

SERMAKA OMARE: THE AINU MOTIF OF PROTECTION.  
AN ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL AINU ARTWORK

A THESIS

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## DEDICATION

For my Dad, Gerhard Bruno Hunger, who showed me how to sit and listen to nature, to appreciate other cultures, and who called me one night in 1999 to tell me to watch a TV show on P.B.S. about the Ainu of the Japanese islands.

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## ABSTRACT

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### SERMAKA OMARE: THE AINU MOTIF OF PROTECTION. AN ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL AINU ARTWORK

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The purpose of this thesis is the preservation and discussion of the artwork of a culture that has been marginalized and almost made to vanish from history. The Ainu people have been pressured to assimilate to either Japanese or Russian cultures in the past. Only recently have they been able to assert their rights as indigenous people and are rebuilding their culture. Interpretations of patterns, through the scope of art history, have been made and linked to the motif of protection, which is referred to as *sermaka omare*. Necessary to understanding this culture, an explanation of their traditions opens the thesis, and then an examination of their traditional works becomes the content.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: PROSPECTUS

#### **Problem**

The Ainu, whose largest population is now found on Hokkaido Island, Japan, are not Japanese, nor are Ainu designs (Fitzhugh 9-13). As distinct as the Ainu language, Ainu cultural objects are unique. This thesis will investigate the earliest known designs of the Ainu culture, examine the design elements and symbolism used throughout the culture's motifs, and develop a theory that the Ainu's care for one another is transferred through their artwork in which protective patterns are created. This paper will restrict the discussion of Ainu objects to clothing and ritual items. The Ainu are a disappearing indigenous people who struggle to keep traditions alive and, although genetics may fade, this people's history does not have to.

#### **Purpose Statement**

To comprehend the art of a culture, an overview of that culture's history must be included. The origin of the Ainu has remained an unanswered question and confounds many branches of science (Hilger x). Normally, an investigation of the motifs of a culture would look to both ancestry and neighboring peoples for signs of borrowing and development of individual unique design. Archeologists, anthropologists, and geneticists have all begun looking into the origins of the Ainu, but often this research results in conflicting or vague findings (Fitzhugh 31).

Ainu language is considered a *language isolate* (Kitagawa and Long 311). Ainu language is also an oral tradition, as opposed to written. Ainu verbal sounds were only written down when Westerners began to take an interest in the late nineteenth century through the work of anthropologists and missionaries. Ainu stories have been passed down from storytellers through *Yukar*, a poetic form of storytelling that sometimes lasts for hours (Hilger 10).

This thesis contributes to the body of knowledge of Ainu design through a thorough examination of symbolism, which reflects Ainu shamanistic beliefs and cultural traditions. Insight and appreciation for this mysterious culture will be developed through the study of clothing and ritual objects. This will lead to connections and parallels to examine and discuss between the work of the Ainu and native tribes of the American Pacific Northwest.

### **Significance Statement**

Although this study will touch upon other branches of inquiry such as archeology, anthropology, and history, the focus for this paper is art history. This approach is one which works from broad to narrow in focus, beginning with the history of the people of the north, the connection between the Jōmon and Ainu cultures, narrowing down to the motifs of the Ainu's clothing and ritual objects while discussing the possible implications of Ainu symbolism. This work will add to the education and research of a traditional culture that is fading into obscurity by being forced to blend with the Japanese, having

traditional objects taken for collections of more modern civilizations, and being absorbed by the encroaching current times (National Geographic Society 92).

### **Literature Review**

The literature treats the Ainu as mysterious, enigmatic, and as an isolated culture. Until recent decades and modern advances in science, it was difficult to determine Ainu ancestry and origin. Many scholars' works express a lack of knowledge as well as a lack of database regarding the Ainu's culture. Through the use of archeological identification techniques, an Ainu genetic make up has slowly been identified. This information is important in placing this culture in certain regions, which helps to explain the cultural symbolism, use of materials, and history of motifs.

Our land, Ainu Mosir, had been invaded, our language stripped, our ancestral remains robbed, the blood of living Ainu taken, and even our few remaining utensils carried away. At this rate, what would happen to the Ainu people? What would happen to Ainu culture? From that moment on, I vowed to take them back. Once I promised myself this, I believe my personality changed. (Kayano 99).

This excerpt from *Our Land Was a Forest* clearly describes the necessity for research and conservation of the artifacts of an oppressed culture. This anecdotal evidence, from an individual who was raised in traditional Ainu culture, presents insight into the main facets of this thesis; these will include history, symbolism, and a comparison with other indigenous peoples' works through an examination of Ainu arts. In addition to the

anecdotal evidence, scholarly sources will supplement and provide further evidence to examine the Ainu and other cultures noted.

There are historical parallels between Ainu and Native American tribes: the treatment of cultural objects, being shuffled between political adversaries and suffering new diseases purposely introduced by the modern world, which killed off large percentages of the populations (Fitzhugh 102). Keeping with that parallel, the “culture has already virtually disappeared”... while its beautiful textiles and other cultural objects “have already achieved the status of museum pieces” and are highly sought-after collectibles (Japan Textile Color Design Center 19).

Although Kayano’s quote, above, clearly identifies the necessity for further study and preservation of his peoples’ artwork, the Ainu have not been considered seriously in art history until very recently. Ossenberg’s osteoarchaeological research states that there were three races in ancient Japan: Japanese, Emishi (which later became the Ainu), and Ashihase. Her findings are that the Jōmon people (14,000 BCE-300 BCE) appear to be the genetic ancestors of the Ainu. In comprehensive art history texts, such as in *Gardener’s Art Through the Ages*, Jōmon pottery and the Jōmon period are mentioned and lead into the Yayoi cultural period (300 BCE 300 CE), and then the Kofun period (300-552 CE). After these three ancient periods in Japanese art are discussed, the text moves on to Shinto and Buddhist art of Japan (Kleiner 207-221), despite Ainu remains having been found with Jōmon and Yayoi pottery styles (Hammel 25). In *The Ainu of the Northwest Coast of Southern Sakhalin*, the Ainu’s beginning is placed somewhere

between the Satsumon culture (700-800 CE to 1300 CE) (Ohnuki-Tierney 5). Out of three art history tomes, two used at the university level as art history textbooks and one printed as an examination of the medieval arts of Japan, none mention the culture or artwork of the Ainu (Kleiner, Seiroku, Stokstad).

William Fitzhugh's background is in anthropology, and he serves as the director of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History's Arctic Studies Center in Anchorage (Smithsonian Institution). The focus of his research is "Circumpolar archaeology, northern cultures, and environments", per the Smithsonian National Museum of History's site. Fitzhugh's work, *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*, is an in-depth catalog with essays, history, and many images of objects in an effort to "redress the lack of information by presenting a traveling exhibition together with an illustrated compendium on Ainu history, culture, arts and modern affairs"(9).

*Textile Designs of Japan III* is a more thorough examination of the Ainu designs and notes the importance of some understanding of a culture's origin: "...Ainu designs are a synthesis of Jōmon patterns, inspired by the shamanism that was and still is widespread among northern peoples who depend chiefly on hunting and fishing..." (Japan Textile Color Design Center 20). The authors compare Ainu design to the Jōmon cord designs, noting that there is much rope-like imagery and embroidery on Ainu textiles, which consist mainly of robes, aprons, belts, and headscarves. The significance of Jōmon patterns and cultural values will be examined and discussed as a framework for the discussion of Ainu art.

Materials used in the production of these textiles include plants used for dyes, native fibers for weaving, and non-native fibers imported from neighbors such as the Japanese main island of Honshu and China (Japan Textile Color Design Center 21). In this same book there is also a discussion of the Ainu's history of importing materials for trade and enthusiasm for Japanese costumes. Although these elaborate clothes were never truly assimilated into the Ainu wardrobe, they were kept as cherished souvenirs. It would seem that the Ainu were also collectors of art.

Many of this study's sources are from anthropological authors whose different focuses are religion, symbolism, myth, and preservation of culture. In *Myths and Symbols*, Kitagawa makes the connection between Ainu and Siberian shamanism by discussing the similarity of rituals (310). Almost all discussions of Ainu will include a description of *kamui*, which is roughly translated as *spirit*, *deity*, or *divine*. This is necessary to understand when investigating and examining the artwork, as it has a divine purpose or symbolism within the design. Munro states, "Ainu religion in general perspective presents every phase of animistic belief", making the point that Ainu beliefs, similar to Shinto beliefs, see spirit in everything (8). Along with believing that there are *kamui* everywhere and in everything, there is also the belief in *ramat*. *Ramat* translates as *heart* but can only be roughly compared to the Western notion of the soul or spirit of a person (Munro 8).

*Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People* has the largest collection of images and information on the artifacts including the year each piece was collected, the collector,



provenance, and present depository. This book will be relied on heavily for images as well as information. The majority of objects that will be discussed will include, but not be limited to: various robes, *ikupasuy* (prayer sticks used in different rituals), *tuki* (lacquerware cups used in different rituals), and cooking utensils. Except for the lacquerware cups, these objects all have motifs either embroidered, woven or carved into them to designate purpose. Recurring designs include protection swirls (or “whorls”), salmon, whales, bears, and snakes. The Ainu jobs were divided between genders and based on religious norms and cultural taboos. Men carved wood, gathered firewood, and tended the sled dogs. Women sewed, wove and cooked (Ohnuki-Tierney, *The Ainu of the Northwest* 36-47). As the duties were distributed between genders so are the mediums and styles of image on the artwork.

