The Ainu and the tourism sector

A critical evaluation in the light of their recognition as Japan's first indigenous people, with a specific reference to the recent opening of the Symbolic Space for Ethnic Harmony

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List of abbreviations

CEMiPos: Centre for Environmental and Minority Policy Studies
CPA: Ainu Culture Promotion Act
FRPAC: Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture
ICCPR: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
JNTO: Japan National Tourism Organization
UNDRIP: United Nations declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNWTO: United Nations World Tourism Organization
UNPFII: United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
MLIT: Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism
MEXT: Ministry of Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

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Introduction

Recently, inbound tourism has become a real 'economic engine' for Japan: according to the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), in only 10 years the number of inbound tourists increased from slightly less than 7 million in 2009 to almost 32 million in 2019.[1] Recognizing its incredible economic potential, in recent years the government started developing strategies to make Japan a 'tourism-oriented country' (*kankō rikkoku,* 観光立国). [2] Among other initiatives, in December 2019 the JNTO launched the promotional campaign 'Your Japan 2020', designed to attract domestic and foreign visitors to several destinations (Murai 2016).

Among the highlights is a cluster of facilities that goes by the name 'Symbolic Space for Ethnic Harmony' (*minzoku kyōsei shōchō kūkan,* 民族共生象徴空間 hereafter 'Space' or 'Symbolic Space'). Sponsored by JNTO as the 'national center for the revival and development of Ainu culture', the Space was built close to the town of Shiraoi, Southern Hokkaido, and opened in July 2020.[3] The three centerpieces of the Space are the National Ainu Museum, the Cultural Exchange Hall and a central depot for Ainu remains. The Space is surrounded by lake Poroto, and was selected because it recalls the connection of the Ainu to nature (Tsunemoto 2016). The JNTO advertised the Space as the perfect place 'to learn about the Ainu's rich culture through a variety of exhibits and hands-on activities': tourists can participate in woodcarving and embroidery workshops, enjoy the performance of the traditional Ainu dance, visit a recreated traditional Ainu village and assist in the re-enactment of ancient Ainu epics through new technologies.[4] The government invested 20 billion Yen (circa 160 million Euros) in the Space, which is expected to welcome 1 million visitors per year (Tandler 2020). The decision to build the Space came after the official recognition of the Ainu as Japan's first indigenous people in 2008.

According to a 2017 survey, there were 13,118 Ainu living in Hokkaido and 210 in the rest of Japan. Some are convinced that these data do not reflect the actual numbers as many Ainu do not

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[1] Statistics can be browsed via this link: https://statistics.jnto.go.jp/en/graph/#graph--inbound--travelers--transition. (Accessed 20th December 2019).

[2] Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT): https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankocho/kankorikkoku/index.html. (Accessed 20th December 2019). See also:https://japan.kantei.go.jp/98_abe/actions/201712/22article1.html. (Accessed 27th December 2019).

[3] 'Your Japan 2020' campaign has a page dedicated to the promotion of the Space: https://www.japan.travel/2020/en/campaigns/001/.

[4] Council for Ainu Policy Promotion (アイヌ政策推進会議): https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/ainusuishin/symbolic_space.html. (Accessed 10 May 2020).

take part in surveys and many are still unwilling to admit having Ainu roots, fearing prejudice (McGrogan 2010, 358). 23% of Ainu declared they experienced discrimination and the number of Ainu who received welfare assistance was 1.6 times higher than other Hokkaido citizens.[5]

Historically, the Ainu have inhabited Hokkaido, the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin at Japan's Northernmost frontier. Assimilationist policies imposed by the Japanese between 1871 and 1899 forbade them to speak the Ainu language and to perform cultural and religious practices. Starting from that period, Ainu faced increasing discrimination due to their public portrayal as 'primitives' and 'uncivilized savages' (Bird 1984, 8). In 1903, during the Fifth Industrial Exposition held in Osaka, living Ainu were exposed close to Ryūkyūans and aboriginal Taiwanese citizens in the Human Pavilion (*jinruikan,* 人類間). The exhibition was meant to display the 'races of the world' and its main goal was to prove the superiority of the Japanese and the Western countries, compared to these 'primitive others' (Ziomek 2004).

As a result of assimilationist policies and negative stereotypes, the Ainu tended to conceal their identity and began to assimilate into Japanese society. In the decades following World War II they were expected to be 'absorbed into the rapidly westernizing Japanese culture' (Hilger 1971, 201). Starting from the 1960s, however, the Ainu were deeply influenced by the global rise of the human (and indigenous) rights movement: Ainu activists and organizations attended international forums to interact with indigenous leaders worldwide. This contributed to an unprecedented awareness and pride in their distinct culture, as the result of which Ainu activists demanded the attention of Japanese politics, aiming to obtain official recognition as Japan's first indigenous people (Lie 2001, 94, Siddle 2003, 509).[6] Only in 1997, with the adoption of the Ainu Culture Promotion Act (CPA), the Japanese government agreed to acknowledge Ainu culture through museum exhibitions, international exchanges and by granting subsidies to support cultural activities, while at the same time abolishing the previous assimilationist acts.[7]

Exactly one decade after the enactment of the CPA in June 2007, the Japanese government adopted the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). One year later, the

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[5] Hokkaido Ainu Association: https://www.ainu-assn.or.jp/english/life.html.

[6] According to International Labor standard convention (ILO) n. 169, indigenous people share the following characteristics: a) cultural distinctiveness b) self-identification as a distinct collectivity c) a history of dispossession, marginalization, discrimination d) a history of continuity with their land, before that colonizers/settlers established their domain (Barnes, Gray and Kingsbury 1995).

[7] Official name: 'Law for the Promotion of the Ainu Culture and for the Dissemination and Advocacy for the Traditions of the Ainu and the Ainu Culture' (アイヌ文化の振興並びにアイヌの伝統等に関する知識の普及及び啓発に関する法律).

government officially implemented the Declaration into future legislation and thus recognized the Ainu as Japan's first indigenous people. As a consequence, an appointed Advisory Council for Ainu Cultural Promotion (*Ainu seisaku suishin kaigi*, アイヌ政策推進会議) produced a Final Report with guidelines to be implemented in a future Ainu Law.[8] The construction of the Space is defined as the 'core point' of the Report, and is meant to facilitate 'education, research, and the exhibition of the history and culture of the Ainu, as well as for the training of successors for their traditional craft skills' (2009, 24). In 2019, the New Ainu Law (*Ainu Shinpō*, アイヌ新法) came into effect, and the Ainu were finally recognized by law as the first indigenous people in Japan, having a 'distinct language, religion and culture'.[9]

The promotion of the Space as a tourist attraction is not the first time that Ainu culture is used in such a way. Ainu and tourism have a longstanding (and complex) relationship that can be traced back to the last decades of the 19th century. At that time, some Ainu communities profited from selling traditional garments and carved wooden bears to curious visitors (Ohtsuka 1999, 92). Starting from the 1950s, Ainu culture became an integral part of the touristic landscape of Hokkaido. In particular, Ainu 'tourism villages' (*kankō kotan,* 観光コタン) became a popular destination among visitors from Japan and overseas. The Ainu living there entertained tourists with performances, and sold souvenirs bearing Ainu motifs.

On the one hand, tourism generated economic benefits for the Ainu involved in these activities, and at the same time offered a 'safe space' to practice their culture and hand down traditional knowledge to next generations. On the other hand, Ainu working in tourism villages, referred to as 'tourist Ainu' (*kankō Ainu,* 観光アイヌ), were accused of 'producing' Ainu culture and 'acting Ainu' solely to earn a good salary and entertain curious visitors (Lewallen 2016, 91-92). Especially before and during the post-war period, these villages offered a 'static and ahistorical picture of the Ainu way of life' (Sjoberg 1993, 134).

This critical view of the involvement of Ainu in tourism has persisted to this day: many Ainu activists and scholars were against the decision to build the Symbolic Space, fearing that the Ainu culture would once again be commodified with little or no direct benefits for Ainu communities.

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[8] English translation of the Final Report: https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/ainu/dai10/siryou1_en.pdf. (Accessed 11 November 2018).

[9] Official name: 'Act on Promotion of Measures to Realize a Society where the Pride of Ainu People is Respected' (アイヌの人々の誇りが尊重される社会を実現するための施策の推進に関する法律). An overview of the New Ainu Law (in Japanese) can be accessed via: https://www.mlit.go.jp/common/001273133.pdf. (Accessed 1 June 2019).

Ainu tattoo artist Mai Haciya feared that the Space 'could end up becoming a theme park [...] People would come to see the dancing and other performances. It would be like a zoo' (Kelly 2019). Ainu activist Shizue Ukaji added: 'We Ainu can't understand why the Japanese Government believes that the completion of those public facilities will bring us happiness. If the Japanese government wants to use the term 'ethnic harmony' [...] it is requested that the Japanese Government make a formal apology to us Ainu for the historic injustices imposed on us' (Ukaji 2018, 172).

Various scholars have pointed out that excessive focus on the construction of the Space may distract public attention from concerns not correctly addressed in the New Ainu Law. These unsolved issues include the (mis)recognition of indigenous collective rights, the lack of a public apology by the Japanese government for the years of imposed hardship and discrimination, and lastly the controversial decision to transport to the Space the Ainu human remains from universities and other institutions in Japan and overseas (Hagaki 2019).

