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The Fight for Self-Representation: Ainu Imaginary, Ethnicity and Assimilation

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Abstract: *Film representation of the Ainu people is as old as cinema but it has not remained stable over time. From the origins of cinema, Ainu people were an object of interest for Japanese and foreign explorers who portrayed them as an Other, savage and isolated from the modern world. The notion of "otherness" was slightly modified during wartime, as the Ainu were represented as Japanese subjects within the "imperial family", and at the end of the fifties when entertainment cinema presented the Ainu according to the codes of the Hollywood Western on the one hand; and Mikio Naruse proposed a new portrayal focusing on the Ainu as a long-discriminated social collective rather than as an ethnic group, on the other. However, Tadayoshi Himeda's series of seven documentaries following the Ainu leader Shigeru Kayano's activities marked a significant shift in Ainu iconography. Himeda challenged both the postwar institutional discourse on the inexistence of minorities in Japan, and the touristic and ahistorical image that concealed the Ainu's cultural assimilation to Japanese culture. The proposed films do not try to show an exotic people but a conventional people struggling to recover their collective past.*

Shifts in Ainu Film Representations

The relationship between film and the Ainu people is as old as cinema. They are featured in *The Ainu in Yeso* (*Les Aïnous à Yéso,* 1897), which are two of the first thirty-three cinematographic sequences shot in Japan as part of the *actualités* filmed by the French operator François-Constant Girel for a Lumière brothers catalogue. However, film representation of the Ainu across history reveals interesting paradoxes. While they are likely to be descendants of the earliest inhabitants of the Japanese archipelago, they have traditionally embodied "otherness" (*tashasei*) in the visual representation of Japan (Dubreil; Bressner; Choi; Okada; Siddle, "The Ainu"; Centeno, "Las grietas de la imagen"). The Ainu have long been represented as savages in contrast to the sophisticated Japanese, a stigma that filmmakers simply imitated from the photographic patterns of representation of the late nineteenth century and earlier painted portrayals (Almazán; Cheung; Kreiner and Sasaki).[1] Therefore, the Ainu iconography became somewhat of a counterpoint to Japanese civilisation. These portrayals of the Ainu must be framed within a system of intertextual representations as "primitives" which proliferated during Meiji Period from the narratives published by adventurers and Christian missionaries (Batchelor; Howard; Landor; Starr).

However, this otherness has not remained immutable over time. Ethnographic cinema, made by both Japanese and foreign explorers, from its origins until the mid-1930s, was characterised by a mise en scène that aimed to project a romantic, mythical, poetic view of the Ainu (Centeno, "Las grietas de la imagen" 66–74). These films did not intend to denounce their poverty, their social exclusion and other issues, such as alcoholism, among the community (Siddle, *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan* 125). Instead, they built an

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ahistorical portrait—through traditional dances, rituals and ceremonies—which was surrounded by an exotic aura. Examples of this range from *Un peuple qui disparaît, les Aïnos* (Pathé catalogue, 1912), to the Japanese documentaries *Life of the Ainu People of Shiraoi* (*Shiraoi Ainu no seikatsu*, Saburō Hatta, 1926), *To the Sunny East* (Prod. Nippon Yusen Kaisha, 1926) and *Bear Festival in Chikafumi near Asahikawa-city* (*Kinbun no kumaokuri girei,* Tetsuo Inukai, 1936), and several American travelogues. The first travel documentary featuring encounters with Ainu villages was *The Ainus of Japan* (Frederick Starr, 1913) financed by William Nicholas Selig, who, knowing about the profitable business of producing images from remote places, had sponsored other films across China, India and Africa (Erish 145). Thus, "travel" became a canonical mode of representation of exotic cultures during the 1910s. Following the interruption during the First World War, two other travelogues featuring Ainu villages were made. They were those filmed by the Russian-American Benjamin Brodsky, who, after making a couple of documentaries across China, headed for Japan to shoot *Beautiful Japan* (1918) and *A Trip through Japan with the YWCA* (1919).[2]

The above examples illustrate how the concept of the Ainu as a "vanishing" people, due to their inability to adapt to the modern world, pervaded the mechanisms of representation at that time. Those early documentaries drew on scenes of small groups of between ten and twenty individuals depicted in an isolated village that was doomed to disappear. For instance, Brodsky introduced his Ainu sequence with the following intertitle: "The Ainus Village at Shiraoi. The Ainus were the original inhabitants of Japan, but like the American Indians they are now a fast vanishing race." Therefore, the appeal of these screenings in the West lay in the fact that they apparently represented the last opportunity to see this "dying race". Nevertheless, according to the official census, the Ainu population remained more or less stable during this period (Ishida; Muñoz-González 107). The ethnographic films, however, reproduced the dominant Western discourses on "civilisation". Therefore, they portrayed "extinction" as a natural consequence of development and concealed the cultural assimilation orchestrated by different Japanese governments from the late Edo period (1603–1868), and intensified from the Meiji Restoration (1868–1912) under the slogan *bunmei kaika* (civilisation and enlightenment).[3] By the time Girel took the earliest cinematic images of the Ainu, the Hokkaido Development Commission had banned many Ainu customs, such as female tattoos and male earrings from 1871. Moreover, they encouraged farming to the detriment of traditional hunting and the acquisition of the Japanese language over the Ainu language




Figures 1 and 2: *To the Sunny East* (Prod. Nippon Yusen Kaisha, 1926). Screenshots.