The similarities between Ainu culture and the cultures of the Pacific Northwest of North America provide another mystery. There is not yet conclusive evidence of Ainu crossing over the Bering Strait, as with Asian peoples who later became known as Native Americans, but the parallels deserve examination (Fitzhugh 116-118). The geography, natural resources, and shamanic practices possibly create similar styles in both Ainu and Haida artifacts. The use of bears, salmon, snakes, and protective designs is found throughout almost all of the art. The artwork can be broken down into a very basic color palette. Usually there are three colors used in garments. Created from prepared plant matter, the colors can be bright red, black, (which depending on the treatment of the plant matter can be gray to dark blue), and yellow. Ohnuki-Tierney discusses the use of color

and pattern on clothing for different genders and ages, noting that that white is reserved for elders (*The Ainu of the Northwest* 43). Lines are both curvilinear and rectilinear. Positive space and negative space is used almost equally to create an overall design covering most of the object (Holm 8-14).

Critical, academic literature on Ainu artwork is sparse, but there is enough available to create a thorough examination and study for this thesis. One consistency in sources is that the origin of Ainu culture is a mystery and that there is a renewed interest in preserving knowledge of this group and its artifacts. Anthropologists in the nineteenth century began to study the Ainu by living with them and recording their traditions and customs. Artworks were collected as early as the 1700s, and therefore a good percentage of those objects have been preserved for study. This thesis will explain the history of the Ainu, examine designs, and compare and contrast the artwork with that of specific Pacific Northwest coast designs in an effort to contribute to the body of knowledge and further understanding of an enigmatic culture.

### **Methodology**

The research for this thesis will rely on several branches of science and the arts. Archeology and anthropology have made the most investigations and discoveries regarding the culture and ideas regarding the origin of the Ainu. The collection of books chosen for this study's sources include a comprehensive collection of essays written by Ainu natives as well as those who study the culture, authors who have examined

shamanism and works whose purpose is the conservation of Ainu ideas and culture.

Black and white images will be included in reference to discussion of motifs and patterns.

### **Limitations**

1. This study will contain a general survey of the history of the Ainu without delving deeply into world politics.
2. This is not an essay on Ainu religion and will only examine it in relation to symbolism in the designs.
3. Objects included in the study will be restricted to clothing, on which the majority of the design work is found, ritual tools and cooking utensils. This will allow inclusion of design created by both female and male members of the culture.
4. An examination of Ainu motifs will be executed following the principles of design, using terminology relating to art history and visual descriptions of images available through print sources.
5. A historical timeline for the Ainu has yet to be established through science and there are conflicting theories regarding their origins.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Ainu:** An indigenous people living in Japan (Hokkaido Island), and Russia (the Sakhalin and Kuril islands) who are not genetically related to the Japanese.

**Indigenous:** A group of people who inhabited an area before colonization or modernization and maintained cultural norms and language from before, or at the beginning of, the known history for that area.

Language Isolate: A language that has no known linguistic affiliation with any other language, such as Basque or Tarascan.

*Yukar*: An Ainu epic, transmitted orally and used to teach Ainu history, poetry and song through rhymed verse and melodies.

## CHAPTER II

### THE AINU

Historical Ainu are considered to be a pre-literate culture, and much of what can be learned of their culture has come from outsiders. Many have offered speculation about the Ainu people's historical timeline; therefore, some contradiction results from looking at different sources. This chapter will explore the contrasting ideas of Ainu time and lineage, ultimately culminating in the most accurate characterization of Ainu historical time periods. An examination of writings from neighboring cultures, and archeological and anthropological data, will provide more insight into from where, and from which cultures, the Ainu originated. Most importantly, this knowledge informs the origins of their artwork and supports theories of construction and symbolism of Ainu artwork.

#### **Theories of Ainu Origins**

Ainu people descended from older cultures, the Jōmon and Satsumon. They are mentioned in early Japanese writings and, although discovered by Europeans and Westerners, their culture strangely remained almost hidden from history. Despite living in northern Japan, they are not genetically related to the Japanese. Ainu people only show a genetic link to the Japanese later, after they are oppressed by and assimilated into Japanese culture by force.

During his missionary work, Reverend John Batchelor (1854-1944) lived with the Ainu for decades while creating an English-Ainu dictionary and wrote several volumes about the people and their culture. His work is of great importance and his name will appear in almost any study of the Ainu. In his first book, *The Ainu of Japan: The Religion, Superstitions, and General History of the Hairy Aborigines of Japan*, he cites a line from the *Kojiki, Record of Ancient Matters*<sup>1</sup>: “When our ancestors descended from heaven in a boat, they found upon this island several barbarous races, the most fierce of whom were the Ainu.” The *Kojiki* was written in the year 712. Batchelor notes that in it the Ainu are mentioned (20). It is clear by this that the Ainu were already established in the area well before the Japanese became aware of them in 712 CE. However, Morioka in *Beyond the Tanabata Bridge* says the earliest account was of a skirmish with the Ainu in 658 CE on northern Honshu (95). Ainu culture does not have a written history, nor uses a calendar similar to their neighbors, so there will be discrepancies between sources about their origins and first meetings with other cultures.

Anthropologist Christy Turner conducted research to attempt to find racial backgrounds through dental evidence in hopes of elucidating the relationship between the different peoples throughout the Japanese archipelago. Through this evidence, that the Ainu were not early Japanese, their story narrows. An examination of the region’s

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<sup>1</sup> The *Kojiki* is the earliest Japanese writing and is dated 712 CE. It is the creation stories of the Japanese people.

archeological history will help to create a more reasonable approximation of when their culture began (Turner 911).

The Jōmon are the earliest group to inhabit the Japanese archipelago and leave behind evidence of their culture. Pearson, in “Sedentism in Non-Agricultural Societies,” cites findings using Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (A.M.S.), which is a more definite way of determining the age of artifacts (rather than radio carbon dating), as “pushing the beginning of the Jōmon Period back to as early as 16,000 years ago” (240). Published in 2006, Pearson’s work represents one of the most recent and more empirical examinations pertaining to the Jōmon culture (see table 1: Jōmon Periods).

In the essay “Ainu Ethnicity: A History,” Fitzhugh expresses the near loss of knowledge of the Ainu culture, “Most who recognized the word ‘Ainu’ knew it only as a four-letter answer to the popular crossword puzzle clue, “a northern native people of Japan” (9). On the World Atlas map (see Fig. 3), the territories that make up the Ainu homelands surround the Sea of Okhotsk. Okhotsk is directly north of Sakhalin Island, which is directly north of Hokkaido Island. The Kuril Islands make up the outer eastern border of the Ainu territory and span from Hokkaido to the Kamchatka Peninsula. The consensus among archeologists, at the time of Fitzhugh’s publication, was that the Okhotsk people became the “immediate ancestors” of the Ainu of the Sakhalin and Kuril areas and that the Satsumon are the “immediate ancestors” of the Ainu of Hokkaido and Honshu (now of the Japanese islands) (Fitzhugh18).

Approximately five hundred years later, the Okhotsk people were “absorbed or replaced by Satsumon culture, which moved into their coastal territories in Hokkaido” (Yamaura and Ushiro 43-44). In 1822, in a census of all of Sakhalin and Hokkaido Ainu, the population stood at 24,339. Only 1,600 Ainu were reported to have lived in Sakhalin by 1922. In 1884 there were a mere 97 on the Kurile Islands. It is believed that their descendants would have moved to Hokkaido after this time (Philippi 3).

“Origins of the Ainu,” a website in conjunction with a Nova special on the Ainu of Hokkaido Island, discusses the beginning of the Satsumon culture within the relationship of the Jōmon and the Ainu by examining housing styles changes and other artifacts. On Hokkaido Island, around 650 CE, pit-houses are suddenly being used while “Satsumon” pottery replaces Jōmon earthenware. Rather than the fine patterns found on Jōmon pottery, the Satsumon style was to smooth the walls of the pot with a piece of wood and then incise larger geometric patterns using lines. The shape of the vessels is different than that of the Jōmon, and the difference between the styles of pottery creates a distinction between the cultures. Consequently, it is noted that the Satsumon site is “crucial to understanding Ainu development.” (Crawford S331-S345).

### **History of the Culture**

Don Philippi was a noted linguist and translator. His work with Ainu language, specifically studying their oral epics, gives great insight into the Ainu culture. In his time with the people and their epics, Philippi pieced together a cultural history, both from Japanese sources and the Ainu storytelling. This chronicle, supplemented with



archeological information, is what will be used to illustrate the Ainu history. The four periods are:

1. Proto-Ainu Period (100 BCE -600 CE)
  2. Early Ainu Period (600-1000 CE)
  3. Middle Ainu Period (1050-1650 CE)
  4. Late Ainu Period (1669-1950s CE)
- (Philippi 1-21)

### **Proto Ainu Period**

This era lasted from perhaps 100 BCE into the sixth century, and what knowledge there is of the Proto Ainu Period was gained from later Ainu epics. These early ancestors are seen as barbaric. In cautionary tales told later, they are described as ignorant of traditional ways important to later Ainu religion and practices in which food supplies are preserved, and the gods are properly acknowledged. A lack of knowledge about making “*inaw*,” a type of whittled stick decorated with curls of shaved wood that is created for a variety of rituals, is mentioned, indicating the uncivilized nature of the period. Philippi says that these later stories are based on “racial memories”<sup>2</sup> (9-10).