This essay is intended as an exploration of the relationship between the Ainu and the tourism sector, with a specific reference to the newly constructed Symbolic Space for Ethnic Harmony. The purpose of this study is to assess different interpretations and possible positive and negative outcomes of the development of the cluster of facilities that opened its doors to the public in July 2020.

This research will be framed within the broader discussion around indigenous tourism and its challenges, studied intensively for almost five decades by anthropologists, sociologists, ethnologists and policy makers. Generally speaking, indigenous tourism is specified as a type of tourism as part of which indigenous people are the main attraction. It can be beneficial to communities on an economic level, creating employment opportunities, and safeguarding indigenous cultures on the verge of disappearance. However, it is also considered a 'double-edged sword' as 'it has the potential to diminish and destroy those cultures when improperly used' (Larrakia Declaration 2012).

Until recently, only a few studies in Japanese and English have focused on the Ainu-tourism relationship and its implications. However, exploring this issue is important for many reasons. First of all, over the last century tourism has become one of the main activities in which the Ainu are engaged, making it an integral part of their contemporary social sphere (Clercq 2013). The involvement in this sector has contributed to the conservation, preservation and even to the

innovation of the Ainu culture (Lewallen 2016). The Symbolic Space is particularly important in this sense as it aims to attract an unprecedented number of tourists to Hokkaido, fueling an industry that has become one of the 'economic engines' of Japan.[10]

More broadly, this study seeks to assess the advantages and disadvantages of the Symbolic Space to Ainu life and culture, drawing from existing literature on the anthropology of (indigenous) tourism and the relationship between Ainu and the tourism sector over the years. I will thereby work towards a critical evaluation of the Space, with a specific focus on cultural commodification and control/agency over the representation of Ainu culture in a tourism venue.

This discussion will conclude with an assessment of the potential benefits of the Space, namely: cultural preservation, innovation and worldwide recognition. At the same time, I will clarify that the Space should not be taken as a substitute for indigenous policy, and that there are still many hurdles to be overcome in regards to the relationship between the Japanese government and the Ainu.

Thesis structure

The starting point of this thesis is an introductory theoretical framework on indigenous tourism and the main issues in the academic debate. The debate around the commodification of (indigenous) cultures in tourism venues evolved over time. In particular, I will focus on the phenomenon of cultural commodification and on different understandings of authenticity. In developing my overview of the field, I have decided to follow a chronological approach, starting from the late 1970s until the present day.

In the second chapter, I will provide the reader with a chronological background on the history and culture of the Ainu. The covered time-frame encompasses the period between the last three decades of the 19th century until the present day. In this section, I tried to highlight how the Ainu gradually lost their distinct language and culture due to assimilationist policies and post-war discrimination. This historical aside is necessary because, as stated by Tessa Morris-Suzuki (2014, 50), it is impossible to talk about Ainu, tourism, cultural transmission, without mentioning the

[10] The opening of the Space was scheduled in the same year of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games (now postponed to Summer 2021 due to the outbreak of COVID-19) when an average of 40 million visitors were expected to visit the country. https://www.ttrweekly.com/site/2020/01/japans-tourism-breaks-record/. (Accessed 20 June 2020).

historical relationship between the colonizing nation-state (Japan) and Ainu studies/anthropology on the other.

Next, I will analyze the connection between the Ainu and the tourism sector, starting from the 1880s. The fourth and last chapter is the climax of this research: in this section I discuss in detail the development of the Symbolic Space and its facilities. First, I will cover a brief description of the Space's facilities, then I will turn to the critics that emerged over time. The decision to transfer the Ainu human remains to the Space is also discussed, and is configured as a sub-theme that will allow me to explore the degree of control that the Ainu had over the development of the Space. [11]

Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative documentary analysis of primary sources such as newspaper articles (Japanese national newspapers as well as international sources), policy documents, and leaflets that explain the details of the facilities included in the Space. Another valuable primary source is the Final Report forwarded to the Chief Cabinet Secretary and successive documents published by the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs (*bunkachō,* 文化庁). [12]

Furthermore, I have analyzed articles and audiovisual materials about the Space, published on the website of the Centre for Environmental and Minority Policy Studies (CEMiPos). The Center, founded by Hiroshi Maruyama in 2016, supports indigenous populations and minorities that faced discrimination through multidisciplinary academic research and has always maintained a critical position regarding the Space.

[11] In this essay, the terms 'human remains', 'return' and 'transfer' are borrowed from Nakamura (2017). Human remains are the physical remains of the body of a person of Ainu ancestry; return means that something is sent back to where it belonged originally and transfer specifies the change over the possession or control of something.

[12] https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/bunkazai/ainu/. (Accessed 10 December 2019).

Chapter 1: Indigenous tourism, commodification, authenticity and control

According to the UN, indigenous tourism is 'a vehicle to address numerous problems experienced by more than 5000 different groups of Indigenous people living in more than 70 countries, with c. 5% of the world's population, yet accounting for about 15% of the world's poor who continue to suffer discrimination, marginalization, extreme poverty and conflict' (2009). Indigenous tourism can be a vehicle for preserving, safeguarding and promoting ancient cultures, while empowering socially and economically marginalized and/or remote cultures. At the same time, it can also lead to negative outcomes, such as 'racism, exploitation, disrupted lifestyles, battered ecosystems, inconsistent profit, eviction from traditional lands, destruction of habitat and inequity in project planning' (Carr et al. 2016).

Although scholarly attention to indigenous tourism grew exponentially over the last decade, early contributions to the field can be traced back to the late 1970s. In selecting relevant studies that emerged during almost five decades of scholarly investigation, I focused on the most important and influential voices that dominated the academic debate over the years.

'We came to see the "others"'

> *Cultures of all types - ethnic, regional and like- that are able to translate their qualities into marketable commodities and spectacles find themselves maintained, experienced, and globalized.*
>
> (Firat 1995, 188).

In *Tourism and Indigenous People* (1996), Richard Butler and Tom Hinch defined 'indigenous tourism' as 'any tourism activity in which indigenous people are *directly involved* either through *control* and/or by having their *culture* serve as the essence of the attraction' (emphasis added, 2). 'Indigenous,' 'ethnic' or 'aboriginal' tourism are terms often used interchangeably to depict the same phenomenon (Yang, Wall 2009, 509). However, indigenous and aboriginal tourism involve

indigenous people, as opposed to ethnic tourism in which those involved are not necessarily indigenous (Carr et al. 2016, 1069).

Anthropologist Valene Smith uses 'ethnic tourism' to refer to the activity of gazing on the 'quaint customs of indigenous and often exotic people' (1977, 2). In their essay collection *Tourism, Ethnicity and the State in Asian and Pacific Societies* (1997), anthropologist Michel Picard and sociologist Robert Wood clarified that these 'exotic people' are clearly distinguishable because they are 'most clearly bounded and culturally different' from the rest of the population (8). As such, indigenous tourism is a phenomenon that takes place when the tourists can enjoy and participate in some form of 'cultural otherness' (1997, 1). Throughout this essay, I will refer to 'indigenous tourism' as a specific kind of touristic activity that has an indigenous or aboriginal culture as the focus of attraction, but as part of which the people themselves retain some degree of control over the activities that are part of the attraction.

According to Butler and Hinch, indigenous tourism was legitimized as a subject of scholarly debate in 1977, when Valene Smith edited *Hosts and Guests,* a collection of essays that focused on the impact of tourism from an anthropological perspective. From the outset, the debate has focused on the potential benefits and threats of tourism to hosting cultures. One of the most distinguishable potential effects of tourism is the dramatic change of the local culture in the name of market logic, that in some instances has lead to the loss of 'authenticity' or 'local color'. This phenomenon is known as 'cultural commodification,' or 'commoditization', and takes place in tourism venues where culture – whether indigenous, aboriginal, or ethnically diverse – is the focus of the attraction to visitors.

Commodification and authenticity: early interpretations

The phenomenon of cultural commodification in tourism venues was introduced for the first time in 1977 by Davydd Greenwood in his essay 'Culture by the Pound', one of the case studies included in *Hosts and Guests*. The author was convinced that when a specific culture enters the tourism market, it is 'altered and often destroyed by the treatment of it as a tourism attraction' (136). To prove his point, he analyzed the ritual of the Alarde, celebrated every year since 1638 in the Basque community of Fuenterrabia (Spain) to commemorate the victory over the French army. Even today,

the 17th century atmosphere is 'recreated' in the village and all the inhabitants take part in the celebration playing music, wearing traditional clothing and joining the parade. Originally, the ritual was meant to be performed for the inhabitants of the city, not for outsiders. However, to accommodate the enormous tourism flux (the Alarde takes place in tourism season) many facilities were built and the ritual gradually turned into a public show performed solely for outsiders. Thus, the citizens, once deeply committed, became rapidly disinterested in the Alarde. The intrusion of the tourism industry in the commemoration, 'violated the meaning of the ritual, definitively destroying its authenticity and its power for the people' (136). Greenwood saw loss of authenticity and meaning for the inhabitants as a direct consequence of the interference of the tourism industry and market logic.

In 1988, anthropologist Eric Cohen suggested that in a tourism context, the phenomenon of cultural commodification is strictly related to the issue of 'authenticity'. This assumption can be traced back to 1973, when Dean MacCannell coined the term 'staged authenticity', a socially constructed kind of authenticity offered to tourists interested in experiencing the 'authentic' culture. However, it is always molded and casted to satisfy the expectations of observers and to conform to market logic. According to Stroma Cole (2007), after Greenwood and MacCannell's observations, it became a common assumption in the academic field that the commodification of culture turned performances into marketable 'products', inevitably resulting in the loss of meaning and authenticity.

