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CONTENTS

1 Creating the Frontier: Border, Identity and History in Japan's Far North
   Tessa Morris-Suzuki

25 The Search for Korea's Past: Japanese Colonial Archaeology
   in the Korean Peninsula (1905–1945)
   Hyung Il Pai

49 Korean Echoes in the Nō Play Furu
   Royall Tyler

67 Emperors and Musume: China and Japan 'on the Boards'
   in Australia, 1850s–1920s
   Darryl Collins

93 Lu Xun, Leon Trotsky, and the Chinese Trotskyists
   Gregor Benton

105 Unwitting Partners: Relations between Taiwan and Britain, 1950–1958
   Steve Tsang
Cover calligraphy  Yan Zhenqing 颜真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover photograph  Dolmen in Hwanghae-do Unyul-gun (Chōsen Sōtokufu, Chōsen koseki zufu [Album of ancient Korean sites and monuments], vol.2 [Keijō, 1915])
The shape of things becomes clearer when one looks at the edge than when one looks at the centre. So the process by which identities are shaped and reshaped is most clearly visible when one focusses upon those places where one self-defined group brushes against the edges of another.¹ This paper sets out to examine the shaping of modern Japanese identity, not by considering the workings of the government, the bureaucracy or big business, but by looking at contact between Japanese society and its most ancient and enduring ‘other’—the Ainu, the indigenous inhabitants of northern Japan. In the process it touches on some broad questions of human identity—questions about the ways in which people in large, highly industrialised countries relate to those in small, indigenous societies, and about the ways in which people of the twentieth century relate to those of past generations.

In the modern world, the writing of history has been intimately connected with the development of the nation state. Nations—their people, cultures and institutions—are often the main characters in the drama constructed by the historian, and the modern state therefore casts a long shadow backwards upon the unfolding of historical time. As we write the histories of ‘France’, ‘Australia’ or ‘China’, our consciousness of contemporary national frontiers tends to create a distorting frame around our vision of the past, and the risk of distortion is no less real in the case of seemingly coherent territories like Japan than it is in the case of more obviously ‘artificial’ modern states like Indonesia. One task for the historian is to rediscover the processes by which those frontiers have been created and have become lines etched into our mental maps of the world.

In order to define Japan’s northern frontier, it was necessary to class those within it as ‘Japanese’, but this in itself required the formation of explicit and

official notions of Japaneseness. The process was complex and often contradictory. As we shall see, definitions of ‘the Japanese’ were contestable and changed over time, influenced both by intellectual environment and economic expediency.

But the lines which mark the boundaries of identity do so in time as well as in space. In the modern world view, one important means of dealing with the unfamiliar has been to define it not as geographically but as chronologically different. Thus contemporary but foreign societies come to be seen as ‘stone age’, ‘prehistoric’ or ‘medieval’. This use of historical ‘stages’ as a means of creating frontiers of identity has been a crucial method of dealing with difference in modern Japan. In the story outlined here, we shall see how modern economic and intellectual development led to the classifying of Ainu culture as a ‘prehistoric’ hunter-gatherer culture, in contrast to an agricultural and rapidly industrialising Japan. At the economic level, the processes that stimulated agricultural development in Japan simultaneously encouraged the de-agrarianisation of Ainu society, increasingly turning the Ainu into hunter-gatherers. At the intellectual level, the hunter-gatherer society that emerged from this process was then described not as the culmination of continuing processes of historical change, but as a fossilised survival of the distant past: a definition which offered a useful way of neutralising the subversive force of cultural difference in an officially ‘homogeneous’ modern nation-state.

Tokugawa Colonialism

Japan is often depicted as a naturally evolved nation-state, a single linguistic and cultural community living within clearly defined political borders. As Edwin Reischauer wrote in one of the best-known popular studies of Japan: “The Japanese concept of difference from other peoples is not so much a matter of superiority, that is, of quality, but a difference in kind. They see themselves as being different not because they are better or worse than others but simply because they are different . . . . Conditions as they existed only a little over a century ago lent credence to this feeling. All the people in the world who spoke the distinctive Japanese language and lived in the distinctive Japanese way were to be found in the sharply drawn and isolated Japanese national unit, and, except for a handful of Ainu and still fewer Chinese, Korean and Dutch traders, there were no other people of any sort in Japan.” Like Reischauer, many scholars see this sense of wholeness and coherence having been consolidated in the two-and-a-half centuries of relative isolation which preceded Japan’s emergence as a modern world power. During these centuries, we are told, Japan (having begun to import firearms from the West in the sixteenth century) abandoned the gun and created a social order which ensured both internal and external peace. “Has any other major race,” asks one historian rhetorically, “experienced
two hundred and fifty years of history in which it had absolutely no wars, but enjoyed peace and accumulated culture and wealth?\textsuperscript{3}

The traditional historical view of Japan in this age of Pax Tokugawa—from the beginning of the seventeenth century to the Meiji Restoration of 1868—was of a ‘Closed Country’ virtually cut off from the outside world. More recent historiography has revised that picture. Tashiro Kazui, for example, has demonstrated the importance not only of continuing trade with the Dutch and Chinese through Nagasaki, but also of trade with Korea through the island of Tsushima, and of a southern trading route through the Ryukyu Islands to China and South-east Asia.\textsuperscript{4} Ronald Toby has emphasised the significance of the diplomatic dimensions of these external economic contacts.\textsuperscript{5} The main image which emerges from these recent historical revisions, though, is of a society in which external contacts were sharply delineated, controlled and ordered: “an insular nation … completely covered by a single administrative system,”\textsuperscript{6} where trade and foreign knowledge were firmly monopolised by the shogun’s central government.\textsuperscript{7} The clear and coherent pre-industrial system of relations between Japan and the outside world thus comes to be seen as forming a framework for modern Japan’s national identity, and is even presented by one well-known Japanese historian as providing a model for international relations in our own more troubled times.\textsuperscript{8}

But in this vision of Japan’s history there seem to be some curious blind-spots, one of which becomes evident if one looks at the maps which commonly accompany discussions of Tokugawa Japan (Figure 1). To the east and west there are indeed clear natural boundaries delineated by the oceans, but for a “sharply-drawn national unit,” Japan has a disconcertingly vague northern border. This is not just a matter of erratic cartography. Rather, it reflects a reluctance to confront certain historical events which challenge the prevailing images of pre-industrial Japan. To put it another way, it reflects an evasion of the fact that Tokugawa Japan fostered indigenous forms not only of entrepreneurship, capital accumulation and technological ingenuity, but also of colonial expansion. This expansion involved a gradual tightening of Japanese control over a wider and wider area of Ainu territory, and was achieved with the help of instruments which Tokugawa society was supposed to have abrogated: illicit trade, war, and the gun. Tokugawa colonialism created a fund of experience and ideas which


\textsuperscript{6} S. Ōishi, “The Bakuhan system,” ibid., p.27.