Within this time frame, the Okhotsk lived nearby and had some type of relationship with the Ainu. However, until the 1930s, people dismissed the clear and

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<sup>2</sup> *Dictionary.com* defines “racial memories” as “feelings, patterns of thought, and fragments of experience that have been transmitted from generation to generation in all humans and have deeply influenced the mind and behavior” (Dictionary.com).

obvious accounts of the Okhotsk people mentioned in Ainu epics. Prior to the twentieth century, the Okhotsk culture was unknown, but the information given in the epics corresponds splendidly with archeological evidence (Philippi 9-10).

### **Early Ainu Period**

From the sixth century into the tenth century, the “Ainu ethos” developed. Essential religious ideas evolved during this period to become tenets of Ainu culture, later found in their archaic epics. Rituals were developed for fishing and hunting, and there was concern expressed in the epics over famine (likely left over from catastrophes of the last era) and giving offerings and pleasing the gods that control food sources. Natural disasters and tragedies are the logical beginning of an important motif in Ainu artwork: protection for one another.

The *Nihon Shoki* (literally: “*Japanese Early Days*”) written in 720 CE, and the second oldest Japanese writing, refers to a military campaign led by a Japanese general between 658-60 CE. It speaks of the Japanese Abe family who ruled the north part of Honshu Island and possibly southern Hokkaido Island. Japanese artifacts dating to the Nara and Heian periods (710-1185 CE) are found in mounds throughout Hokkaido, placing the Japanese on the northern island in this early Ainu period. Trade and relationships are apparent between the Japanese and Ainu as several Japanese words including *sake* (rice wine) and *kamui* (god) are adopted into the Ainu vocabulary. Okhotsk culture is still active and flourishing around the Okhotsk Sea, and they may have introduced Paleo-Asiatic elements to the Ainu. Trade with Okhotsk is likely the link that

brought Chinese elements into Ainu designs, illustrated in Chapter III. The Japanese are not mentioned in traditional Ainu epics regarding this period, but wars fought against the Okhotsk are later commemorated (Philippi 10-11).

Harrison mentions that in the Japanese *Kojiki*, trade with the Ainu is described as “a small one dealing mostly in furs and feathers.” (280). The Japanese’ interest, already, is “less in trade than to maintain some kind of watch on the movements of continental peoples” for the purpose of seizing control of the Ainu later. Whichever clan was in charge of the northern areas of Japan had the monopoly in trading with their neighbors. The position of Sakhalin made it central in the trade route, connecting China and Japan (Harrison 280).

### **Middle Ainu Period**

Philippi refers to this time as “the greatest flourishing of the Ainu culture.” Between the mid-tenth and the mid-seventeenth century, the Okhotsk culture is absorbed, and the Ainu are forged into a single cultural entity (11). The Ainu of this period were more militarily powerful than the Japanese. The Middle Ainu Period is a time of leisure activities for some. Men were able to engage in carving wood while women developed their skills at embroidery and weaving. Gender roles are addressed in the following chapters as details of traditional Ainu artwork are expanded. Some families lived in fortified stockades with servants and even slaves and accumulated Japanese goods as treasures. There were differences in social status noted in physical appearance and dress, all described in the epics called *Yukar* (Philippi 11-13).

The Japanese nickname for the Ainu was ‘Ezo’ and was a blend of the words for “barbarians” and “sword,” revealing the Japanese people’s opinion of their neighbors (Patrie 2). In 1602, an Italian Jesuit missionary named Girolamo de Angelis is the first European to visit and observe the Ainu. He studies their language and gives reports to his superiors. This may have been the first recording of their language, before Batchelor would live with them two hundred years later (Philippi 16).

As a gesture of respect to Ainu chiefs, merchant ships had to lower their sails and stop when passing certain points on the coast. Elaborate ceremonies were performed for trading in which gifts, or “tributes” were exchanged. This long-established way of trading engendered some trust that would later be taken advantage of in horrific ways by the Japanese. It is important to note that this gesture is very similar to the ones used by the United States when trying to gain land from the Native Americans. Essentially a psychological tactic, it was a way to observe the Ainu and keep abreast of changes in their politics (Shinichiro & Harrison 12).

### **Late Ainu Period**

This era begins with the defeat of the Ainu by the Japanese in the rebellion of 1669. Armed conflict continues into the early eighteenth century, and the final rebellion occurs in 1789. The Matsumae clan continues to rule Hokkaido through 1798. From 1799 to 1821, the *shogunate*-military administration, “Bakufu,” is in control of the north. In December of 1821, the affairs of the northern territories are handed back over to the Matsumae clan. Thirty-three years later, a commissioner is appointed at Hakodate, and

later a government-established court manages Hokkaido and all “native” affairs (Shinichiro and Harrison 9-12). Ainu social status changed with new wealth from trade. Some families were able to trade directly with immigrants and governments, thereby surpassing their Ainu neighbors and gaining more strata in their culture. The presence of the Japanese government causes the decline of Ainu traditions and a loss of independence. Syphilis spread between the Japanese and Ainu beginning around 1793 through prostitution and sexual exploitation. Additionally, in 1845, the Ainu experienced a sixty-percent death rate in one community from smallpox (Walker 102-103).

During the end of these outbreaks the Japanese were kidnapping Ainu from their villages. Kayano recounts his grandparents’ experiences with forced labor in 1858. The *shamo* or Japanese would come to a village and take Ainu people, from ages three to their fifties. They would be forced to walk for miles to their destination and later would be let go as though they had served a sentence and had been freed. They would be “paid” for their labor “as little as a sparrow’s tear,” although some returned home with nothing. Some lacquerware found in Ainu homes was obtained in this way, as payment for labor (Kayano 27-36).

Under duress, the Ainu adopted the Japanese language and customs. Assimilation was encouraged between 1899 and 1937 through a system of “native education” that aimed to turn the Ainu into loyal and useful subjects of the Japanese empire. Part of the assimilation had consisted of increased intermarriage since 1945, but there are many who still claim an Ainu identity and say they do not feel “Japanese.” The Ainu organized to

retain their heritage, and in 1930, The Ainu Association was formed. It was the first organization for leaders of communities to be able to unite to serve Ainu interests (Siddle 26-33).

### **Modern Ainu Period**

Western societies see “radical social movements” in the 1960s, and during this time Ainu activists create a new Ainu movement. During the 1970s, there were movements worldwide for indigenous rights. Awareness and contact with North American, and Australian indigenous peoples helps the Ainu join together to encourage a re-cultivation of their identity. The Ainu Association drafted the New Law for the Ainu People in 1984 to attempt to abolish institutional racism and provide pathways for them to maintain their culture through language learning and cultural education. Racism was, and still is, difficult to eradicate. When the Prime Minister Nakasone was quoted in 1986 as saying that Japan was “an educationally superior society due to the ‘absence of racial minorities,’” new activism was encouraged and the “The New Law” was presented to the United Nations in 1987.

Cooperating with the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, The Ainu Association was finally able to have the Japanese government admit, in 1991, that the Ainu were in fact a minority under the Japanese International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights. A court case in 1997 finally stated that Ainu were an indigenous people in a legal context (Siddle 29-34).

Six months later, “The Ainu Shinpo” (Ainu New Law) was enacted. Its description reads: “Law on Promotion of Ainu Culture and Facilitation of Popular Understanding of Ainu Tradition.” This was the first time that a separate ethnic group was acknowledged by Japan as living within its borders (Tsunemoto 366). Since then, the Japanese have become more aware and embracing of the Ainu. Newer generations have taken an interest in them as a marginalized people. Tokyo filmmakers have made documentaries about them, and Ainu history has been taught in Japanese public schools as part of the curriculum for a few decades. Europeans were so interested in collecting Ainu clothes and “trinkets” during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that many Ainu artifacts that would have perished through daily use have been preserved. Many estates of these collectors have gifted these treasures back and put them on display in museums.

### **Culture and Religion**

The Ainu’s morals and values are the basis for an ideal world. The main tenets are: take care of one another to strengthen their people, do not waste or pollute resources, be respectful of each other and the land, and show gratitude for what is received. Unless they had to defend their land or people, they remained passive while working toward the goals of the village, which was a subsistence lifestyle. Debate was used to settle conflict rather than violence. They hunted, fished and gathered what they needed. Women and men had specific roles and were equally important to their communities and families. The gods lived with and around the Ainu and were thought to affect daily life. They were thanked, implored and spoken with through shamanism and gifts.

## Culture

One must not arbitrarily cut down trees, one must not pollute running water, even birds and beasts will remember kindnesses and return favors, and so on. One of the most often-repeated tales was about a child who was considerate of the elderly, praised by other people and the gods, and grew up to become a happy and respected adult (Kayano 5).

Kayano's father taught him that one never fished to excess. There was always enough to eat because the resources were never depleted (18). In respecting the land, he was taught to keep his voice low so they would not startle the mountain gods. This likely also helped to not frighten away prey and is expressed in this quote from his writing, "When you're walking by the river or the edge of a marsh, don't move a rock without reason... If you lift a rock to get fish bait, you're expected to put it back where it was" (66).

Speaking with the gods (*kamui*) was essential to life. As Philippi stated, later Ainu felt that their ancestors were barbaric for not knowing about the *inau*, a whittled stick left in the ground as an offering and thanks to the *kamui* of that tree, rock, river, house, animal, etc. (9). To give thanks for the first salmon of the season, the salmon was placed on a cutting board and faced an auspicious direction by the fire pit. The salmon was bowed to by the head of the household and thanked for the honor of its presence. The fire goddess in the hearth was invited to join the family in their feast, and after prayers were



offered, the salmon was cut into pieces and stewed in a pot to be shared with others (Kayano 19).