If an indigenous culture is the target of a tourism attraction, the phenomenon of commodification and the consequent loss of authenticity becomes particularly striking (Wang 1999, 350). The desire to experience the 'real, untamed' other, not corrupted by societal constructs and modern technology is one of the strongest drives that guides tourists to discover indigenous cultures, often imagined as 'distant'. At the same time, as suggested by the quote opening this section, an indigenous culture needs to market itself if it wants to attract potential tourists and survive.

Later developments: towards a more inclusive and flexible approach to commodification and authenticity

The academic debate evolved over time and some scholars challenged this 'negative' view on commodification of culture and tried to formulate a different and more inclusive conception of

authenticity. One of the first to move away from these assumptions was Cohen (1988). He pointed out that when a culture is modified, a *new* meaning can emerge, and that staged rituals can benefit both the performers and the observers. The former are actively engaging in cultural activities that otherwise might get lost, while the latter can enjoy and 'accept as authentic' the rituals staged. In fact, each tourist bears with them a different experience that influences his perception of authenticity. As a response to MacCannell's 'staged authenticity', Cohen introduced 'emergent authenticity' as a kind of 'negotiable' authenticity that emerges in tourism performances and products. According to Cohen, some cultural practices judged 'inauthentic' may be perceived as authentic over time. He mentions, for instance, the case of the Inti Raymi, a revival of an ancient Inca festival in Kuzko, and the carvings produced by the Eskimo (Cohen 1988, 945).

Later, sociologist Ning Wang (1999) identified three different kinds of authenticity applicable in context of tourism: 'objective' (museum-like), 'constructive' (or symbolical) and 'existential'. The first depends upon the inherent originality of the artifacts, while the second refers to what Cohen called 'emergent authenticity'. Conversely, existential authenticity refers to performances that affect the personal perceptions of tourists. In this case, the interpretation of the authenticity of the performance is influenced by the previous experiences and emotions of the audience involved. Wang defined 'existential authenticity' as an 'authenticity of Being': the quest for authenticity becomes the quest for the Self, and is independent from the inherent authenticity of the toured object/experience. While they must be viewed as a suggestion rather than an arriving point, Wang's observations gave more prominence to the personal experience of the tourist, rather than the inherent authenticity or originality of the artifacts.

Swiss anthropologist Regina Bendix had already raised a new view in regards to the problematic nature of commodification in 1989, when she explored the development of tourism in the Swiss village of Interlake. In early 20th century, new tourism resorts were being built in Interlake, and the local community chose to entertain visitors by displaying 'folk' cowherders' culture. Bendix explored the emergence of 'invented traditions' in the village as occasions to display the folkloric culture of Interlake. Tourism provided an input for the endeavor, but the outcome resulted in cultural preservation and community involvement.

Bendix is critical of Greenwood's observation. She believes that the presence of money in the negotiation over cultural displays does not necessarily rob them of their inherent meaning and

importance for the communities involved. Even though there are vast differences between these communities, the Alarde and Interlake examples illustrate how communities and cultures react differently to the intervention of tourism: some perceive this interference in a negative way and tend to detach from the performances, perceiving them as 'less authentic', while others are not influenced negatively and even encourage tourists to take part in the celebrations.

As the field and its conceptualizations of culture evolved, Greenwood's views changed accordingly. Almost three decades after the publication of his influential 'Culture by the Pound', Greenwood admitted to having conducted his research postulating a 'homogeneous image of the "culture" of Fuenterrabia' (2004, 167). Without taking distance from his previous critical views on the cultural impact of tourism on the community, he admitted that his observations had offered a limited view of the process. He conceded that it is important to consider cultures not as static elements, but as constantly changing. As such, the destruction of one thing can be considered the construction of something else.

Such debates continued to revolve around the question of whether cultural performances become less authentic after the intrusion of the tourism industry and market logic—and the implications of such developments. In *Native Tours* (2010), anthropologist Erve Chambers pointed out that the answer to this issue depends on our interpretation of authenticity. On the one hand, we could follow McCannell, and sustain that 'authenticity' in the modern world is a chimera that can never be fully achieved in a tourism context, where it is *staged* rather than simply existing. On the other hand, we might legitimize the emergence of 'invented traditions' as hosting communities' creative responses to the intrusion of tourism.

In short, Chambers is convinced that there is no normative definition of authenticity, and that all cultures are continuously shaped and redefined according to the needs of the present. His merit was to put the accent on the agency/control of the communities, claiming that 'without any significant degrees of autonomy, any notion of authenticity is meaningless' (2010, 101).

Latest developments and the UN: sustainability and equitable partnership

When it comes to managing an indigenous tourist attraction, Butler and Hinch were among the first to put emphasis on 'control': if an indigenous community has power over its representation, then it

can regulate the pace at which tourism develops. Indigenous people have 'control' over tourism when it is not 'forced upon them', when they become active participants in the experience, rather than mere human spectacles.

Butler and Hinch's *Indigenous Tourism* (1997) encompasses several case studies across the globe, from Indonesia and Nepal to the US and New Zealand. One of the variables considered is the degree of 'control' that indigenous communities have over the representation of their heritage. On the one hand, there are communities that managed to adapt to the intrusion of tourism, retaining some degree of control over tourist activities. On the other hand, there are communities that have become increasingly dependent and are being exploited by the tourism sector.

In the last two decades, international organizations stipulated charters and guidelines as a response to indigenous communities' claims to more active participation and control over their culture in a tourist setting. In March 2012, in the context of the Pacific Asia Indigenous Tourism Conference held in Darwin, Australia, 191 delegates from 16 countries adopted the Larrakia Declaration, a document which summarized guidelines on the development of indigenous tourism.

In December 2019, the UNWTO has also published guidelines on sustainable indigenous tourism. Their document stated that a sound partnership between indigenous communities and governments is important to both parties: states can attract potential visitors through a sustainable and respectful tourism strategy, whilst the indigenous communities can take advantage of positive outcomes generated from their involvement in the tourism industry. Respect for indigenous cultural values and practices is considered a basic principle in order to achieve this goal. Furthermore, states are required to obtain 'free,' 'prior' and 'informed consent' from the indigenous communities involved, without undertaking any legislative action. This right refers to the ability of the indigenous peoples to take part in the consulting process around issues that might affect them, including tourism development. Thanks to this powerful weapon, indigenous communities have the power to withhold any proceedings that could contribute to the undermining or exploitation of their resources.

This chapter introduced the main issues regarding the anthropology of tourism, with a specific reference to indigenous tourism: commodification of culture, authenticity and control. The academic field evolved over time, and so did perceptions regarding commodification and authenticity: starting from the staged, recreated authenticity as theorized by MacCannell, passing

through a socially accepted and constantly changing authenticity, and concluding with an existential authenticity. Indigenous tourism has become an important topic in international forums, as demonstrated by the publication of guidelines on sustainable indigenous tourism.

Chapter 2: Historical Background

Society, religious beliefs and cultural practices of the Ainu

The Ainu are the historical inhabitants of Hokkaido, the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin. Before being renamed 'Hokkaido' in 1886 by Japanese colonizers, the portion of the island where the Ainu dwelled was known as 'Ezo', or 'Ezochi', translated as 'the land of the Ainu' (Irish 2001, 9). The term 'Ainu' means 'man', or 'men' in the Ainu language, and the inhabitants of Ezo used this term to refer to each other (Batchelor 1892, 16). Accounts of Western travelers that lived with the natives for some time contain precious information on the Ainu language, culture and religious beliefs. Particularly noteworthy were Scottish physician Neil Gordon Munro, missionary John Batchelor and English traveler Isabella Bird, who stayed with the Ainu between the last two decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th.

According to Batchelor, the Ainu lived in wooden houses (*chise*) grouped together to form a village called *kotan*, led by a male chief (1892, 187). They were animists and believed that every living thing and object had a soul or spirit called *ramat*. Once the object was burned (or destroyed) or the living thing died, the *ramat* migrated elsewhere (Munro 1979, 8). According to Ainu cosmology, the human and the supernatural world coexisted and constantly communicated with one another. They worshipped many gods, the *kamuy,* manifesting in the world through different forms, for instance plants, animals etcetera. Several rituals were performed to please the *kamuy*, who were offered sacred wooden sticks, called *inau*, containing the *ramat*.

One of the most important ceremonies was the *iyomante*. The term itself means 'to send off' in the Ainu language and refers to the spirit of the animal that, after its ritual killing, returns to the ancestors' realm. The most popular 'send-off' ceremony was performed on a bear cub that was caught, brought to the village, put into a cage and fed until it was time to perform the ritual killing, finally releasing the spirit confined in his body. In 1868 the Japanese authorities forbade the ritual, judged too cruel for the animal (Sjoberg 2004, 225).

Social relationships were determined according to a complex system that can be defined 'parallel descent': women traced their descent matrilineally and the men patrilineally (Sjoberg 1993, 68). Women inherited the matrilineal kin from their mother through special chords (*upshoro kut*)

woven around their waist and tattoos on their lips and forearms, while men used crests called *itokpa* (Lewallen 2016, 55).

Traditional robes, called *attush*, were made of elm bark and decorated with animal skin. Women skillfully embroidered and decorated the garments with traditional patterns of protection (Batchelor 1979, 45-49). The sewing techniques were handed down from mother to daughter and embroidering was considered an activity functional to reconnect with the ancestors' knowledge (Lewallen 2016). The Ainu men were experienced woodcarvers, and produced many utensils for the house using techniques handed down through the generations.

