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Subjectivity of the Ainu People Described in the Book ‘Nibutani’, Edited by Kaizawa Tadashi

A New Discovery and Approach to Ainu Research

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Ph.D. student, Rikkyo University, Tokyo, Japan. Born 1966 in Saitama Prefecture. Graduated from the Chinese Language and Literature Department at Beijing University, worked at a travel agency and secretary to Kayano Shigeru of the House of Councillors. In the aim of reevaluating the image of the Ainu outside the bounds of current Ainu research, entered Rikkyo University Graduate School Sociology Department’s Ph.D. program as a graduate student and is researching documents pertaining to Kaizawa Tadashi, her grandfather. Interests include Ainu research, life history, historical sociology, and issues pertaining to modern Ainu.

Abstract

Ainu studies still lack an inside perspective from the Ainu themselves though the importance of such perspective has been recognized for a deeper understanding of the Ainu by a few Ainu and Wajin [ethnic Japanese] postmodern scholar. To begin with, Ainu “self telling history” have been considered by researchers of Ainu studies to be “non-existent.” In other words, it can be said that the very act of dealing with modern history in relation to the Ainu by those materials was under a taboo for both the Ainu and the Wajin.

This article demonstrates that a history book of the Nibutani Community entitled “Nibutani” edited by Kaizawa Tadashi in cooperation with local residents is a rare example of modern Ainu history compiled by the Ainu themselves. The book covers all the details of each family with family trees though the Ainu hardly confessed themselves as Ainu under severe discrimination at the time. Further most of its lifestories were collected through the interviewing of those families by Kaizawa himself. As far as the contents are concerned, some stories are related to the Ainu, whereas others are seemingly related to their personal life. Thus the book presented a variety of stories that represent the then lives of the local residents in the Nibutani Community.

At the moment when ‘Nibutani’ was published the Ainu did not voluntarily talk about their own history, and neither were expected to do so. ‘Nibutani’,

which was completed by Kaizawa, connected the individually divided histories to each other, and made clear the relationships between the individuals and the community. As a result, the local residents in the Nibutani Community have appreciated this book for highlighting their own perspectives on their local history.

Purpose and Method of the Research

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that a book ‘Nibutani’, written and edited by Kaizawa Tadashi in 1981, is an epoch-making book, even at the time of the writing of this article, to the extent that it is written about and by the Ainu themselves and in the format of general communal history books. The materials that have been used in this article are those that remained after Kaizawa’s death in his study chambers at his former residence in Nibutani, Biratori-cho in Hokkaido; I attempted a basic organization of those materials while living there in 2010. In addition to those materials, interviews I conducted with several people who were involved in the creation of the ‘Nibutani’ book are also used for the writing of this article. I am a granddaughter of Kaizawa and am able to access his left materials, such as manuscripts. Furthermore, I am connected to the ancestors and the community Kaizawa has written about, both tangibly and intangibly, as an Ainu myself. This makes it possible for me to have a perspective on the Ainu, who have different history from that of Wajin (non-Ainu Japanese), from an internal viewpoint (Arai, 2010). Hopefully this perspective will strengthen my research activities.

Background of the Research

A broad overview on the background of Ainu research in relation to ‘Nibutani’ is as follows: Ainu research¹ has been framed by discourses wherein the sources used for Ainu research were only the ones described from the perspective of Wajin, and the sources described by the will and values of the Ainu were considered “non-existent”(Sasaki, T. 2010: 33). In regard to literary materials, most of them are written in the 18th century onwards and from the perspective of Wajin and, as a result, the traditional and eternal image of the Ainu appearing in the Ainu historical research is fixed in many minds (Emori 1982: 11-3). In terms of folk materials, most of them had been collected in certain areas since the 1930s in Japan; this has resulted in a single and uniform perception of the Ainu culture, despite the fact that Ainu culture was originally highly diverse both chronologically and spatially (Ko-

tani, 1996). Ainu as described in such Wajin constructed Ainu research were strictly objects and merely existed as “others” with no individual faces from the perspective of Wajin. The biggest problem in such research is that the Ainu culture is seen as a single and uniform traditional culture. Such a view makes it difficult for Ainu themselves to perceive their own history and culture as theirs and something that is connected to the present. Stereotypes formed in such a way serve to reinforce, rather than weaken, prejudices against Ainu, who bear the burden of the predicament² that has been created by the relationship with Japan.

