

Ainu Ceremonial Music and Dance "Restored" and Recontextualized

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Abstract: At the Ainu Culture Festival I attended in 2010, an ensemble of twelve young adults called Team Nikaop performed what they describe as "restorations" (fukugen) of Ainu ceremonial music and dance incorporating historical videos and other documents. This article explores the way that images of Ainu ceremonial music and dance used in Japanese museums and tourist centres throughout the 20th century are recontextualized through subtle gestures in Team Nikaop's restorations onstage and behaviour offstage and in everyday life to balance old stereotypes with new meanings that contribute to the festival's goal of garnering respect for Ainu culture.

Résumé : Lors du Festival culturel aïnou auquel j'ai assisté en 2010, un ensemble de douze jeunes adultes appelé Team Nikaop a présenté ce que l'équipe appelle des « restaurations » (fukugen) de musique et de danse cérémonielles aïnoues qui incorporent des vidéos historiques et d'autres documents. Cet article examine la façon dont les images de musique et de danse cérémonielles aïnoues utilisées dans les musées et les centres touristiques japonais au cours du 20ème siècle sont recontextualisées par les gestes subtils du Team Nikaop dans ses restaurations sur scène et son comportement hors scène et dans la vie quotidienne. En trouvant un équilibre entre les vieux stéréotypes et les significations nouvelles, le groupe contribue à l'objectif du festival de susciter le respect pour la culture aïnou.

Most Japanese people, until as late as the 1980s or 90s, believed that Assimilation policies implemented in the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century had wiped out the distinct cultural practices of the Ainu people. Ainu people, ancestors of the original inhabitants of Hokkaido and other islands north of mainland Japan, are proving otherwise by restoring and recontextualizing traditional music and other aspects of their culture in contemporary performances. Historically, Japanese colonizers and domestic

tourist companies listened to Ainu ceremonial music without understanding the sentiments that informed its original contexts, and they exploited the relationship between Ainu music and traditional animal sacrifice ceremonies to position the indigenous people as a culturally inferior race destined for extinction. The Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act of 1898 instantiated discrimination, even denying the indigenous status of the Ainu by describing them as “former” aborigines. Ainu associations that struggled to have their rights recognized were established by the 1940s, but only since the 1980s have cultural rights become a focus. The much-hated Protection Act was finally struck down in 1997 with the Japanese enactment of the Law for the Promotion of Ainu Culture, and in 2008 the Japanese government granted official recognition to the Ainu as Indigenous people according to the definition formulated by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Today, many people who identify with their Ainu heritage reclaim ceremonial music and dance through aesthetic presentations in contexts such as the annual Ainu Culture Festival (*Ainu bunka fesutabaru*). The festival is a result of a shift in Ainu activists’ focus away from welfare and assistance policies that aimed to assimilate them into mainstream Japanese society, towards decolonizing strategies inspired by the discourse of Indigenous rights and freedoms developed by Indigenous peoples around the world. Particularly after sending representatives to the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples in 1981, a previously disparate and marginalized Ainu population became more involved in global Indigeneity struggles and began to unite around their traditional music as an emblem of cultural heritage. Ainu leaders in various communities across Hokkaido were inspired to revalue the music of their ancestors both aesthetically and as a means to gain political recognition in Japan (see Siddle 1996:177-8). The Ainu Culture Festival, started in 1989, is one of the first examples of a new, globally-influenced festival format being adapted by a Japanese minority people as a platform to celebrate cultural traditions. Although there is an element of education and promotion directed towards local non-Ainu people who comprise much of the event’s audience as it moves to a new city each year, the festival is not intended as a tourist spectacle. It is similar to Hawaiian dance competitions that Amy Stillman describes, in that it is an “outward-reaching festival” in some respects, while it also functions as an “inward-reaching festival ... within and for a community” (1996:357-8). Both Ainu and non-Ainu Japanese people from the different towns or cities that host the event each year celebrate the contemporary life of Ainu traditional music and dance by attending.

In the village of Shiraoi, Hokkaido, where I attended the festival on December 23, 2010, an ensemble of six young women and six young men called Team Nikaop performed what their website describes as “restorations” (*fukugen*) of Ainu ceremonial music and dance. The members of Team Nikaop, like most Ainu people today, live in Sapporo, Tokyo, or other metropolitan centres. Many attend the same universities and institutions as non-Ainu Japanese, but they have developed methods for making everyday connections to the Indigenous culture and traditions with which they identify. In addition to participation in musical projects outside of Team Nikaop, several members are enrolled in the recently developed Ainu Studies program at Hokkaido University, and a few have found employment at museums or research centres for traditional Ainu customs. Membership in Team Nikaop, however, is among the most important commitments to Ainu heritage that many of these self-identifying Ainu people make, since the ensemble not only performs traditional music but also studies, rehearses, and researches historical recordings of it.

As part of Team Nikaop’s performance at the festival in 2010, ethnographic videos and monochrome photographs of ancestors, images of traditional weapons, maps, and other signs of Ainu-ness flashed across a jumbo video screen suspended above the stage. Despite the use of modern technology, the ensemble suggested that they were performing exactly as their ancestors had by mimicking the old videos. The technological mediation required to project the videos was striking at first glance, but only minimal changes between the action in the videos and the choreography onstage were made to suit the festival. Team Nikaop played no recorded sound during their set, and performed *a capella* without microphones or even the traditional Ainu instruments that some musicians use today.¹ When they took to the sparse stage at the multi-purpose community centre, they wore garments similar to those of the ancestors in the videos. The overall effect was that Team Nikaop was accurately continuing past traditions, and in many ways the ensemble’s “restorations” appeared transparent and objective.