Today, a particular importance is attached to traditional Ainu dance, performed not only for entertainment, but also for religious purposes. Dancers imitate the movement of different animals, accompanied by various instruments and sounds, including the mouth harp (*mukkuri*) to express their gratitude to the *kamuy* and their ancestors.[13]

The Ainu language has no writing system and is therefore taught orally. The oral literature includes the epics, called *yukar*, that celebrate the vicissitudes of heroes and demigods (Batchelor, 281). The Ainu language is listed in the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger as 'critically endangered' and it is estimated that there are only 600 Ainu (about 2% of the whole Ainu people) who can actually speak the language (Akulov 2015).

Japan's first encounters with the Ainu: contact, control, assimilation

The Ezo territory became an important trading post for Japan in 1604, when the Matsumae clan established its power there under the mandate of Tokugawa Ieyasu (Takakura, Harrison 1960, 10). Starting from that moment, a flux of Japanese immigrants moved to Hokkaido and settled among the natives.

In the beginning, the relationship between the Matsumae clan and the Ainu communities was somewhat peaceful and mostly based on trade: an important commercial route originated from China and passed through Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands (Chinese domains at the time) reaching Ezo. The Ainu contributed to the economic wealth of Japan at the time, venturing north to trade

[13] Ainu Ancient Ceremonial Dance 阿寒湖アイヌコタン阿寒湖アイヌコタン. *Akanainu.jp*. https://www.akanainu.jp/en/tr-dance. (Accessed 20 April 2019).

fur, metalwork, sake and tobacco in exchange for goods from China such as cotton, brocades, beads and coins (Irish 2001, 45-46). However, the terms of the trading system were unfair to the Ainu, who received little compensation for their services to the clan (Okada 2012). Furthermore, men were sent far from their villages and reduced to a state of near-slavery and sometimes Ainu women fell victim to sexual violence (Lewallen 2016, 131-132). As a consequence, the Ainu started to rebel against the Japanese settlers, leading to two revolts in 1669 and 1789 (Takakura, Harrison 1960, 29). Time passed, and stricter policies were put into effect to control the natives, delineating the process of Ainu assimilation into Japanese society (Okada 2012, 4).

The Census Registration Act was introduced in 1871, forcing all the Ainu to be registered in official records, to use the Japanese language, and to adopt Japanese names. At the same time, many cultural practices, including traditional hunting and tattooing, were forbidden (Hasegawa 2010, 209, Okada 2012, 5). Soon afterwards, in 1899, the Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act (*Hokkaidō kyūdojin hogohō,* 北海道旧土人保護法） came into effect, delineating the total assimilation of the Ainu into the Japanese society. Modelled on the American Dawes Act of 1877, the Protection Act was officially introduced to regulate land distribution among the Ainu of Hokkaido (Maruyama 2003, 100). However, the lands given them were not suitable for farming, and the Ainu did not have any chance to learn farming techniques, while their traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle was completely disrupted (Batchelor, 39-40).

The Protection Act has been widely criticized for its assimilationist approach (Cornell 1964, 299, Siddle 1996, Morris-Suzuki 1999). Maruyama (2014, 6) highlighted the almost 'inhuman treatment of the Ainu', while Siddle (1996, 87) tells us that the Ainu were referred to as an 'inferior race' (*rettō no jinshu*, 劣等 の人種). In this period, their image came to be associated with a dog, for the assonance of the word Ainu with *inu* ('dog' in Japanese, see Gottlieb 2005, 111).

At the same time, the Ainu attracted the interest of anthropologists and archaeologists who, supported by Social Darwinist theories, began to collect Ainu human remains in an attempt to trace back and identify the origins of the Japanese people (Lewallen 2010, 513).[14] Excavations of Ainu burial grounds, sometimes carried out without the consent of the community, continued until 1977

[14] Spencer introduced Social Darwinism theories in the 19th century, in an attempt to apply the concept of natural selection to human society. The supporters of these theories are convinced that only the 'fittest' is able to survive in this world, and those who do not have this ability are doomed to die out over time. Over the past century and a half, these theories contributed to justify imperialism, racism, eugenics and social inequality (Bowler 2016).

(Nakamura 2017, 222). Shigeru Kayano – the first Ainu to be elected into the Japanese Diet in 1994 and at the forefront of handing down and disseminating Ainu language and culture in Japan and abroad – recounts with sorrow the time when Social Darwinist scholars came to his village to steal not only utensils, but also 'dug up our sacred tombs and carried away ancestral bones' (Kayano 1994, 98).

Intermarriage between Ainu and Japanese contributed considerably to the assimilation of the Ainu into the Japanese society (Lewallen 2016, 73). In tandem with the increasing discrimination endured, starting from the first half of the 20th century the Ainu rapidly became portrayed as the 'vanishing people' of Japan (Hilger 1971).

At the same time, a corpus of studies that theorized the myth of the Japanese uniqueness and cultural homogeneity, known as *Nihonjinron*, gained prominence during the post war period. The main purpose of these authors was to 'demonstrate the unique qualities of Japanese culture, Japanese society, and the Japanese people' (Befu 2001, 4). One of the threats to this perceived homogeneity was the existence of minorities in Japan, including the Ainu.[15] The 'homogeneity myth' contributed even more to the assimilation of the Ainu into the Japanese society, giving impetus to the narrative of a 'vanishing' race.

From assimilation to cultural promotion

The myth of the Japanese homogeneity and the idea of the Ainu as the vanishing people of Japan started to be challenged in the 1960s. In that period, the Ainu took advantage of the resurgence of the indigenous rights movement abroad and at the same time began to push their claims to the attention of Japanese politics (Lie 2001, 94, Siddle 2003, 509, Sugimoto 2003). In particular, the Hokkaido Ainu Association contributed to bringing the Ainu experience to the attention of international indigenous forums.[16] In the 1970s and 80s, Ainu activists visited Canada, Scandinavia and Alaska, where they had the chance to see how indigenous people exhibited with pride their distinct culture while preserving their way of life, joining larger local communities as equal partners.

[15] Weiner (1997) identifies six main minority groups in Japan: Ainu, Burakumin, Chinese, Koreans, Nikkeijin and Okinawans.

[16] Founded in February 1946 as a consultative group that had to mediate between Ainu demands and the government, the Association was initially based in Sapporo and counted 2.000 members (Siddle 1996, 148). The Association is now the biggest and most influential Ainu association, active on a domestic and international level, combining activism, protest conferences, meetings with UN ambassadors and consultations with the Japanese government (Tsutsui 2018, 197). A general overview of the Association can be found on the official website: https://www.ainu-assn.or.jp/outline/overview.html.

In 1987, the first Ainu delegation was sent to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples (UNWGIP), founded three years earlier to investigate the status of minority groups worldwide. Erica Daes, UNWGIP chairwoman at the time, visited Japan in 1991, and as a consequence the Japanese government rapidly accorded the Ainu the status of 'minority group' (Cotterill 2011). One year later, Giichi Nomura, leader of the Hokkaido Association at the time, held a historical speech at the opening ceremony of the International Year of the Indigenous People. Nomura made public the discrimination endured by the Ainu in the 19th century, and at the same time urged the UN to formulate international standards to prevent this moving forward. This contributed enormously in bringing the Ainu situation to the attention of the world public.

The Japanese government reacted to the increasing international visibility of the Ainu situation and to external pressures enacting the Law for the Promotion of the Ainu Culture (CPA). The Law came into effect July 1st 1997, replacing the previous assimilationist acts. The CPA was designed to 'realize a society in which the ethnic pride of the Ainu people is respected [..] by the implementation of the measures for the promotion of Ainu culture (hereafter called 'Ainu Traditions'), the spread of knowledge related to Ainu Traditions [..] from which the Ainu people find their ethnic pride'.[17]

As a consequence of the policy, the Foundation for Promotion and Research of Ainu Culture (hereafter FRPAC) was appointed by the government as the sole corporation that could mediate with the state and put into practice the principles of the CPA. The FRPAC promoted Ainu culture through museum exhibitions, special events and other initiatives, forging awareness of Ainu culture in Japan and abroad (Cheung 2003, 955-956). This law contributed to bringing the discourse regarding the Ainu into the realm of politics, conveying the idea of an emergent multicultural Japan (Lewallen 2016, 69-89). The CPA can be considered the first multicultural policy in Japan, because for the first time it promoted a different, 'non-mainstream ethnic culture' (Siddle 2003).

Notwithstanding, the CPA also had many flaws. First of all, the involvement of the Ainu themselves in drafting the policy was almost absent (Siddle 2002, 408-409). Furthermore, the excessive focus on cultural revitalization and preservation distracted attention from issues judged

[17] English translation: http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/instree/law-ainu.html (Accessed 30 October 2018).

more 'urgent' by Ainu activists and organizations. These included the elimination of all sorts of discrimination against the Ainu through a declaration of basic human rights, support for the stability of their industries and the creation a consultative body for ethnic policies (Watson 2004, 130).

Another controversy pertained to the definition of 'Ainu cultural heritage,' as included in the CPA, which was seen by many as too narrow and incomplete. In the CPA, Ainu culture was defined as 'language and cultural properties such as music, dance, and crafts'. Siddle pointed out that the state's narrow definition relegates Ainu traditional culture to the past, leaving no space for contemporary interpretations (jazz, drama, fine art) and offering a view 'divorced from everyday life' (2002, 413). Moreover, Morris Suzuki found that the years of political struggle should have been included in the definition of 'Ainu culture', being an integral part of their identities as Ainu (1999). A few years later, Morris-Suzuki (2002) would introduce the concept of 'cosmetic multiculturalism' to describe the general attitude of the Japanese government that celebrates diversity, but only under certain circumstances. In this case, the 'diverse' culture should not contain political implications and can only be displayed in a controlled manner as a form of external decoration.