Ainu life, prior to Japanese influence, was bucolic. The seasons were celebrated by what was available to hunt, catch, or gather to make essentials. Autumn brought salmon caught with a net using a “scooping” technique. After the first salmon was caught and cooked, neighbors were invited and the convivial evening lasted into the dawn, and everyone was taken care of (Kayano 19-21). Reeds were gathered by women in winter and used to repair holes in the houses to stop drafts (Kayano 21). Men sat at the fire pit in the home and made tools on carving stands sunken into the floor. Grandmothers would wind thread while telling Ainu folktales (*uwekepere*) and would relate tales in verse about Ainu *kamui* (*kamui yukar*) (Kayano 2-5).

Illness was treated with herbs and foods. These were inhaled, drunk, eaten or applied topically (Hilger 112-116). In some regions, meat foods included: bear, deer, fox, moyuk (a raccoon-like dog), weasel, badger, rabbit, squirrel, pheasant, blue jay, sparrow, and other birds besides crow. The vegetables and grains eaten were pumpkin, potatoes, mushrooms, and millet (mostly now replaced by rice), and boiled-down maple sap was used before sugar was available (Hilger 124).

Mint tea and a hot drink made by pouring boiling water over dried lily root and salt were consumed before the Japanese introduced black and green teas. Malt was added to fermented millet to make an alcoholic drink and was used in religious rituals as well as socially. “...Millet was pounded to flour, mixed with malt, cooked and cooled, and let

ferment” (Hilger 125). Hilger goes on to say, “After ten days it was filtered through a bamboo bowl and more malt added. A day or two later it was ready for consumption.” Although this millet wine is not one of the Ainu artworks, its use in rituals and with ritual items, such as the *ikupasuy*. Now rice sake is more prevalent over traditional millet-based drinks (Hilger 126).

A corner on the north side of each home was a place of honor for the family treasures. Hilger and her team were reminded by Ainu elders that these objects were not made by Ainu and were not considered treasures by many older Ainu. “They were given to Ainu by Japanese in the days of feudal lords in exchange for fish. We old Ainu of today know that our grandfathers and fathers were cheated by such transactions!” These objects were lacquerware (that were given to Ainu from the Japanese), and lacquerware was introduced into Ainu culture and incorporated into religious tools. Large lacquerware containers were used as storage. These containers were passed down from generation to generation and were honored, but the history of how they were procured was always known (Hilger 130).

Some of the most distinctive designs of traditional Ainu culture were tattoos found on Ainu women (see fig. 5). Bluish-black crescent shapes surrounded the mouth and, on some, strap-like designs wrapped from the back of the hands to up and around the forearms. The tattoo was started when an Ainu girl was twelve years old and given by a maternal relative, such as her aunt, mother or grandmother. One Ainu folktale claims the tradition was begun by the *kamui* who taught women their roles, and another legend says

that it came from the tradition of an earlier people who were pit dwellers (Hilger 151). There are clay figures, an art either never practiced or forgotten by the Ainu, of the Jōmon era that appear to wear robes (which will be examined in the next section at length) with patterns similar to traditional Ainu designs with markings around the mouth that are reminiscent of the mouth tattoo (see Fig. 6).

The *kamui* of the fire was *Kamui-Fuchi*. It was the responsibility of women to tend the hearth. “Woe betide the woman who failed to keep the fire alive; there was no worse sin than neglect to provide fuel for *Kamui-Fuchi*,<sup>3</sup> who reared all Ainu at her hearth. Such neglect ranked with adultery as a reason for divorce” (Munro 58). Ainu women were charged with protection of the fire and hearth, and therefore the protectors of the home, spiritually and physically. With the belief that *Kamui-Fuchi* is the goddess of fire and resides in the hearth, there is a tie between this deity and Ainu women. The soot was created by first boiling ash tree bark, and then this was lit under a pot from which the soot was collected. The tattoo around an Ainu woman’s mouth was thought to keep evil spirits from entering through the mouth and nose (Munro 117-119). These markings on the skin are part of an overall idea of protection from evil spirits, a motif prevalent through Ainu culture and found on Ainu artwork.

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<sup>3</sup> As the Ainu has no written language, authors relied on their translators and had to ascertain the best spellings from regional dialects. Therefore, different spellings of Ainu words may be present throughout this thesis in quotes and references.

## Religion

The Ainu belief system is complex. Ranging from the protection of the home to the significance of remains found in nature, there was meaning ascribed to the smallest details of life. Munro describes three important aspects of Ainu religion: *ramat*, *kamui*, and *inau*. *Ramat* translates to heart, soul, or spirit. It is a religion of animism, as explained by an elder to Munro, “Ramat is all pervading and indestructible” (Munro 8). *Ramat* was believed to inhabit even personal items. Therefore, utensils and weapons were broken and buried with their owners so that the *ramat* might move on with the deceased (Munro 8).

There are believed to be innumerable *kamui*, independent and in a large hierarchy. These deities were believed to react to human behavior. If respected, they returned the sentiment, and if disrespected their ire was raised, and there could be consequences. *Pirika kamui* (good spirits) were beseeched through ritual for aid in combating *wen kamui* (malicious spirits) and were more often thought to help when the correct ritual was used while prayers and wine were offered for assistance. Sorcery, or the worship of evil spirits, was taboo, and an Ainu caught doing this was ostracized (Munro 9-11).

The medium through which all other *kamui* were addressed was *Kamui-Fuchi*. *Fuchi*, also spelled *Fuji* and *Huci*, translates to “grandmother” or “ancestor goddess.” She resides in the hearth of each home and women are believed to be direct ancestors of her. As the sunlight reaches the hearth through the sacred eastern window of the home, *Kamui-Fuchi* communicates the needs, desires, and prayers to the other *kamui* of the

Ainu pantheon. This also points to the importance and reverence of women in Ainu culture (Munro 12).

*Inau* were in every Ainu home, in the pit of each fireplace, altar, and any activity where the *kamui* were invoked or thanked. *Inau* are only made by Ainu men. Seated by their hearth, they begin with a stick of green willow and shave curls from the stick. Willow is used because of the story of *Kotan-Koru-Kamui* (the god of the village). After making the world, he left his chopsticks behind. So that they would not rot, he turned them into willow trees, and the Ainu has made *inau* from willow ever since (Hilger 91-2).

Howell discusses one of the oldest Ainu epics called *Kamui-Oina* (Sacred Inheritance), in which the Ainu are taught about their people's origins and the origins of their traditions. The *inau* is described by Howell as "...not deities or offerings, but living mediators between gods and man" (Ainu Ethnicity and the Boundaries of the Early Modern Japanese 80). There are innumerable *inau* made, each for a specific deity and prayer. *Inau* are considered messengers to the *kamui* and sometimes *kamui* themselves. In Ainu lore, the gods prized *inau* and other offerings of wine given with libation wands called *ikupasuy* and could impress other *kamui* when they returned to the spirit world with their gifts from humans (Philippi 62). The essence of Ainu religion was trade of favors for protection and resources. The gods are believed to visit because they desire *inau* and wine. In return, the Ainu are given animal fur, meat, and other needs they express using the *inau*.

There are many more aspects to the Ainu culture and religion. Different groups at public and private rituals perform dances. The purpose of the dances range from celebration to exorcism. Myriad songs are sung for every occasion: daily work, lullabies, giving thanks, religious expression, drinking, boating, and incantations used by shamans (Hilger 71-75). As with many indigenous cultures, drumming was also used by shamans to induce a trance state in which the *kamui* could be better addressed and through which knowledge about cures for disease was transmitted (Ohnuki-Tierney “Ainu Illness and Healing: A Symbolic Interpretation”).

Ainu cultural tenets protected both their land and people. As a subsistence culture, they took what they needed but never depleted a resource, nor did they pollute. They were not reckless with what little they had and shared with family and neighbors so that all thrived. Although the genders had separate roles, they complimented each other, again for the goal of the whole rather than the individual. The Ainu religion was an animistic one full of reverence for everything in their world. As respect was given for each other and nature, a relationship with the deities in the invisible world was cultivated and maintained for centuries.

## CHAPTER III

### ELEMENTS OF AINU ARTWORK: GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT MOTIFS AND BASIC ELEMENTS

#### *Sermaka Omare*

*Sermaka omare* is an Ainu phrase that encompasses the main motif of their artwork, which is protection for one another. Traditional designs corresponding to this motif are found on many of the hand-made artifacts in Ainu culture and symbolism is infused in each design. Ainu designs symbolize spiritual protection of the wearer or user, while the actual item is used for physical protection either against the elements or physical danger. Visual elements of Ainu artwork found on garments consist of labyrinths, braces, nets or fences, thorns, and swirls that thwart and repel harmful spirits. These elements all reinforce the centrality of *sermaka omare* in Ainu culture and artwork.

The word *sermak* means “back” or “shadow.” It was thought that evil spirits could more easily enter the body from behind, perhaps because it is a universal human blind spot. When an Ainu exited a home, their host would say, “*sermaka omare*,” translated to “put something on your back” (Dubreuil 293). In *Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans*, Philippi’s research uncovers a similar phrase; *sermak orke*, from the Ainu epics called *yukar*. Philippi claims that this term absolutely refers to supernatural protection and that the word *sermak* literally means “behind.” In the *yukar*, *sermaka* also refers to “any type of being or object which hovers behind a person and provides protection” (Philippi 350).