Due to the above-mentioned reasons, Wajin-constructed and -conducted Ainu research has been severely criticized by “the Ainu with voice”, who were aware of their own ethnic identity since the end of the 1960s (Yūki, 1997). However, most of these Ainu criticisms have resulted in the extreme glorification of their own kind via a putting of themselves on the side of the victims, a lapsing into a simple “victimizer and victim”-based model (Sasaki, M. 2008: 133-8) through the lack of a reflection on the past. Such overly-positive images of the Ainu are merely reversals of the inherently negative image of Ainu created by Wajin – the other side of the same proverbial coin. Hence, it cannot be argued that those Ainu reversals alone are effective in criticizing the existing Wajin-based Ainu research for the stereotyping of the Ainu.³ Kaizawa, unlike those “Ainu with voice”, attempted to begin talking about his true self. In other words, he did not romanticize the Ainu, but rather pursued diverse images of the Ainu that reflected the real nature of the Ainu.

About Kaizawa Tadashi

Kaizawa Tadashi was born the eldest son of nine brothers in 1912 to a poor family of Nibutani village; a village in which most of the population has consisted of Ainu even up to the present-day. Today it is considered common logic that the poverty of the Ainu originates from the national policies of Japan. However, at the time of Kaizawa poverty was used as a justification for prejudice against the Ainu to prove the Ainu’s “racial inferiority.” In order to avoid prejudice, the Ainu who were conscious of their ethnic identities made efforts to be perceived as “Wajin” through “cultivation of the mind” for themselves and their own people (Baba, 1972: 230). Among them was Kaizawa, who grew up with the single objective of “becoming Sisam (Wajin)” (Kaizawa, 1993: 5-6).

After World War II, Kaizawa worked hard to acquire new agricultural skills and became one of the “leading exemplary farmers” in Hokkaido (Kayano, 1993: 279). Aside from those agricultural activities he acted in communal community

roles, for example as farmland commissioner, and organized the local young Ainu generation to develop the local industry in Nibutani. Eventually these activities made Kaizawa realize that the community issues would not be resolved only by economic reconstruction; therefore, he started to direct his efforts in the direction of the Ainu rights movement – at that time he was over forty years old. Kaizawa later served for the Ainu as the Vice Chairman of the Ainu Association of Hokkaido, and he became an icon that represents and symbolizes the Ainu People through struggling against the Japanese government for Ainu Indigenous rights.

The then-campaign for the restoration of Ainu rights primarily focused on the promotion of Ainu culture. Although helping those campaigners, Kaizawa also wrote and edited several history books of the Ainu People throughout his life, with a firm belief that rebuilding Ainu history was what was needed for the campaign.⁴ His attitude towards valuing Ainu history was prominently different from that of other activists in the same period. Kaizawa gradually started to turn his urge to become Wajin in his youth into a desire for his own ethnic awareness. He did this by being involved in the campaign for the restoration of Ainu rights and deepening his understanding of the history.

Uniqueness of ‘Nibutani’

The written communal history of Nibutani originates in Nibutani’s Community Association of 1978, where the proposal of Kayano,⁵ “Why don’t we consider the editorial of Nibutani history while the elders are alive,” was decided with a “unanimous vote (Nibutani buraku-shi hensyū iinkai, 1983: 1).” The Chairman of the time, Nitani,⁶ says that he did some behind-the-scenes work to have it voted down; however, the fact that the proposal was “unanimously” adopted exhibits how much the people in Nibutani wanted to write their own history. Kaizawa accepted the offer to be the head of the Editorial Committee, as he had already served as a member of the editorial committee of a history book on Biratori-cho and had published an article entitled “Visiting the History” through a branch of the Ainu Association of Hokkaido.

During a decade before and after the 100th anniversary of the annexation of Hokkaido by Japan, with 1968 as a peak, the time was ripe for the publication of communal history books across Hokkaido, and a large number of communal history books were published (Kuwabara, 1993: 362-3). The bookbinding style of those books resembles that of ‘Nibutani’ in the sense that they also are upholstered and stored in boxes. However, the most prominent difference between ‘Nibutani’ and other communal history books is that the former consists of the family trees

and life stories of 124 families of the 138 families total of Nibutani, only excluding those 14 who refused to be listed, with each page as allocated to each family. To my knowledge, there is no other Ainu communal history book that includes the family trees and life stories of common people. Even in 1983 and in Nibutani, where the Ainu population was large, “the word ‘Ainu’ was nearly a taboo” (Honda, 1997: 64-5). Under those circumstances it was a rather daring challenge to list family trees, exposing Ainu identities through the names of their ancestors. The refusal of potential participants to be listed in the communal history book was mainly due to the listing of such family trees. A note by Kaizawa shows that this reality made the editorial process difficult in many occasions. It is merely my assumption that Kaizawa might have requested the people of the community to talk about themselves from the inescapable standpoint of bloodline.