Official recognition as the first indigenous people of Japan

In July 2007, the Japanese government ratified the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), which sets 'the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world' (Hanson 2009). Although the declaration is not legally binding, the signatories are required to implement its principles in their constitutions and to respect the individual and collective rights mentioned in the document. One year after ratifying UNDRIP, the government adopted a resolution to recognize the Ainu as the first indigenous people of Japan. Through an official statement, historical injustices and marginalization experiences endured by the Ainu communities over the last centuries were finally recognized. Simultaneously, the Japanese government started consultations to implement the principles formulated in the UNDRIP in a new policy that would guarantee the individual and collective indigenous rights of the Ainu.

In May 2019, the New Ainu Law passed the scrutiny of both Diets, marking the official recognition of the Ainu as Japan's indigenous people and replacing the previous CPA. This was a

landmark event, and was praised as such by Ainu leaders and organizations. However, the Japanese myth of homogeneity persisted in part due to controversial statements by Japanese politicians. In 2005 Minister Aso Taro insisted that Japan had 'one nation, one civilization, one language, one culture, one race,' and two years later the same ideas were expressed by Education Minister Ibuki Bunmei (Burgess 2007, 5).

As I have highlighted in this chapter, the Ainu began to 'lose' facets of their unique culture as the result of assimilationist policies enacted in 1871 and 1898. Increasing discrimination due to negative stereotypes associated with the Ainu led to many preferring to integrate into the Japanese mainstream and refraining from revealing their identity.

Nearly a century later, with the surge of the human rights movement in the 1960s, Ainu activists took inspiration from indigenous leaders worldwide, gaining unprecedented awareness of their identity and the determination to claim their rights. Thanks to the enactment of the CPA, the Ainu were finally able to recover traditional practices, and to access funds to promote cultural and educational activities.

The quest for recognition was far from over, however, as Ainu activists continued fighting to be officially recognized as Japan's first indigenous people. This finally occurred in 2008. The process that led to increasing self-awareness of Ainu cultural diversity went hand-in-hand with their involvement in the tourism sector, explored more in depth in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: The Ainu and the tourism sector

Origins (1880-1950s)

Over the last century and a half, the island of Hokkaido attracted an increasing number of Japanese and overseas tourists. For many Japanese, travelling to Hokkaido was similar to travelling abroad: a way to venture outside the 'inner territories' of Honshu and discover the untamed sceneries of Japan's northernmost island. Besides the pleasant natural landscapes and the exciting outdoor activities, many tourists travelled to Hokkaido to discover the culture of the Ainu, Japan's 'others'.

In her travel diaries, Bird (1984, 17) recorded that the Ainu of Biratori were selling *attush* and other items to both Japanese and foreign visitors as early as the 1880s. Due to increasing demand, in 1903 two storage buildings for Ainu souvenirs were built in Asahikawa. The mayor of the town recognized the increasing monetary value of these goods, and in 1917 passed an amendment to buy all the production of the Ainu (Clercq 2017).

In this period, the general tendency of the Ainu was to conceal their roots and conform to Japanese society, due to the assimilationist policies and enduring discrimination. Simultaneously, the Japanese government's goals were more oriented towards building the nation and promoting an advanced country in the eyes of foreign observers. This ambition clashed with the existence of these 'others', and therefore Ainu settlements were not mentioned in tourism brochures and pamphlets at that time.

Meanwhile, displaying the 'diversity' of the Ainu was functional to substantiate the superiority of the Japanese over these primitive subjects. This was the case, for instance, with the Human Pavillon at the 1903 Osaka Industrial Exhibition where living Ainu were showcased with the goal to prove the superiority of the Japanese and the Western countries compared to 'primitive others' (Hasegawa 2010, 211, Ziomek 2004).

The 'Ainu boom' (1950s)

According to sociologist Lisa Hiwasaki (2000, 399), the real 'Ainu boom' began in the 1950s. Starting from that period, domestic and international tourists became more and more interested in

discovering the Ainu of northern Japan. As a consequence, Ainu culture became an integral part of the Hokkaido touristic landscape.

In the mid-20th century, Ainu were still perceived as 'vanishing people' in a culturally 'homogeneous' Japan, and their survival was threatened by their increasing assimilation to Japanese society. In this sense, the tourism sector offered the individuals employed there a 'safe space' to practice and revitalize traditions that otherwise might have been lost over time (Hiwasaki 189). The years of activism and international experiences (1960s) also pushed the Ainu to take pride in their culture (Sjoberg 1993). Participation in international exchanges contributed to the realization that indigenous people all over the world were taking pride in their distinct culture and did not perceive themselves as in danger of vanishing. Conscious of this new reality, the Ainu became more active participants also in the representation of their identity and culture in tourism during these years. In this sense, tourism played a fundamental role in preserving cultural practices (Hendry 2005).

In this period, tourism villages (*kankō kotan*, 観光コタン) became a popular attraction for domestic and overseas visitors. The villages reflected what once was the usual pattern of an ancient Ainu settlement, formed by many wooden houses (*chise*) grouped together. These touristic venues started to be organized as tourism attractions as early as the 1890s and followed a common display: a shopping street where visitors could purchase souvenirs, one or more spaces to learn Ainu culture (through exhibitions, workshops of different activities including embroidery and woodcarving) and to assist in Ainu dance performances (Hiwasaki 2000, 403). The Ainu villages share some striking similarities with the Symbolic Space: both are 'open air' displays where visitors can engage in many hands-on activities, purchase souvenirs, see an exhibition of Ainu materials at the National Museum and assist in the traditional Ainu dance.

Especially in the period of the economic Bubble era (1980s-90s), the Ainu villages became an important and valuable source of income for the Ainu employed there. They profited from selling souvenirs to tourists who could buy from workshops and take part in activities (Lewallen 2016, 93).

The Poroto *kotan* was built in Shiraoi in the 1970s and was initially composed of five recreated *chise*. The Poroto Kotan Museum was added to the village in 1984 and considered an important hub for the transmission of Ainu culture, featuring a permanent exhibition of about 800 Ainu artifacts. The museum was visited by about 25 million tourists and closed officially on 23 March 2020 to make place for the Symbolic Space.

Conversely, the village located in Akan opened in 1951, and in the beginning it was formed by only 5 households. Currently, there are 36 residences inhabited by 120 people. In 1994, about 1.6 million people visited the Akan village (Cheung 2005). The Akan theater (*ikor*) hosts various performances, including the reenactment of the ancient epics and the Lost Kamuy show, discussed below.

The settlement in Akan is an interesting example that shows how the involvement of the Ainu in the tourism sector generated positive outcomes for the community living there. The influx of tourists visiting the Akan village had profound economic benefits for the community living in the village (Chang et al. 2011). The residents expressed positive feelings about the growth of tourism in the region, and were delighted to see many people coming from far away to experience Ainu culture. From the 1970s, the Akan theater became increasingly popular and its members had the chance to perform in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Canada and Paris (Cheung 2005).

The strengthening of the Ainu-tourism relation went hand in hand with the process of growing Ainu self-awareness and self-education in the spheres of their cultural heritage. In 1978 the Association for the Maintenance of Ainu Culture was founded, and in 1988 the first Ainu Cultural Festival took place in Sapporo (Cotterill 2011, 15). Lastly, thanks to the enactment of the CPA (1997) the government allocated about 470 million to promote Ainu culture through tourism.

Despite the economic benefits and cultural importance of tourism venues for the communities involved, the image of the Ainu as portrayed in tourism villages was often judged by scholars as ahistorical and fictitious. The Ainu working there appeared more interested in a good salary than in 'presenting a true picture of themselves and their culture' (Sjoberg 1993, 134). The perception of the Ainu as 'uncivilized savages' led to visitors asking whether they really had to go to the mountains to chase bears for a living, or if they paid taxes (Hiwasaki 2000).

The term 'tourist Ainu' (*kankō Ainu*, 観光アイヌ) was often used in a pejorative way to designate the Ainu employed in tourism villages who 'acted Ainu' to entertain curious visitors and thereby earned some money (Lewallen 2016, 91-92). Shigeru Kayano himself recounts with sorrow his experience working in Nibutani in the 1960s, and 'how miserable it made us feel to sing and dance [..] in front of curious tourists' (Kayano 1994, 119).

Sometimes those employed in the villages were not even Ainu, but temporary employees dressed in 'Ainu-style' to draw curious visitors (Hendry 2005). In some instances, even the language

used to market these places contributed to increase the discrimination towards the Ainu and convey negative stereotypes. In a 1981 advertisement in the Japan Times, the Japan Travel Bureau (JTB) described tourism villages as places where visitors could observe 'the ancient customs and culture of the famed hairy Ainu' (Gottlieb 2005, 112). The newspaper removed the ad after being criticized, but it exemplifies the general tendency in those years to 'racialize' and denigrate Ainu working in tourism venues.

