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Mapping the space of Ainu people' s participation in museums:

A case study on Nibutani kotan

（博物館におけるアイヌ民族の参加状況について ―二風谷コタンの事例研究を通して―）

This research paper focuses on the participation of Ainu and local people in Ainu museums, with Nibutani as case study, a small district located in Biratori town, Hokkaido, Japan. While special attention is directed towards the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum, due to the special feature of the area, other Ainu-related facilities and activities in the area were given consideration due to several factors that will be elaborated on. As for the research design, instead of just focusing on the museum itself, several other factors including laws and other museum-related policies, and the museum visitors along with organizations involved with the museum activities were included. The main reason for this is the idea that the museum as part of the society, as a (public) institution is also subject to other external factors, while the museum also exerts some influence on the society, following the two-way relations accounted for in Practice Theory (Ortner, 2010).

The main research problems that this research tries to address are: how much voice and involvement do Ainu people actually have in museums and exhibitions about them? And how do museums enable active participation of the community or the people who are exhibition subjects? To address these, this research' s main objectives are stated below.

1. To investigate how museums can serve as a platform for Indigenous people such as the Ainu to engage in representations about themselves through identifying museum activities that allow community to participate;
2. To identify and consider other factors that may (directly or indirectly) influence museums and Ainu communities participation in such institution;
3. To explore and evaluate how active participation of local community/ Ainu people affect exhibitions and visitors museum experience through observation and interviews; and
4. To evaluate the dynamics of collaboration between museum and Ainu people with museum as a space specially at Nibutani.

The study employs mixed methods, involving ethnography with formal and informal interviews with museum personnel, people from the local community, and museum visitors. On top of these, participant-observation during my two-month internship at Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum was also undertaken. Aside from the internship, several short trips lasting for 3 days to a week was also done over the course of three years. For the quantitative component, online survey

and paper survey were done for museum visitors to capture their museum experience. The online survey was intended for the general audience, targeting Japanese and foreign museum visitors living in different parts of Japan. For a more focused exploration, paper and online survey through QR code on the visitors of the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum was also undertaken during the internship period.

The paper is mainly divided into seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the general structure of the paper and gives an overview of the over-all design of the study and clarifies the main problem as well as the objectives of the paper. The second chapter centered on the other museum stakeholders through the discussion of several laws and policies related to Ainu and the museums as well as significant Ainu-related organizations. The third chapter gives an overview of the state of Ainu museums in Japan through consideration of earlier related studies, while incorporating the results of my own field data findings, including the surveys on museum visitors. Chapter four gives consideration on the identity and representations of Ainu people in relation to their participation at museums. Results of field interviews along with earlier studies on the said topic were mainly utilized in this chapter. Chapter five gives focus on Nibutani as a case study, and gives an over-all introduction of the area, centering on the Ainu cultural activities especially those connected to the museum. Analysis and integration of the paper utilizing existing theories on museums and participation is covered in chapter 6. And finally, chapter seven gives a summary while providing recommendations for future studies.

Utilizing the concepts of Ecomuseum and Participatory Museum, this research paper's main arguments are elaborated below, in consonance with this research's objectives.

Following Clifford's (1997) proposition of museums as contact zones, wherein people of different backgrounds and perspectives come together, the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum serves as a hub in the area. To be a hub, means to be a center of activities or a place where people with varying motivations come together for a common purpose and in this case for Ainu culture transmission/experience. This particularly becomes more evident with the completion of Nibutani kotan, a maintenance project to improve the museum's vicinity. This project however did not only improve the museum vicinity but also further highlighted the interconnectivity of the museum to the unique natural and cultural features of the area. As evident in the signboards around the museum, the local (Ainu) community, the significance of other places, rivers and mountains to the Ainu culture are being introduced. In such form, it can also be interpreted that NACM, with Nibutani kotan in place, can be classified as an ecomuseum. That is because the two major components of an ecomuseum as elaborated below can be observed in Nibutani kotan:

1. link local inhabitants and visitors to their environment; and
2. museums composed of the sites, landscapes, memories of people, nature, traditions and heritage of each local community (Simeoni and De Crescenzo, 2018, p.1).

This is despite the fact that the locals or even the museum people do not regard it as such. One of the main reasons for this is that although several regional projects can be associated as ecomuseum projects, however because there are only few cases in Japan wherein the three elements of ecomuseum - heritage, participation and museum - interact on equal footing (Ohara, 2006).