Since the 1970s, the profound epistemological crisis that took place in the field of Visual Anthropology helped us to understand that ethnographic film is essentially an

encounter between two cultures, that of the film crew and that of the filmed community (Ruby; MacDougall, "Whose story is it?"; De France). As a result, the films' images of the "primitive" are unavoidably mediatised through the authorised interpretation of filmmakers (MacDougal, "Beyond Observational Cinema." 405–26; Nichols 67–94). This makes it necessary to question film's ability to witness history, as those images are taken to represent a past reality. However, the previously mentioned footage of the Ainu did not align with the contemporary moment in which it was taken. As a consequence, the filmmakers projected misleading messages that were far from the social reality of the portrayed individuals. In order to draw some insight from these, let's say "ethnographic" images, therefore, they must first be called into question and put in dialogue with the narratives, methodologies and trends used to portray the Other (Nichols). Then, we must assess these films in relation to their motivations, their interests and the audience to whom they were addressed (Worth 203–9). Recent studies of ethnographic cinema have shown that the representation of the Other must be historically and geographically contextualised. Unavoidably, the films discussed so far reflect a situation noted by Edward Said wherein "the relation between Occident and Orient is a relation of power, domination and different levels of complex hegemony" (5). As he revealed, Orientalism was not about landowners but about who has the right to represent who. Said's theoretical contribution is crucial to understanding how those early representations of Ainu culture were overdetermined by hegemonic structures that imposed a system of meanings and values over the sense of reality.

Further to the contradictory nature of representation in ethnographic film, De France pointed out a difference between scene and backstage, in other words, the existence of a gap between what filmed individuals are willing to show and what they want to conceal (227–8). This conflict conditions these early film representations of the Ainu people. Behind the cameras, the Ainu movement became increasingly strong during the interwar years. However, while the first Ainu association, *Ainu Kyōkai,* was founded in 1930 (Gluck 275–86), it aimed at assimilation rather than promoting Ainu culture (Siddle, "The Ainu" 25). Despite the fact that racial theories of the time often attributed Ainu origins to a remnant Caucasian population (Nakamura 339), some Ainu individuals simultaneously claimed Mongoloid roots similar to those of the Japanese in order to promote equality and undermine discrimination (Kawamura). Eventually, these demands for equality became temporarily silenced as militarism rose during the 1930s and organisations engaged in activities protesting discrimination, such as *Kaiheisha,* were banned (Siddle 131; Howell). The last documentary on the Ainu culture made before the Pacific War was *Bear Festival in Chikafumi near Asahikawa-city* (*Kinbun no kumaokuri girei,* 1936), shot by Hokkaido University Professor Tetsuo Inukai with the supervision of the Ainu chief Kaneto Kwamura. After this, the ethnographic interest was replaced with propagandic objectives. However, although phenomena of cultural assimilation can be traced in earlier photos of Ainu (Cheung), it was, ironically, during the wartime period that the reality of Japanese assimilation was shown in cinemas for the first time. The propaganda film *Brethren of the North* (*Kita no dōhō,* Tazuko Sakane, 1941) changed the previous ethnographic construction of the Ainu as Other in order to fit the needs of the war.[4] Many Ainu were enlisted, sent to Manchuria, China and the Pacific, and integrated in regiments with other Japanese without any ethnic distinction—though this did not protect them from extortion and mistreatment (Muñoz-González 127–8; Suzuki and Keibo 95; Chikkap 38). Therefore, for the first time, rather than being aliens living on the margins of Japanese civilisation, the female director Tazuko Sakane showed the Ainu as individuals living inside (*uchi*) the "imperial family" (*tenno kazoku*) (Hori).[5] To do this, Sakane combined sequences of rituals with scenes of everyday life and newsreel footage of a young Ainu soldier working in an office for the army (Onishi).

After the surrender and the subsequent Allied Occupation of Japan (1945–1952), the ethnographic documentation of the Ainu was sporadically retaken. For instance, Sakuzaemon Kodama, professor at University of Tokyo, filmed *Ainu Clothes* (*Ainu no yosooi,* 1960), which was commissioned by the Educational Committee of Hokkaido (Okada 190). In the early 1950s, the Ainu were again featured in several documentaries, but they had very little control over their depiction in those films (Okada 191). This problem was even more evident in the Japanese entertainment industry, which, by echoing the American idea of the multiethnic nation, renewed the image of the primitive and exotic Ainu, adding unrealistic elements shaped by American popular culture. As can be seen in *The Outsiders* (*Mori to Mizuumi no Matsuri*, Tomu Uchida, 1958) and *The Rambler Rides Again* (*Daisogen no wataridori*, Takeichi Saitō, 1960), the Ainu mirrored the iconography of the Far West, embodying romantic and savage roles similar to those of the Indians in Hollywood Westerns.



Figures 3 and 4: *The Rambler Rides Again* (*Daisogen no wataridori*, Takeichi Saitō 1960). Screenshots.