\textbf{Figure 1}


The definition of Ainu identity is a complex matter about which there is continuing debate. Modern scholarship recognises several major phases in the history of Hokkaido, of which the most important are generally labelled Jomon (before 100 BC), Proto-Jomon [Zoku Jomon—100 BC–AD 700/800], Satsumon [AD 800–1300] and Ainu (from AD 1300); a separate Ezo-Haji phase is now commonly recognised as existing between the Proto-Jomon and Satsumon stages, and Utagawa Hiroshi has also identified several sub-phases within the Ainu period, the most important division being between Proto-Ainu (fourteenth to late eighteenth century AD) and New Ainu (from the late eighteenth century onwards). Archaeological evidence points to strong links between Satsumon and Ainu culture, but also to some significant differences. All of this suggests that Ainu culture in historical times is a product of elements inherited from Jomon culture and a wide range of elements indigenously developed or acquired through contact with northern and southern neighbours. In short, it is no easier to say when the Ainu became Ainu than it is to state when the Japanese became Japanese or the English became English. See Gary W. Crawford and H. Takamiya, “The origins and implications of late prehistoric plant husbandry in northern Japan,” *Antiquity*, vol. 64, no. 245 (Dec. 1990). Y. Fukusawa, “Emishi and the Ainu from archaeological point of view,” International Symposium on Japanese Archaeology in Protohistoric and Early Historic Period: Yamato and its Relations to Surrounding Populations, Bonn, Sept. 1992, H. Utagawa, “The ‘sending-back’ rite in Ainu culture,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 19.2–3 (1992): 255–70.

Throughout most of its history, Japan’s northern frontier has been a ‘frontier’ in the sense in which Frederick Jackson Turner used the term, rather than in the sense of a clear and permanent line on the map. It was, in other words, a region where Japanese intermingled, traded and sometimes fought with the northern neighbours whom they called Emishi 蛮夷 and later Ezo (written with the same characters), in the process gradually pushing the bounds of their political control northwards. During the eighth and ninth centuries AD Japanese warlords established centres of control in northern Honshu, and from then on the Emishi inhabitants, who were probably ancestors of the modern Ainu, were gradually driven out or assimilated. From the twelfth century onwards Japanese settlers were beginning to migrate to the southern shores of what is now called Hokkaido, but was then commonly known to the Japanese as Ezo. Most seem to have made a living by fishing, trading furs, fish or seaweed, or producing goods like knives and saucepans which were sold to their Ainu neighbours. The Japanese inhabitants clustered around fortified settlements (tate 領) controlled by a few powerful families, and their mutually profitable but sometimes uneasy relationship with the Ainu resembled that which existed between the Ainu and their northern neighbours, the Uilta, Nivkh and Ulchi in Sakhalin and the Koryaks and Itelmen (Kamchadals) in southern Kamchatka (Figure 2).

During the early stages of Japanese settlement the Andō warrior family claimed control over the southern tip of Hokkaido, but from the middle of the fifteenth century the area was beset by political and social instability. The growing intrusion of Japanese traders provoked a hostile reaction from the Ainu inhabitants, and there were repeated outbreaks of fighting between Ainu and settlers. One recent study suggests that the Ainu were, by and large, the victors in these conflicts. In any event, by the mid-sixteenth century the extent of Japanese settlement in the area had shrunk, and power had come to be consolidated in the hands of a new ruling family, the Kakizaki 加志家, who used the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1603 as an opportunity to establish themselves as domain lords (at the same time changing their name to that of the territory which they controlled: Matsumae 松前). The Matsumae domain had a unique place in the Tokugawa political order. While all other domains had a clearly-defined level of wealth and status, nominally measured in terms of their rice production (kokudaka 石高), Matsumae had neither a defined kokudaka nor defined geographical limits. In fact, the Matsumae family claimed sovereignty over two quite distinct areas. In the south of modern Hokkaido there was Matsumaechi 松前地 (the Land of Matsumae), inhabited by Japanese settlers and a dwindling community of Ainu. (By 1788 there were said to be just three Ainu inhabitants left.) The limits of Matsumaechi were delineated by a very
distinct border, which for most of the Tokugawa period ran from Kumaishi in the west to Kameda in the east (Figure 3). Guard-posts at each end of the border controlled movement in both directions across this imaginary line, but to the north stretched the large and mysterious realm of Ezochi 蝦夷地, the Land of the Ainu. Although the lords of Matsumae were commonly referred to as *Ezo Daiō* 蝦夷大王 (the Great Kings of Ezo), they had in the early stages only rather hazy ideas about the extent of this realm. Maps of the region drawn as late as the 1740s show it disappearing over the horizon or petering out into a splatter of unconvincing islands known as ‘Ezo-gachishima’ 蝦夷が千島 (the Thousand Islands of Ezo) (Figure 4).15

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, ex-

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14 Ibid., p.75.
15 This name is the origin of ‘Chishima’, the modern Japanese name for the Kuril Archipelago.

*Figure 2*

The Ainu and their neighbours. The ethnic group here called Oroks are now more commonly known as Uilta (Source: James Forsyth, A history of the peoples of Siberia [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992])
explorations commissioned first by the Matsumae domain and later by the shogunate provided a clearer picture of the Land of the Ainu, while equally important knowledge came from the gradual penetration of Japanese mercantile might into the region. It was this trade which was the principal source of Matsumae’s wealth. Until 1717, rights to trade in a particular section of Ainu territory were allocated to powerful families within the domain, most of whom had controlled their own fortresses before the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate. Thereafter, trading charters were sold directly to wealthy merchants, and eventually came to be auctioned off to the highest bidder. Little by little, merchants pushed their way up the coast, and commercial rights were granted to more and more northerly parts of Ainu territory. By the 1660s, the area round Yūbetsu on the north coast of Hokkaido had been allocated; in 1754 Kunashir in the Southern Kurils was apportioned; and in 1790 a trading district was created in the far south of Sakhalin.16 Since trade was largely seaborne, the inland area of Ainu country remained relatively untouched, although (as we shall see) contact with the Japanese had important indirect effects on the economy and society.

Until the early eighteenth century, furs, salmon and hunting-hawks constituted the main booty to be extracted from Ainu territory, traded in exchange for rice, sake, lacquer goods and metalware. Later, a significant proportion of the region’s exports came to consist of so-called ‘Nagasaki bundles’ (Nagasaki tawaramono 長崎俵物)—goods such as trepang and dried abalone which were sent to Nagasaki to be traded for imports from China.17 During the early part of the Tokugawa period rumours of rich gold deposits also attracted Japanese treasure-seekers, and large numbers of gold prospectors migrated to Matsumaechi and the southern parts of Ainu territory. In the end, however, it was a very different resource which proved to be the real goldmine. From about the 1720s onward, the Land of the Ainu was gradually drawn into what was a minor revolution in Japanese agriculture. The middle decades of the Tokugawa period witnessed a rapid rise in the production of cash crops such as cotton, grown mostly in the central and western districts of Japan. This development was supported by improvements in agricultural technology, and particularly by the increased use of commercial fertilisers. The major share of this ‘golden fertiliser’ (kinpi 金肥)—as it was called in Japanese—consisted of dried herring produced in the northern trading posts, where Japanese merchants employed Ainu labour in semi-servile conditions for extremely low wages. Many of these fishing and fish-processing enterprises were large and very lucrative. The Russian navigator Adam von Krusenstern, who visited Sakhalin in 1805, described two Japanese factories employing “upwards of four hundred Ainos, who have no other nourishment than fish, merely to clean and dry [herring] for exportation to Japan.”18