Yet subtle on- and off-stage gestures conveyed different nuances, encouraging respect towards the ceremonial pieces they “restored.” Onstage gestures recontextualized ceremonial songs and dances as emblems of contemporary Ainu-ness and Indigenous rights in Japan. Offstage at the festival – itself an index of the global discourse that inspired it – movement, clothing, and social interaction connected the everyday behaviour of musicians in Team Nikaop to the de-colonizing goals of the new paradigm. In this article, my concern is how videos and images previously used in museums and tourist centres as justification for assimilating Ainu people on

the discriminatory basis of presumed cultural inferiority (see Siddle 1996) are reinterpreted through artistic performance on stage and in everyday life to convey new meanings in line with global discourses on Indigenous rights.

Ainu Ceremonial Music in Context

Historical videos of Ainu ceremonies are similar to religious texts, laws, nations' charters, or other historical documents whose meanings appear fixed independently of time and space. Scholars in different academic disciplines argue that such text-artefacts "have the ability to instantiate the timeless, context-free character of culture, which can be uniformly shared within a community and passed down across generations" (Silverstein and Urban 1996:12) through a process called "entextualization" (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Silverstein and Urban 1996). Yet, as William Hanks put it, "text (as code or work) is centred insofar as it is grounded in a locally defined social context, which functions as the source of information an author and reader draw on to flesh out the interpretation of the textual artifact (itself incomplete)" (1989:106). Hanks' notion of text, which I use in this article with reference to the videos and music that Team Nikaop restore, is that texts or text-artefacts acquire meaning from their local context. In the case of my study, videos and the music learned from those videos or other historical sources are recontextualized by artistic performances at events such as the Ainu Culture Festival. Team Nikaop redresses the history of outsider misinterpretations of Ainu ceremonial music, even while they present their own interpretations by installing videos of past performances as if they were intended for aesthetic reproduction.

Before introducing readers to Team Nikaop and their performance at the Ainu Culture Festival, it is appropriate to discuss important historical contexts that contribute to the way traditional Ainu music and dance is interpreted as text by practitioners and the non-Ainu Japanese spectators who constitute at least half of the sixty to seventy-person audience at the performance I attended. In this section, I briefly describe Ainu ceremonial music's precolonial religious context, its appropriation for domestic tourism in Japan, and its prominence as material for artistic presentation on programmes at Ainu-run cultural events. These three important social settings for Ainu ceremonial music are described separately, with chronological references to give the reader a sense of process, but in actuality both the categories themselves, and the implication that they are chronological, are oversimplifications. Traces of sacredness from ceremonial music and dance's precolonial religious use, as well as elements

of spectacle and theatricality from tourist performances, linger in the minds of Ainu and non-Ainu audience members. Through the aesthetic medium of a choreographed musical performance, the artists in Team Nikaop arrange – or “voice” (Bakhtin 1981) – elements of sacredness as well as spectacle from previous contexts to guide audience members to interpret ceremonial Ainu music as an emblem of Ainu identity that, indeed, seems timeless and context-free.

It is difficult to recount with certainty the details of Ainu music as it was practiced before colonization because Japanese assimilation policies were fierce, like those of many other countries including Canada. They banned Ainu language and culture in schools and other institutions as early as 1898.² Many Ainu intermarried and hid their roots in order to avoid the discrimination that came with an influx of Japanese settlers, schools, industry, and other colonial institutions. But testimonies of Ainu elders recorded by the Ainu Museum Foundation contain important clues to precolonial lifeways (see Akino 1999). There are descriptions of epic stories and songs, called *yukar*, in the work of some Japanese ethnologists (Chiri 1955, Kindaichi 1931), and numerous recordings of Ainu music made by Japan’s national broadcasting company and released in 1965 (NHK). The first Ainu person to be elected to the Japanese Diet, Shigeru Kanayo, produced audio recordings (released in 2008) and wrote several books that mention songs and epic stories his grandmother taught him in the 1930s (1975, 1980, 1988, 1997), some of which have been translated into English (1985, 1994). Christian missionary John Batchelor (1927) and Scottish physician Gordon Munro (1962) made passing mention of Ainu music, adding to sources available to the first wave of Ainu activists during the cultural revival of the 1980s. Today, these activists are knowledgeable practitioners working closely with younger generations who perform Ainu music and dance.

In their precolonial religious context, Ainu ceremonies were celebratory events. Testimony given by elder Zenjiro Hikawa in 1989 and later published online by the Ainu Museum Foundation, explains how members of a *kotan* (village) formed a circle around a single male dancer who was trained to conduct the primary action of a particular ceremony (Ainu 2002). Men, women, and children in the circle interlocked a variety of non-lexical vocal patterns often repeated antiphonally between two groups with a pulse created by hand claps. Ainu people with whom I have spoken during my recent fieldwork ascribe various meanings to the ceremonial dances of their ancestors. However, most of today’s practitioners agree that one of these, the *Iyomante* (“bear sending”), was the most sacred ceremony. According to Hikawa’s testimony, the purpose of the *Iyomante* was to honour a god that had taken the form of a bear in order

to travel from the “world of the gods” (*Kamui moshir*) to the “world of humans” (*Ainu moshir*). After caring for the bear exceptionally well in captivity for an undetermined period, its spirit would be returned to the heavens through song, dance, and finally ceremonial sacrifice.