The Rambler Rides Again is an example of *mukokuseki eiga* ("films without nationality"), a kind of "Eastern Western" that recycled genre conventions, featuring Nikkatsu Studios star Akira Kobayashi as the Japanese alter ego of a cowboy who helps the Ainu fight for their lands against a villainous businessman who wants to build an airstrip on them. This film gave the Ainu otherness a new dimension. First, *The Rambler Rides Again*

features Ainu peasants who not only live away from Japanese civilisation, but also fight against it. Second, the film disconnects the Ainu at once from their social reality and from their history, as they are portrayed as holding alien ceremonies, such as a dancing around a bonfire, which act as reminders of Sioux images in American films.

In reality, comparisons between the Ainu and the Native Americans could already be found in pre-war documentaries, including Brodsky's *Beautiful Japan* noted above, and in the work of travelogue writers (Starr, *The Ainu Group* 36). However, this series of "films without nationality" went one step further and contributed to creating a "pseudo-ainu" (*giji ainu*) image which was simultaneously promoted by tourist agencies from the second half of the 1950s (Yoshino 38). To promote trips to the northern island of Japan, tourism discourses created an imagery of the "Japanese Far West" which counted on the exoticism of its own "Indians" (Hatozawa 64). This promotion, combined with the increase of visitors to Hokkaido, led to a proliferation of ancient festivals that many Ainu criticised, considering them to be false touristic representations (Ohtsuka; Sugawara; Siddle, *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan* 162).

Despite the proliferation of the representations discussed above, it would not be fair to say that all Ainu film representations of the time were disconnected from reality. Mikio Naruse directed the fictional film *Whistling in Kotan* (*Kotan no kuchibue*, 1959) in which he demonstrated his social concern by exploring the poor living conditions of the Ainu instead of focusing on issues of racial or ethnical difference. However, by the end of the 1950s the word "Ainu" had acquired pejorative connotations and the community struggled against prejudices associating them with "savages" (*mikaijin*) and turning them into a target for mockery (Muñoz-González 305–9; Narita and Hanasaki; Higashimura 39). In *Whistling in Kotan*, Naruse showed a commitment to the Ainu cause by removing the exotic imaginary that dominated the commercial exploitation of the Ainu from the end of the Second World War.

The Right to Self-representation in the 1970s

By the 1970s the Ainu fight took on another form: rather than claiming equality with the *wajin,* Japan's ethnic majority, their struggle against social exclusion was directed at redefining their difference. As such, the Ainu took an active role in constructing their own visual imaginary and counteracting the discourse of otherness that had been imposed upon them. Protests against Japanese tampering with the Ainu image for touristic purposes proliferated during these years. Tourist agencies had made the difference visible, but this difference needed to be reformulated, not only because they articulated idealised views that hid circumstances of discrimination, but also because those portrayals were denigrating in many cases. One of the most notorious cases involved the Japan Travel Bureau (Nihon Kōtsū Kōsha) advertising campaign aimed at domestic and overseas tourists, which invited them, in Japanese and English, to see "the famous hairy Ainu". After being sued by the Ainu activist Tokuhei Narita, the agency had to publish an apology, remove all degrading references in its Hokkaido travel guide and provide its staff with training on racial discrimination (Narita and Hanasaki).

Not only did the Ainu had to face the offensive stereotypes of the "tourist Ainu" (*ainu kankō*) created by Japanese agencies (Muñoz-González 308), but they were also confronted with official political discourse that argued for the nonexistence of minorities in Japan. The conservative *Jiyūminshutō* or Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, with hegemonic power from

the end of the Occupation period, made efforts to create a political discourse on the notion of Japanese "homogeneity" based on the myth of there being "only one race" (*tanitsu minzoku*) (Siddle 156). In response to a question raised by Seiichi Kawamura, head of the Special Committee for the Ainu Issue, Prime Minister Takeo Miki stated, in November 1975, to the Diet (Japanese parliament) that "Japan was a homogeneous nation without the racial problems of the rest of the world" ("Diet 76" 696). In addition, Japanese government representatives in the UN Committee for Human Rights held in 1980 asserted that "the right for any individual to enjoy their culture, profess their religion or use their language is guaranteed in the Japanese law. However, the minorities mentioned in the Treaty were non-existent in Japan" ("Twelfth Session of the Human Right Committee. 14 Nov. 1980"). Thus, the visual representation of the Ainu faced two problems: First, romantic stereotypes and decontextualised views of the Ainu hid problems of assimilation and social exclusion; as has been noted on several occasions, Japan's period of rapid economic growth did not benefit the Ainu in the same way it did the Japanese and most remained poor farmers and labourers (Muñoz García 130; Lozoya and Kerber 269–77). Second, contradictions in the political discourse defending the nonexistence of minorities through "elimination of the Other" (*kesareta tasha*) promoted general ignorance about their social reality (Russell 417).



Figures 5, 6 and 7: English version of the *Japan Travel Bureau* announcement in *Japan Times*, 22 July 1981. It was published on several occasions between 1979 and 1981 (left). Apology note in diaries *Asahi, Mainichi, Yomiuri* and *Hokkaido shinbun,* 12 May 1982 (centre and right).