On textiles, the Ainu concept of *sermaka omare* is evident by the placement of the majority of designs on the back of the robes. The majority of the design is concentrated on the robe from the back of the neck (see Fig. 11), down to the waist, with the design becoming less visually dense over the shoulders and down the front of the robe (not shown in Fig. 11) on either side of the opening. It is a like a shawl of protection. Ainu men wore their swords on their backs and sprinkled *sake* over their shoulders during religious ceremonies, showing respect to their guardian *kamui* who must have been following them to protect them as well (Dubreuil 293).

Through interviews with Japanese writer Shigeru Kayano, Dubreuil discusses the most important symbolism of Ainu designs: protection. In her essay, *Ainu Art: The Beginnings of Tradition*, she states that, “traditionally women embroidered a simple ‘rope’ around the neck, front openings, sleeves, and hem on the earliest garments to keep evil spirits from entering the body” (296). Originally, the rope would have been a dark blue color, and Kayano stated that this likely began when “an Ainu mother working in the mountains or fields with her baby would encircle the infant with a rope to protect it while it slept. Any evil spirits in the area would not be able to enter inside the rope to harm the baby” (296). Kayano does not give Dubreuil details about a specific material or type of rope, other than that it would have been dark blue. The protection simply comes from the rope symbolizing a barrier. Protective patterns such as these covering the upper back are ubiquitous in Ainu garments. Later we will see that everyday tools are covered with patterns similar to those designs, as well as specific totemic carvings. Just as Ainu



women are the embroiderers, Ainu men are the carvers. Two main areas that best show the separation of work by gender are women's artwork and men's artwork, discussed further in the following chapters.

Rathbun notes that the fact that men's robes are "more elaborately decorated than women's may reflect the need and desire to secure more protection for men, who engage in dangerous outdoor activities, such as hunting" which require more protection (102). This compliments what Dubreuil says: "when an Ainu woman left the house, she put on an embroidered garment so that the guardian spirits of these items would protect her from harm" (293). Rathbun describes the pattern visually and its function; "rows of repeated brace patterns constitute an overall netlike design, as if ready to catch evil spirits and prevent them from entering the body" (102). Photographs of Ainu people from early visitors would have been the most historically accurate images to illustrate this idea; however, when Ainu were photographed, they were often in summer robes with little decoration featured or in elaborate ceremonial dress to please tourists and missionaries.

### ***Aiushi and Moreu***

Although traditional Ainu patterns are complex lattices they are made only of two designs: *aiushi* and *moreu*. The brace shapes, called *aiushi*<sup>1</sup> or "thorned," consist of thorn-like projections that jut into the negative space of the garment from the perimeter

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<sup>1</sup> Recalling that Ainu language is an isolate and was never a written language, there are different spellings for the same word depending on the author. *Aiushi* is spelled *ayus* and *moreu* is spelled *morew*, but the same description is given for both.

design. The points of the thorns often end in one or more extra single-width stitches, which create a short sharp line. This projection makes the barb of the thorn (see Fig. 12). The spiral shapes of the *moreu*'s "smoothly flowing" curves create the boundaries that separate the positive and negative space on the garment (see Fig. 13 [Japan 23]).

One of the most identifiable Ainu design element is the brevity of the *moreu*. *Moreu* coils are, traditionally, never made up of more than one and a half turns. This pattern choice is illustrated as (Fig. 13) a backwards "G" shape created in the design in the upper right hand corner of the image. Versions of this are ubiquitous throughout the language of Ainu art. Japan Textile Color Design Center lists names for different versions of *moreu*:

*Ara moreu*: single spiral

*Uren moreu*: a double version of the *ara moreu*, or two *ara moreu*  
combined

*Ara shikkeunu moreu*: angular squared single spiral

*Uren shikkeunu moreu*: squared double spiral

*Aiushi moreu*: squared spiral with thorns on the corners (23).

*Moreu* and *aiushi* are responsible for many of the ornate patterns in Ainu artwork and balance and compliment each other to create designs recognizable as Ainu.

Transposing elements of the pattern, such as changing the direction of the motif or flipping the design vertically or horizontally, produces a more complex and visually pleasing ornamentation. Each pattern is carefully thought out by the artist to meet the

spiritual needs of the wearer or bearer, whether on a garment or tool, and highlights the motif of *sermaka omare* and the protective themes in Ainu artwork.

### **Incorporation of Foreign Designs**

Trade with neighboring cultures added foreign designs to the Ainu repertoire, but Ainu artists incorporated them in a way that insured they were still of use as the Ainu motif of *sermaka omare*. Note that (see Fig. 14) the traditional Ainu design is closest to the inside of the garment, while the Japanese motif is on the outside. On the left bottom the corner of the robe, (Fig. 14) there is a diamond shape with leaf-like teardrop shapes curving upward. A dot at the top of this design leads the eye to an *aiushi* (thorn).

Following the pattern to the right, a Japanese *mon*, or family crest is visible (see Fig. 14). It is a circle with three comma-like shapes chasing each other, or swirling, from the Japanese Kobayakawa samurai clan, which was in rule from the thirteenth-century to 1602 CE (Turnbull 11-15)<sup>2</sup>. *Aiushi* are added onto the perimeter of the circle, highlighting the fusion of traditional Ainu and foreign motifs. The incorporation of foreign patterns into Ainu design are given the same motif as the rest of the patterns on the robe, that of protection with barbs and curves.

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<sup>2</sup> Illustrating the distance between trading peoples, the Japanese *mon* discussed (see Fig. 14) is from a samurai clan called Kobayakawa, originating from the southernmost island of Japan (Turnbull 2000). Since garments degrade quickly, and there is no written history from the Ainu, the beginning of the use of foreign designs cannot be determined, however, the Kobayakawa clan exists from the thirteenth century to its dissolution in 1602 (Turnbull 2000). It can be surmised that early trade after the thirteenth century brought this design to Ainu culture.

The authors of *Textile Designs of Japan III* discuss an even earlier theory of incorporation: “we may say that Ainu designs are a synthesis of Jōmon patterns which are inspired by the magical concept of Shamanism that was and is widely spread among northern peoples who depend chiefly on hunting and fishing for their livelihood, and of foreign elements notably from China” (Japan Textile Color Design Center 19). It is presumed by the writers that the coils, curves, and other elements on Jōmon pottery were expected to purify the foods contained in the vessel through the vessel’s pattern’s inherent spiritual qualities. This appears to have been transferred to clothing through design. Early Jōmon curves can be seen on this vessel (see Fig. 15) and reflect the connection to Chinese elements. Seen here (Fig. 16) is a simplified drawing of a Chinese vessel featuring a *Taotie*, a mythical beast referred to as both an ogre and a glutton as it devours everything in its path. The face is split in half, down the nose, which creates a centerline and a mirror of the two beasts facing each other (Columbia University).

Most importantly, note the similarities between the Chinese *Taotie* design compared to the loose version of these lines in Jōmon pottery, and then in the Ainu design on textiles. The synthesis of the three eras is illustrated in a side-by-side comparison of the three (see Fig. 17). The Jōmon vessel’s design is three-dimensional as the lines are made of rolled clay. It is, therefore, a bit more difficult to see the swirls, or *moreu*, which are made of several lines, creating a small, wave-like element. The significance of this integration of elements into Jōmon and then Ainu motifs speaks to the lineage and trade that was likely, but not yet recorded, in Chinese history. In the diagram

created in Fig. 17, the evolution of *aiushi* and *moreu* can be seen. The final Ainu representation of these swirls displays the simplification of the design. With the influence of Ainu style, the pattern is more defined through the use of negative and positive designs. Bronze Chinese vessels and clay Jōmon vessels differ from Ainu style in that patterns in the former mediums are the same hue as the background, and the bas-relief of bronze and clay create a visible design using shadow. This bas-relief pattern will be seen in Ainu woodcarvings, and the Ainu tradition of clean and simplified lines will be presented in the following discussions of hand carved wood items.

Many Ainu objects appear to have symmetrical designs. Throughout the textiles chapter, robes are viewed laid out so that the back is fully visible, creating a centerline that appears to create two mirrored images of the same design. However, Dubreuil notes in her research that not all garment designs are symmetrical. The majority of the asymmetrical designs are on the bottom of the garments from the waist down (294-295). Despite a general lack of images in Dubreuil's research<sup>3</sup>, it is important to note this difference in Ainu artwork so that a clear description of Ainu visual culture is examined. Since this asymmetry in Ainu work is rare, it could be posited that symmetry is more important to Ainu design and therefore an element of protection.

One strict rule in Ainu lore is to never create an image of a living being on textiles. In fact, traditional Ainu were quite superstitious about their own image being recreated, even drawn. In Isabella Bird's travel diary, entry "LETTER XXXVII," she

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<sup>3</sup> This description is from Dubreuil's research and the books are unfortunately out of print and unavailable.

wrote about her experience with Ainu and the etiquette of image making: “I took a rough sketch of one of the handsomest, and, showing it to him, asked if he would have it, but instead of being amused or pleased he showed symptoms of fear, and asked me to burn it, saying it would bring him bad luck and he should die” (Bird 131). Bird’s observation emphasizes the fear associated with recreating the image of a living being in artwork.

