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Chapter 2

Ainu Heritage and Identity

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Introduction

The act of defining ethnic groups is fraught with a number of extremely complex issues, and there are as yet no established theories on the subject. Generally, the terms *race* and *racial group* are based on biological characteristics, while the term *ethnic group* relates to shared social and cultural considerations. However, the clear definition of ethnic groups remains problematic due to a host of related issues, such as where social and cultural boundaries should be drawn and what aspects of culture should be emphasized.

Given this background, the concepts of heritage (i.e., who our ancestors were) and ethnic identity (i.e., who we consider ourselves to be) have been frequently used as factors in identifying ethnic groups. When indigenous rights are involved, heritage takes on a higher level of importance. If a person strongly identifies with an ethnic group even without having the same racial background as the majority of the group, he or she may nonetheless be recognized as a member of that group in many cases.

Hence, this chapter considers the heritage and ethnic consciousness of the survey subjects. In Section 1 (Ainu Heritage), we ascertain the present state of Ainu heritage. It is said that there are now very few Ainu that are not of mixed descent due to their rapid assimilation into and mixed parentage with Wajin since the Meiji period (1868-1912), but what is actual situation? The Hokkaido government does not give the concept of heritage absolute priority when defining Ainu identity. The Hokkaido Ainu Living Conditions Survey conducted by the Hokkaido government's Department of Environment and Lifestyle defines Ainu as people in the local community who are considered to have an Ainu bloodline and those who reside with Ainu people due to marriage, adoption, and so forth. Figures based on this definition are used in many Ainu-related research projects and materials to represent the number of Ainu people living in Hokkaido.

In Section 2 (Ethnic Consciousness), we consider ethnic awareness, and finally we examine the Ainu sense of pride in Section 3 (Pride in Ainu Ethnicity).

In this chapter, the term *Wajin* is used to describe non-Ainu Japanese people as opposed to Ainu.¹

Ainu Heritage

Of the 5,703 survey subjects, 2,386 (43.2%) indicated that their fathers were of Ainu descent, and 2,385 (43.1%) said their mothers were of Ainu descent. These two figures are almost the same, but there were many households in which only the father or only the mother was Ainu, and only 1,080 respondents (18.9% of the total) said that both their parents were Ainu descendants. The number of respondents with blood in their veins even from the grandparental generation was much lower—only 327 respondents (5.7%) said all their family members, including their maternal and paternal grandparents, were Ainu. The rest had Wajin blood somewhere prior to the grandparental generation.

Conversely, the number of respondents neither of whose biological parents were of Ainu descent (1,837, 32.2%) exceeded that of respondents whose biological parents were both Ainu. Many (1,166) had spouses of Ainu descent, and the rest were those whose adoptive parents were Ainu, those who did not know about their parents' heritage, and others.

Table 2-1 Do you have family members of Ainu descent? (by region)

	Father	Paternal grandfather	Paternal grandmother	Mother	Maternal grandfather	Maternal grandmother	Adoptive father
Ishikari Subprefecture	282 39.7	142 20.0	171 24.1	359 50.5	210 29.5	240 33.8	10 1.4
Oshima Subprefecture	91 24.7	55 14.9	27 7.3	43 11.7	23 6.2	19 5.1	3 0.8
Kamikawa, Soya and Abashiri Subprefectures	41 46.1	16 18.0	22 24.7	34 38.2	6 6.7	15 16.9	2 2.2
Tokachi Subprefecture	180 51.4	81 23.1	102 29.1	198 56.6	94 26.9	121 34.6	8 2.3
Iburi Subprefecture	851 43.6	450 23.0	487 24.9	908 46.5	477 24.4	568 29.1	48 2.5
Hidaka Subprefecture	727 47.0	385 24.9	329 21.3	632 40.9	288 18.6	348 22.5	29 1.9
Kushiro and Nemuro Subprefectures	199 43.4	123 26.8	119 25.9	185 40.3	115 25.1	142 30.9	13 2.8
Areas where the Hokkaido Utari Association has no branches	15 30.6	11 22.4	9 18.4	26 53.1	13 26.5	19 38.8	1 2.0
Total	2,386 43.2	1,263 22.8	1,266 22.9	2,385 43.1	1,226 22.2	1,472 26.6	114 2.1

Note: Excluding those indicating no response

By region, respondents who said they had no Ainu descendants in their families (108, 29.3%) and those who said they had no idea (77, 20.9%) accounted for more than half (50.2%) in Oshima Subprefecture as shown in Table 2-1. Additionally, 16.8% (77) in Kushiro and Nemuro Subprefectures and 11.1% (172) in Hidaka Subprefecture answered that they had no idea.