Matsumae’s wealth was also supported by a small but valuable flow of trade via Ainu territory with the outside world. The Ainu had a long history
of trading relationships not only with the Japanese but also with the Manchus and with northern groups like the Uilta and Nivkh. Two avenues of this long-distance trading network flourished in the early Tokugawa period. One was the so-called ‘Santan trade’, which involved the exchange of Chinese goods via the trading communities of the lower Amur through Sakhalin to Matsumae and more southerly parts of Japan.\(^1\) In 1843, official documents recorded the purchase, via the Santan trade route, of ninety bolts of figured silk textiles, over two thousand strings of jade, and an assortment of other gemstones and small trade items; it is likely that a good deal more was traded unofficially.\(^2\) The second route involved trade via the Kuril Ainu with the Russians, who by the 1740s had established themselves on the Northern Kuril islands of Shumshu and Paramushir.\(^3\) The volume of this trade is difficult to estimate, but it was significant enough for one member of the Matsumae clan to put forward the ingenious explanation that the Russian goods which arrived in Matsumae from the north were identical with Dutch goods—"naturally enough, when we consider that the kingdom of Muscovy lies to the east of Holland"—and were therefore permissible imports.\(^4\)

Matsumae was able to extend its economic control over Ainu society partly because of its military strength—backed up when necessary by the forces of other domains and of the shogunate itself—but also because of its geographical position and political structure. Ainu society was decentralised, with political power resting mainly in the hands of village heads, who in turn owed a loose allegiance to regional leaders. Matsumae, on the other hand, was part of a relatively centralised system which allowed the domain’s rulers to enforce a monopoly over trade with the Ainu. Until the seventeenth century, it seems likely that the Ainu possessed quite strong bargaining power in their interactions with the Japanese. The Ainu were experienced and enthusiastic traders, and many Ainu families acquired collections of lacquer-ware and Japanese swords which would have been far beyond the reach of the average Japanese farmer.\(^5\) As the Matsumae domain tightened its grip on the region, however, the multiple trading routes that had once existed between Ainu territory and northern Japan came to be channelled exclusively through the domain’s trading-monopoly system, and the Japanese merchants who were licensed to trade with the Ainu acquired the power to impose exhorbitant prices on them.

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\(^3\) *Matsumae shi* [Chronicles of Matsumae] (1781), in *Hoppō mikikai kobunsho shūsei* [Collection of unpublished historical documents on the northern region], 10 vols (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1979), 1: 103.

\(^4\) See, for example, Krusenstern, *Voyage round the world*, p.74.

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**Figure 4**

Ezochi and beyond, as depicted in a map compiled in the 1740s (Source: *Matsumae shi* [see n.22])
This power was fiercely resisted. In 1669 a large Ainu force under the regional leader Shakushain attacked Japanese trading and gold-mining settlements and marched on Matsumae. Armies from the northern domains of Tsugaru, Akita, Nanbu and Sendai were mobilised for the defence of Matsumae, and fierce fighting ensued in which hundreds of Japanese settlers, and probably many more Ainu, were killed. An important factor in the eventual Japanese victory was the possession of matchlock muskets, of which two hundred were used in the decisive battle of Kunnui River. It is possible that the Ainu side, too, had a small number of firearms, perhaps smuggled in by Japanese merchants, but such weapons as they possessed were far too few to provide a defence against the more heavily armed Japanese.24 A second, though smaller-scale, outbreak of fighting was provoked by the exploitative practices of Japanese merchants in the Southern Kurils in 1789, and this conflict, together with the growing presence of Russians in the Kurils and Sakhalin, encouraged the shogunate to establish direct rule over Matsumae and its Ainu colonies: the eastern part of the region was placed under shogunal control in 1799 and the western part in 1807, though rule by the Matsumae family was restored in 1821.25

It was the consciousness of strategic threats that stimulated the gradual development of the notion of a northern border. By the mid-eighteenth century, a number of Japanese intellectuals were demanding a more active policy of colonisation in Ezochi, both to exploit its natural resources and to create a barrier against Russia's southern advance. Honda Toshiaki, an outspoken advocate of foreign trade and overseas expansion, wrote of the need to develop Ezochi in order to "establish a mutual frontier between Japan and other countries and create a fortress to withstand foreign enemies," while the rulers of Matsumae began to describe their domain as "the key to the northern gate of Japan," a phrase which soon became one of the most well-worn clichés in discourse on the northern frontier.26 Awareness of the frontier was even more sharply focussed by a series of Russian attacks launched against Japanese trading-posts in Sakhalin and the Southern Kuril island of Iturup in 1806–07. Although these attacks were essentially an act of private revenge by a couple of young Russian officers offended by Japanese refusals to open up trade with their country, they provoked a strong reaction in official circles and, according to the prominent Meiji period politician and educator Ōkuma Shigenobu, helped to convince the next generation of Japanese leaders of the need to rethink Japan's relationship with the outside world.28

When Tokugawa Japan opened its doors in the 1850s, the existing relationship between Japanese and Ainu fitted neatly into a Western philosophy in which large centralised societies ('nation-states') were the only recognised participants in international relations. The defining of a northern frontier therefore became a matter for Japan and Russia, with the Ainu and other indigenous people serving merely as pawns in the negotiations between the two governments. The first round of negotiations in 1855 assigned

24 On the question of Ainu and firearms, see Kaiho Mineo, Nihon hoppōshi no ronri [The logic of history in Japan's northern region] (Tokyo, Yusankaku, 1974), pp.227–41.
25 Stephan, Kuril Islands, p.69.
26 Quoted in Kaiho, Kinsei no Hokkaidō, p.129.
27 Matsumae shi, vol.1, p.115.
28 Harrison, Japan's northern frontier, p.23.
the Kuril Islands to Russia, but left the status of Sakhalin uncertain. In 1875 these arrangements were revised, and the Kurils were given to Japan in return for a renunciation of Japanese sovereignty over Sakhalin. The arbitrary status of Japan’s northern frontier is reflected in the fact that it has been redrawn three times since 1875, and is still a source of controversy today.

Creating Japaneseness

There is nothing particularly new in the history which I have just outlined. Relations between Matsumae and the Ainu were well documented at the time, and have since been discussed in many studies of Hokkaido. The problem is not that these facts are unknown, but that they seem to have made remarkably little impact on the total picture of pre-industrial Japan. Research on the history of Hokkaido or Hoppō 北方 (the Northern Region) flourishes, but only in its own secluded corner. When one turns to general histories of Japan, the area (more often than not) lies off the edge of the map. Even recent studies which have attempted to question the image of the Tokugawa state as a ‘closed country’ commonly ignore the North. But the North is of great importance not just for what it tells us about the creation of geographical borders, but also for what it tells us about the definition of ‘Japaneseness’.

As is the case in many colonial situations, the Ainu probably knew a good deal more about their colonisers than their colonisers knew about them. By the eighteenth century, almost all coastal Ainu groups were in constant contact with Japanese traders, and their long history of contact with other trading groups had given some communities (such as those of Sakhalin) a surprisingly acute knowledge of more distant nations. (When the Dutch explorer Maarten de Vries visited Sakhalin in 1643, the local Ainu villagers offered his crewmen chopsticks to eat with, and, finding that they could not use them properly, laughed and called them “Spanola.”) The Ainu language had words for many of the profusion of social ranks which characterised Tokugawa Japanese society: there were words, for example, for shogun, daimyō (domain lord) and batamotō (one of several ranks of samurai). Ainu ballads collected in the first half of the twentieth century include stories clearly set in Tokugawa Japan, and contain an abundance of plausible detail on such things as village schools and the relations between large and small farmers. Though some of these details may have been added more recently, it is quite likely that many of them reflect a knowledge of Japan acquired at the time from Tokugawa officials and merchants.