The sacred aspect of Ainu ceremonial music, however, was mostly ignored in the Japanese popular imagination, to which tourist attractions catered throughout the twentieth century. Visual representations and staged performances of the *Iyomante* and other ceremonies were sensationalized to attract tourists to the “exotic” island of Hokkaido. In the 1950s and 60s, Ainu people “began to play an indispensable role in the ‘scenery’” of Japan’s most popular vacation spot (Ohtsuka 1999:92). Signs associated with Ainu people, such as bears carved into unfinished pieces of wood, embroidered tote bags, jewellery, and other handicrafts proliferated in gift shops throughout Hokkaido and are prominent even today as the only representations of Ainu culture in Japanese museums (Niessen 1994). When Ainu people took ownership of certain attractions in the 1970s, the tourist industry became useful to activists who started to hold events for Ainu communities at tourist facilities (Sjoberg 1993, Hiwasaki 2000).

The Ainu Culture Festival represents a very different context from the pre-1970s tourist presentations described above. There is no fee to attend, and its primary function is not as a spectacle for tourists. Still, many of the same signs found in tourist attractions are displayed to signal that the host facility (which changes each year) has temporarily become a place to recognize Ainu difference. At the festival in 2010, these signs functioned as markers for the audience, many of whom were non-Ainu locals from the host community, but they were also a source of pride for Ainu people who attended and volunteered. This was explained to me by an employee of the local Ainu Museum Foundation who, on an earlier visit, invited me to see the traditional Ainu clothing she made to display in the festival venue and to meet her son. He and other children would be singing Christmas songs in the Ainu language – part of a seasonable attempt to revitalize the language, which is estimated to have only ten to fifteen fluent speakers.

The word *fesutabaru* (a transliteration of the English “festival”) in the title of the *Ainu bunka fesutabaru*, rather than the more typical *matsuri*, is important. The Japanese word *bunka* has the purely referential meaning “culture,” just as *matsuri* does “festival.” However, *matsuri* indexes a Japanese-style event celebrated on national holidays as “Japanese culture” (*nihon no bunka*), which obscures Shinto and Buddhist implications and denies minority customs by naturalizing ethnic homogeneity. My non-Ainu Japanese companion, Hideyuki, seemed surprised less by English in the event title (as foreign words

are often borrowed to advertise events and products in Japan) than by the style of the formal programme. He told me that its “presentational style made it nothing like a [Japanese] *matsuri*” (*happyoukai mitati de, matsuri to chigau*). I doubt that Hideyuki connected this presentational festival style with the global discourse of Indigenous rights and freedoms that inspired it in the 1980s, or gave any thought to the indexical work done by the word *fesutabaru* to align the event with that discourse. However, he did find the style and type of listening required at the Ainu Culture Festival to be different from a typical *matsuri*, where audience members stroll about outdoors while drinking, eating, and playing games instead of paying attention to the performers.

Hideyuki and I slumped into the hard plastic chairs arranged in rows across the auditorium floor, and glanced at the programme booklets. The words “*Ainu minzoku no ongaku to odori*” (traditional Ainu music and dance) were printed next to Team Nikaop’s name in the booklet. Their performance was the next event; on stage a giant projection screen was being lowered into place for their set. It struck me that many of the signs at the festival, such as handmade Ainu clothing on display and worn by volunteers, marked the hall as a place for Ainu tradition, while others, such as the format and title of the festival itself, signified pan-Indigeneity. Still others, such as the projection screen and Ainu-language Christmas songs, seemed like free-floating or postmodern signifiers. Yet all of these signs became relevant to the context of the Ainu-run festival and affected the way attendees experienced Team Nikaop’s performance of Ainu ceremonial music.

Team Nikaop

A few weeks before attending the festival, I had sent a private message to Team Nikaop through their myspace web page. My goal was to introduce myself and explain my interest in contemporary Ainu music so as not to take anyone by surprise if I approached them with questions. Ainu people have had experiences that have led to mistrust anthropologists and researchers. Older people can still recall seeing their parents’ head circumferences measured or ancestors’ graves excavated in the name of research (see Kayano 1997). Even in recent decades, anthropologists like ann-elise lewallen [*sic*] have been told, “you are the object of Ainu contempt because you are an anthropologist, and there’s nothing you can do about it” (lewallen 2007:510; see also Watson 2006 on refusal to participate in his fieldwork with Ainu people living in mainland Japan). My initial reception by Team Nikaop at the festival was cool, although I would characterize members’ response as disinterested rather than

contemptuous. Since moving to Asahikawa in the spring of 2012 to begin fieldwork for my proposed doctoral studies, I have developed friendships with members who live there. However, my interlocutors in Asahikawa do not presume to speak on behalf of the ensemble. Team Nikaop has official leaders and contact personnel with whom my relationship has mostly involved emails and blog postings often with little response. I have incorporated insights from my 2011-2012 fieldwork into this article, but the observations made below about the ensemble's performance and the members' individual relationships to traditional Ainu music are primarily based on field notes from the festival, self-reflexive observations of a video of the festival obtained from its organizers, and blog entries and email communications with Team Nikaop's contact personnel after we met at the festival in 2010.