In Dubreuil’s interviews with Ainu women, the consensus was that incorporating an image of any animal or person would trap the animal or person’s soul in that design. Animals are representations of *kamui*, or gods, and therefore a god would be trapped in a design and become angry toward the maker and the wearer. Therefore, animals and people are not featured in Ainu textile patterns (Dubreuil 292). The exception to the rule is representation in personal spirit totems, which are important in Ainu religious ceremonies. Represented by animal images, the totems are carved into wooden sticks called *ikupasuy*. The sticks are approximately two inches by twelve inches long, painted or dyed, and carved with designs signifying lineage, purpose, village, and other identifiers of the user. Figure 18 has a bear prominently displayed on it, and there are shallower carved designs with other significance. These are discussed in following chapters. Another artifact where the image of an animal is seen is on a knife’s sheath and handle. Carved into bone or wood are personal totems which are significant in that they relate to lineage and the cultural heritage of Ainu men (Dubreuil 296).

One of these totems relating to lineage is the bear, which is the highest deity in Ainu religion. After a cub is raised and spoiled by its caretakers, it is killed in a ceremony

called the *Iyomande*. In killing the bear, the *kamui* within is released back to the spirit realm with the Ainu's prayers. When something is killed or destroyed in this way, it is called a "sending ceremony" in that its spirit, or the god within, is freed from its mortal coil and sent to the spirit realm (Fitzhugh 22-23). Images of bears may only be carved into the prayer sticks, *ikupasuy*, to represent the man that carved the religious tool and his family. Animals used as totems in carvings will be discussed with each object featuring that specific animal in a following chapter.

Designs created by Ainu follow their cultural and religious motifs. These motifs consist of *sermaka omare* (or protection), the woman's origins, such as the region of her village, and matrilineal patterns. Patterns found on textiles reflect the feminine side of Ainu artwork and roles. In this matrilineal tradition, women are the weavers and seamstresses for their families, and mothers pass designs on to their daughters.

Ainu designs included regional indicators, and then each artist created variations of their own. Unfortunately, without a written language, many of the regional indicators are not traceable. A young Ainu girl practiced her own versions of family designs in the sand with her finger until she was ready to create her own weaving. When an artist was ready to weave and make a robe, she focused on the individual who would wear the robe in her design of the garment so that each garment was infused with spiritual significance (Dubreuil 291).

Ainu artwork is deceptively complex and must be created by highly skilled artists. Traditional Ainu objects are imbued with protection through the designs carved or sewn

into them. In Ainu culture, a person's back is most vulnerable to physical and spiritual attack, and so the motif of *sermaka omare* is infused into their artwork. Previously discussed patterns on traditional Ainu objects consist only of two elements: *aiushi* (thorns) and *moreu* (curves). As a result, the design elements of Ainu artwork appear simple: negative and positive space is created with curvilinear patterns on a woven textile's background or carved into wood, but when transposed and repeated in unique and personalized ways, they create unified wholes that visually express rhythm, unity, and balance in complex designs.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE SACRED WORK OF AINU WOMEN: TEXTILES AND GARMENTS, MATERIALS AND CONSTRUCTION

#### **Textiles**

Ainu women make the textiles, which are turned into garments, sword carriers, belts, head coverings, scarves, and other accessories. Few Ainu garments are made from animal skins, therefore, plant-based clothing will be examined more extensively than clothing made from animal skins. For the purpose of the discussion of traditional Ainu artwork, the following analysis will focus only on traditional garments.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, certain tasks in Ainu culture are assigned by gender. While Ainu men hunt far from home and build the houses of Ainu villages, women gather plants for food and textiles and clean fresh kills from the men, for both food and leather. After gathering, the plants are treated in ways specific to each material, bleached or dyed, and then woven into the textiles that will become a traditional garment.

Gender roles are passed from gods to humans (in Ainu lore), and from parents to children. When an Ainu mother believes her daughter is ready, she teaches her to create the labyrinths, braces, swirls, and thorns that are the primer of Ainu motifs. Without a written language, it is difficult to determine the meaning of Ainu symbols in their artwork. However, included in each garment is a narrative of the artist's homeland, if she relocated for marriage, and other identifiers of her people (Dubreuil 291). A lack of

knowledge of the specific narrative of each piece does not detract from the inherent beauty and importance of Ainu garments.

## **Fibers**

Historically, traditional fibers used to create Ainu garments are found in local plants. After trade with other countries was established, cotton and silk were added into garments. The most ubiquitous plant material is from elm tree bark and that creates the most well known of Ainu garments, the *attush* robe. The Ainu Museum in Hokkaido also refers to *attush* garments as “traditional ‘bark’ clothes” (Ainu Museum 2015). Shigeki Kawakami, of the Kyoto National Museum’s Department of Applied Arts (translated by Melissa M. Rinne), gives a clear and concise explanation of the processing of elm to make cloth:

Attus<sup>1</sup> are made from the bast fibers of a Japanese elm tree that is native to Hokkaido. First the tree is cut down and the bark is removed. The fibers, taken from the inner layers of the bark, are soaked in water to soften, bleached in the sun, and then split into fine, fibrous strands. The strands are joined together into thread and this thread is woven into cloth. The finished product is a thick, stiff cloth of a brownish color, like the bark fibers. This cloth is then sewn into an attus (Kawakami).

Color images show that the *attush* (or *attus*) garments are a very light brown color, and the threads are large enough that the weave is easily visible, as in Fig. 6. The

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<sup>1</sup>Mentioned previously, the spelling of Ainu words varies by author.

texture looks like smooth and tightly woven burlap. Bleaching from the sun, as mentioned in the quote above, is done in stages to achieve varying degrees of gradation. The weaving section will give a more comprehensive description of the Ainu loom style, but as can be seen in Fig. 6, the lengthwise threads are often placed so that thick lines of alternating dark and light create stripes on the main fabric of the garment. These will be referred to in the weaving section as the warp.

Another plant that gives its fibers for fabrics is nettle, and it has been used since the Bronze Age for clothing (Kavalali 13). In contrast to elm, nettle fiber is lighter in color and used to create *retarpe*, translated as “white things [garments]”. *Retarpe* is found more with Sakhalin Ainu from the north (Ainu Museum 2015). In northern Sakhalin, the Ainu dialect is different, and *retarpe* is *tetarape* (Ohnuki-Tierney, *The Ainu of the Northwest Coast of Southern Sakhalin* 40). According to Ohnuki-Tierney, nettle clothing is the most treasured of garments and takes the most time and energy to make (*The Ainu of the Northwest Coast* 40).

Nettle is gathered in the fall. A knife or sharp shell is used to strip the outside of the plant. These fibers are twined for drying and used later in the winter. Bleaching the fibers is a long process involving soaking them in water, crushing them by stepping on the fibers in the snow, and then hanging them to dry. The bleaching process can take at least two months before the level of lightness in the fibers is achieved. *Retarpe* are reserved for male elders (Ohnuki-Tierney, *The Ainu of the Northwest Coast of Southern Sakhalin* 40-43).

## Dyes

The spiritual symbolism of the use of color in Ainu garments requires a longer discussion after further research, though some authors write that Ainu design and color choices are made for the owner of the garment and have no symbolism. Blue may have more sacred weight than others because it is the color of the sky and water, and these are the lands of the gods. Historically, Ainu use local resources, and this is equally true of the materials used for textile dyes. With the evolution of Ainu art, different ways to extract and then set the colors in garments and threads were gained through experimentation over the centuries.

Red is used on the male elders' *retarpe* (white robes) by soaking some material in water infused with alder bark. Alder bark makes the water red, and a gradation of red, from bright red to brown, can be achieved on the fabric. Among the Sakhalin Ainu, no red is used on women's garments, and there are a smaller number of designs on women's garments. All clothing, however, is made in the same style. See for example the robe with sleeves in Fig. 5. Crushed berries from different plants also create a vibrant red and a black that "ranges from our gray to dark blue and black," while yellow is created from soaking bark from the cork tree the same way dye is obtained from alder bark (Ohnuki-Tierney, *The Ainu of the Northwest Coast* 43-46).

The most common practice for extracting color from a plant to create a fabric dye is decoction. With decoction, the part of the plant from which color is extracted is submerged in heated or boiling water until the desired color intensity for the project is

achieved. Table 2 lists dyes created by the Hokkaido Ainu by plant, the part of the plant used for dye, and the color produced. Regarding differences in plant dyes per region, in the north, alder bark is used for red while in the south, petals from a rose specific to Asian areas is decocted. Crowberry juice is used for purple. Blue-green comes from the leaves and stalks of *Isatis tinctoria*, or Woad. Another difference between northern and southern Ainu practice is the use of “ferrous liquid,” i.e.: boiling water with plant matter in an iron pot (Japan Textile Color Design Center 20-21). After the fibers are soaked in the decoction, cleaned, and dried, they are attached to a back-strap loom for weaving.

### **Weaving**

The back-strap loom was created prehistorically and is still used by cultures that follow historical traditions. In weaving, vertical threads are affixed to a sturdy object at both ends to keep them tight called the warp. The weft is the horizontal thread that is woven in and out of the warp threads. For a back-strap loom, the warp is attached at one end to the trunk of a tree or a post solidly hammered into the ground. Fig. 13 is a postcard with the image of a young Ainu woman, likely around the early twentieth century, using a back-strap loom. The namesake is clear in the picture because she has a strap around her back that secures the other end of the warp to her. She weaves the fabric just in front of her, and it folds underneath, and she “creeps along” to the other end of the warp. *Izari-bata* is the Ainu word for back-strap loom and literally translates to “creep-along loom” (Japan Textile Color Design Center 21).