In the Ainu world-view the Japanese were sbisam or shamo—‘neighbours’—a term also applied to the Russians and later to American whalers. This was distinct from the terms kur or utar which were applied both to regional divisions within Ainu society itself and to small neighbouring

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29 See, for example, Tashiro, Tokugawa jidai no bōeki; Toby, State and diplomacy: One honourable exception is Yamaguchi Keiji’s Sakoku to kaikoku [Closed country and open country] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993), which has a brief section on trade between Matsumae and the Ainu.
30 CornelisJ. Coen (ed. P. A Leupe), Reize van Maarten Gerritszoon Vries in 1943 naar het Noorden en Oosten van Japan (Amsterdam: Frederick Muller, 1858), pp.130-1.
societies like the Uilta. The term itself suggests a clear sense of difference from, but no particular feeling of antagonism towards, the Japanese. Where hostility to Japan is expressed in Ainu oral tradition, it often seems to be expressed in terms of a sense of betrayal—an emotion which may reflect the gradual shift in relations from a state of affairs where gains and losses were reasonably equally balanced to the overt exploitation of the eighteenth century and later. One ballad, for example, tells how a Japanese merchant tries to steal the wife of the god Oina, and kills her infant son when he comes to her rescue. The ensuing revenge by Oina on the Japanese is seen by some as an allegorical description of the Shakushain War of 1669, but it is the cry of Oina’s wife to her captors that most poignantly captures the anger of the betrayed: “I had heard the Japanese called honourable people, people with truly good hearts, but how evil your hearts must be!”

On the other side of the equation, the Japanese quite clearly saw the Ainu as different and exotic. Japanese descriptions of the Ainu, indeed, are not unlike early European accounts of African or South American tribespeople. In the course of the eighteenth century a large number of works were written on Ainu society (some first-hand, others compiled at a distance from travellers’ tales) and Japanese culture accumulated a repertoire of stock images about this closest and most familiar ‘other’. The description almost always began with comments about hairstyle, clothing and jewellery. In the context of Tokugawa society, where differing hairstyles were one of the most obvious marks of status, the flowing locks and beards of the Ainu were the visible signs of a people beyond the realm of the existing social order. Unfamiliar styles of hair and clothing (particularly the practice of fastening clothes with the left rather than the right lapel in front) were also key elements in a set of images of ‘barbarism’ (蠻夷) which Japan had borrowed from China, and emphasis on the exotic appearance of the Ainu was therefore part of a conceptual framework within which the world was divided between ka華, the settled, ordered centre of the universe, and y, the outer realms of disorder and savagery.

After detailed discussions of clothing and footwear (the Ainu’s use of fur boots rather than straw sandals occasioned much comment), the accounts generally went on to discuss diet. To Japanese observers it was striking that the Ainu grew no rice (though they bought it in considerable quantities from Japanese merchants), that they took their meals at irregular times, and that they ate deer and bear as well as salmon and a variety of other fish. Ainu skill at diving for shellfish was often remarked on, as was their use of poisoned arrows for hunting (strenuous efforts were made by the Matsumae domain to discover the secrets of Ainu arrow-poisons). Some texts also included extensive discussions of religious and burial practices, and many commented on the Ainu’s lack of a writing system. As in accounts by European travellers, the tone varied widely according to the writer. Disdain and incomprehension were common, but some Japanese travellers (like the famous explorer Mamiya Rinzō) were careful observers who had praise, as well as criticism, for Ainu
BORDER, HISTORY AND IDENTITY IN JAPAN'S FAR NORTH

culture.\textsuperscript{37} Other accounts contain a note of envy at the ‘simplicity’ of Ainu life. The scholar and statesman Arai Hakuseki, author of one of the earliest compilations of information on Ainu society, was predictably supercilious, describing the Ainu as “knowing neither rites nor justice” and living like wild animals.\textsuperscript{38} Another early eighteenth-century text, however, uses the same analogy to rather different effect: “truly they seem to be similar to wild animals, but what makes them rich in spirit is that they have few worries about food, clothing or shelter, and no need for skill in profit-making.”\textsuperscript{39}

But amidst all this consciousness of difference, there was also an inescapable sense that the Ainu were not entirely different. Arai Hakuseki began by trying to trace the origins of the Ainu through early Chinese and Japanese writings, arguing that they were “the northern Wa of ancient times” (‘Wa’ being the name given in Han Chinese writings to the inhabitants of Japan).\textsuperscript{40} Since the Japanese themselves were clearly descendants of the Wa, this suggested an unmistakable ancestral relationship between Japanese and Ainu. There was widespread awareness, too, that many of the inhabitants of northern Honshu were of Ainu ancestry. Sakakura Genjirō, who praised the simplicity of the Ainu lifestyle, was nevertheless one of the first advocates for the assimilation of the Ainu into Japanese society, and as such provided some intriguing insights into the process of defining Japaneseeseness. The Ainu, he argued, should be encouraged to take up rice-farming and become grain-eaters. “In other words, they should be turned into people of our country” (\textit{sunawachi bonpō no hito to kasubeshi to ieri}). To prove that this was possible, he cited the case of the Ainu populations of Tsugaru and Nanbu in northern Honshu that had gradually been assimilated into Japanese society.\textsuperscript{41} Japaneseeseness, it seemed, was not a matter of blood, but something which could be created (and indeed it is interesting that in Sakakura’s account the Japanese settlers of Matsumaechi, with their free-and-easy frontier lifestyle, also appear only slightly less exotic than their Ainu neighbours.\textsuperscript{42}

Questions of similarity and difference, however, were not just matters for scholarly speculation, but were inevitably entangled with questions of politics. Until the late eighteenth century, the rulers of the Matsumae domain had a vested interest in maintaining difference, rather than promoting assimilation. In other words, their concern was to differentiate Ezoichi not from the outside world but from the rest of Japan. Their monopoly over trade with the region was most easily maintained in a world where Ainu were instantly and visibly different from Japanese, and besides, their control over these ‘barbarian’ people enhanced their prestige in relation to the shogunate and other domain lords. So regulations were promulgated prohibiting Ainu from wearing such Japanese items of dress as straw sandals and conical hats.\textsuperscript{43}

From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, however, the perceived Russian threat to the north, and the need (as Honda Toshiaki had put it) to “establish a mutual frontier with other countries,” cast an entirely new light on the issue of Ainu identity. Since the 1730s Russia had been engaged in
a policy of settlement and Russification in the Northern Kurils, endowing the native Ainu and Kamchadal populations with Orthodox Christianity, Russian names and European-style clothes.\textsuperscript{44} The Japanese claim to the southern part of the region required that its population, in contrast, should be firmly defined as Japanese, and after the establishment of direct shogunal rule a policy of Japanisation was introduced, a policy mainly directed not at those who lived nearest to Matsumaechi, but rather at those who lived nearest to Russia, in particular the inhabitants of the Southern Kuril islands of Kunashir and Iturup.

These policies of acculturation are of enormous interest for what they tell us about official Tokugawa concepts of Japaneseness. In the creation of shogunal policy towards the northern frontier we can see the outlines of two competing visions of the region, each of which carried with it a distinctive idea of the relationship between Japanese and Ainu identity. From one perspective, the problem of the North was a problem of security, and the main concern was to defend the region from attack or infiltration from abroad. This involved the need to mark the Ainu with visible signs which would identify them as ‘Japanese’, while avoiding (as far as possible) policies which might arouse their hostility and encourage them to side with the ‘enemy’. From another point of view, however, the Northern question was also potentially concerned with economic development: Ezochi was (as Sakakura Genjirō had suggested) an area rich in resources which could be exploited to the benefit of the whole nation. This developmental approach entailed a much more radical policy of encouraging Japanese migration to the region, promoting farming, and in the process inevitably altering the entire Ainu way of life. In the first view of the North, issues of identity could be handled within the existing intellectual framework: ‘barbarism’ (i) could be converted into ‘civilization’ (ka) by attention to outward details of appearance, etiquette and ritual; the second view suggested the need for a more fundamental transformation of lifestyle, one which went well beyond the bounds of existing philosophies of social order.