Internet research hardly constitutes a comprehensive ethnographic method for investigating the role of music and other cultural processes in the everyday lives of socially engaged human beings; but the combination of my experience as a festival-goer together with subsequent online communications does allow me to make some observations that might not have been possible using other means of communication. It has also laid the groundwork for future collaboration and given me a sense of the terms of my participation. Email is a revealing form of communication because even a refusal to reply to a question is sent in some sort of response (the refusal often written between the lines of an only partially relevant reply). Of course this is true of spoken refusals as well, but reviewing emails has allowed me to identify a pattern in my correspondence with members of the group. Generally, queries about traditional Ainu music as it is thought to have been practiced before colonization have been answered immediately with descriptions matching those in standard sources. On the other hand, questions about members' individual experiences as Ainu people in contemporary Japan, or their feelings of connectedness to the ancestors in the ethnographic sources they restore, are unanswered or ignored. This suggests that it is a distinctly traditional image that the individuals wish to put forward as an ensemble. They may also regard their experiences and beliefs as private or subjective and not for sharing with someone they do not know. At any rate, several features of Team Nikaop's performance support a traditional image: the clothes worn onstage, the lack of sound amplification, and the congruence between their movements and those in the historic videos.

Preservation, documentation, and restoration of traditional knowledge are the pillars of most Ainu cultural organizations today, including those with which members of Team Nikaop are connected through their workplaces or education. The Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture

(FRPAC) is affiliated with the Hokkaido University Center for Ainu and Indigenous Studies where several members study or are employed. It has a mandate to “preserve and reproduce traditional skills,” and has published a “manual for reproduction of the Ainu lifestyle and culture” (FRPAC). The Ainu Museum Foundation where several others were trained from a young age and where they now volunteer or work “seeks to understand Ainu culture comprehensively through the museum’s collection” (Akino 1999:184). These projects resonate with the approach of Team Nikaop who, according to their MySpace web page, constantly search for new sources to add to their repertoire of restored works.

Although Team Nikaop’s philosophy as an ensemble is rooted in the preservation or recovery of historical documents, members are also engaged in other projects that place traditional Ainu music in contemporary environments, positively re-shaping their significance. One woman in Team Nikaop, for example, is also a member of the Ainu Rebels, a contemporary ensemble that mixes traditional dance with rap and hip-hop aesthetics. Another sings reggae-influenced music with the Ainu rights and anti-nuclear activist Oki Kano in a group called Marewrew. Cultural exchanges with Indigenous groups in other parts of the world are important to many members. One man participated in an eight-week cultural exchange with representatives of six North American First Nations at the Burke Museum in Washington State in 2010. He and one other Ainu representative learned museum curatorial skills that they could “take home and share with the Ainu community,” according to *University of Washington Today* (University of Washington 2010b). Other Ainu representatives joined the two upon the completion of their program at the Burke Museum for “Tribal Journey” – an annual canoe trip that brings Indigenous people from around the world together to exchange cultural traditions by performing for each other and to discuss the challenges facing their communities. Another article in *University of Washington Today* claimed that Tribal Journey offered the Ainu “the opportunity to reconnect with long-held canoe paddling traditions” (University of Washington 2010a). While the effects of hip-hop, reggae, and cultural exchange with other Indigenous peoples may not be immediately perceivable in Team Nikaop’s “restorations” of Ainu ceremonial music, no doubt these experiences have inspired approaches to the performance and presentation style of Ainu culture on stage and in everyday life.

One influence of cultural exchange noticeable at the festival is Team Nikaop’s physical appearance as they move around the florescent-lit lobby before and after they perform. Otherwise undistinguishable from non-Ainu audience members, especially the younger members of the ensemble wear moccasins, jewellery, woven bags, and other pan-Indigenous or Indigenous-

looking clothing. Rather than detracting from their goal of maintaining a traditional Ainu image, these accessories index other Indigenous nations and can be seen as aligning them with global discourses of Indigenous rights. They create a feeling of connectedness to an Indigenous worldview despite the fact that there is no historical relation between Ainu culture and the clothing of other Indigenous nations, or that some of this clothing is obviously manufactured and mass marketed to consumers with little or no investment in Indigenous issues. Even if audiences are unaware that some approaches to Ainu tradition have been inspired by cultural exchange, or that members of Team Nikaop also perform hip-hop and reggae (styles associated with race-based counterculture in Japan as they are in North America),³ the attitudes associated with these movements are indexed through clothing. Because festivals emphasize visual presentation, fashion carries powerful meanings that come to bear on audience members' interpretations of Ainu ceremonial music and dance.

Presenting *Ku rimse* (Bow Dance) and *Emushi rimse* (Sword Dance) Onstage

When Team Nikaop perform, they wear traditional Ainu kimonos called *attush*. As the ensemble begins, festival attendees who had left the auditorium during the break gradually return to their seats. Team Nikaop's opening pieces are mostly traditional musical games or dances that mimic the movements of animals, not the emblematic ceremonial pieces that even non-Ainu Japanese have passing familiarity with. These opening dance pieces are intended for three or four performers. After most of the audience has returned to their seats, all twelve performers move into predetermined positions and begin the first ceremonial piece of their set, *Ku rimse* (bow dance).

While the lights are low, the male members form a semi-circle, open to the audience, around one dancer who holds a bow with arrows hanging by his side. The female members gather at the left side of the stage. As the lights come up, titles written in white font over the black video screen introduce a video clip recorded by Japan's national broadcasting company in 1954. The ancestors in the video are in the exact same configuration as the live performers. The name of the ceremonial dance (printed in Japanese) and the date and location it was recorded dissolve as the monochrome video continues. The female performers at the side of the stage begin a stylized clapping. No audio tracks for any of Team Nikaop's videos are played; instead, they perform all of the music themselves. After four beats of group hand-clapping, one member sings

a string of non-lexical vocables that further defines the pulse. This vocal pattern weaves in between clapped “beats,” while the visual movement of the singer’s arms adds another layer to the experience, one that seems almost audible from where I sit. The other women repeat the first sung pattern. The men in the circle sway rhythmically from side to side, interjecting shouts and calls that thicken the texture of the women’s singing, but the man in the middle of the stage stands still. He is the only one who does not precisely shadow his body double in the video. His composure reveals this to be intentional. Carefully, he raises his bow into the air and genuflects. He brings the bow down and joins in unison with the video and the rest of the ensemble.