From the late 1960s, there had been attempts made by documentary film to counteract the unrealistic ethnicity created by entertainment cinema and tourist agencies. Shinya Matsuoka, for example, deliberately shifted away from the image of "indigenous people" based on foreign iconographies and attempted to more accurately show Ainu material and immaterial culture. Matsuoka depicted the lost ethnicity through the process of making the *itomacip* (Ainu canoe) in *Ainu Canoes* (*Ainu no marukibune,* 1968), and explained aspects of Ainu animism in *The Gods of the Ainu* (*Kamisama to tomoni. Ainu minzoku to inau,* 1969). Both documentaries marked a turning point within the Ainu movement, trying to combine the reactivation of social demands with the reconstruction of a more coherent identity (Sjöberg 7). Together with the expansion of organisations such as the *Peure Utari no kai* (Young Comrades Association), *Tokyo Utari Kai* (Tokyo Ainu Association) and *Ainu Kaihō Dōmei* (Ainu Liberation League), the community began to promote festivals aimed at the reconstruction of their past and gaining a self-consciousness of their ethnicity. Events to remember the resistance against Japanese domination appeared in those years, such as the Shakushain Festival in Shinhidaka held in 1970, where a memorial was installed for Ainu chieftain Shakushain, who led an all-out war against the Japanese rule in Southern Hokkaido,

represented by the Matsumae clan. Additionally, the *Ikarpa* (an annual festival in the memory of the dead) began in Nokkamappu in 1974, aimed at remembering those Ainu executed during the Kunashir-Menashi uprising in 1789 (Siddle 174). Furthermore, the Ainu flag was created in 1973 (Anderson 7) and the community popularised the term *ainu mosir* ("Ainu land"), which served to claim that the Ainu were the original inhabitants of Hokkaido (Siddle 176). These initiatives found their means of expression in the fortnightly journal *We Humans* (*Anutari Ainu*), published from 1973 to 1976, whose editorial line was conscious of the fact that the reconstruction of the Ainu identity was ultimately a social concern. As the Ainu poet, Masao Sasaki, stated in the first volume:

> What we are facing now is neither the Ainu as a race nor the Ainu as a people but simply Ainu as a situation. A situation in which people call us Ainu and the meaning of that Ainu comes to constrain our lives. (8)

Redefining the Ownership of Representation in Himeda's Films

Within the context of the mobilisation and revitalisation of Ainu self-consciousness as both an ethnic people and a social collective, the filmmaker Tadayoshi Himeda made a total of seven documentaries on the Ainu. Himeda founded the *Minzoku Bunka Eizō Kenkyujo* (Laboratory of Ethnographic Visual Culture) in 1976 and devoted most of his career to capturing minority cultures, from rural Japan to Basque and Catalan folklore in Spain—seen in *Catalan Easter* (*Kataronia no fukkatsusai*, 1974) and *Basque Country, People from Amalur Land* (*Amaruru daichi no hito basuku*, 1981). During the 1970s, Himeda made five works on the Ainu: *Ainu Wedding* (*Ainu no kekkonshiki*, 1971), *Chise a Kara. We Build Our Home* (*Chise a kara. Warera ie o tsukuru,* 1974), *Iyomante. The Bear Ceremony* (*Iyomante, Kuma okuri*, 1977), *Ainu Canoe* (*Ainu no marukibune*, 1978) and *Saru River. Children's Entertainment* (*Saru gawa. Ainu kodomo no asobi*, 1978). These works were made in close collaboration with Shigeru Kayano, a key figure of the Ainu movement and one of the last native speakers of the Ainu language, who became the first Ainu to sit in the Japanese parliament in 1994. Himeda made these documentaries following the activities of Kayano in his hometown, Biratori, a village of Ainu majority. Kayano's family has had a prominent role in the history of the film representation of the Ainu people. His father, Seitaro Kayano participated in several of the documentaries on Ainu customs made in the 1930s by the Scottish doctor Neil Gordon Munro: *The Ainu Bear Festival / Divine Dispatch* (*Iyomande. Kuma okuri,* 1931), an Ainu exorcism in *Uepotara: A Traditional Exorcism Rite of the Nibutani Ainu* (*N.G.Munro no Nibutani ainu no akuma harai no gishiki-Uepotara,* 1933) and an Ainu housewarming ceremony in *Chisenomi* (*Ainu no Chisenomi*, 1934). Six decades later, his grandson Shiro Kayano made *Words: the Symbol of a People* (*Kotoba wa minzoku no shirushi,* 1993) and *Tontokami. Sake Gods* (*Tontokamui. Sake no kamisama,* 1993), which document the sacred rite of *sake*-making; Shigeru Kayano himself filmed this tradition as performed by his father in the 1980s (Okada 191).

The alliance between Himeda and Shigeru Kayano marked a turning point in the history of Ainu representation, since their ambition was neither to portray a people stuck in their past or to show the primitivism exploited by tourist enterprises and commercial cinema, but rather to document a community whose traditions had become alien to its own members. Unlike earlier documentaries, in which Ainu people were seemingly able to participate in the reconstruction of their ethnicity because their traditional culture was still alive, Himeda portrayed a community for whom those traditions are unknown. As Kayano explained with

frankness in his self-reflexive book *Our Land was a Forest*, his generation had to face those modern contradictions that meant recovering a culture to which most of them had become outsiders. Revolving around that absence, Himeda and Kayano's film corpus brings the problem of cultural assimilation to the forefront. What we see in these films is not an ethnic group but a social collective lacking any ethnic identity, struggling to reconstruct itself because it has been forgotten by almost all those on-screen. The significance of these works resides in how they highlight this identitarian crisis and serve as a powerful warning for the Ainu people.