In the creation of shogunal policy towards the North, there is evidence of an internal struggle between these two contrasting viewpoints. Proposals put forward in 1799, for example, spoke of the need to promote large-scale Japanese settlement in Ezochi, to develop roads, forestry and shipbuilding, to encourage Ainu farming, and so achieve the ‘opening-up of the country’ (kaikoku 開国).\textsuperscript{45} It very quickly became evident, though, that such ambitious schemes were far beyond the resources of the system, and that attempts to pursue them would risk destabilising the region at the very time when stability was most urgently needed. As we shall see later, agricultural development was particularly problematic because it conflicted with the interests of the powerful merchants who controlled the northern herring fisheries. Although there was some increase in the flow of seasonal Japanese labour into the Kuril fisheries, plans for encouraging migration and agricultural development were soon abandoned, and the term kaikoku was officially banished from the vocabulary of debates on the subject.\textsuperscript{46}
In the end, therefore, the Tokugawa shogunate's policies of Japanisation chose to begin with the body rather than with the soul. As Kikuchi Isao shows in his detailed study of the subject, the chief target of this first assimilation-drive was hair and clothes. Public ceremonies to 'celebrate the improvement of customs' (kaizoku no shugi 改俗の祝儀) were held at which groups of Ainu had their beards shaved and hair cut in Japanese fashion and were dressed in Japanese garments, before being treated by shogunal officials to a feast of eating and sake-drinking. In the longer term, efforts were made to teach them the Japanese language, Ainu leaders had their names transcribed into Japanese characters, and intermarriage between Ainu women and the growing number of Japanese fishery workers was encouraged (partly, no doubt, to prevent social unrest caused by rape or extramarital relationships).

These Japanisation measures may seem simple and indeed crude, yet even they were not without their own complications. For one thing, the convoluted structure of Tokugawa society provided no yardstick for a single generic Japaneseness, even as regards dress and hairstyle. Everything varied according to place in the social hierarchy, and efforts to turn the Ainu into 'people like us' involved sensitive decisions as to what sort of 'us' they should be like. As far as dress was concerned, for example, the ordinary Ainu of Iturup Island were simply given cast-off commoners' clothing, but village heads were presented with more formal haori 羽織 jackets. This marked them as superior within their own society, yet at the same time defined them as inferior to shogunal officials and Japanese merchants, who wore full suits of haori 和服 and hakama 袴 (divided skirts), or the even more formal multi-layered kamishimo 祐. Thus difference—inferiority—was codified in the very process of assimilation itself.

A second problem was that Japaneseness itself was not a fixed but a moving target. Policies for the Japanisation of the Ainu lapsed after the first decades of the nineteenth century and were not seriously revived until after the Meiji Restoration. By this time, however, official concepts of national identity were in a state of considerable flux. The government was beginning to embark on an immensely ambitious programme of reform whose aims were to modernise and industrialise the Japanese economy and strengthen national defence. In this process, Japan's major northern island, now re-named Hokkaido, had a special place. As the only area of Japan which had not been extensively settled by Japanese people, it was seen as offering a tabula rasa (or terra nullius) that could be turned into a showplace of the 'New Japan'.

Because of this symbolic role, the future of Hokkaido aroused heated debate in early Meiji intellectual circles. Some favoured a relatively laissez faire approach, which would allow the gradual development of Hokkaido's maritime and mineral wealth; others argued for a much more interventionist policy of colonisation. The government's solution, in the end, was characteristic of the new age. A team of Western experts, under the leadership of the
former US Commissioner for Agriculture Horace Capron, was invited to Japan to conduct a scientific survey of the region and advise on its future. Careful studies of climate, geology, transport and communications were carried out, the final reports revealing only that the experts disagreed just as much as the amateurs. Capron himself put forward a proposal for rapid and radical development: Hokkaido was to be settled by immigrants from other parts of Japan and its land opened up for large-scale farming using Western techniques. Since he and his fellow scientists judged the region to be unsuitable for rice-growing, he proposed that Japanese settlers be encouraged to grow wheat and eat bread—and, to complete the social ‘development’ of this Meiji Utopia, that they should live in western-style stone or brick houses, sit on western-style furniture, and adopt a wholly western-style diet.

Perhaps predictably, the Japanese government’s response to these ideas was mixed. The head of the newly-formed Hokkaido development agency (Kaitakushi開拓使) warmly welcomed Capron’s call for large-scale immigration and agricultural expansion. After the border agreement concluded with Russia in 1875, the security threat to Hokkaido seems to have diminished, opening the way for a shift in emphasis from defence to development: the Kaitakushi now liked to refer to the region not as “the key to the northern gate of Japan” but rather as hokumon no hoko 北門の宝庫, “the treasure house at the northern gate of Japan.” Capron’s vision of Hokkaido as an Asian version of New England was, however, politely ignored. Rather than bending culture to fit nature, nature was to be bent to fit culture. New hybrid rice strains were developed to survive the rigours of Hokkaido’s cold winters and dry summers, and the agricultural colonisation of the region was to be based on rice cultivation.

In this vision for Hokkaido, the original inhabitants obviously presented a problem. As one official history put it, “their character had always been submissive, so it was not necessary to used armed force in the way, for example, that Europeans had used it against Indians in the settlement of America. However, the fact that they continued to hold on to their primitive way of life did create many problems for the establishment of means by which they could be treated equally as citizens.” The issues of status which had earlier troubled the shogunate were no longer important, for in the New Japan the complex ranking systems of the Tokugawa period had been abolished. On the other hand, however, the new form of assimilation, befitting the reforming zeal of the Meiji government, was to be far more thorough-going than anything seen under the old regime. The changing shape of national identity, as reflected in assimilation policies, was partly a matter of economic expediency, but it also expressed a fundamental shift in the symbols with which Japaneseeness was identified. Now the centre of attention was no longer body, hair and clothing—the outer manifestations of the ordered world of ka—but rather work, production and economy—the lived experience of bunmei文明, a neologism introduced to render the nineteenth-
BORDER, HISTORY AND IDENTITY IN JAPAN'S FAR NORTH

The key to Japanisation in the new order, therefore, was the conversion of the Ainu into farmers. In Ainu tradition, land-rights were based on use rather than permanent ownership: anyone, for example, could mark out unused land for cultivation and had the exclusive right to that land for as long as he or she cultivated it. Once land was abandoned, however, anyone else could claim it. Under the new dispensation, with its western-inspired legal code, none of these forms of land-right were recognised; Ainu land was taken over by the government, which allotted the original inhabitants small plots to farm. Traditional Ainu hunting practices were banned, and in place of the old Japanese name ‘Ezo’, with its overtones of barbarism, the Ainu now became Kyūdojin旧士人—‘former natives’, a term redolent with the paradoxes of Meiji assimilation policy.