After a few minutes performing in synchronization with the silent video, the clip fades to black. A new set of titles introduces a second video of *Ku rimse* performed by Ainu activist Zenjiro Hikawa as part of an *Iyomante* “bear sending” ceremony with a live bear in 1985. Team Nikaop continue performing *Ku rimse* as they had before. They do not perform the exact songs and dances associated with the *Iyomante* at any time during their set because a senior ensemble will enact the ceremony towards the end of the day. This clip of the *Iyomante*, however, imports some of the symbolic force of the well-known ceremony into the first ceremonial and full-ensemble piece of Team Nikaop’s set.

Less than a minute later there is another switch to a final projection of Team Nikaop performing live in the present moment. This real-time video actually lags a split second behind the action on stage because of the projection technology, and the ensemble self-consciously inscribes their work into Ainu history by documenting it along with their historical sources. This last video is the shortest – only long enough for the main dancer to interject a closing gesture similar to the opening genuflection, before bringing the piece to a close. The ensemble stands silently as the audience applauds. It is as if they are fixed with reverence while the screen fades to black. They do not acknowledge the audience’s applause except to stretch their arms into the air for a moment before bringing them down in an undulating motion, first to their hearts, and then to the earth. Finally, they press their palms together. The entire gestural sequence, which accompanies most Ainu prayers, is unfamiliar to my non-Ainu Japanese companion Hideyuki except that he interprets it as somehow “spiritual.” From his perspective, it is ambiguous as to whether Team Nikaop intends to acknowledge the applause, the ancestors in the video, or some supernatural force.

The creative medium of video enables Team Nikaop to use material documents to imagine and show continuity from past to present. As David Samuels observes of Native American people on the San Carlos Apache Reservation who have also dealt with misrepresentations of their history and culture, “by linking aesthetic pleasure to an imagined sense of the historical past, expression makes

the past available to people...in their imaginative and feelingful responses” (2004:39). The video projected during Team Nikaop’s presentation of *Ku rimse* places three generations of performers side by side in a narrative that suggests uninterrupted cultural transmission. Titles before each segment (except the last) give the names of the ceremonies, original performers, and the locations and dates the material was recorded. These video edits that fade in and out at various moments during the performance are a creative response to the demands of a festival. I spoke with some audience members after the performance who said that the projection created a sense that the ensemble’s performance was “authentic” (*honkaku*) and “rooted in the past” (*mukashi nagara*). These mostly non-Ainu Japanese attendees view the imagined Ainu past positively through the Team Nikaop’s presentation and the celebratory lens of the festival.

After *Ku rimse*, the lights go down for a moment and a new set of titles introduces Team Nikaop’s next ceremonial song and dance, *Emushi rimse* (sword dance). The source video footage for this restoration addresses stereotypes constructed by Imperial-era ideologues that cast the Ainu as a culturally inferior race. During World War Two the administration circulated propaganda about all Japan’s colonial subjects in order to bolster claims of racial superiority.⁴ Richard Siddle describes the effect of such rhetoric on Ainu men conscripted into the Japanese military in his book *Race, Resistance, and the Ainu of Japan* (1996). One Ainu soldier was asked if he could eat army rations, because his superiors thought his digestive system was only accustomed to the raw flesh of wild animals; another man was beaten when he inquired about his missing footwear, because other men in his unit insisted that Ainu people did not wear shoes (Siddle 1996:109-10). Ainu politician Shigeru Kayano describes how Japanese school children teased Ainu classmates by calling them “dogs” – a reference to the traditional Ainu custom for men to keep their hair and beards uncut, and a pun on the word *inu* (“dog” in Japanese) (quoted in Creighton 2003:127). In the source video for Team Nikaop’s version of *Emushi rimse*, a heavily bearded man dances barefoot with a weapon that could easily be presumed to be for hunting in Hokkaido’s wilderness – conforming in many ways to the image perpetuated by stereotypes like those described above. The group’s choreographed restoration mirrors the video so closely that it does not immediately preclude the possibility for audience interpretations based on these stereotypes simply because it is mediated by modern technology. Instead, as with *Ku rimse*, subtle physical gestures not seen in the video, such as ignoring audience applause or venerating the sword that the principal male dancer uses before and after the dance, downplay the potential for exoticization and foster an attitude of respect for the ceremonial dance. The group recontextualizes Ainu ceremonial music and dance to suit the festival by stressing the ambiguity between religious,

touristic, and artistic performance. On one hand, small deviations from source videos reveal that contemporary Ainu music and dance is refined to suit its own aesthetic ideal, not just re-animate traditions of the past. On the other hand, the recontextualizing gestures are so slight that the group does not appear to be suggesting new artistic interpretations, but rather “restoring” Ainu traditions as they have always been practiced, thereby redressing outsider misinterpretations and reclaiming original musical forms.