Through the original text left at the Kaizawa’s residence it became apparent to me that most of the life stories were documented by Kaizawa. The image of Ainu appeared no longer as an object to be described, but as a creation of the Ainu who express themselves by their own will. In these texts, Ainu speak freely about their own families in modern history. ‘Nibutani’ includes stories that are not only typically Ainu-associated, such as stories of Ainu culture, but that are also something inherently and individually unique. These stories, which are written in an animated form of first-person perspective as if the people themselves are speaking, depict various characteristics of each individual in Nibutani that may or may not be typically “Ainu.” In addition, ‘Nibutani’ pays attention to even those families that refused to be listed, so that they themselves or their ancestors could be found somewhere in the book, at the least. In general, Ainu research has ignored the “ordinary” Ainu who do not express the will to change their own situations and are not involved in Ainu culture, as if they were considered “not ethnically aware of themselves” – ‘Nibutani’ contrasts that research well. In other words, ‘Nibutani’ itself makes a counterargument against Wajin-based, stereotypical Ainu research. ‘Nibutani’, which was created by Kaizawa together with the people of Nibutani, is



Ainu family tree. Photo by Kaori Arai.

currently acclaimed by the community. The community Chairman of the time of the book's creation, Nitani, said "everyone was pleased" when the book was published, that even those who refused to be listed in the book sought after it. Nitani also said that the book impressed Wajin in Biratori-cho, who said things like "Nibutani is impressive", as there had been no attempts to create such communal history books prior to 'Nibutani' inanna Birtori. The current community Chairman and Director of the Biratori Ainu Association, Kimura,⁷ also gives it high praise:

I think that the people in Nibutani value it [this book] a lot. You can understand the history and the situation of that time in Nibutani. [...] Yes, of course, that is possible. This is my own opinion, but there are no other communities where such a book has been created. The pride of Nibutani comes from the fact that it is extraordinary that Ainu created something like this in a proper fashion within Biratori-cho.

Even now Ainu in Nibutani favor 'Nibutani', as it depicts their own history and gives them pride.

Concluding Remarks

The Law for the Promotion of Ainu Culture of 1997 could potentially solidify the traditional, yet stereotypical, image of the Ainu as a result of being built upon deficits of research about the Ainu. The enforcement of such law is likely to lead to the oppression of the diverse individual realities that each Ainu person has.

'Nibutani', edited by Kaizawa Tadashi, has not been labeled as an "academic" work since it was published for the Nibutani community. However, as mentioned earlier, it depicts a modern history of the Ainu from a viewpoint of the Ainu themselves, not from that of research merely *about* the Ainu. 'Nibutani', therefore, may in fact release the Ainu from the existing stereotypical image of the Ainu; 'Nibutani' is worth reading today.

Going forward, I wish to continue with the organization of Kaizawa's materials so as to contribute towards the rebuilding the image of the Ainu. I also intend to interpret the history of the Ainu from Kaizawa's perspective using a history-based, sociological approach, as well as an extensive reading of a wide range of research concerning the Ainu from the past, so as to reveal a fresh interpretation to society. This article represents the basis of my research.

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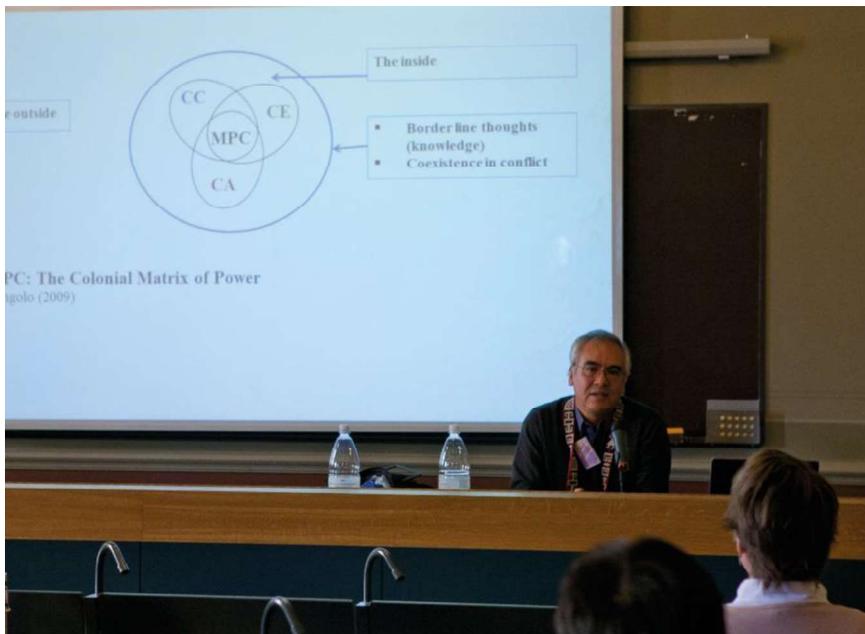
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Notes

