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## Establishment of the Ainu Indigenous People's Film Society

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I established the Ainu Indigenous People's Film Society in October 2014. The Ainu Indigenous People's Film Society is a private group which works to contribute to the creation of a society in which everyone, no matter what their ethnicity, can live happily. This group also promotes awareness of Indigenous peoples—not only their history and culture, but also the problems that they face at present. The group's main activities are holding a monthly film meeting, and we are planning to run an annual film festival. We disseminate information on a website (Ainu senjuminzoku deneisha 2018). I would like to introduce this group in this article, and discuss how it was formed and how it works.

A member of the Sapporo City Council (at that time) tweeted in September of 2014,

Ainu people as an ethnic group do not exist anymore. And if they did, they would be Ainu-ish Japanese, and should not be called 'Ainu people'.

I cannot explain to tax-payers why they keep exercising rights and interests.

Such posts should be considered hate speech and hate crimes that conjure prejudice, discrimination and hatred against the Ainu, and are unacceptable. It was a shame that a public official made a comment like this. However, as an Ainu person, this led me to take action and take a step forward.

At that time, I was a second year student in the master's course at Hokkaidō University of Public Policy, studying the future of public policy for Indigenous peoples. Right after the tweet by the member of the council, a few NGOs and scholars from the ethnic majority spoke out against him and wrote articles in both local and national newspapers. I thought this movement by the majority group was very healthy; however, I was not completely satisfied with the self-advocacy movement of both old and young generations of the Ainu. This was a significant motivation for me to establish my group, the Ainu Indigenous People's Film Society.

I thought the first thing to do was to have a place in which people could gather and talk about what Indigenous peoples are. After going to friends and other people with expertise for advice, I decided to have a monthly 'movie meeting', which we named the Ainu Indigenous People's Film Fest (AIPFF). The reason why I chose movies as a keyword for our group was that my aim was to gather people with a variety of interests, not only those who have strong interests in ethnic minorities. Even though more and more Ainu people are learning and practising Ainu culture and are proud of it, not many Ainu people are interested in Indigenous peoples' rights or have knowledge of what 'Indigenous peoples' are (people's or peoples' - both are used in this chapter). I hoped that this meeting would help more people become familiar with Indigenous peoples, and I wanted to think with them about a vision of what a Hokkaidō where Indigenous peoples are living should be.

Most Japanese do not often focus on their or others' ethnicity in their daily lives. So, watching movies relating to 'Indigenous peoples', selected by participants at the meeting, provides a good opportunity to think about this issue. The consciousness of 'ethnicity' or 'peoples' has not been widespread in the Japanese public. For example, not all of those who have family records of Ainu ancestry claim it. They might feel inferiority or shame, but additionally, I can say they also may not understand the concept of 'ethnicity' and 'peoples'. Likewise, the ethnic majority also may not understand these concepts. There is a tendency for Japanese people to neglect to reflect on their negative history in order to move forward. I needed to advance my activities in consideration of this aspect of the nature of Japanese people.

Excluding a single small performance, there are three organisations which plan and provide Ainu events in Sapporo. The first one is the Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture. This is a foundation established to promote Ainu culture, so the events often focus on this.

The second is the Center for Ainu and Indigenous Studies at Hokkaidō University. Events conducted by this group are mostly academic. The last one is the Sapporo Ainu Association. This group provides interactive participatory events, but the event venue is often in the suburbs because of the location of its office.

Our event would be able to bring new attention to the younger generation with movies and music—unconventional new tools. We held our first event, the 'Ainu Indigenous Film Festival', on 3 May 2015. The event had three parts: screening a film, discussion and a *tonkori* performance, an Ainu traditional musical instrument.

The film we screened was *The Sapphires*, about a female vocal group of Aboriginal Australians. Since this was the first event for us, I didn't want to make it too serious or to insist heavily on information about Indigenous peoples. Our target audience was the youth who have been less interested in Ainu or ethnic minorities. So, the film was a good choice, with tears and laughter describing human drama, rather than Indigenous peoples in a society.

The part we really could not miss was holding a discussion after the screening. We invited two young Ainu and one woman from an Indigenous Taiwanese tribe to speak. I didn't ask the two Ainu to wear our traditional clothing because I wanted to emphasise, and wanted the audience to realise, that the Ainu everywhere are leading an everyday westernised life, like other people are. The three guests talked about what being Indigenous means to them, and when they felt that they were Ainu/Indigenous Taiwanese. One of the panelists said, 'I am never without the feeling that I am the Ainu. Even when I am sleeping, eating, or drinking, I am Ainu'. I should say that this comment was a new one that gave us a chance to think about what 'ethnicity' is. This is exactly what I had hoped for.

The *tonkori* performance was the climax of this event, and we were very lucky to have the representative Ainu musician of Japan, OKI, perform. The success of this event relied heavily on his performance. We hoped for this to be an opportunity to show the Ainu living in the present, while cherishing their traditional culture.

The event was held in the middle of Sapporo, and I was moved by the fact that the word 'AINU' was shining forth from posters on the busy city streets. The event appeared in the newspaper twice and attracted about 80 people, aged from their late teens to their 40s, which exceeded the target number and age.

Everyone can participate in the events relating to the Ainu that are conducted by the three organisations, mentioned above, for free. So, I can say our event was attractive, even for its cost. Some of the audience answered in our questionnaire that this was the first time they had joined an event related to the Ainu. If it was by emphasising the casualness of the event that made it easier for people who had not cared about ethnicity, Indigenous peoples, or the Ainu before to join in, then there's nothing that could make me happier.

Recently, the Ainu Indigenous People's Film Society started a new 'roots-seeking' program, and began writing blog articles about it. As part of the program, I would go to a city hall with someone who is interested in checking their family background, and we would get a family register and search whether she/he had a family record of Ainu ancestry. I assume many people are not aware of their Ainu-ness or even their roots. The Japanese register system has some problems, which I won't go into here, so this project might be slightly controversial. However, the first person whom I searched with in June of 2015 had a good change of mind. In the end, it transpired that she didn't have any Ainu ancestry. Nevertheless, in the process of exploring her family history, and on finding out that her ancestors had come to Hokkaidō from Akita prefecture about just 70 years ago, she said, 'I am totally new to this island compared to the Ainu. I noticed that this island is the Ainu people's land and they have a right to it'. Whatever measures it takes, it is necessary to get people to think about ethnicity and the history of Ainu Mosir, Hokkaidō. Without understanding the background history, we cannot go forward. I intend to keep thinking about a vision of what a Hokkaidō, where Indigenous peoples are living, should be. Through the Ainu Indigenous People's Film Society, I will continue working until the day when my vision turns into reality.

## Reference

Ainu senjuminzoku deneisha. 2018. Online: [ainuindigenoupeoplesfilmfest.blogspot.com/](http://ainuindigenoupeoplesfilmfest.blogspot.com/) (accessed 28 June 2018).

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