The vocables in *Ku rimse* and *Emushi rimse*, called *rekte*, are found in most traditional Ainu singing. *Rekte* was traditionally passed down and practiced through games. Team Nikaop, however, learn through meticulous study and restoration of archival sources. By using throat muscles and controlling breath, singers make rapid switches between falsetto and normal registers, sometimes mixing voiced and unvoiced syllables to produce a sung rhythm that is layered over an independent clapping rhythm. *Rekte* is frequently performed with more than one singer and more than one vocal part, as in Team Nikaop’s version of *Emushi rimse*. The opening pattern does not use the falsetto register but relies on precise syllabic articulation to create a pulse between two vocal parts:

The figure shows a musical score for the opening pattern of *Rekte*. It consists of three staves: vocal part A, vocal part B, and hand claps. The time signature is 4/4. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The score is divided into two measures by a double bar line with repeat dots. The first measure contains the syllables 'oh hey hey hey oh' for both vocal parts. The second measure contains 'hey hey hey oh' for both vocal parts. The hand claps are represented by 'x' marks on a staff, with a vertical line indicating the downbeat. The claps occur on the first, second, third, and fourth beats of each measure.

Figure 1: *Rekte* vocables. Opening pattern.

The tempo remains steady at an average of seventy-six beats per minute. The opening pattern switches to a second figure after about fifty seconds. The second figure is comprised of one four-beat sequence that is passed between the two groups of singers without overlap. This figure makes use of the falsetto leaps characteristic of *rekte*. There are no completely unvoiced notes but a glottal stop on the highest pitch of the pattern makes that note stand out in terms of its unique timbre and indeterminate pitch. This note is transcribed with an x-shaped note head, and the falsetto notes are marked with ⁰ in the following transcription:

The musical score is written in 4/4 time. It consists of three staves. The top staff, labeled 'vocal part A', contains a melody of four notes: a quarter note 'an', a half note 'ho', a quarter note 'hoi', and a half note 'an ho'. The second staff, labeled 'vocal part B', is silent for the first two measures and then contains the same melody as vocal part A. The third staff, labeled 'hand claps', shows a series of eight 'x' marks on a line, indicating claps on every quarter note throughout the piece.

Figure 2: *Rekte* vocables. Second pattern.

This performance of *rekte* functions as a display of Team Nikaop's virtuosity and their commitment to continuing Ainu musical traditions. Charlotte Frisbie discusses how vocables in general, but especially in Indigenous music and language, accrue meaning not only in ceremonial or song contexts where they function as cues, for instance, but also through various relationships with everyday social life where indexical value accumulates that is difficult for outsiders to appreciate (1980). The Ainu Museum Foundation director, Masahiro Nomoto, described the vocables in *Emushi rimse* as having no meaning (personal communication, 2010), but I now realize that the questions I put to Mr. Nomoto focused too narrowly on the fixed and text-like components of *Emushi rimse*'s accompanying music. The syllables used in Team Nikaop's performance gain importance from their rarity – there are very few practitioners of *rekte* today. It is perhaps even more significant that the group uncovered the technique from archives and restored it for performance in new contexts to celebrate Ainu rights in contemporary Japan. Much of *rekte*'s meaning, then, lies in the process of learning and rehearsing that is necessary to present ceremonial songs in modern contexts.

Japanese researcher Nobuhiko Chiba writes with regard to rhythm in Ainu music that some performers “clap on what seems to be the on-beat, others on the off-beat, with little apparent concern for coordination” (2008:333). However, the six female members of Team Nikaop produce a dense rhythmic texture that is obviously deliberate and carefully rehearsed. It is rich with “participatory discrepancies” that invite both performers and listeners to involve themselves in the experience of listening (Keil 1994:96). The groove is coordinated to begin precisely while stage lights are low and the video screen is black. Audience members become more attentive as a pulse emerges gradually from the silence and darkness of the stage. The camera flashes that punctuate the opening of Team Nikaop's set subside, and the video

for *Emushi rimse* begins as if the ancestors pictured on screen have been invoked by the precise clapping. The concentration the ensemble brings to the rhythmic aspect of their performance encourages respectful listening from the audience and appreciation for a particular aesthetic specific to Ainu ceremonial music.

The auditorium is silent and all attention is focused on the stage, where the ensemble employs intense facial expressions and deliberate gestures not seen in the videos. They move quickly in and out of position while the lights are low and most members pause for a deep breath before beginning. The performers are familiar with the subtleties of Japanese physical interaction and know what movements indicate mental concentration and will therefore command attention from the audience.

Audience members are further implicated in the recontextualization of Ainu ceremonial music by the position of most male performers at the side of the stage – outside the frame of the lights and on the stairs nearest the auditorium seating. The visual contrast with the video, which features a single male dancer surrounded by six women, would have been startling had these men appeared centre stage. They further obscure the line between performer and observer by singing in an improvisatory style not formally integrated into the rhythmic patterns transcribed above. They interject shouts of “ho,” “ha,” and “hey” unsystematically so that random accents enhance the rhythmic patterns sung throughout the three-minute piece. Their offstage position draws attention to the frame of the stage and highlights audience members’ role as participants in the performance.