Cultural commodification and authenticity in Ainu tourism venues

Despite the negative consequences observed in the previous paragraph, tourism had a profound 'cultural' impact on the Ainu (Hiwasaki 2000, 404). Tourism venues provided a space where Ainu culture and identity was 'represented, maintained and reinforced' (ibid. 405). In some instances, the involvement of the Ainu in tourism not only provided them with a safe space to practice ancient traditions, but also gave way to the creation and negotiation of a new future-oriented Ainu culture. This resulted in more active participation and commitment in the performances. In the following section, I analyze a few positive examples of Ainu culture adapted to a tourism setting.

Marimo Festival

The Marimo is a spherical green algae that grows in the lake Akan, and in 1920 it was recognized by the Japanese government as an important cultural heritage. Within decades, its survival was threatened not only due to environmental changes, but also the increasing number of tourists visiting the Ainu village in Akan. The Marimo had in fact become a popular souvenir among tourists, who could purchase it in the nearby Ainu village.

In order to save the algae from extinction, the Akan local government introduced the Marimo festival in 1950. As part of the annual October celebrations, the algae are symbolically restored to the lake, accompanied by Ainu dances and music. Many Ainu and external observers judged the *marimo sai* a mere 'invented tradition', created solely to draw tourists to the area and generate a source of income for the community in Akan. The festival was criticized by the Ainu community outside of Akan as it did not adhere to 'traditional' Ainu culture.

In analyzing the significance of the Marimo festival for the Akan community, in 2004 Japanese anthropologist Takashi Irimoto theorized the emergence of a 'new Ainu culture', also called 'tourist culture'. He pointed out that in the case of the ritual, the Ainu succeeded at 'adapting the rituals for tourism, while preserving the spirituality that lies at the very core of Ainu ethnicity' (2004, 34). Irimoto views the *marimo sai* as a 'new' expression of Ainu cultural tradition, because although it was created to attract visitors, it also reflects their traditional beliefs. As a matter of fact, as we have seen in the previous chapter for the *iyomante*, the 'restitution' is part of the Ainu religious beliefs, which see the world of humans constantly communicating with the netherworld, and living things (in this case the *marimo*) as travelers infused with the *ramat*.

Even though some Ainu cannot accept it as 'authentic' and perceive it as an 'invented tradition', this festival can be considered as an inventive expression of Ainu culture, although it is not 'accepted' by the whole community.

Kibori kuma

As observed previously, the Ainu men are experienced woodcarvers. In the first decades of the 20th century they began to use their skills to produce wooden souvenirs that became popular among tourists. The *kibori kuma* （木彫り熊), a bear with a fish in its mouth, became one of the most popular images engraved in wood and sold to tourists. The sales of wooden bears peaked in 1936, when the Emperor Hirohito toured Hokkaido and was offered an Ainu bear carving (Coulter-Pultz 2016, 28). Before this period, representing deities (in this case the bear) was considered a taboo, according to Ainu beliefs (Wilkinson 2000, 149).

Kazuyoshi Ohtsuka (1999, 37) argued that this kind of representation was most likely imported from abroad by a Japanese tourist who came back from Switzerland, fascinated by the carved wooden bears sold by the farmers there to earn some extra money during winter. Nelson Graburn (1976, 217) was convinced that the bear was introduced by American soldiers after World War II. Chisato Dubreuil was more cautious and stated that the matter requires further exploration and documentary analysis. Nonetheless, it is likely that the commodification of the bear carvings could have been a direct consequence of the increasing demand souvenirs representative of the Ainu culture (2007, 89).

What is certain is that for Ainu men, woodcarving was considered an activity that allowed them to reaffirm their ethnic identity, passing on traditional carving techniques to the next generation (Wilkinson 150-154). In this sense, producing wooden bears contributed not only to the economic well-being of the communities, but also played an important role in reconnecting Ainu men with traditional knowledge, allowing them to practice ancient techniques.

Dancing

The performance of traditional Ainu dance is an essential element of tourism venues that feature Ainu culture. Ainu dance was recognized as an Important Cultural Property of Japan in 1984, and since 2009 is part of the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.[18] Since its registration on the UNESCO list, the dancers took an unprecedented pride in their performance (Hiwasaki 411). At the moment, there are about 17 groups in Japan authorized to preserve and transmit their knowledge and techniques to perform this unique dance (Hunter 2015, 70). The dance became representative of Ainu culture to the extent that it was scheduled to be performed at the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020.

The Ainu dancer Kanako Uzawa stated that when she performs her mind is not focused on repeating the exact steps, but she always puts something of herself in the dance. She questions the very significance of the term 'authenticity' (as formulated by others) for the Ainu as too restrictive. The authenticity of the ritual (in this case dance) is not reflected in the exact re-enactment of movements, because to her what matters is that whenever she dances, a 'new' authenticity comes around (Uzawa 2018). Another experienced Ainu dancer, Mana Shinoda, in addressing the UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous People in 2005, said she felt 'fortunate' to be able to perform the dance every day in front of curious tourists. The performance enabled her to reconnect with her Ainu roots (her father is Ainu, while her mother is Japanese) and at the same time pass on this knowledge to future generations (Shinoda 2018).

In the same way the Alarde, as described by Greenwood, was repeated twice a day to accommodate tourists' expectations, the Ainu dance is performed in tourism venues several times a day – 3 times in the spring and summer periods in Akan and 15 times in the Shiraoi Museum – to be enjoyed by a broader audience, and not only on special occasions, as it was meant originally. The

[18] UNESCO registration: https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditional-ainu-dance-00278.

extensive repetition of the dance throughout the day could have brought a loss of meaning (Wilkinson). Nonetheless, for some performers, practicing Ainu dance proved to be an empowering means to reconnect with ancestral knowledge and pass on the technique to the future generations.

Light shows and the lost God

Since March 2019, the Akan tourism village's theater offers visitors the opportunity to assist in a 'modern reinterpretation' of the ancient Ainu *yukar*. The light show, called 'Lost Kamui', is attended by tourists on a daily basis. The 'lost' *kamui* refers to the Hokkaido wolves that went extinct because, starting from 1882, they were the target of extensive hunting campaigns. The god residing in the wolves comes 'back to life' during the representation, encouraging the performers and the audience to reflect upon the inconsiderate actions of the hunters that led to their extinction.

Unique about the show is that it merges the secular Ainu tradition of the *yukar* with more modern means of representation: the Ainu world is visualized by mixing Ainu dances with video mapping and visual (light) art. The performers felt enthusiastic and did not think of it as a job, but rather as something they wanted to do to inform the visitors of the Ainu worldview. In turn, the audience is amazed by the light show, and so the Ainu worldview is conveyed: every living thing has a soul and we are all part of something bigger. During the performance, the audience is asked to stand up and dance with the actors, engaging actively in the performance (Fukusawa 2019). The performance reflects a 'new Ainu culture' as theorized by Irimoto: although born in a tourism setting, it contributes to convey the Ainu belief and as such should be seen as an innovative expression of the Ainu culture.

These examples help to understand the changing perspective of some Ainu in regards to the usage of their culture in a tourism venue. From this analysis emerged that a 'fixed' notion of authenticity is not applicable to the Ainu. External factors, such as market demands, environmental changes, and new technologies have influenced traditional Ainu practices, resulting in a 'new Ainu culture', distinguishable in many tourism venues. This is 'new' because although created in a tourism context, it has a strong connection to Ainu beliefs and cultural heritage. This is exemplified by the *kibori kuma*, the *marimo sai* and the Lost Kamuy. Furthermore, 'performing Ainu' in a tourism setting proved to be empowering and therapeutic for some individuals, as illustrated by the Ainu dance. In this case, the official recognition by UNESCO gave new pride to the performers.

This chapter served to illustrate the changing involvement of the Ainu in the tourism sector over the last century and a half. Over the years, tourism for the Ainu has proven to be first of all a source of income; secondly, a 'safe place' to reconnect with ancestral traditions; and lastly, a creative way to develop and modify their traditional culture to engage with a broader audience. This will be functional for the analysis of the Symbolic Space and its potential positive and negative outcomes for the Ainu, explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: The Symbolic Space for Ethnic Harmony

In this chapter I will analyze the Symbolic Space in regards to its potential positive and negative outcomes for the Ainu communities, in light of what has been discussed in previous chapters on indigenous tourism and in the specific case of the Ainu. In the first section I will provide a brief overview of the three main areas included in the Space (museum, cultural exchange hall and resting place). Next, I will consider the Space's critics that have emerged over the last decade. Finally, I will discuss the transportation of the Ainu remains to the Space in particular. This final section is intended to analyze the degree of control retained by the Ainu on the attraction. This issue is of fundamental importance, as it highlights the Japanese government's lack of attention towards Ainu religious beliefs and the disrespect of international regulations.

The Space

The decision to build the Space was formulated for the first time in the Final Report issued in 2009 by the Advisory Council for Future Ainu Policy. The only Ainu member on this Council was Kato Tadashi, the chairman of the Hokkaido Ainu Association, while the other seven were Japanese politicians and experts on different fields. The founding of the Space was endowed to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) and to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The former is responsible for the National Ainu Museum, while the latter takes care of the Ethnic Symbiosis Park and the resting place.

The Ainu Ethnic Cultural Foundation (*Ainu minzoku bunka zaidan,* アイヌ民族文化財団), formed by merging the old FRPAC with the management structure of the old Shiraoi Museum, is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Space (Morris-Suzuki 2018, 16). The 3 main areas that compose the Space are the National Ainu Museum, the Cultural Exchange Hall and the Resting Place. The facilities are surrounded by the Ethnic Symbiosis Park.

