. Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Re-inventing Japan: Time, Space, Nation* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998); David Howell, *Geographies of Identity in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); Siddle (1996); Brett Walker, *The Conquest of Ainu Lands: Ecology and Culture in Japanese Expansion, 1590-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
  15. Siddle (1996), 26-27.
  16. The word "*Wajin*" refers to people under the political control of the various military governments that ruled Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu (most of modern-day Japan) prior to the foundation of Japan as a modern nation-state. Often, the "*Wajin*" are called "Japanese" but I argue the term "Japanese" only truly describes residents of the archipelago after the formation of the modern nation-state in 1868.
  17. David Howell, "Ainu Ethnicity and the Boundaries of the Early Modern Japanese State" *Past and Present* 142 (1994): 69-93.
  18. Walker, 48-72.
  19. The Matsumae clan was in turn partially under the control of the Shogun in Edo (now Tokyo).
  20. Siddle (1996), 31-37.
  21. *Shogun*, the short form of the official title "*Sei Tai Shogun*" whose literal meaning in Japanese is "great general who defeats barbarians," refers to the individual who held the position and is capitalized. Shogunate refers to the position itself, or else the government lead by a Shogun, and is not capitalized. Moreover, as an English word, it will not be italicized in this paper.
  22. In Japanese, "*Ezochi*" means "Land (*chi*) of the *Ezo*." *Ezo*, in turn, literally means "Eastern barbarian" and is what *Wajin* called the Ainu, since the word "ainu" is an Ainu word meaning "human beings."
  23. Siddle (1996), 52.
  24. See pages 14-20.
  25. *Ibid.*, 15.
  26. Siddle (1996), 27.
  27. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, first Vintage Books edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
  28. Harry D. Harootunian, *Toward Restoration: The Growth of Political Consciousness*

- in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970): 8.
29. *Ibid.*, 5.
  30. Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003): 36.
  31. Harootunian, 8.
  32. To call this system “stagnant” is inaccurate, since there was no conception that time could stand still, per se. Rather, the emphasis was on achieving harmony with eternal principles that, when followed, would give the impression of an unchanging society.
  33. Japan’s transition from the feudal Tokugawa period to the modern period is a significant subject in scholarship on Japanese history, and for the sake of readability, the complex reasons and implications of the shift have been excluded here. See Gordon, 2003; Harootunian, 1970 and Marius Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2000).
  34. Gluck, 27.
  35. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, second edition (New York: Verso, 1983): 6-36.
  36. *Ibid.*, 24.
  37. *Ibid.*, 26.
  38. See Gordon, 16.
  39. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikazes, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
  40. Namely Inazo Nitobe’s classic of 1912, *The Japanese Nation: Its Land, Its People, and Its Life, With Special Consideration to Its Relations with the United State*. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons) and Kunio Yanagita’s seminal work on early Japanese history and ethno-genesis, *About Our Ancestors: The Japanese Family System* (Tokyo: Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, 1970).
  41. Gluck, 103-156.
  42. Although Emperor worship and political belonging have been somewhat disconnected from each other following World War II, this strong sense of racial unity and the accompanying notion of the family-state still prevails, as evinced by former Prime Minister Nakasone’s comments on racial homogeneity and by the larger body of popular literature proclaiming Japanese uniqueness. See Befu (2001).
  43. This does not mean that ethnographers and anthropologists were agents of the Meiji state, or charged directly with discovering or creating such evidence. Such discoveries, though, were consistent with and then further reinforced the paradigm shift going on at the national level at the same time.
  44. Morris-Suzuki, 31. Italics in original.
  45. Siddle (1996), 80-81.
  46. Mark Hudson, *Ruins of Identity: Ethnogenesis in the Japanese Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999).
  47. Siddle (1996), 80-81.
  48. Morris-Suzuki, 28-29.
  49. Siddle (1996), 60.
  50. See Howell, 172-196.
  51. *Ibid.*, 172-185.
  52. Siddle (1996), 72.

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53. Howell, 179.
  54. Siddle (1996), 76-112.
  55. *Ibid.*, 11.
  56. Gluck, 109.
  57. *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 154.
  58. Ohnuki-Tierney, 252.
  59. Fabian, 31.
  60. *Ibid.*, 17.
  61. Cheung, 955.
  62. Siddle (2002), 420-421.
  63. Literally, "people of the hamlet," this term refers to an untouchable caste in Japan prior to the modern era. The legal distinction was abolished in the late nineteenth century, but even today, descendents of *burakumin* are still marginalized within Japanese society.
  64. For more on resurgent Japanese nationalism, see Gavan McCormack, "Nationalism and Identity in Post-Cold War Japan," *Pacifica Review* 12:3 (2000): 247-263; Masaru Tamamoto, "A Land without Patriots: The Yasukuni Controversy and Japanese Nationalism," *World Policy Journal*, Fall 2001: 33-40; Jeff Kingston, *Japan's Quiet Transformation* (Oxon, UK: Routledge Courzon, 2004).