A debate developed in the literature on performance and poetics during the 1970s and 80s as to whether greater focus should be given to either the broad context of a particular performance or the micro-social details and organizational features of the text being performed. Some argued that too much attention to subtle gestures, interactional texts, or social poetics missed the larger political and social concerns (Bronner 1988; Limón and Young 1986 [both cited in Bauman and Briggs 1990]). Others thought that overemphasis on context treated texts as fully-formed entities when really they are flexible and shaped by their surroundings (Blackburn 1981, 1986; Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz 1976; Gumperz 1982; Silverstein 1976 [all cited in Bauman and Briggs 1990]). Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs (1990) resolve that choosing between broad social cultural context or small-scale interaction oversimplifies both concerns and places unnecessary limits on the analysis of recontextualizing performances. Instead, they argue that performers make “predictions about how the communicative competence, personal histories, and social identities of their interlocutors will shape the reception of what is [performed],” (Ibid.:69) ultimately embedding these socially informed

assessments in the structure and significance of performance itself.

In my analysis, the subtle gestures and organizational features of Team Nikaop's performance are responsive to and constitutive of the discourse and political atmosphere surrounding the Ainu Culture Festival and Ainu rights in Japan. More than half of the sixty or seventy people who attended the performance were in their forties or fifties, old enough to recall the "exotic" interpretations of Ainu culture in pre-1970s tourist performances. Team Nikaop avoided indexing this painful history when, they performed a gesture associated with Ainu spiritual practice instead of bowing to acknowledge applause. Indeed there is an element of spectacle inherent in any sharply framed performance, but composed elements of their performance such as the spiritual gesture, their skilful execution of vocables and rhythmic groove, and dramatic video edits cast Ainu ceremonial music as extraordinary and worthy of high attention. Team Nikaop use their knowledge of past and present contexts for Ainu music, and make predictions about their audience's experience (whether consciously or not) to negotiate a measure of sanctity for Indigenous ceremonial music.

Extending Performance Offstage and into Everyday Life

Scholars in various academic disciplines have noted that folkloric and festival performances have the ability to transform social relationships and create awareness of social boundaries by combining elements of ritual efficacy and theatricality (Cooley 2005; Schechner 1981, 1983, 1985; Turner 1974, 1992). In terms of its ritual efficacy, Team Nikaop's performance sets Ainu ceremonial music and dance off as apart from everyday life. In terms of theatrical affect, their performance distinguishes individuals in the group as Ainu in an urban society where they are otherwise indistinguishable from non-Ainu Japanese. Both elements are brought together at the festival to grant Team Nikaop status as specialized practitioners of a rarefied tradition that is "introduced" to a different community in Japan each year. To phrase it in terms used by the academic tradition described above, once a year members of the ensemble are transformed from ordinary Japanese citizens into Ainu people through a performance that is recognized and celebrated by others. Of course, they are already Ainu people, but the process of self-identifying as any category of person in society involves performing that category so that others recognize the identification as well.

Not all affirmations of cultural heritage are made through elaborate presentations at festivals or through sharply-framed art forms; everyday life

is shot through with elements of ritual efficacy and theatricality that allow even mundane experiences to be an expression of one's roots. Deciding what clothes to wear, enjoying a certain mode of sociability, participating in ritual-like behaviours such as smoking cigarettes or almost any behaviour, if it becomes associated with conventionally recognized enactments of heritage, can evoke a sense of shared roots in everyday life.

When I looked for Team Nikaop after their set, I found several members making their way toward the indoor smoking lounge. The lounge was open to the public, but separated from the main action at the community centre. One man from the ensemble, still wearing traditional *attush*, responded warmly to my self-introduction and compliments on the performance, but when I explained my academic interest, the tone of our conversation changed. He insisted that I speak with the "male leader" (*otoko rēdā*) of Team Nikaop, and the person knowledgeable about "traditional Ainu music" (*ainu no dentou ongaku*). I recognized this man from the ensemble's internet blog, although he had changed his hairstyle from the "Mohawk" I saw online to a bleached-out buzz cut. He turned to another member, who I later found out is the "female leader" (*onna rēdā*), and asked for a lighter. She produced one from a fabric bag with a vaguely pan-Indigenous design (an approximation of a Hopi weaving pattern, or perhaps the real thing); she wore a long skirt and beaded leather moccasins. Hideyuki, who had come to help me with my less-than-perfect Japanese skills, sensed that we were intruding and suggested that I exchange email addresses and get in touch later. He thanked the ensemble for their performance and bowed as we exited the smoking area.

The members of Team Nikaop did not immediately return to an "ordinary sphere of existence" after their performance (Schechner 1981:90), but extended the social structure established by their performance of Ainu-ness by withdrawing to the lounge, smoking together, and making fashion choices that separated them a little while longer from the audience with whom they would soon go back to sharing most of the same daily experiences.

Through the idea of "restored behaviour," Richard Schechner argued that everyday social interaction exists on a continuum with theatrical performance. Social behaviour constantly entails restorations of particular versions of self, verifiable pasts, or imagined pasts. Schechner explained in personal terms: "the difference between performing myself...and more formal [presentation] is a difference of degree, not kind" (1985:37). Socializing after their performance and smoking cigarettes seem unrelated to the traditional music and ceremonies Team Nikaop restore, but these are ritual-like behaviours that can be linked with extraordinary experiences such as performing music for an audience. Dressing a particular way, smoking cigarettes, and socializing with other self-identifying

Ainu people can strengthen the feeling of being Ainu in everyday life. In sum, Team Nikaop's performance on stage reaffirms their position in society as culturally distinct Ainu people while at the festival. The group also extends this feeling offstage and into everyday life through various mundane activities linked to musical performance.