Rather than resorting to common images of exotically dressed barbarians from another time, *Ainu Wedding* features common people living, working and speaking the same language as the rest of the Japanese. Thereby, Himeda's film reveals what other ethnographic documentaries had long concealed: the absence of any recognisable Ainu trait among Ainu people. The aim is clear from the outset: to make visible the search for the lost difference. As Shigeru Kayano states during the voiceover: "Seventy or eighty years went by since we stopped holding wedding ceremonies in the Ainu style." The popularisation of Japanese style weddings among the Ainu, as a consequence of increasingly mixed marriages (Baba 80–2), and a wish to hide ethnic identity, meant that the traditional wedding ceremony was unknown to most of its attendees. As one of the guests acknowledges in the film: "I was born in the Taishō era [1912–1926] but I had never seen or heard about an Ainu style wedding." Thus, *Ainu Wedding* was valuable in rescuing a ceremony from the past that had faded from memory. These images became a resource for the reconstruction of Ainu history because they witnessed the moment in which the Ainu became aware of their cultural assimilation and tried to counteract it. It is true that this was not the first time this issue was shown on screen. The problem of cultural assimilation had also been addressed in the television reportage *Kotan People. Ethnic Minority in Japan* (*Kotan no hitotachi. Nihon no shōzuminzoku,* Uchirō Ogura, 1959), in which Kayano also participated.[6] The opening sequence for this stated:

> It is unknown if there remains a small proportion of elderly people who still speak Ainu. Only the children of the village think about having the long beard of their grandfathers. The rest have ended up becoming completely Japanese. (Author's translation)

However, there is a significant difference between this television reportage and Himeda's documentary. By 1959, when Uchirō Ogura made this programme for the NHK, the Ainu, far from claiming their difference, were demanding equality with the Japanese people. As the voiceover asserts: "Among most of the Ainu, there are still traces of the disdain and humiliation suffered, which is why they want to become Japanese and look like them." The reportage ends with the voiceover stating: "All the people in Kotan wish to live happily as Japanese, moving away from their past." As such, Ogura presents assimilation to Japanese culture as something desired by Ainu people. However, more than a decade later, Himeda's *Ainu Wedding* shows a different attitude among the Ainu. He portrays a people dealing with a past that they want to remember rather than forget; through this act of remembering, he attempts to make their differences visible and articulates an identitarian discourse.




Figures 8 and 9: *Ainu Wedding* (*Ainu no kekkonshiki*, Tadayoshi Himeda, 1971). Screenshots.

The opening sequence of *Ainu Wedding* presents the bride as a farmer and the groom working in his car repair shop. The subsequent scene shows their respective wedding preparations. She sews the motifs of her *ruunpe* (Ainu kimono made of cotton) while he carves the designs of his *makiri* (Ainu dagger). Both objects, representing each other's belongings (*ikoro*), are swapped in a ceremony prior to the wedding in which both families gather and drink *sake* together using a lacquer cup called *tuki* and a ritual wooden rib called *ikupasui*. The next sequence features the male protagonist during the decoration of their prospective *chise* (Ainu traditional house), the *inau* (sacred wood-shaving stick) arrangement and the prayers to the "guardian god of the house" (*chise kor kamuy*). Next, elderly women help the female protagonist dress up. The filming of this ritual is fascinating for the recovery of customs that Ainu women had previously kept secret and which, by the 1970s, had absolutely fallen into disuse, including the act of tying a ribbon called a *raunke* (also *upsorokut* or *raunkut*) around the bride's waist as a symbol of maturity and chastity. Munro was the first foreigner who talked about this item (Munro 171–3) and its usage was even unknown to researchers from Hokkaido University who held a sample at their university museum (Hilger 155).

Throughout the preparations the couple seem clumsy and insecure in their movements; the unsteady groom and bride follow the indication of an elderly man and woman, imitating their gestures. This film is extraordinarily appealing precisely because it was able to convert into images, and thus capture for posterity, a document of ritualised movements and gestures from the past. Unavoidably, the level of faithfulness to old nuptials is difficult to assess as no Ainu wedding had ever been filmed before; without any visual reference to imitate, attendees therefore had to reconstruct the event's rituals and sequence of actions from the indirect references and memories of a few elderly individuals.

The second part of the film focuses on the wedding itself, which took place on 10 April 1971. After the feast, during which men and women sit around a fireplace and offer *sake* to the fire's goddess (*Ape fuchi kamuy*), the ceremony ends with songs and traditional dances. This film became the first documentary featuring an Ainu wedding; it also has the merit of being the first documentary made mainly in the Ainu language—the ceremony is officiated in this language, and Japanese subtitles were added afterwards in the editing. This deliberate linguistic usage highlights the Ainu cultural singularity that needed to be recovered and, more importantly, is the first and foremost example of the Ainu becoming owners of their own representation. Earlier documentaries featured the Ainu using English, French or Japanese, which emphasised who the authors of the representation were as well as to whom those films were addressed. The prominence of Ainu language in *Ainu Wedding* represents a

significant attempt to challenge hegemonic discourses related to the construction of Ainu ethnicity by giving, for the first time, prominence to the Ainu as the main owners and addressees of the film.