On the other hand, Tokachi Subprefecture had many respondents with relatively close blood relationships to the Ainu—32.6% (114) said both their parents were of Ainu descent, and 10.6% (37) said all their family members up to those in the grandparental generation were of Ainu descent. In Kushiro and Nemuro Subprefectures, where many respondents replied that they had no idea, there were also many respondents with close blood relationships to the Ainu; 13.1% (60)—more than in Tokachi—said that all family members up to those in the grandparental generation were of Ainu descent.

By age group, among those under 30, the largest number of respondents (11.7%, 104) said they had no idea. However, this does not necessarily indicate less familiarity with heritage among younger people. With older age groups, the ratio of respondents who said that they had no idea gradually decreased with age: 61 respondents (9.0%) among those in their 30s, 91 respondents (8.5%) among those in their 40s, and 89 respondents (6.7%) among those in their 50s. However, the corresponding ratio increased again among those aged 60 or older: 81 respondents (8.6%) among those in their 60s, and 50 respondents (9.1%) among those in their 70s or older.

The reasons for the significant percentage of respondents in Oshima Subprefecture answering that they had no idea of their heritage are unknown. However, as this subprefecture does not have a disproportionately large population of people below 30 years of age or those aged 70 or older, this is not considered to be a spurious correlation with age.

Units: No. of people, %

Adoptive mother	Spouse	No	No idea	Other	Parents	All family members up to paternal and maternal grandparents	Valid cases
9	210	6	37	5	130	43	711
1.3	29.5	0.8	5.2	0.7	18.3	6.0	100.0
3	81	108	77	4	9	3	369
0.8	22.0	29.3	20.9	1.1	2.4	0.8	100.0
2	32	0	7	0	18	1	89
2.2	36.0	0.0	7.9	0.0	20.2	1.1	100.0
11	121	2	12	4	114	37	350
3.1	34.6	0.6	3.4	1.1	32.6	10.6	100.0
38	704	37	94	29	384	124	1,954
1.9	36.0	1.9	4.8	1.5	19.7	6.3	100.0
25	544	48	172	7	309	58	1,547
1.6	35.2	3.1	11.1	0.5	20.0	3.7	100.0
4	146	33	77	0	105	60	459
0.9	31.8	7.2	16.8	0.0	22.9	13.1	100.0
0	13	0	2	1	6	1	49
0.0	26.5	0.0	4.1	2.0	12.2	2.0	100.0
92	1,851	234	478	50	1,075	327	5,528
1.7	33.5	4.2	8.6	0.9	19.4	5.9	100.0

Ethnic Consciousness

Ethnic consciousness is considered important in defining ethnic groups, along with factors such as language, culture, and religion. However, a lower number of respondents felt particularly aware of their Ainu ethnicity, and Table 2-2 indicates that 48.0% (2,486) of respondents—nearly half—replied that they did not feel overly aware of it at all. In particular, 66.8% (577) of those under 30—more than two thirds—said they did not feel strongly aware of their Ainu status.

On the other hand, 13.8% (712) of all respondents said that they felt constantly aware, and 11.4% (592) replied that they often felt aware of being Ainu. Among those under 30 years of age, respondents who said they felt constantly aware of it accounted only for 3.4% (29), and those who replied that they often felt aware made up a mere 5.1% (44). Even when combined, these figures do not reach 10%.

An increasing number of respondents in older age groups said they felt aware of their Ainu heritage compared with those in younger age groups. Around one out of every four people in more mature age groups said they always felt aware of being Ainu: 23.9% (215) among those aged from 60 to 70, and 26.4% (132) among those aged 70 or older. However, the number of respondents who said they never felt particularly aware of their ethnicity surpassed that of those who always felt so: 35.2% (316) among those from 60 to 70, and 38.2% (191) among those aged 70 or older.

Although levels of ethnic consciousness were found to increase in proportion to age, those who felt a particular awareness of their Ainu heritage formed a minority compared with those who did not in terms of all age groups.