The Ainu National Museum is the first national museum to feature uniquely Ainu history and culture. It is structured into a main exhibition room, temporary exhibition room, and a 100-

seat theater. The main exhibition encompasses an Ainu perspective on 'our' language, universes, lives, history, work, and exchange.

The Cultural Exchange Hall is a theater-like construction where performances, including the traditional Ainu dance, *mukkuri* and *tonkori* (traditional Ainu instruments) are held on a daily basis. The light show 'Kamuy Symphonia' is projected on the dome of the Culture Exchange Hall and the surrounding valley and trees. Two short movies based on the ancient Ainu epics are projected inside on a daily basis. These shows combine the interactive video-mapping with traditional Ainu music and songs. This performance is intended to give the audience an immersive experience into the Ainu world and religious beliefs.

The resting place is located on the Eastern side of the Poroto lake, facing the Pacific Ocean. It is composed of a cemetery, a memorial service facility and a monument. The cemetery is a concrete building with Ainu grave markers on all sides. Is purpose is to host and preserve Ainu remains transported from universities and institutions in Japan and overseas. The funeral services (*kamuinomi*) will be performed inside the memorial facility, a construction inspired by the design of the traditional Ainu *chise*.

No 'Space' for collective rights?

Since its inception, many scholars have been against the decision to build the Space, perceived as another tool to draw visitors to Japan and generate income by using the appeal of Ainu culture. They feared in particular that the excessive focus on tourism promotion could distract the attention from issues such as Ainu land and self-determination rights, two fundamental 'collective rights'. This specific set of rights pertain to a collectivity and cannot be claimed individually. Collective rights play a vital role for the minority groups, support the preservation of their specific culture and protect them from discrimination (Porter 2001, 209).[19]

[19] Right to land, territories and natural resources is a fundamental indigenous collective right enshrined in the 26th article of UNDRIP: 'Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired' (UNDRIP, 19). It implies the restitution of lands that were once owned by indigenous people that have been dispossessed by settler countries. After the Meiji restoration, Hokkaido was declared *terra nullis* and the Ainu were expropriated of their lands by the Japanese settlers under the Land Regulation Ordinance (Stevens 2001).

According to the UNPFII, collective rights to 'land, territories and resources' are vital for indigenous people, who should be entitled to possess, or at least claim ownership of their lands. So far, various countries, such as Australia, have agreed to redistribute portions of their territory to indigenous peoples (Kershaw 2016). The restitution of ancestral Ainu land was first unsuccessfully discussed in 1990 during the 8th session of the Working Group on Indigenous People (Chisato 2015). Many Ainu activists expected that the 2019 New Ainu Law would finally put an end to the dispute. However, this was ultimately not realized.

Maruyama (2019) pointed out that instead of recognizing Ainu indigenous collective rights, the Japanese government preferred to focus on the development of the Space as part of a well-structured tourism strategy. From his perspective, the Ainu were thus 'victims of a developmental scheme' that aimed to boost tourism during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. He talks about the commodification of Ainu culture as a way to attract more visitors to the country, leaving little or no room for the Ainu's perspective on their culture's representation in the Space (Grau 2020).

Anthropologist Naohiro Nakamura emphasized that the Japanese government is trying to find a way to recognize Ainu collective rights without enacting a specific law. Since the Ainu are already acknowledged as individuals by the Constitution (2019), the enactment of collective rights would require the Japanese government to convince the whole nation that the Ainu need 'special' privileges. The Symbolic Space will fulfill Articles 11, 12, 13, 14 of the UNDRIP which guarantee the right to freely perform, develop and inherit indigenous religious and cultural practices. As such, the facility and its educational mission are part of the required conditions to respect the UNDRIP.

Morris-Suzuki, on the other hand, maintained an ambivalent attitude towards the Space (2018). She pointed out that Ainu input regarding the decision to build the Space had been minimal. Nonetheless, she hoped that the Space would promote Ainu culture among an international audience, and that it would serve as a first step towards an open dialogue between the Japanese government and the Ainu. Two years later, Morris-Suzuki analyzed the opening of the Space in the context of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games as an occasion to promote Japan as multi-cultural. However, she remained skeptical if the Ainu's portrayal in the Space would include discrimination, oppression and political struggle. Another fear that emerged from some activists' observations is that the Space could contribute to the exploitation of Ainu culture for tourism's sake, leading to the

excessive transformation of traditional culture (in other words, that it would lead to negative commodification of the Ainu culture, resulting in the loss of authenticity).

The centuries of Ainu oppression are mentioned in the Museum's main exhibition's sub-sections 'turbulent times,' 'our work,' and 'our history'. However, Maruyama (2020) pointed out that the section dedicated to the 1899 Former Aborigines Protection Act is missing the critical condemnation of the Act, recognized unanimously as humiliating and in clear violation of basic human rights. She recognized Japan's tendency to apply historical revisionism to conceal a painful past, providing sugar-coated descriptions to visitors, and overlooking the darkest moments in Ainu history.

Similarly, CEMiPoS (2020) issued a statement on its website in which it harshly condemned the Space for being a repetition of the colonial legacy towards the Ainu. 'As a culture on the verge of extinction [...] the Ainu, like a natural resource, are a thing to be conserved. More so, the relegation of Ainu life to dehumanized relics provides an easy channel to the commodification of their culture'. CEMiPoS also criticized the National Museum for its ahistorical and fictitious portrayal of Ainu culture as having crystallized in the past.

These observations on the Space are certainly valid, but fail to see the phenomenon in its entirety. First of all, the relationship between Ainu and tourism is not new. As observed in the previous chapter, over the years tourism served as a means to not only generate profit but also, more importantly, to reconnect with ancestral knowledge and perform Ainu traditional culture that otherwise might have been lost. Previously, the government had used ethnic tourism as a tool to safeguard Ainu practices at a moment in time (late 19th century to the 1960s) when their culture was actually on the verge of extinction (Hiwasaki 2000). Now that the Ainu have been officially recognized, and their culture is not expected to vanish anytime soon, it is also possible to explore future scenarios.

Furthermore, the Space can provide fertile ground for the growth of a 'new Ainu culture,' as theorized by Irimoto. In the Space's cultural exchange hall visitors can assist in the re-enactment of traditional Ainu epics through new technologies. Similar to the 'Lost Kamui' light show as performed in Akan, this can contribute to drawing new generations closer to Ainu culture and convey an image of Ainu culture as constantly evolving, rather than relegated to the past. This as opposed to the 'primitive' representation that had been common in Ainu museum exhibitions, and

criticized because they lacked more 'contemporary' artistic expressions of the Ainu culture. The National Ainu Museum will, however, also give way to the digitization, preservation and conservation of the materials exhibited.

Finally, the appeal to international tourists is demonstrated by extensive media coverage and promotion of the Space abroad. This will play a vital role in raising awareness on the Ainu situation globally, and should be considered as a starting point from which to work on future Ainu policy that will hopefully satisfy the demands of Ainu leaders and global heritage organizations.

Challenges of repatriating Ainu remains

'Repatriation is itself a performance of heritage, where [..] the identity of the Indigenous people concerned is reasserted, legitimized and remembered' (Smith 2016, 296).

Another issue that attracted criticism from external observers was the decision to transport Ainu human remains stored in national and overseas institutions to the Space's memorial facility. Among others, Maruyama was the most critical, defining the memorial site 'a concrete jail for unjustly-collected Ainu human remains' (CEMiPoS 2020). In this section, I will point out that this decision violates Ainu beliefs and international standards, and at the same time demonstrates lack of control on the decision to stage these materials in a tourism setting. First, I will illustrate why this discussion is particularly sensitive for indigenous (and Ainu) communities. Next, I will examine the consultations between the government and the Ainu representatives pointing out the power imbalances that emerged.

There are several reasons why repatriation is a particularly sensitive topic for the Ainu communities. First of all, the way in which the remains were collected by the anthropologists exemplifies the poor respect that Japanese scholars have showed towards the Ainu. The excavations of Ainu burial grounds and the bodies stored therein were often carried out without the consent of the Ainu community (Nakamura 2017, 222). Furthermore, to honor the deceased, the Ainu

communities perform the *shinnurappa* and the *icharpa* memorial services regularly.[20] The body of the deceased is of fundamental importance and has to be buried in its entirety, otherwise the missing body parts will also be missing on 'the other side', the netherworld. However, there have been instances where skulls – often the subject of scholars' research – were separated from the body. This was first discovered in 2002, when the Hokkaido Ainu Association visited the memorial hall of Hokkaido University and found out that the 300 fragments were kept in plastic bags, and the rest were mixed with other remains that did not belong to the same specimen (Nakamura 2019, 365).

The incorrect or total absence of detailed records with the date of the excavation makes things even more complicated. As stated by present policy, research can only be conducted on remains that can be dated back to more than 150 years. Before carrying out any kind of research or study, the materials have to meet this standard requirement. However, according to the vice-president of the Kotan Association Tsugio Kuzuno, in 1969 Sapporo Medical University excavated 34 bodies in Urakawa. Records held at the Urakawa Provincial Museum did not prove that the cemetery excavated by the University was older than 150 years, generating a controversy not yet solved (CEMiPos 2019).

Many Ainu also maintain that remains should be buried in the village where the deceased had lived (Cotter, Schinckel 2018, 50). In fact, the Ainu religion prescribes that funeral services are to be performed by the whole village, not only by the family of the deceased. However, Japanese law does not allow for the return of remains to a 'collectivity' (village, in this case), instead only to related families. Over the last decade, Ainu organizations and individuals have filed lawsuits against the prefectural government of Hokkaido in an attempt to bring ancestors back home, with mixed results.