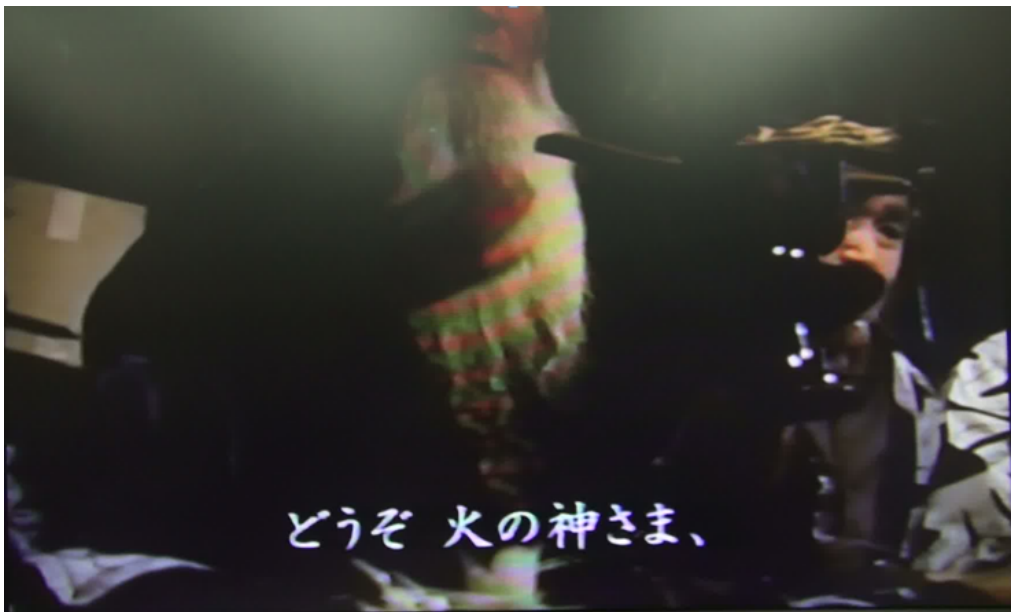


Figure 10: *Ainu Wedding* (*Ainu no kekkonshiki*, 1971). Screenshot.

Three years after *Ainu Wedding,* Himeda directed *Chise a Kara. We Build Our Home,* about the construction of a traditional house and granary that was built in Biratori according to Shigeru Kayano's guidelines. The voiceover consists of a somewhat improvised dialogue between Himeda, who raises questions and makes brief comments, and Kayano, who provides detailed explanations about each step in the process of the construction, including both practical and spiritual aspects. Kayano's narration differs significantly from all previous ethnographic films on the Ainu people. He is not a "distant observer", to take Noël Burch's expression, as his approach is not dominated by the exoticism of an outsider who does not know the reality being filmed. Unlike in the previous Japanese and foreign representations, Kayano provides a close gaze to what is depicted on screen, adding his personal standpoint according to what he learnt on his own, what he was told by his family or what he remembered. As a result, the border between the observer and the observed is blurred and the spectator can listen to Kayano's explanation whilst seeing him on screen participating in the construction. Thereby, the conventional dialectic relationship between the concepts of *uchi* ("inside") and *soto* ("outside") is dismantled. The filmmaker is not the one who presents the filmed community to the audience, as Himeda renounces the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Ainu. Instead, he takes a step back and the narration coming from within that community is foregrounded. The film unfolds according to Kayano's speech and, when he remembers that building a *chise* was a task performed by men and women in collaboration, the film shows men lifting the structure made of trunks while women prepare the straw and wicker that are to fill the roof and walls. After finishing the exterior façade, Kayano explains the spiritual beliefs related to the interior preparation of the house as he undertakes them on screen with the other characters.




Figures 11 and 12: *Chise a Kara. We Build our Home* (Tadayoshi Himeda, 1974). Screenshots.

Shooting the material and spiritual aspects in the construction of the Ainu house ultimately becomes a metaphor for the construction of memory. Kayano asserts that the last time he saw a *chise* being built was in year four of the Shōwa era, 1948, and explicitly acknowledges that the film is somehow a way to save this practice from oblivion. As he states, "the house might still stand twenty or thirty years"; but beyond the construction itself, using the footage as educational material to teach the traditional technique for future generations is crucial.

Shigeru Kayano acknowledged that he reproduced ceremonies he had seen his father practice (Kayano 2007). In fact, Himeda captured two rituals led by Shigeru Kayano that his father Seitaro had also performed, for Munro's camera, in the same Biratori village. One was the intriguing *chisenomi,* the Ainu house-warming included in *Chise a Kara,* which was also shot forty years before by Munro in *Nibutani Ainu no Chisenomi* (1934). However, Shigeru Kayano's explanatory narration over the images of himself and other attendees throwing arrows onto wooden columns allows the audience to engage more deeply with the symbolic and religious dimension of this performance. The second ritual is the *iyomante,* the Ainu bear ceremony in *The Bear Ceremony* (*Iyomante, Kuma okuri*, 1977), also captured by Munro in *The Ainu Bear Festival* (*Iyomande. Kuma okuri,* 1931). The *iyomante* had actually been outlawed by the Tokugawa Shogunate in the mid-nineteenth century (Siddle 131) and the assimilation policies implemented by the subsequent Meiji government resulted in the ceremony being held in its original form on only a few occasions (Ogawa).