Textiles created on a back-strap loom are extremely limited in the amount of design. Possible options include only solids or stripes and are made through the warp. Threads are dyed first, before weaving, which affects the overall color of the robe. The textile is assembled into a piece of clothing with sleeves, and more fabric is appliquéd around the sleeves, neck and bottom hem in a contrasting color. The final step is embroidering a lighter color of thread on top of the appliqué. A variety of garments are constructed through this process. The following chapter examines seven types of traditional Ainu robes.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SACRED WORK OF AINU WOMEN: TEXTILES AND GARMENTS, OBJECT ANALYSIS

#### **Analysis and Discussion of Garments by Category**

Traditional Ainu people are non-nomadic hunter-gatherers. Through almost two thousand years of history, the *kotan* (village) was the home of Ainu throughout northern and southern Ainu territories. Only in the last two centuries did the Ainu people begin true agricultural practices and animal husbandry. They did not keep animals for wool, nor did they grow specific crops for textile fibers. Despite the crudeness of weaving and the small amount of materials to work with, Ainu women decorate Ainu garments with the utmost care and spiritual depth.

#### **Salmon Skin**

The skin of smaller animals is used for clothing by the Ainu of the Kurile Islands (north) more than that of the more southern Ainu on Hokkaido Island. Dubreuil lists “skin, fur, and feathers” as some of the animal-based materials that the Ainu use for garment making (288). There are few surviving animal skin garments from Ainu history, and for this study, only one animal-based material will be examined—and that is salmon skin.

Fish skin is used in many traditional northern cultures for any clothing that needs to be able to shed water. The salmon-skin coat is an outer garment made to protect

against rain while keeping the wearer dry underneath. Other items that are made of fish, or salmon skin are leg covers, mittens, and boots. Some figures have been changed to black and white versions for the purpose of defining detail, but color photographs reveal that the salmon-skin coats (and boots, which are outside the scope of this paper) featured in *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People* (Fitzhugh), and on museum sites, are a light tan or soft yellow.

In Chapter III, with the discussion of the protection motif (*sermaka omare*), It was noted that Ainu women place designs on the upper back where the body is more physically vulnerable. This motif can be found throughout Ainu garments from the north to the south. Fig.14 features a salmon-skin coat from the collection of the Sakhalin Regional Museum in Russia. A major difference between the Sakhalin Ainu garments and Hokkaido Ainu garments is the lack of design on the borders of the Sakhalin robes. A material, which appears to be black velvet ribbon, has been appliquéd along the hem of the robe in Fig 14. Along the hem, the black border is approximately one and one half inches from the bottom of the garment and is right at the edge of the sleeve's wrist opening. Fig 17 has no discernable border along the hemline, and the wrist appears to have a border of the same material as the rest of the coat.

*Moreu*, the spiral shapes, and *aiushi*, the thorns, are very different on the salmon-skin coats as compared to the fiber textiles. Figure 15 shows a detail of these patterns on the upper back in which the curves and barbs designs are set along a line and made of appliquéd ribbon . Despite the difference in design, the basic elements of *aiushi* and



*moreu* are present. These patterns are very different from Hokkaido (southern) Ainu garment designs, as seen in Fig. 16. It is less clear which is embroidery and which is appliqué. Complete circles are present in the design even though these circles are not typical in southern Ainu artifacts. There are also oblong lozenge shapes with barbs jutting off from the sides with two curves coming from the top and bottom of the shape. This highlights regional differences in traditional Ainu designs and the influence of other cultures upon those designs.

Dubreuil's essay, "Ainu Art: The Beginnings of Tradition," includes another example of a Kurile area garment: a salmon-skin coat for a child (see Fig. 17 and 18) (288). The lozenge designs are present in the middle of the coat (Fig. 17) but there is a different motif in which the *moreu* (spiral) shapes almost defy the rule of not completing a circle. Bone-like shapes, in which the heads of the femur of the leg bone appear to meet, are placed on two panels of the child's coat. Other designs on panels moving laterally outward appear bird-like despite one taboo stating that no being should ever be represented on clothing.

### ***Attush*: Elm Bark Fiber**

Elm trees are found throughout all of the Ainu territories, from Hokkaido to the Kurile Islands (Botanic Gardens Conservation International 9). Since it is a plentiful material, it is fitting that *attush*, or elm bark fiber, garments would be the objects that represent a traditional Ainu wardrobe. The woven background is a perfect canvas on

which Ainu women artists can express themselves and create the intricate patterns that are characteristic of Ainu artwork.

Variety in *attush* garment design can be seen in the collection in Fig 20. A plain background is used to keep the focus on the decoration around the hem, sleeve openings, and upper back in ‘2’ of Fig. 20. Numbers ‘1’ and ‘3’(in Fig. 20) use alternating dark and light stripes in the base textile. ‘1’ has sharp linear designs making rectangles and 90-degree patterns. Faint embroidery can be seen placed upon the dark appliquéd fabric. *Aiushi* and *moreu* are present in these delicate lines, and where each corner of the 90-degree designs meet, a four-petal flower-like design is present. Contrast is not only in the stark dark and light fabrics but also in the delicate light thread embroidered on the thick, dark lines. The motifs are bold but simple, and the symmetry produces harmony in the design.

Moving clockwise in Fig. 20 to number ‘2,’ natural variations in the material are apparent around the bottom of the garment, just above the thick dark hemline. A similar contrast to the previous examined robe is present in the design of ‘2.’ The artist, again, created a dynamic visual distinction between her surface and her motif. Comparing the previous ‘1’ to this, openings between the darker fabric on the upper back of the robe make larger lines in the design and break up the blocks into a beautiful expression of pattern. The previous garment had these openings between lines of dark fabric, but in the ‘2,’ the artist made diamond shapes, giving the simple, larger lines variation in width and adding more detail to her pattern.

Different from the solid rectangles in ‘1’, ‘2’ has the barbs, or *aiushi*, jutting off of the dark fabric into the negative space created by the plain background. *Aiushi* are only present on the upper back design and nowhere on the hem or sleeve openings. Again, as in ‘1’, ‘2’ has delicate embroidery stitched onto each dark area. Inspection of areas of the upper back reveals tulip-like, teardrop, and elongated, soft, diamond-like shapes. Around the hem and sleeve openings *aiushi* (barbs) and *moreu* (curves) are joined together and create the lozenge shapes seen on the salmon-skin coats.

‘3’ in Fig. 20 combines the elements from the previous two robes and adds more fabric and flourishes to create the most elaborate of the three. This robe not only has alternating dark and light warp (vertical threads) in the base textile, but it also has three gradations: light, medium, and dark stripes that make a pattern on the base garment. Following *sermaka omare*, the wearer of this robe must have been well-protected because there are barbs and a thorough netting that covers most of the back. The hemline design covers more than a third of the garment. It wraps around the hem and up the front opening of the robe on either side.

Fig. 21 is an image of the upper back of ‘3’ and has been enhanced to show the detail and contrast of the patterns. Stripes, rectangles, diamonds, braces, points, open circles, and soft squares are a few shapes that can be seen in this graceful expression of love and protection for another. A central motif is created, and all of the lines of the design lead the eye out from the central pattern. It is an elegant maze designed to thwart any evil spirit.

The three *attush* garments are a small sample of the beauty of the first form of Ainu fiber-based clothing. Ephemeral in quality, there are few left of these examples to show the variety that must have been produced by Ainu women for the last two millennia. Following traditional Ainu materials, trade with other nations is reflected in differences in materials available to Ainu women artists. The later robes will include cotton, silk, and metal threads. First, though, will be an examination of the nettle, or *retarpe*, robes.

### ***Retarpe*: Nettle Fiber**

“The most treasured garment is called *tetarape*<sup>1</sup>, which means “white thing” in Ainu, and is the most time-consuming to make” (Just bleaching and softening the nettle fibers takes two months) (Ohnuki-Tierney, *The Ainu of the Northwest Coast* 40). Ainu women are honored to make these special robes, although historically, only male elders wear them. Color images of *attush* and *retarpe* robes depict aged and yellowed garments. This makes distinguishing between the two fibers difficult through pictures. Using basic units of design, *retarpe* embody traditional Ainu motifs of barbs and curves turned and flipped so that an entire motif is again in a visually stunning pattern that protects the wearer from harm.

In contrast to the previous *attush* robe images, the example for *retarpe* shows that the artist added more bands of colored fabric around openings, made heavier contrasting

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<sup>1</sup>*Retarpe* is the southern Ainu dialect pronunciation, and *tetarape* is the northern dialect. Both are the term for “white thing” which is the robe made from nettle fibers.

vertical lines, and varied the colors of *aiushi* and *moreu* (see Fig. 22). The first element noticeable in this robe is that there is a light, star-like design placed directly in the middle of the pattern covering the upper back. Upon examination of the color plate for this image, the center of this pattern is no brighter or different in color. It is, in fact, only highlighted and made to seem brighter by the dark blue fabric that creates the linear blocks of the design. As if to thwart evil twice, the heavy blue fabric is surrounded by a thinner pattern of the same material, producing a pattern like a metal fence, but as though it was made of lace.

Stripes of dark and light values are woven into the base textile. Evenly spaced, so that when the top fabric is appliquéd and embroidery is applied, the stripes become streamer-like lines that emphasize the upper pattern's linear aspects and seem to be visually punctured by the barbs. The vertical lines lead the eye down the back, behind the bottom pattern of barbs and curves, and disappear underneath the fabric along the hemline.