Final Dance and Beyond the Festival

The afternoon festivities culminate in an invitation for audience members to dance on stage after a senior ensemble from the Ainu Museum Foundation finishes an enactment of an *Iyomante* ceremony. The lights go up and all members of Team Nikaop return to the stage in their plain clothes to dance with the senior ensemble and members of the audience. There is no attempt to present this as a "restoration" or tradition. The atmosphere is similar to an intertribal dance at a powwow where audience members are invited to dance together with performers. The four or five non-Ainu people I spoke with during the afternoon left the auditorium after stopping near the exit for a free sample of hot rice wine. Only about fifteen or twenty audience members of various ages remain in the auditorium. I am not certain they are Ainu people, although most of them display signifiers of Indigeneity such as leather jackets, moccasins, or woven fabric accessories. They head for the stage or gather in the aisles to dance.

Gestures such as inviting audience participation or wearing clothing suggestive of Indigeneity make unspoken connections that define the terms of contemporary Ainu-ness in ways that articles and resolutions formulated in the United Nations Assembly or the Japanese Diet cannot. Both style elements, such as clothing, and events like the festival index collective identities already being negotiated by Indigenous peoples in many parts of the world. In many cases, these stylistic gestures and events draw attention to the rights and freedoms of these other Indigenous communities. As the tour guides on my visit to the Ainu Museum Foundation explained to visitors the day before the festival, Ainu people today lead lives like those of other Japanese – traditional villages, homes, foods, and ways of life barely exist. Outside of formal performance then, the members of Team Nikaop need to make efforts in order to distinguish themselves from other Japanese people. Enthusiastically participating in the final dance at the Ainu Cultural Festival which is less like a Japanese *matsuri* than a powwow, and wearing clothing associated with Indigenous peoples in North America lets members ally themselves with First Nations who – despite continued systemic discrimination – have won rights and freedoms that many Indigenous people in Asia have yet to achieve. Ethnomusicologist Beverley Diamond suggests that analysts need

to consider the importance of stylistic alliances, for, “indeed, our alliances produce our identities” (2011 [2006]:2). In addition to individual identities, alliances that Ainu performers make with global discourses on Indigenous rights recontextualize ceremonial music as an “expedient” cultural resource (Yúdice 2003) for achieving recognition as an Indigenous people internationally and at home in Japan.

Beyond the festival and across Japan, Team Nikaop brings Ainu ceremonial music to thousands of non-Ainu people. In May of 2011, members volunteered to perform for victims in tsunami-stricken communities. They have volunteered along with people indigenous to Japan’s southern island of Okinawa as well. In all of these settings, Team Nikaop “restore” Ainu ceremonial music, recontextualizing it as a dynamic tradition that responds to presently-held sentiments at the same time it helps imagine the past through artistically-conceived performance.

Conclusion

Broadly put, this case study demonstrates that the text-like formality of music allows songs and dances to be re-performed in new environments where some interpretations are encouraged over others. Connections between the features of a re-performance and the discourses surrounding that re-performance can suggest subjective or self-serving interpretations that seem objectively contained by the original musical structures rather than influenced by social and cultural surroundings. Japanese colonizers, for example, used recordings and descriptions of Ainu ceremonial music involving animal sacrifice as justification for discrimination in an era of Imperial rhetoric about Japanese racial superiority. Later, domestic tourist companies interpreted recordings and performances of the same music as “exotic” in the context of capitalist market forces that demanded resorts in previously unexplored areas of Japan like Hokkaido. Today, however, the young Ainu musicians in Team Nikaop value the ceremonial music of their ancestors as aesthetically pleasing source material for artistic presentation, in the context of celebrating Indigenous rights and freedoms recently achieved by Ainu people in Japan.

Team Nikaop’s performance at the Ainu Culture Festival also shows how music and dance can recall history. By implicating the past, contemporary performances of traditional music and dance provide marginalized people with an opportunity to redress earlier outsider misinterpretations of their culture, and reclaim authority over the musical forms of their ancestors.

In my analysis of some members of Team Nikaop’s interactional style offstage at the festival I suggest that music is useful for collectives of people in

search of shared roots and cultural recognition because it permeates everyday life. For example, the musically-motivated organization of individuals into a song and dance ensemble such as Team Nikaop, which allows its members to be recognized as culturally distinct through public performance, shares a structural coherency with everyday social interactions such as those my non-Ainu Japanese companion and I encountered in a public area after their set. After the ensemble's performance, clothing and shared activities such as smoking created intimacy while also indexing pan-Indigenous connections developed through cultural exchange with other Indigenous groups around the world. The relationship between musical performance and the experience of everyday life marks a point of departure for future investigation. Scholars interested in the social and cultural life of Ainu music today must listen closely not only to the recontextualizing performances of devoted practitioners in formal presentations on stage, but also to the way that music motivates the gestures and interactional styles of people who use it to identify with their heritage and to express the culture of Ainu people in contemporary Japan. ❁

Notes

1. The staff of the Ainu Museum Foundation performed ceremonial music and dance at the festival in 2010 accompanied by a recording that featured a synthesized string orchestra and atmospheric percussion sounds. Oki Kano sometimes performs Ainu ceremonial music with a traditional zither-like instrument called the *tonkori*, even though this instrument was not historically used for the ceremonial repertoire in Hokkaido (see Chiba 2008).
2. For more information about the Former Aborigines Protection Act responsible for these policies, see Siddle 2009.
3. See Marvin Sterling's book *Babylon East* (2010) for a discussion of the various social meanings that hip hop and reggae style have accrued in contemporary Japan.
4. See Howell 2004 for an excellent discussion of the role popular Social Darwinism played in the development of the Japanese government's policies towards Ainu people.

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