Table 2-2 Do you feel particularly aware of being Ainu? (by age group)

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never	Total
Under 30	29	44	214	577	864
	3.4	5.1	24.8	66.8	100.0
30 – 39	50	70	178	359	657
	7.6	10.7	27.1	54.6	100.0
40 – 49	96	117	317	488	1,018
	9.4	11.5	31.1	47.9	100.0
50 – 59	190	157	339	555	1,241
	15.3	12.7	27.3	44.7	100.0
60 – 69	215	134	233	316	898
	23.9	14.9	25.9	35.2	100.0
70 or over	132	70	107	191	500
	26.4	14.0	21.4	38.2	100.0
Total	712	592	1,388	2,486	5,178
	13.8	11.4	26.8	48.0	100.0

Notes:

1. The units are numbers of people and percentages.

2. Excluding those with "Don't know" responses and no response (same for all cases hereafter)

Table 2-3 How would you like to live in the future? (by age group)

	Live positively as an Ainu	Live without feeling particular awareness of ethnicity	Live without revealing my Ainu ethnicity as much as possible	Other	Total
Under 30	31	212	25	4	272
	11.4	77.9	9.2	1.5	100.0
30 – 39	46	200	27	5	278
	16.5	71.9	9.7	1.8	100.0
40 – 49	80	374	31	11	496
	16.1	75.4	6.3	2.2	100.0
50 – 59	115	487	31	10	643
	17.9	75.7	4.8	1.6	100.0
60 – 69	119	372	21	11	523
	22.8	71.1	4.0	2.1	100.0
70 or over	65	212	7	3	287
	22.6	73.9	2.4	1.0	100.0
Total	456	1,857	142	44	2,499
	18.2	74.3	5.7	1.8	100.0

Notes: The units are numbers of people and percentages.

As for future lifestyles, only 18.2% (456) of respondents said that they wanted to live positively as Ainu (Table 2-3). Three out of four (74.3%) said that they wanted to live without particular awareness of ethnicity. This question also shows distinct age-group trends: While 65 respondents (22.6%) aged 70 or older said that they wanted to live positively as Ainu, only half–31 respondents (11.4%)—of those under 30 said they wanted to do so. Those replying that they wanted to live without revealing their Ainu identity as much as possible accounted for less than 10% across all age groups, but an overwhelming majority overall indicated the desire to live without particular awareness of ethnicity.

Many respondents felt no particular awareness of their Ainu heritage and wanted to continue to be that way. How can we interpret this? Let us make three observations based on the answers given to other questions and open-ended questions.

First of all, negative experiences and memories, such as discrimination, may have caused respondents to develop a negative view of Ainu classification. Discrimination against Ainu people has left a large scar on the elderly in particular.

Table 2-4 indicates that the largest number of respondents (46.3%, 1,184) cited experience of anti-Ainu discrimination as something they disliked about being Ainu, followed by physical characteristics (34.1%, 872). By age group, 29.7% (85) of those in the youngest age group—respondents under 30—cited experiencing discrimination, but a greater percentage—40.6% (116)—cited physical characteristics. In all other age groups, however, more respondents cited experiencing discrimination, and the percentage increased with more mature age groups. Among those aged 70 or older, as many as 59.4% (174) of respondents said that experience of anti-Ainu discrimination was a negative factor.

Among respondents who said that experience of anti-Ainu discrimination was something they disliked about being Ainu, 63.5% (517) cited their non-Ainu friend(s)/acquaintance(s) as the cause of such feelings. This figure is much higher than the corresponding number for Ainu friend(s)/acquaintance(s) (13.0%, 106) and school teacher(s) (12.8%, 104). It may be that such experience of discrimination has a deep effect and causes individuals to develop an inability or unwillingness to feel positive about their Ainu heritage.

The second interpretation is that the majority of Ainu people have assimilated into Wajin ethnicity, leaving few opportunities for them to feel aware of their heritage.

The third interpretation, which is related to the second and is based on answers to the survey's open-ended questions and the like, is the existence of a consciousness that can be described as a kind of cosmopolitanism. Those with this consciousness show no interest in distinctions between Ainu people and Wajin, instead considering themselves Japanese or more broadly as global citizens. As the following answers to open-ended questions indicate, their ideas of living as cosmopolitan individuals without regard to ethnicity may be suppressing lifestyles that emphasize ethnicity:

- Ainu or otherwise, I believe that all ethnic groups in the world are equal.
 - I have nothing to do with ethnic groups, races or national borders. We all live on this planet together, so I just live my life.
 - I live an ordinary life as a human.
 - I don't think that I have to do certain things just because I'm Ainu.
 - ... We are all humans, not Japanese or Ainu. We are all Japanese and global citizens.
- (Comments about the survey as a whole)