Nevertheless, in the case of Nibutani, because of the place's compact feature especially when it comes to learning Ainu culture, the local history and heritage are somewhat emphasized through the local people's participation, with museum serving as the platform. In looking at Nibutani kotan as an ecomuseum, the concepts of territory, core, trail, and satellite deserve further discussion. As regionality or the unique characteristic of the locality is given emphasis in ecomuseum, it is imperative to consider the bigger Biratori town as territory since in ecomuseums, places are not only defined by conventional boundaries. This is specialty true when it comes to Ainu tradition in the area, with Biratori town having been designated as "The Cultural Landscape along the Sarugawa River Resulting from Ainu Tradition and Modern Settlement" (Japan Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2015) which suggests the expanse of the Ainu tradition in the area. Furthermore, oral tradition also influences the scope of the territory, and therefore the extent of the Sarugawa basin is an important consideration, and one that clearly goes beyond the border of Nibutani.

When it comes to the core-satellite concepts, it can be argued that Nibutani serves as the core since majority of Ainu-related projects and activities are concentrated in this area. Aside from the Iwor Projects, as majority of the population in Nibutani is said to be of Ainu descent, and no matter how small in scope, Ainu cultural activities can be observed at the area - from the seasonal wild plants picking in May, the random drying of tree barks in some houses and the kotan vicinity to the yukar and daily scenes of artisans doing their crafts at their shops or inside the iwor chise. Moreover, having the Sarugawa river adjacent to the museums with an active on-site preservation effort done in the area further enhances the value of Nibutani as a center when it comes to passing down Ainu tradition. In connection to this, it can be argued that the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum can be regarded as the core facility in the area. Aside from specializing on Ainu-related exhibitions, being a town-owned museum equips it with more resources and capabilities to operate and expand its activities. The physical location of the museum, being surrounded by the natural environment, such as the Saru River, the Iwor project within the museum vicinity, and the residential areas and local artisans practicing Ainu crafts, further strengthens its position as a hub.

With museums as hubs, visitors as well as the local community come together through the museum's several activities such as the experiential learning menu among others. Having such activities allow the visitors to have a deeper appreciation and understanding of Ainu people and culture and also engage in dialogues with the museum people and the local community. As for the community that is the subject of the exhibition, their participation is not limited

to the exhibition but also in other museum activities and programs. One of their most notable contributions is in demonstrating the intangible heritage part of their culture.

That is not however to discount the influence the role and value of the original Ainu museum, the *Shiryokan*, in the area. As majority of the initial collections at the NACM was bought from Kayano Shigeru's collection, the credibility and reputation of the collection is somehow passed on to the new facility. Since *shiryokan* was the first Ainu museum built in the area, the patronage and reputation it has gained over the years are also instrumental in bringing visitors to the area, aside from being a center of Ainu-related activities. Additionally, since the museum is being run and managed by an Ainu family, its position as a core facility should also be considered. The presence of the two Ainu museums in the area may also be indicative of how the core-satellite system may not always function in the same way as other ecomuseums. Besides, a closer look on Japanese ecomuseums, revealed that community participation is prioritized over tangibility and that decentralized structural model to replace the widely known core-satellite system are observed (Ohara, 2008, p. 44).

Clearly, the development or the completion of Nibutani Kotan, a maintenance project that started in 2016 with the main purpose of rehabilitating the museum and its vicinity, strengthened the position of NACM as a hub. As the maintenance works included road and landscaping improvement, it inadvertently links other institutions within the museum vicinity. Therefore, facilities such as the *shiryokan*, Urespa, the *kougeikan*, Iwor chise as well as the shops of the local artisans can be considered as satellites or quasi-museums as Ainu-related exhibits can be seen in these facilities. In the same way, these same facilities form part of the trail, along with the other museums, the community hall, the Munro house, the activities and projects under Iwor such as the yukar and kataribe, and even the natural landscapes such as the river banks of the Sarugawa river and also mountains associated with Ainu oral history. The compact and strategic location of the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum enables its integration to the community, and is able to take full advantage of the cultural and natural resources in the area.

Furthermore, this study also elaborates how other factors such as laws and policies, concerned individuals and groups among others influence the museums, both in the nature of the exhibitions as well as to the activities that the museums engage in. In the case of Japan, the museum's role as an educational facility has been set earlier on with its incorporation in the Basic Education Act, which was further strengthened by other succeeding policies. In addition, individuals as well as local groups who partners with the museum also influence museum activities. That is why, it is also important not to disregard these factors when studying museums and exhibitions. In the case of Biratori, it is evident how government policies and designations such as Iwor projects influences the activities in the area, as funding also becomes an important factor.