The central contradiction of assimilation was that, since the Ainu could not be relied upon spontaneously to behave like ‘proper’ Japanese, special measures had to be applied to them to make them do so. The most notable of these was the Former Natives Protection Law (Kyūdojin hogo hō旧士人保護法) of 1899, which provided all Ainu families with plots of land up to five hectares in area, a variety of forms of social welfare, and a formidable set of regulations on the way in which they were to live their lives. Land, for example, could not be sold without official permission or used for anything other than farming; land which was not farmed for fifteen years would be confiscated; savings accumulated by Ainu villages were to be placed under state control and used with the permission of the Minister of Home Affairs “for the common benefit of the owners”; and children were to be educated in special schools where the main emphasis was on the study of Japanese language and society. The policy of creating sameness, in short, created a monumental edifice of difference, much of which survives to the present day. (The Former Natives Protection Law, though much amended, is still on the statute book, and its removal is one of the main objects of contemporary Ainu political campaigns.)

Yet the Ainu were not content to remain simply passive victims of the Japanese government’s identity politics. During the Edo period, the official ‘Japanisation’ policies often had to be abandoned or modified in the face of Ainu resistance. Beards, in particular, were important symbols of masculine strength and dignity, and policies of ‘improving customs’ often resulted in Ainu men adopting Japanese hairstyles while retaining their flowing beards.

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Symbols of difference, including beards and traditional forms of ceremonial clothing, were jealously guarded by some communities well into the twentieth century, and even imposed identity itself became a weapon of resistance. After Japan acquired the Kuril Archipelago in 1875, for example, it confronted a perplexing paradox in the form of the Russified Ainu of Shumshu and Paramushir. Their presence was not only a potential threat to security, but also a violation of the whole edifice of Meiji nationhood, in which citizenship, language and culture were to be one. In the end, the government chose to solve the problem by moving the Northern Kuril Ainu *en masse* to the small southern island of Shikotan, where they were given plots of land and rice allowances, and encouraged to become Japanese. The authorities seem quite genuinely to have believed that this would be good for the community’s welfare. In fact, it was a disaster. The Ainu deportees succumbed to homesickness and disease, and their numbers dwindled rapidly. The one thing they did not lose was their Russian identity. Not only did they keep their Russian names, dress and religion (Figure 6), they even succeeded in converting a number of Japanese settlers on Shikotan to Orthodox Christianity.\(^5^7\) The use of imposed identity for the purpose of resistance could, however, equally well cut the other way: when the Soviet Army gained control of Etorofu at the end of the Pacific War, they found just two Ainu among the inhabitants, and both of them—to the bemusement of their would-be liberators—insisted that they were Japanese.\(^5^8\)

**The Past in the Present**

Tokugawa and Meiji colonialism therefore created a profoundly ambivalent attitude to Ainu identity and its relationship with Japanese identity. For external political purposes, it was necessary that the Ainu should be Japanese, but at the same time they were clearly different Japanese in a society where official perceptions of nationhood left no room for straightforward difference (as distinct from superiority and inferiority). To acknowledge Ainu difference would have implied acknowledging possible claims to autonomy; to deny it would have removed the intellectual justification for the Meiji government’s energetic policies of subjugation and assimilation.

This uneasy ambivalence lies at the heart not just of Ainu policy in modern Japan, but also of modern Japanese and Western scholarship on the Ainu. From the late Meiji period onwards, Ainu society became the subject of a huge outpouring of academic writing, much of it obsessed with the question of defining Ainu identity in terms of ethnic origins. Within this scholarship two rival theses emerged: one proposing that the Ainu were a people ethnically quite different from the Japanese, the other emphasising the shared ethnic origins of Japanese and Ainu. The first theory was particularly popular amongst early European ethnographers and archaeologists in Japan, but it also exerted considerable influence in Japan during the 1920s.
and 1930s, at a time when notions of ethnic purity and uniqueness were gaining an increasing hold (and thus when excluding Ainu from Japaneseness provided a means of reasserting the absolute ethnic and cultural purity of the Japanese people).59 Perhaps the most bizarre detour in the history of writings on the Ainu was a minor boom in Ainu studies which occurred in Nazi Germany, stimulated by the vain hope that, in establishing a Caucasian ancestry for these ‘ancient’ Japanese people, it would somehow be possible to bridge the gap between Nazi racist theory and the Realpolitik of the German-Japanese alliance.60

For many scholars, however, it was history rather than geography which provided the key to resolving the paradox of identity. Sameness and difference could be reconciled not by distinguishing separate ethnic and geographical origins, but by placing societies at different levels on a mental map of historical chronology. The framework for this approach was provided by the models of historical progress which Japan had imported from the west from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. Writers like Henry Thomas Buckle and François Guizot (whose works exerted a tremendous influence on Meiji westernisers) had offered a picture of human society moving step by step through successive stages in the progress of civilization. In the twentieth century, the elder Arnold Toynbee’s concept of an ‘industrial revolution’ and Vere Gordon Childe’s ideas of ‘agricultural’ and ‘urban’ revolutions had helped to crystallise this picture, defining distinct chronological ‘frontiers’ in the forward march of human society. Using these frontiers, it was possible to resolve the dilemmas of difference by consigning the unfamiliar to clearly defined regions of the past. Ainu, in short, could be seen as Japanese, but as Japanese of another historical period which the rest of Japanese society had long since left behind. In this way, their difference could be rendered fascinating, exotic and unthreatening. They could become, to borrow the title of one book on the subject, “the past in the present.”61

This approach, of course, is very similar to the view of small-scale societies presented in much twentieth-century European and American anthropology and archaeology. Seeing modern small-scale societies as a mirror of ‘our’ own past stimulates interest in and study of these societies, and the images generated by such research are not necessarily negative. In the recent writings of the philosopher Umehara Takeshi, for example, the Ainu are defined as bearers of the Jōmon hunter-gatherer culture—the earliest of all known Japanese cultures—and this culture

61 Peng and Geiser, The Ainu.
Umehara and Fujimura, *Ainu no yoake*, p.13; this approach has been criticised, *inter alia*, by Mark Hudson and Simon Kaner in "Editors’ introduction: towards an archaeology of Japanese ritual and religion," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 19, nos.2-3; see particularly p.120.


In historical times, Ainu societies relied on hunting, fishing and the collection of shellfish and plants for a large part of their diet, but there is also abundant archaeological, documentary and ethnographic evidence to show in turn is seen as containing the solution to the troubles of our modern, materialistic, ecologically degraded world: “surely we have reached a time when, unless we can learn the wisdom of hunter-gatherer society, humanity cannot survive. I believe that the Jōmon culture continues to exist most strongly in Ainu and Okinawan society. Okinawa has been quite widely influenced by Korea and China, but it is in Ainu culture that the culture of the Jōmon period survives in its purest form.”

Umehara’s view of Ainu society as a treasure-house of ancestral wisdom is in some ways not unlike the views of tribal society recently popularised by writers such as David Suzuki and David Maybury-Lewis.

But this solution to the dilemmas of identity is achieved only at the cost of de-historicising the experience of small societies like the Ainu, rendering them ‘ancient’ and ‘timeless’, and in the process often seriously distorting the nature of their past. In the case of the Ainu, efforts to define them as survivals of ancient Japan make it particularly difficult to confront one of the most fascinating aspects of their history: the story of Ainu agriculture. If Ainu culture is a fossilised version of the earliest known Japanese culture, it is necessary that the Ainu should be hunter-gatherers—people who have not yet crossed the threshold of the ‘agricultural revolution’—and this indeed is how they appear in many texts from the eighteenth century to the present day. The label, however, reflects a misunderstanding not just of the nature of Ainu society, but of the nature of historical change itself.