Table 2-4 Things you dislike about being Ainu (multiple answers, by age group)

Units: No. of people, %

	Ainu history	Ainu culture	Experience of anti-Ainu discrimination	Standard of living	Physical characteristics	Other	Nothing in particular	Valid cases
Under 30	7	4	85	31	116	3	101	286
	2.4	1.4	29.7	10.8	40.6	1.0	35.3	100.0
30 – 39	4	3	111	45	109	4	113	290
	1.4	1.0	38.3	15.5	37.6	1.4	39.0	100.0
40 – 49	16	11	222	97	200	13	151	497
	3.2	2.2	44.7	19.5	40.2	2.6	30.4	100.0
50 – 59	23	18	309	149	247	19	184	656
	3.5	2.7	47.1	22.7	37.7	2.9	28.0	100.0
60 – 69	9	11	283	139	133	11	159	536
	1.7	2.1	52.8	25.9	24.8	2.1	29.7	100.0
70 or over	9	13	174	87	67	0	75	293
	3.1	4.4	59.4	29.7	22.9	0.0	25.6	100.0
Total	68	60	1,184	548	872	50	783	2,558
	2.7	2.3	46.3	21.4	34.1	2.0	30.6	100.0

Table 2-5 Person(s)/thing(s) that made respondents dislike being Ainu (multiple answers)

Units: No. of people, %

	Parent(s)	Family member(s)/relative(s) other than parent(s)	Ainu friend(s)/acquaintance(s)	Non-Ainu friend(s)/acquaintance(s)	School teacher(s)	TV program(s)	Book(s)	Other	Nothing in particular	Valid cases
With experience of discrimination	25	54	106	517	104	67	28	42	107	814
	3.1	6.6	13.0	63.5	12.8	8.2	3.4	5.2	13.1	100.0
Without experience of discrimination	17	28	50	191	29	72	9	31	571	948
	1.8	3.0	5.3	20.1	3.1	7.6	0.9	3.3	60.2	100.0
Total	42	82	156	708	133	139	37	73	678	1,762
	2.4	4.7	8.9	40.2	7.5	7.9	2.1	4.1	38.5	100.0

Pride in Ainu Ethnicity

While the number of those not feeling particularly aware of their ethnicity shows a marked increase among younger people, many Ainu are also proud of their ethnicity. As shown in Table 2-6, the largest proportion of respondents (45.7%, 1,167) cited Ainu culture as a source of pride for the Ainu, followed by Ainu history (34.5%, 881). In Ainu culture, with regard to the question of what *Ainu puri* (meaning Ainu habits, customs, or manners) means, many respondents wrote answers indicating a feeling of pride, and some of these are reproduced below. This indicates that the Ainu have long cherished lifestyles with a deep reverence for nature.

“*Ainu puri* is a way of life. I believe *puri* reveals itself in everything—ways of thinking about things or people and Ainu culture as a whole, including mentality. It shows in our minds, such as in ways of communing with nature, having gratitude for things, and exhibiting kindness and affection toward others. Since I married my Ainu husband, I have come to love the concept of *Ainu puri*. I feel the utmost peace of mind and the gentleness of the world.”

“*Ainu puri* is a way for us to become aware of Ainu pride and to make efforts for the development of Ainu culture through dissemination of its traditions.”

In response to the question of who or what made respondents proud of being Ainu, the largest number cited parent(s) (37.8%, 666), indicating that Ainu teachings are continuously passed down in families (Table 2-7).

On the other hand, it is also a fact that younger age groups feel less pride in their Ainu heritage. Those who said they did not feel proud of anything in particular accounted for 26.4%—roughly one in four—among those aged 70 or older, but this figure increased to nearly half among younger age groups: 37.8% among those aged between 30 and 39, and 44.7% among those under 30. Although those who indicated pride in Ainu culture made up 45.5% of those between 30 and 39 years of age, the figure sharply decreased by nearly 10 points to 36.2% among those under 30.