Figures 13 and 14: *The Ainu Bear Festival / Divine Dispatch* (*Iyomande. Kuma okuri,* Neil Gordon Munro 1931). Screenshots.

After this, the Bear Festival disappeared almost completely and only token events were still held, namely those performed to outsiders for touristic purposes or academic research, like the one captured by Munro as well as in other documentaries shot by Japanese operators: *Life of Shiraoi Ainu* (*Shiraoi Ainu no seikatsu,* Saburō Hatta, 1926) and *Bear Festival in Chikafumi near Asahikawa-city* (*Kinbun no kumaokuri girei*, Tetsuo Inukai 1936). However, the festival Himeda shot for *The Bear Ceremony* was held during the revitalisation of these traditions that took place from the mid-1970s (Ainu bunka 7; Ogawa). This *iyomante* was arranged by Shigeru Kayano and aimed at teaching the Ainu people rather than astonishing a foreign audience. Himeda filmed the preparations for the festival from late-February 1977 for the first half of *The Bear Ceremony* and the latter part consists of the *iyomante* itself, filmed between 3–5 March 1977. Sequences portray a bear being driven to an altar where it is sacrificed with arrows. Next, dried fish is arranged for a feast. Men simulate a fight with the bear, pray to the *inoka*—an Ainu wooden talisman—and invoke the Goddess of Fire. The celebration continues throughout the night; at the end of the second day neighbours bring their offerings and the morning of the third day, the "dispatch" (*okuri*) takes place, in which the bear's remains are sent to the other world. Himeda explains that the bear was an important daily support but that it was also considered an embodiment of the mountain god in the Ainu belief. The ceremony was, in reality, a ritual sacrifice to bring the spirit back to the "gods' realm" (*kamuy mosir*). The *iyomante* was one of the most representative events of Ainu culture and had been well known in the West since the late nineteenth century. As such, it is not surprising that a number of adventurers prior to the Pacific War were interested in filming it.



Figure 16: *Ainu Canoe* (*Ainu no marukibune*, 1978). © 民族文化映像研究所

The following year, Himeda directed *Ainu Canoe* (1978) in which he shot Kayano explaining the process of making a *cip,* a traditional canoe, from the selection of wood to the

technique of carving. Again, this documentary is not restricted to a mere registration of the material culture but also portrays its symbolic dimension. The canoe is not chosen by chance; it represents the quintessential Ainu ancestral way of life as hunters and fishers, which is believed to be inherited from the *Jōmon* people.[7] Thus, the *cip* has long been a key element in the construction of Ainu identity as it epitomised their difference from the *wajin* Japanese lifestyle based on agriculture and rice farming.

Himeda's last Ainu documentary of this decade, *Saru River. Children's Entertainment* (*Saru gawa. Ainu kodomo no asobi*, 1978), illustrated Shigeru Kayano's tenacity in disseminating his Ainu ancestors' ways of living amongst a new generation of children. Through games, Kayano explains to these new generations the special link that Ainu people had with nature. Kayano demonstrates techniques they developed to store materials collected from the forest, which they venerated, for later use. Himeda continued following Kayano as he disseminated aspects of traditional life among Biratori children in *Saru River. Children's Entertainment from Winter to Spring* (*Saru gawa. Ainu kodomo no asobi fuyu kara natsu e*, 1984). Himeda cleverly showed how the children learnt about Ainu traditions as if they were foreign to them, as well as parents' inability to transmit anything related to the Ainu cultural legacy, resulting from generations of concealment in order to prevent discrimination. Again, this film is remarkable for two reasons. First, the honesty with which the representation of the Ainu community unfolds, without the ethnic traits that had been eliminated for at least a century. Instead of Ainu people practicing Ainu traditions before the camera, the camera shoots Ainu people alien to those traditions. Thus, Himeda continued challenging previously configured iconography by openly revealing an uneasy reality for ethnographic filmmakers: Ainu people were indistinguishable from other Japanese people. Second, more than a decade after the first collaboration between Himeda and Kayano, *Saru River. Children's Entertainment from Winter to Spring* again warns about the extinction of Ainu heritage, given the failure to transmit insight into their immaterial culture to subsequent generations.