In historical times, Ainu societies relied on hunting, fishing and the collection of shellfish and plants for a large part of their diet, but there is also abundant archaeological, documentary and ethnographic evidence to show
that they practised at least two forms of farming. The first was dog-farming, an activity which formed the basis of the Sakhalin Ainu economy (and also seems to have been practised on a smaller scale in other parts of Ainu territory). Perhaps because dogs play a very different role in both European and Japanese society, the Ainu techniques of dog-breeding are seldom recognised as ‘farming’, yet all the available information suggests that for the Sakhalin Ainu dogs played very much the same role that cows or camels play in other societies: in other words, they provided food and clothing and acted as draft animals. In addition, of course, they were important companions in the hunt. Mamiya Rinzō, who travelled through Sakhalin in 1807–09, describes each well-to-do Ainu family as owning between five and thirteen dogs, who were selectively bred, and fed and trained with great care (Figure 7). Small and weak dogs were killed for their meat and hides, while the stronger dogs were used to pull sleds and boats. Sakhalin Ainu had well-developed veterinary techniques, which were used, for example, when castrating sled dogs—a practice that was said to make them stronger. Good-quality dogs were greatly valued and traded for high prices. As well as their use as food and beasts of burden, Cornelis Coen records that the dogs were trained to catch salmon from the rivers, and that they would tear off and eat the fish head and carry the rest of the carcass back to their owner’s house. The second form of farming involved the more familiar activities of cultivating sorghum, millet, beans and vegetables. Recent archaeological studies of sites in southern Hokkaido have produced evidence of quite substantial agriculture as early as the ninth century AD. Crops seem to have included barley, wheat, millet, and beans; some rice was also found, though this was probably imported. A number of Tokugawa texts include references to Ainu agriculture, and in more recent times the subject has been researched in some detail by scholars like Takakura Shin’ichirō and Hayashi Yoshishige. Work in the fields was generally carried out by women, who, throughout the summer months, would rise early and spend the morning tending their crops (Figure 8). Small fields were cleared along the banks of rivers, with the cut grasses and weeds being burned to provide ash as fertiliser. These fields would be cultivated for two or three years, and then allowed to return to forest. Once the seeds had been sown no fertiliser was used and fields were only occasionally weeded, but before planting seeds were sometimes soaked in a mixture of bird’s egg and extracts of various plants, which was believed to encourage germination.

When so much is known about the nature of Ainu agriculture, how is it possible that the Ainu can still routinely be defined as having been “hunters, fishermen and trappers until the Japanese moved into Hokkaido and attempted to settle them in agriculture,” and how is it that they can be held up by Umehara Takeshi as the model case of a surviving hunter-gatherer society? Part of the answer, I believe, lies in the fact that the history of Ainu agriculture so radically contradicts various deeply-rooted modern intellectual paradigms that it has sometimes become entirely invisible to observers. In Archaeological evidence suggests that dogs were eaten in many parts of Hokkaido during the Satsumon period, and that they formed part of the diet of Ainu communities in south-eastern Hokkaido in the late Tokugawa period. See Yokoyama Etsuke, Satsumon bunka [The Satsumon culture] (Tokyo: Nyū Saisensu Sha, 1990), pp.93–4; Benen kaizuka [The Benen shellmound], (Tomakomai: Tomakomai Shi Maizō Bunkazai Chōsa Sentā, 1987), p.56. Takakura Shin’ichirō is one of the few writers on the subject who identifies the Sakhalin Ainu dogs as ‘domestic livestock’ (kachiku 家畜) See Takakura Shin’ichirō, Shinpan Ainu sessaku sbi [A history of Ainu policy, revised edition] (Tokyo: San’ichi Shobō, 1972), p.31. Mamiya, Kita Ezocho züetsu, pp.319–24; on Ainu dog-farming, see also Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, The Ainu of the northwest coast of southern Sakhalin (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1974), pp.38–40. Coen, Reize van Maarten Gerritszoon Vrees, p.131. Crawford and Takamiya, “Late prehistoric plant husbandry”; see particularly p.903. Takakura Shin’ichirō, Meiji izen no Hokkaidō ni okeru nōbokuji [Farming and pastoralism in pre-Meiji Hokkaido], Hoppō Bunka Kenkyū Hōkoku, no.12 (Sapporo, 1957); Hayashi, Ainu no nōbō bunka. Hayashi Yoshishige emphasises the fact that, in contrast to Japanese shifting cultivation, Ainu farming did not involve the clearing of fields by burning (partly, perhaps, for fear that the fire would spread to surrounding forests and kill animals like deer and bear). But Matsuura Takeshirō, who visited the inland areas of Ainu territory in the 1850s, records that grass cleared from the fields was usually piled in one place and burnt, and that the ash was then scattered on the soil; see Matsuura Takeshirō (ed. Yoshida Takeko), Sanbō Ezo nissbi [A diary of three voyages to Ezo], 3 vols (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Köbunkan, 1971), 2: 51–2. Hayashi, Ainu no nōbō bunka; see also H. Watanabe, The Ainu ecosystem (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1972), p.41. New Encyclopedia Britannica, Micropaedia, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1992), vol. 1.
the first place, the very existence of Ainu agriculture upsets the attempt to construct the Ainu as preservers of the most ancient known form of Japanese culture. This in itself may not be an insuperable problem. Hayashi Yoshi-shige dealt with it by arguing that Ainu society was a survival not of Jōmon hunter-gatherer culture but of the very earliest form of Japanese agricultural society, which he associated with the late Yayoi to Kofun periods (around AD 200–500): "It is recognised," he wrote, "that Ainu material culture was influenced to no small degree by Japanese Yayoi- and Kofun-period culture. One typical example is the impact of agriculture. The Ainu being a static hunter-gatherer people, it can be said that they preserved this Yayoi- and Kofun-period Japanese agriculture almost unchanged to the present day."73 Having provided a careful and interesting description of the nature of Ainu farming techniques, Hayashi then felt impelled to go on to demonstrate that these techniques were similar to techniques found in Japan, but always more primitive than anything to be found in historical Japanese society.74

But this picture of Ainu society as a culture trapped forever on the brink of the ‘agricultural revolution’ presents some problems. For one thing, despite Hayashi’s emphasis on differences, Ainu farm techniques were remarkably like the forms of agriculture practised in various parts of Japan at least until the late eighteenth century. For example, Japanese settlers in Matsumae, whose small-scale farming activities were described by Mogami Tokunai in the 1780s, also practised shifting cultivation. They too cleared small fields, abandoning them after three to five years, and like Ainu farmers did not fertilise the soil (despite the abundance of locally produced fertiliser) or devote effort to weeding. These farming practices, besides, were not unique to Matsumae, for the farmer whom Mogami interviewed came from the island of Sado off the western coast of Japan, and said that the same techniques were used in his home district.75 Indeed, similar forms of shifting cultivation are known to have existed in many parts of Japan until relatively recent times.

Japanese farmers in Matsumae and Sado would surely have known about the more intensive farming techniques used in other parts of Japan, and the fact that their agriculture was similar to that of the Ainu suggests a rather different interpretation of this form of shifting cultivation, an interpretation that is borne out by Sakakura Genjirō’s observations of Matsumae in the 1730s. Sakakura commented that agriculture was uncommon in Matsumae, not because the soil was poor, but because the main farming season coincided with the summer months when herring swarmed in vast shoals off the coast. The lucrative

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73 Hayashi, *Ainu no nōkō bunka*, p.3.
herring fisheries drew labour away from farming, and made the very labour-intensive forms of agriculture practised in most other parts of Japan impractical. In fact, Sakakura implied that farming had at one stage been attempted on a larger scale in Matsumae, but that because of the wealth to be won from the fisheries, “the people have long since ceased to attempt farming.” In the light of these comments, it seems likely that the types of agriculture practised by the Ainu and by Japanese communities in Matsumae and Sado were not simply a primitive survival from the past, but employed techniques specifically developed to suit societies where a large amount of time was taken up with fishing or hunting activities. Small-scale, shifting cultivation with very little weeding, fertilising and irrigation would have made good sense in areas where land was abundant and labour scarce.