Table 2-6 Sources of Ainu pride among respondents (multiple answers, by age group)

Units: No. of people, %

	Ainu history	Ainu culture	Battle against anti-Ainu discrimination	Great Ainu men and women	Physical characteristics	Other	Nothing in particular	Valid cases
Under 30	71	102	35	34	22	7	126	282
	25.2	36.2	12.4	12.1	7.8	2.5	44.7	100.0
30 – 39	85	131	52	47	15	5	109	288
	29.5	45.5	18.1	16.3	5.2	1.7	37.8	100.0
40 – 49	178	231	109	95	23	10	156	498
	35.7	46.4	21.9	19.1	4.6	2.0	31.3	100.0
50 – 59	254	306	153	123	35	16	190	659
	38.5	46.4	23.2	18.7	5.3	2.4	28.8	100.0
60 – 69	184	256	157	106	36	10	140	529
	34.8	48.4	29.7	20.0	6.8	1.9	26.5	100.0
70 or over	109	141	92	57	20	6	78	295
	36.9	47.8	31.2	19.3	6.8	2.0	26.4	100.0
Total	881	1,167	598	462	151	54	799	2,551
	34.5	45.7	23.4	18.1	5.9	2.1	31.3	100.0

Table 2-7 Person(s)/thing(s) as sources of Ainu pride among respondents (multiple answers, by age group)

Units: No. of people, %

	Parent(s)	Family member(s)/relative(s) other than parents	Ainu friend(s)/acquaintance(s)	Non-Ainu friend(s)/acquaintance(s)	School teacher(s)	TV program(s)	Book(s)	Other	Nothing in particular	Valid cases
Under 30	85	30	18	6	4	10	7	7	82	216
	39.4	13.9	8.3	2.8	1.9	4.6	3.2	3.2	38.0	100.0
30 – 39	88	42	21	11	5	19	15	4	76	229
	38.4	18.3	9.2	4.8	2.2	8.3	6.6	1.7	33.2	100.0
40 – 49	134	56	48	10	4	27	21	5	136	381
	35.2	14.7	12.6	2.6	1.0	7.1	5.5	1.3	35.7	100.0
50 – 59	158	46	78	14	3	21	21	12	152	428
	36.9	10.7	18.2	3.3	0.7	4.9	4.9	2.8	35.5	100.0
60 – 69	137	42	44	11	7	8	12	5	123	333
	41.1	12.6	13.2	3.3	2.1	2.4	3.6	1.5	36.9	100.0
70 or over	64	19	24	7	6	4	2	3	67	175
	36.6	10.9	13.7	4.0	3.4	2.3	1.1	1.7	38.3	100.0
Total	666	235	233	59	29	89	78	36	636	1,762
	37.8	13.3	13.2	3.3	1.6	5.1	4.4	2.0	36.1	100.0

Summary

This chapter highlighted the major factors involved in defining ethnic groups—heritage and ethnic consciousness. As for heritage, our survey confirmed advanced mixed parentage with Wajin as a factor, as has already been pointed out. Only 5.7% of respondents said all family members including their grandparents were Ainu, with the rest having Wajin blood from somewhere in their heritage.

As for ethnic consciousness, only 13.8% of respondents said they felt constantly aware of their Ainu heritage, and nearly half said they were usually not particularly aware of their ethnicity at all. In regard to future lifestyles, only 18.2% said that they wanted to live positively as Ainu. In this regard, the rapidly rising number of those who do not feel particularly aware of their Ainu status among younger age groups appears particularly problematic. Certain degrees of ethnic consciousness can be observed among older groups, but this trend becomes weaker among younger ones and rapidly decreases among those under 30 years of age. Such diminished levels of ethnic awareness pose a serious problem in terms of ethnic-group solidarity.

However, interpretation of this phenomenon—the increasing number of young Ainu people becoming less aware of their ethnicity—requires caution. This is because reduced ethnic consciousness may be a manifestation of skepticism toward ethnicity-based distinction or a positive consciousness of individuals identifying themselves as global citizens, rather than a manifestation of passive consciousness and attempts to conceal ethnicity.

Furthermore, many respondents indicated a sense of pride in being Ainu, particularly for Ainu culture and history. There was also a trend of lower levels of Ainu pride among younger age groups. However, as parents were overwhelmingly cited by respondents as a source of Ainu pride, it is expected that parents will hand down this pride to their children, thereby instilling it in younger generations.

Note

- 1) Much has been said about how we should define so-called Japanese people, i.e., non-Ainu people who have long lived on the Japanese archipelago. Masahito Ogawa uses the term *shamo* not as a derogatory reference but as a historical term based on his judgment that it has long been used among the Ainu and that it is reasonable to borrow it as an appellation due to the weak independent ethnic consciousness of the Japanese (Ogawa 1996:4). Based on Ogawa's comments about the term Wajin and the like, Yasutoshi Nakamura uses the term *majority Japanese* as a more neutral expression (Nakamura 2009:20).

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