Japanese government expropriation of Ainu lands for the construction of Nibutani dam on Saru River prompted Himeda and Kayano to make their last collaboration, *Documenting Transmission of Ainu Culture along Saru River* (*Shishirimuka no hotori de ainu bunka denshō no kiroku,* 1996). Unlike the previous films, this documentary was made with a clear political motivation: criticising the governmental decision and supporting Shigeru Kayano's arguments regarding how the dam violated Ainu rights to protect their cultural heritage. Kayano defended the mountains surrounding Saru river as sacred sites (*chinomi-shir*), and the annual *chip-sanke* (boat launching) ceremony held in the river as a legacy that should be preserved. *Documenting Transmission of Ainu Culture along Saru River* starts explaining the long relationship the Ainu had with nature and portrays activities of the local community such as fishing, hunting and harvesting. Additionally, Himeda includes a historical contextualisation to highlight the paradox found in the fact that the Japanese government had previously forced the Ainu to change their lifestyle and replace it with a life based on agriculture; now, their cultivated lands were being expropriated by this Japanese government. The construction of the Nibutani dam was one of the late examples of the exploitation of Hokkaido natural resources at the expense of the Ainu population. Work on the dam started in 1991 and was the subject of famous litigation led by Tadashi Kaizawa and Shigeru Kayano, who owned lands that were being flooded. By 1996, protests by the local community increased and the case earned notoriety in the press.[8] The same year, the construction of the dam was completed, but the trial resulted in the first ever Japanese legal decision to recognise the Ainu people as an indigenous people.[9]

Conclusion

Himeda's series of documentaries marked a shift within Ainu representation; rather than showing stereotyped prejudices articulated about a supposed exotic tribe stuck in a bucolic past, they presented a contemporary people whose past was about to be forgotten. These films are not about depicting individuals from another time in the present, but about capturing a people in the present struggling to reconstruct their past. It can be said that memory restoration is the axis of all Himeda's films and, to this aim, Kayano's help is essential. Together, they created a body of films that highlighted the problem of cultural assimilation previously concealed by ethnographic cinema. This long-hidden assimilation equally obscured the problem of discrimination and, by keeping that in mind, Himeda and Kayano's work can be understood as a quest to recover not so much a past ethnicity as a lost pride.

In addition, this film corpus is underpinned by Himeda's will to dismantle the notion of otherness that dominated the iconography around which the Ainu image was built. To a great extent, Himeda allowed the Ainu to take the reins of their representation. The use of the Ainu language, Kayano's narration and the standpoint of the community regarding the recovery of its traditional culture demonstrate this. Himeda, with Kayano's inestimable help, manages to invert the notion of Other and Self, reaching a qualitative leap in ethnographic cinema, and, through this experiment of self-representation, the limits of previous representations are ultimately brought to the foreground. More broadly, Himeda's films overcame the sense that shooting ethnographic films became a clash between two cultures, wherein the observer imposed hegemonic discourses around the notion of civilisation upon the observed. Thus, through close collaboration with the portrayed community, Himeda questioned the authority traditionally attributed to filmmakers and anthropologists, challenging inherited stylistic conventions in ethnographic cinema and opening up avenues to new collaborative documentaries that would overcome old distinctions between the "primitive" and the "civilised", the filmmaker and the filmed object.

Notes

[1] Sasaki ("On Ainu-E"; "Ainu-e") shows that what we know of the ancient Ainu culture derives, to a great extent, from *Ainu-e,* paintings of Ainu customs created by Japanese artists between mid-seventeenth and early twentieth century. Almazán explains how foreigners proposed opposite representations of Ainu primitivism versus modern Japan through the engraving art, *ukiyo-e* (77). Cheung describes the Japanese use of photo-images on the Ainu to, ironically, define the concept of Japaneseness (1–21).

[2] For an account of these early travelogues on the Ainu people see Centeno, "Las grietas de la imagen"; Kar and Bren; Curry and Tseng. For a wider account of the hegemonic Western gaze projected upon travel documentaries in general see Rony.

[3] Ainu assimilation to Japanese culture was officially enacted in the "Hokkaido Former Aborigine Protection Law" (*Hokaidō kyūdojin hogohō*) of 1899 (Ainu Bunka 7).

[4] The film is lost but Sakane's texts ("Kita no doho Zatsukan"; "Kita no doho") contain information related to the production and plot of the film. There is discrepancy regarding the

release date of the film. While Nornes notes the year 1937 (3), Hori states that it was released in 1941. Hori's date seems more likely given the data provided in Sakane's notes ("Kita no doho Zatsukan" 53–4).

[5] Interesting remarks on the role of the primitive "other" Ainu in the formation of modern Japanese identity can be found in Weiner. For an account on the usage of "outside" (*soto*) and "inside" (*uchi*) as sociological categories reinforcing Japaneseness, see Creigthon.

[6] Broadcast on 30 August 1959 within the *Nihon no sugao* (The True Face of Japan) series (November 1957–April 1964). This reportage belongs to episode 87, produced by Uchirō Ogura (Choi 1–18). Shigeru Kayano had also participated in the educational film *Ainu Clothing* (*Ainu no yosooi,* Sakuzaemon Kodama, 1960) (Fitzhugh and Dubreil 187–92).

[7] The *Jōmon* were a hunter-gatherer people who inhabited the Japanese archipelago more than 10,000 years ago. There is an extensive literature that has fuelled the debate on links between the Ainu roots and *Jōmon* people, ranging from the field of anthropologists to geneticists (see Tajima).

[8] The international edition of the main Japanese diary, *Mainichi,* included the April protest led by Kayano in "Ainu protest flooding of sacred land", *Mainichi Daily News,* 3 April 1996.

[9] Sapporo District Court stated that the Ainu people had established a unique culture in Hokkaido before the arrival of the Japanese and that therefore their rights should have been given consideration. However, this sentence was not enforceable until the Diet passed a resolution that recognised the Ainu as the indigenous people of Japan in 2008.

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