- ¹ The Ainu research has been developed mainly around linguistics as a separate field of studies from various humanities such as historiography or anthropology though some are related.
- ² The current state of Ainu is summarized based on the research report by Hokkaido University.
- A. The college attendance rate of Ainu is only 4.7 percent (national average of Japan is 50 percent).
- B. The average household income of Ainu is 200-300 mil. JPY/year, this is 200 mil. JPY lower than national average.
- C. Discrimination against Ainu perseveres. Discrimination is especially relevant in regards to marriage patterns (Onai ed. 2010).
- ³ In regards to claims made by "Ainu with voice", Wajin researchers refrain from criticizing them due to the influence of the position of "Ainu with voice", hence it is not well-analyzed. In the future, I wish to deepen the argument on this point.
- ⁴ Other history books edited by Kaizawa are *Biratori-chōshi* and *Ainu si siryo hen 1-4*. In addition to these works, there are many history-related articles, published in both newspapers and magazines and written by Kaizawa, that I have not listed here.



Kaori Arai with interpreter Jorunn Nilsson at the Symposium. Photo by Tor Lundberg Tuorda.



Jorge Calbucura. Photo by Tor Lundberg Tuorda.

⁵ Kayano Shigeru (1926-2006). Born in Nibutani. After graduating from Nibutani Elementary [Primary] School, Shigeru worked in forestry and carpentry and at the same time began to collect Ainu objects (folk art) and folk tales. He was the recipient of many prizes. In 1994, he was elected to the House of Councilors, where he was instrumental in the creation of the *Law for the Promotion of Ainu Culture*.

⁶ Nitani Mitsugu (1928-). Born in Nibutani. After graduating from the upper grade of Biratori Primary School, Mitsugu worked in agriculture and forestry. He was interviewed twice by the author of this article, on February 23 and April 26, 2011, at the Nitani home in Nibutani.

⁷ Kimura Hidehiko (1963-). Born in Nibutani. After dropping out of Sapporo University, Hidehiko became a landscape architect in Nibutani. He was interviewed twice by the author of this article, on February 22 and April 19, 2011, at the Kimura home in Nibutani.

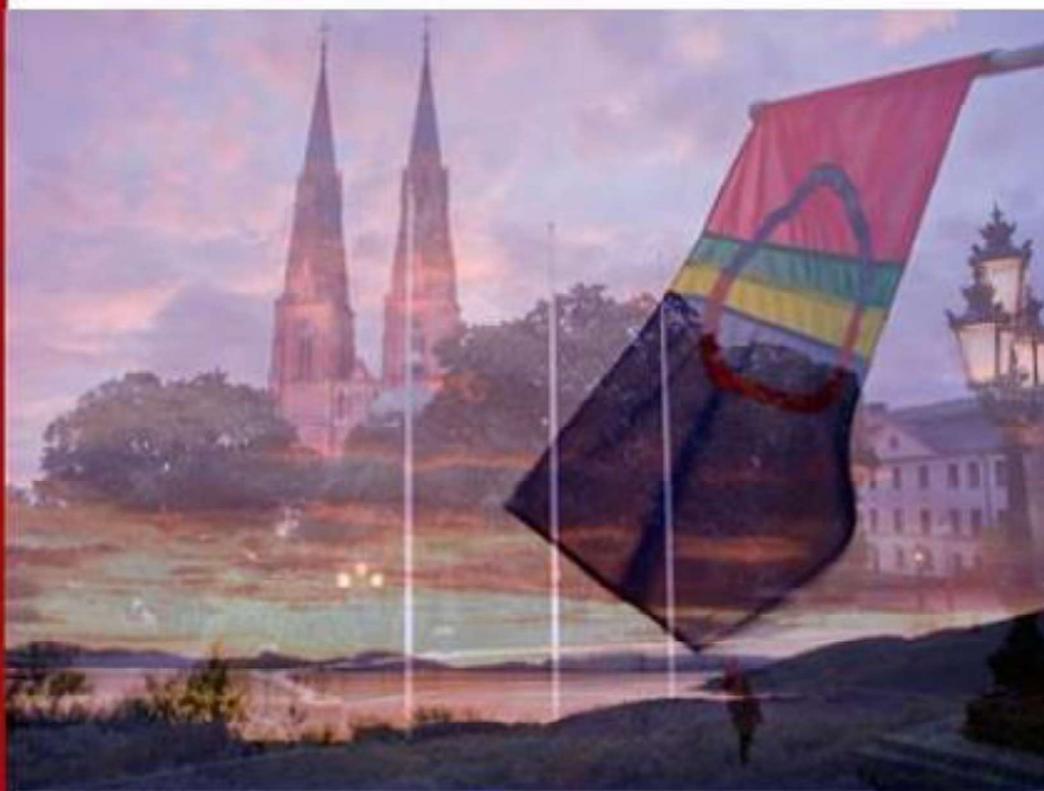


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