In 2012, a group of Ainu from Urakawa tried to repatriate the ancestral remains from Hokkaido University. However, the University stated that it was impossible to establish who was the 'next of kin'. Four years later, the University finally agreed to return 5 bodies. However, none of these were intact. Finally, in August 2017, Hokkaido University returned 63 bodies to Urahoro village, after almost 80 years (Nakamura 2019). On a brighter note, in November 2019 Tetsuji Miura, the Dean of Sapporo Medical University, issued the first formal apology to the Ainu for the ways in

[20] Starting from October 2006, the Hokkaido Ainu Association held regular ceremonies for 250 remains stored at the Sapporo Medical University (Lewallen 2016, 520).

which excavations and research were conducted, expressing regret for the pain and the hardship caused to the communities (NHK 2019).

According to article 12 of the UNDRIP, indigenous people are allowed to 'manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies [..] and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites [..] and the right to the repatriation of their human remains'. This should take place 'through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with the indigenous peoples concerned'. Furthermore, the signatories are required to 'obtain the Free, Prior and Informed Consent' (FPIC) before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them (article 19)'. In case the remains, or any sacred object, become part of a tourism attraction, the guidelines on sustainable indigenous tourism must be followed. These ensure that the religious indigenous values are respected and that the consultations on the development/design of the attraction takes place in a 'thorough, transparent and permanent consultation process'. As we shall see below, this was not the case in transferring Ainu remains.

The consultations on remains

According to MEXT, in April 2019 – before being transported to the Symbolic Space – there were a total of 1574 bodies and 346 boxes of unidentified remains stored in 12 institutions in Japan and in 8 countries overseas (Yoshigaki 2019). In July 2011, the Office of the Prime Minister appointed the Committee on the Promotion of Ainu Policy to discuss the guidelines to repatriate the human bodies to the communities, and the role of the memorial hall in this process. Five of the eleven members of the Committee were of Ainu descent.

According to Nakamura (2018), during the Committee meetings a great deal of time was spent to discuss the possibility to do academic research on the remains that will be stored in the Space. The Hokkaido Ainu Association has always been in favor of academic research on the remains as it might help in tracing back the origins of the Ainu people and hinder racial discrimination. However, many other Ainu organizations and individuals have voiced their opposition to scientific research on the remains. Furthermore, 'asymmetrical power relations' emerged during the consultations. In other words: the majority of non-Ainu members on the Committee allowed them lead the

conversation and make decisions at the expense of the Ainu's religious beliefs. As such, the voice of the Ainu Committee members was not properly taken into consideration.

From Nakamura's perspective, the decision to transfer all the remains to the memorial facility in the Symbolic Space cannot be seen as a means to finally meet the will of the majority of Ainu communities, 'addressing the concerns of the Ainu and redressing past injustices such as grave-robbery, unethical research conduct, and disrespectful handling of human remains' (16). For the future, he urges the Japanese government to actively engage with Ainu individuals willing to take ownership and manage the remains according to their beliefs. This would also demonstrate the government's willingness to cooperate with the communities.

The decision to transfer the remains to the Space is controversial and unsatisfactory for the following reasons. First of all, it violates Ainu religious beliefs and is the result of power imbalances that emerged during the Committee meetings. From what we have seen so far, it seems that this decision was 'imposed' on the Ainu communities as the degree of control they exerted on this decision could be considered minimal. As we have observed, the majority of Ainu communities were against the decision to transport the remains to the Space, therefore the FPIC had not been respected.

Then there is the issue of 'privacy', as stipulated in UNDRIP. In reports on the Space issued in 2016, the memorial hall was presented as a calm and respectful place that would not welcome 'occasional visitors'. However, it is not clear whether this be the case in practice, since the facility is located inside the Symbolic Space, designed to welcome a large number of visitors. Furthermore, Ainu communities not residing in Shiraoi could argue that their ancestors' remains are held 'hostage' far from home, without the chance to have a memorial service where they originally belong.

In addition, on the English-language sign in front of the memorial facility there is no mention of the historical injustices endured by the Ainu. It is not stated that some remains were obtained illegally by Japanese anthropologists, but instead that the acquisition of the bodies took place 'as part of their work' (CEMiPos 2020). If the purpose of the Symbolic Space is to raise awareness of Ainu history and culture, then it could be argued that tourists should know how the remains were collected: the painful aftermath of the years of scientific research, the poor management of Ainu ancestors' remains and last but not least the Japanese government's reluctance to return sacred objects and remains to the community.

As I have shown in this chapter, the Space can be beneficial to the Ainu in many ways. In particular, it can serve as a hub that would raise international awareness on the Ainu culture. Furthermore, it could contribute to the preservation, but also to the 'evolution' of a 'new Ainu culture', that could potentially attract younger generations of Ainu to their heritage. In order to do so, I referred to previous involvement of the Ainu into tourism and to specific performances taking place in the Space.

However, it is understood that there are still issues that need to be discussed properly. For instance, the unsolved issue of the indigenous collective rights will continue to be discussed by Ainu leaders and scholars interested in their quest. Another issue that was not addressed correctly was the transfer of the Ainu ancestral remains to the Space's resting place. From an analysis to the consultation process, it was demonstrated that the voice of the Ainu members of the Committee on the Promotion of Ainu Policy was not listened properly. Finally, I concluded that the decision to transfer the remains does not respect the international standards (UNDRIP, FPIC), thereby demonstrating a low degree of control over the Space's memorial hall.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have analyzed the Ainu in relation in to tourism sector and development of the Symbolic Space for Ethnic Harmony, a facility that features Ainu culture and opened its doors in July 2020 on the shores of the lake Poroto, Southern Hokkaido. In order to do so, I first explored the academic field and different interpretations of the main issues at stake when it comes to stage an indigenous culture in a tourism venue. Indigenous tourism can be potentially beneficial on many levels: it can generate profit for the communities involved, create employment opportunities and ultimately serve as a means to hand-on traditional practices for the future. Nonetheless, it can also contribute to the dramatic change of the indigenous culture staged, which is shaped to conform to the tourism economy. This process, known as the commodification of culture, can potentially lead to detachment from the rituals staged and loss of authenticity. Scholars initially perceived authenticity as a static entity, best kept secret to tourists as the staging process irremediably modified the inherent authenticity of rituals staged. The equation 'commodification=authenticity loss' has been challenged over the past fifty years of academic discourse. Ultimately, a need to consider a more inclusive and flexible approach to authenticity (emergent, existential authenticity) was recognized, one that goes hand-in-hand with the changing socio-economic situation.

Next, I contextualized the Ainu and their historical background in relation to the Japanese state. In particular, I have highlighted the historical developments that led the Ainu to assimilate within the Japanese society. The recent efforts of the Japanese government to promote Ainu culture (CPA) and to officially recognize the Ainu as indigenous followed the process of Ainu self-awareness and their alignment with other indigenous communities worldwide, from the 1960s.

Consequently, I explored the involvement of the Ainu with the tourism sector, analyzing the different roles that this sector has played for Ainu over time. A topic often subject to academic criticism, I also emphasized the positive outcomes that this interaction can potentially generate. In particular, the emergence of a 'new' Ainu culture. In order to do so, I selected examples that demonstrate the positive involvement of Ainu in the tourism sector as well as the new approach to authenticity that emerged in this context. From these examples it emerged that over the years the Ainu were receptive to external influences, environmental changes and evolution of the modes of representation.

Finally, I turned my attention to the construction of the Space, focusing on the first critiques that it has received since the project was disclosed to the public. In the final sub-section, I explored how the issue of the repatriation of the Ainu human remains has been addressed, pointing out the lack of involvement of Ainu individuals and organizations in the decision-making process.

From this research emerged that the involvement of the Ainu in the tourism sector, and therefore the construction of the Space, will undoubtedly have positive impacts. First of all, it will contribute to informing the international audience on the present conditions and past challenges endured by the Ainu, though crucial details are sometimes omitted or downplayed. The celebration of Ainu culture in the venue will hopefully help diminish the perception of the Ainu as a vanishing people of Japan. Instead, moving forward, Ainu culture may be perceived as constantly evolving (also with the support of the latest technologies/developments) and contribute to the global awareness of their existence. Furthermore, the Space will allow Ainu to continue to perform their cultural practices and hand down ancestral knowledge to new generations.

Nonetheless, it goes without saying that there are still issues that need to be addressed more adequately: the construction of the Space does not provide a substitute for indigenous policy, does not ensure collective rights and cannot be taken as an official apology for the years of imposed hardship. Nonetheless, it is clear that the consultation process, especially regarding the decision to transport the remains to the Space, was conducted according to a top-down approach that did not properly take into account the opinion of the Ainu communities as a whole.

The dissenting voices over the Space will continue to rise if the Ainu will not be accorded their collective rights in the near future. However, the harsh dismissal of the Space by scholars and human rights organizations could be considered both counter-productive and ignorant of the fact that the involvement of the Ainu in the tourism sector in the past has generated positive outcomes for both parties involved.

The recent outbreak of COVID-19 has had an unprecedented negative impact on the tourism sector worldwide. Many performances and activities scheduled to take place in the Space have been adjusted to prevent the spread of the virus and its effects on the performers and visitors' expectations are as of yet unpredictable. Previous studies relied on interviews with Ainu individuals and visitors involved in indigenous tourism activities in Japan. In future research on the same topic,

participant observation could be used as an effective tool to more deeply and concretely assess the impact of the Symbolic Space.

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