This close interrelationship between farming and fishing activities had crucial implications for the fate of Ainu agriculture during the Tokugawa period. For the fact is that, as the archaeologist Fukusawa Yuriko puts it, “Ainu culture is defined rather by the disappearance of cultivation than by its existence.” While there is substantial archeological evidence for farming in earlier centuries, signs of crop-growing seem to become more and more elusive in the middle to late Tokugawa period. The increasing incorporation of Ainu labour (both male and female) into the herring fisheries almost certainly had much to do with this disappearance. When Sakakura Genjirō visited the region in the 1730s, he remarked that farming was carried out by Ainu living in the mountain areas, but not by those on the coast. The extent of farming by coastal Ainu in earlier periods is not clear, but the penetration of Japanese fishing activities into the area undoubtedly discouraged cultivation.

At times, this may have been a simple question of ‘comparative advantage’: selling fish to the Japanese may indeed have been more profitable than the uncertain process of producing a small harvest of grain or vegetables. But, as is often the case in economic history, comparative advantage was, where necessary, reinforced with the gun. As Matsumae’s revenue became increasingly dependent on Ainu labour in the herring fisheries, so it became essential for Ainu farming activities to be discouraged. Mogami Tokunai noted that by the late eighteenth century the import of seeds from Matsumae to Ainu territory was prohibited, while another Edo text provides a fascinating comment on the reason why Ainu farming was carried out in remote mountain valleys rather than near to their villages: “(1) so that they [the farm fields] are not troubled by thieves; (2) because when the Japanese come to trade they complain that [crop growing] prevents fishing and suppress it.” The same story is told by Matsuura Takeshiro, an unusually observant and sympathetic Japanese traveller who visited the remoter parts of Ezochi in the mid-nineteenth century. Matsuura heard complaints from local village leaders that efforts to cultivate crops—particularly crops such as tobacco and hemp—inevitably invited reprisals from officials in Japanese trading posts,

76 Sakakura, Edo zuibitsu, pp.67, 69.
77 Fukusawa, “Emishi and the Ainu.”
78 Mogami, Ezo sōshi, p.315.
79 Quoted in Hayashi, Ainu no nō bunka, p.26 (emphasis added); surprisingly, Hayashi includes this quotation without making any comment on its implications for the development of Ainu farming.
who feared that farming might reduce the reliance of Ainu on imported Japanese products and on wage labour in the Japanese fisheries.80

De-agrarianisation was also caused by other, less obvious factors. Inland Ainu communities depended on a complex and interrelated web of food-gathering activities, one of the most important being salmon fishing. In autumn, cherry- and dog-salmon would swim up the rivers in Ainu territory to spawn, and villagers in the mountain valleys would catch the fish using spears or bag-nets.81 During the Ainu salmon-fishing season, relatively small numbers of fish were taken, and these were often caught after they had spawned. In contrast, Japanese fishing enterprises, which entered the region in growing numbers during the late Tokugawa period, used large nets to catch the fish as they entered the river mouth. The result was a drastic drop in salmon stocks which caused hardship and even famine in some inland Ainu settlements. Driven by hunger, villagers left the inland districts for the coast, where they often found employment as fishery workers.82 The drift of population away from the mountains further undermined the balance of hunting, fishing and crop-growing which had characterised the inland Ainu economy.

In other words, the incorporation of Ainu society into an increasingly close trading relationship with Japan encouraged a shift from a relatively diversified, self-sufficient economy to one which increasingly concentrated on the areas of particular Ainu ‘comparative advantage’: hunting and fishing. This led not only to a diminution of farming but also to the disappearance of other activities for which Japan was more advantageously placed. One of the most important examples was metalworking. When Mamiya Rinzo reached Sakhalin in the early nineteenth century, he found Ainu blacksmiths using techniques quite different from those which existed in Tokugawa Japan (Figure 9). This type of metalworking, he noted, had existed until recently in other parts of Ainu territory (including the north of modern Hokkaido), but had gradually vanished in the face of Japanese imports of metal goods.83 Many modern texts on Ainu culture deny that they ever possessed the ability to make metal tools.84 The process of declining self-sufficiency in early modern Ainu society is also emphasised by the historian Kaiho Mineo, who focusses particularly on the disappearance of Ainu pottery and on the growing Ainu dependence on Japanese-made tools.85

It seems probable, then, that it was the very process of early modern development which reconstituted Ainu society as an archetypal ‘hunter-gatherer’ society. The growth of trade promoted a more sharply defined division of labour between Japan and the Land of the Ainu: a division in which the latter specialised in fishing and hunting while the former specialised in farming and metalworking. In this sense, the decline of Ainu agriculture was part of the same process as the development of agricultural techniques in Tokugawa Japan: the cotton-fields of western Japan flourished with the decay of the sorghum and vegetable patches of the Ainu economy.
Just as economic development, trade and an increasingly complex division of labour has produced de-industrialisation in many modern societies, so they encouraged the de-agrarianisation of Ainu society. All of this, of course, left the way open for the Meiji state to identify Japanese-ness with agriculture, and to turn the Ainu into Former Natives by ‘introducing’ them to farming.

Conclusions

The paradoxes and contradictions which have beset the creation of identity in modern Japan recur in the history of many other societies. The formation of a modern state required the drawing of a distinct border and the imposition of some form of national identity upon all those within the border. Efforts to impose an officially defined identity on border peoples such as the Ainu, however, had an ironic effect. The very establishment of specially designed ‘assimilation’ policies marked out the objects of assimilation as different from the rest of society, creating cycles of discrimination and resistance which perpetuated difference.

The nation-state, therefore, was left with an ambiguous ideology in which minorities were at once ‘us’ and ‘not us’, and this ambiguity has had crucial repercussions for the whole structure of academic attitudes to minorities in twentieth-century society. I have argued here that one way of dealing with this dilemma was to use chronological boundaries, through which the minority could be defined as ‘us in the past’. In the case of the Ainu, this
meant consigning Ainu culture to a category called 'hunter-gatherer society' and seeing that society as a fossilised survival of the past rather than a product of continuing development. The historical evidence, though, suggests that the Ainu had increasingly *become* hunter-gatherers as a result of quite recent processes of economic change, particularly in the early modern period. From their perspective, therefore, the conventional notion of an 'agricultural revolution' as a crucial watershed in history made very little sense.

How far this experience is replicated in other modern small-scale societies is something which can only be revealed by wider comparative studies. What the story of Japan and the Ainu emphasises, however, is the importance of overcoming a deep-rooted vision of the world in which large, rich nation-states are seen as the only heirs of history, the only possessors of modernity, and difference is the product of some form of 'backwardness', the mark of societies beached on the shoals of an earlier age. The acceptance of contemporary diversity involves, I think, the acceptance of diverse historical trajectories. It is only when we can see in small societies like the Ainu an unfamiliar face of modernity rather than the familiar face of prehistory, that we can begin to transcend the divisive identities created by the frontiers of the twentieth-century nation-state.