In relation to the points mentioned above, the case study at Nibutani illustrates how the active participation of the locals contributes to the way museums are perceive by the audience.

In particular, because of the locals' active participation with the museum, the visitors' museum experience is also enhanced. For example, by seeing some local's participation in museum activities, this creates an impression among museum audience, citing "credibility" since they receive first-hand information from the community itself through the museum. Results of the survey confirmed how the representation of Ainu in exhibitions remain focused on the traditional aspect of Ainu culture as pointed out by earlier researchers (Stewart and Hazuki 2006; Nakamura 2007a; Nakamura 2007b; Niessen 1994; Stewart 2012). In addition, the different needs of the visitors, especially between the foreign and Japanese visitors are partly revealed due to language barrier, among others. For that reason, the museum also needs to strategize and manage their position to cater to the different needs of their audience and to the community that is the subject of the exhibition.

In connection to the discussion on Ainu participation, this study dedicated a discussion on Ainu identity and argued that identity is complex and that there is no single Ainu identity. Through illustration of at least three different ways on how Ainu identity manifest, the study proposed that identity is not only limited to blood heritage but there are other considerations such as self and also community ascription and acceptance, among others, not to mention those who do not and cannot seem to locate their identity. This study therefore considers a more inclusive definition of who are Ainu and leaves it to the Ainu community to determine belongingness to their community as some tend to be more inclusive while there are those who are more conservative in this aspect. When it comes to the involvement of the local community to the museum, following the Participatory Museum approach (Simon, 2010), different levels of community participation is confirmed and classified as detailed in the table below.

Table 1. Classification of Participation at Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum

Activities	Contributory projects	Collaborative projects	Co-creative projects	Hosted projects
Exhibition (permanent exhibits)	●	●		
Special exhibitions		●	●	
Experiential learning	●	●		
Chisenomi (Traditional ceremonies)		●		

Chise building			●	●
Study bus tour		●		
Chipsanke (wedding rites)				●

Reiterating the differences among each project, in contributory projects, there is limited and specific participatory engagement, and it rarely connects participants to the entire process (Simon, 2010), while the institution controls the process a lot. Collaborative projects on the other hand, while it continues being controlled by the institution, but participants serve as active partners and their choices shape the design and content of the resulting product. Meanwhile, for co-creative projects, unlike the first two, participants are given more control to design a project from the beginning. Therefore, participants as co-creators, partners with museum staff to produce exhibits and programs based on community member's interests and the institution's collections, serving mutual interests in the end. With hosted projects, museums or institutions relinquish more control to participants, as they follow institution rules, and normally allow a portion of the institution's space or resources to be utilized by public groups or visitors, allowing them to produce what they want. While there is no prescribed model for all institutions as the needs and resources are unique per institution, but if the goal is to give more power or self-determination to Indigenous peoples, hosted projects and to some extent co-creative projects appear to be the ideal model.

Finally, several issues regarding the dynamics of museum and community participation are identified in this study. These include among others the low numbers of Ainu curators, the still limited participation of the local (Ainu) community, especially as museum professionals and also the lack of evaluation of the audience's reception on exhibition remains a challenge for most museums. The establishment of the National Ainu Museum (Upopoy) in Shiraoi is perceived to open up new challenges and also promising contributions to the museum-Ainu community-audience web of relations. This needs further investigation in the future as it is not discussed here in detail due to the study's limitations. In addition, since the study is focused on Nibutani, conducting a comparative study in the future between other Ainu museums in Hokkaido such as in Akan or Asahikawa with considerable Ainu population is also deemed significant. Taking note of the differences and similarities on how the museum operates here could lead to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of local (Ainu) community participation in museums.

Lastly, using or developing an evaluation system or concept model for museums that is not limited to Western standards is perceived as valuable especially in dealing with Asian museums to capture the nuances. In Asia, as relationships tend to focus and center on group dynamics,

rather than the individual, using western model would have its limitations as well. The case of Ainu people, and also of other Indigenous people in the Philippines for example shares similarities as well as differences with that of the West. The idea that Indigenous people should be left to manage their own affair, or for this study, manage their own museum, somehow comes with the assumption that they are empowered. However, such is not always the case, since in small Ainu-run museums as elaborated in this research, they are met with several difficulties without proper support from the government or other organizations. The main position of this paper is for museums to be a space that Ainu people can easily access and utilize to advance their voice and eventually be empowered enough to effect significant changes in the society.