This *retarpe* hemline is different than the previous *attush* examples because there are three different fabrics used. The bottom, and darkest, is dark blue. On top of that, brown makes a table shape. Underneath and on the sides of the brown is a tan that is almost yellow. A new element is also introduced in this textile and red thread. Much of the light lines embroidered onto the darker fabrics are the light nettle color, which is a dark ivory. However, red thread is incorporated into this design. It is only used on the

bottom tan ribbon of the hemline and in some of the *aiushi* and *moreu*, which creep around the front of the robe's opening.

The Ainu woman that made this was an expert at creating a visual barrier to imply protection for the elder for whom it was woven. She used multiple elements of the Ainu design language and signed her piece with subtle motifs, a variety of fabrics, and red lines whose symbolism will remain a mystery.

### ***Chikarkarpe*: Embroidered Robes**

Museums that have Ainu textiles in their collections often place the objects' age at sometime during the Japanese *Edo* period, 1603-1868 CE. Many of these objects are made of cotton. Ainu artists kept their native and unique designs and made new garments with new fabrics into traditional looking robes. *Yukata* is a light Japanese kimono made of cotton, usually worn in the summer. Japanese produced cotton products as early, or prior to, the seventeenth century, and the Ainu obtained foreign textiles to work with through trade (Abe 3). Into the early twentieth century, cotton became easier to obtain because it is both more common and cheaper. It never totally replaces *attush*, but Ainu textile artists do begin to use more and more cotton in their garments and still appliqué and embroider on the robes as before (Dubreuil 291).

*Chikarkarpe* translates to “our embroidered thing” (Kotani 144). As Ainu incorporate the new textiles into their traditional garments, the look changes and the overall design becomes more complex. One example of this new element can be seen in Fig. 23. Cotton *yukata* is now the base textile, replacing *attush*, made by the Japanese. A

black and white “woven” pattern makes up the background of the robe and traditional Ainu motifs are appliquéd and embroidered on top of the cotton. The example robe in Fig. 23 was obtained by a collector in 1904 and by the look of the condition of the robe was likely created after the end of the *Edo* period, between 1868 and 1904 CE. Braces and whorls are applied to the base, around the sleeves, and following up the front of the garment almost midway (see Fig. 24). Previous *attush* garments are lined with the same fabric as the outside layer, but the cotton *chikarkarpe* is lined with a contrasting fabric.

It is easy to see in Fig. 24 that the garment is quilt-like and that there are two layers of fabric. The contrasting layers are held together with hand stitching throughout the robe. Black threads, where the black is appliquéd onto the outer layer, can be seen in the front view of the robe. Not visible in the black and white images, the inside lining of the robe is a pink-peach color, and on the outside of the robe the white embroidered patterns are filled with red embroidered thread. Cotton is a new fabric for Ainu textiles and is used more often after steady trade is established with Japan. The use of cotton marks a turn in Ainu history. With the addition of traded goods, Ainu objects change from only handmade items processed from the natural resources available locally, to an incorporation of foreign materials that include finished products and fine woven textiles.

### ***Kaparamip***

*Kaparamip* garments are made with cotton and have a predominantly white pattern overall. Distinct from the previous types of robes, the pattern is not limited to the borders (see Fig. 25). The use of foreign fabrics is most apparent along the hem, sleeve

openings, and neck. Comparing the *chikarkarpe* example (Fig. 23) with the *kaparamip* example (Fig. 25), the design travels up the garment and covers it completely. In keeping with traditional Ainu motifs, there is symmetry, visible *aiushi* and *moreu*, and the upper back has a central pattern from which the rest of the whorls and braces appear to radiate.

The Japan Folk Crafts Museum dates Fig. 25 to between the nineteenth and twentieth century, making this a newer example of the robes previously discussed. Although historically Ainu women artists have stated that their patterns are not meant to symbolize any being or object specifically, it is difficult not to visually decipher much of the repeating motifs in this pattern as floral (Dubreuil 289). Chinese and Japanese artwork often feature flower motifs, so this pattern may simply be an influence from trade with other countries.

### ***Ruunpe*: Embroidered and Appliqued Robes**

The Poroto Kotan Ainu Museum in Shiraoi, Japan has an extensive collection of Ainu objects, many of which are textiles. Their site describes *ruunpe* as “elaborately embroidered with delicate appliqué” (Ainu Museum). Considering that appliqué and embroidery are used on almost each type of Ainu garment, defining each type of robe and separating them into specific categories becomes difficult. The Japan Folk Crafts Museum defines *Ruunpe* as “appliquéd with tape-shaped thin cotton and silk cloths on cotton fabric ground”.

Finding an Ainu garment that meets the criteria in different publications’ definitions of *ruunpe* proves difficult. The definition from The Japan Folk Crafts



Museum describes Plate No. 63 in *Textile Designs of Japan III* perfectly, so that is the image that will be examined (see Fig. 26). The original plate shows beautiful work that is dramatic with a high contrast between light lines, few motifs, and a black background.

In contrast to the *kaparamip* example, the *ruunpe* images show that the artist chose not to create an overall pattern. In all three robes, there is a break of pattern at the waistline where a belt is tied to hold it closed. No. 2 and no. 3 follow the description of *ruunpe*: thin lines of fabric appliquéd onto a garment. Without the large blocks of contrasting fabric, as in some of the first robe examples, the *ruunpe* appear to be a more refined version of Ainu textiles.

### *Chijiri*

No. 1, in Fig. 26, is the most refined of *ruunpe* style. Rather than thin lines of fabric appliquéd onto the background, the artist has used only thread to embroider her motifs onto the textile. Japan Textile Color Design Center states that the “elaborate types of the chain stitch group... were probably introduced from China via Karafuto, and also the satin stitch” (22). This is a subcategory of *ruunpe* garments called *chijiri* style.

*Chijiri* refers to a specific style of decoration on a robe where there is no appliqué, only embroidery. More than seven different colors of thread make up the stunning pattern in Fig 27. Red is the main color throughout the design, and second is either a very light blue or white. Diamond shapes are filled with yellow, blue, red, or a combination of two of the colors. Curving *moreu* creates cloud-like shapes and *aiushi* form barbs along the

hem of the robe. Running down the midline of the back of the textile are five equal-armed crosses formed with curving right angles.

*Sermaka omare*, the Ainu motif of protection, is present in each robe discussed. From *attush* elm fiber garments to the more modern cotton *chijiri*, the principles of the language of Ainu design are constant. Openings on garments are protected with whorls and barbs to lay a barrier of protection against evil *kamui*. Protection is especially concentrated on the upper back of every robe with a symmetrical pattern that has a central motif. As trade with other countries, such as China, Japan, and Russia, developed, Ainu women artists continued their unique, spiritual, and personalized traditional patterns on new textiles and with new materials.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SACRED WORK OF AINU MEN: TOOLS, RITUAL OBJECTS, AND MATERIALS

The separation of duties by gender is directed by cultural norms and taboos. Only Ainu men may “carve religious objects, because it is a strict taboo for women” (Ohnuki-Tierney, *The Ainu of the Northwest Coast of Southern Sakhalin* 36). In contrast to Ainu women’s responsibilities being in and around the home, Ainu men’s responsibilities outside of the house are hunting, fishing, house building, woodworking, the creation of sacred objects, protecting the village, and trading with foreign peoples. As mentioned, Ainu women work with natural fibers to create textiles. In comparison, Ainu men work mostly with wood, and specific woods are used for specific items as prescribed by Ainu religious tenets, such as willow being seen as a gift from one of the oldest gods and therefore closely connected with that *kamui*. Wood is also chosen for pragmatic reasons, one being durability.

Traditional Ainu artwork that ties men and women’s work together is decorated with uniquely Ainu designs. Although the *aiushi* and *moreu* are present in both genders’ artwork, the designs are not the same. One notable difference is the use of representational designs on spiritual tools made by Ainu men, which is considered taboo for Ainu women to put on garments. The Ainu tradition of passing personal and cultural

patterns from parent to child is also seen in men's work. Patrilineal patterns and motifs are passed from fathers to sons.

Primarily Ainu men give prayers to the *kamui*. Much the same as young Ainu girls practice their matrilineal patterns in the sand, young Ainu boys listen to their fathers and grandfathers during ceremonies until they memorize the prayers. According to Tatsujiro Kuzuno, an Ainu elder, "people live because of the gods, and because humans exist the gods can be adored and prayed to" (Keira & Keira 1999). This quote reflects the intimate and cyclical nature of the relationship that the Ainu have with the *kamui*. It also emphasizes the burden of responsibility placed on young Ainu men to know how to create sacred objects with which to send the correct prayers as spiritual representatives. The artwork of Ainu men will be explored, in detail, in the next chapter. The following discussion explains which materials are chosen, for which projects they are chosen, and why they are chosen.

### **Materials**

The Ainu live in northern territories that are predominantly forest. Therefore, the most ubiquitous material in Ainu regions is wood. Previous chapters discussed the use of the inner bark of trees for fiber production. Houses, boats, food trays, fishing and hunting tools, spoons, vessels, knife sheaths, and religious objects are all carved from wood. Different types of wood have different purposes and different spiritual aspects according to traditional Ainu beliefs. Iron is the second-most important material to Ainu men's work. Prior to foreign trade, Ainu men's tools for carving were stone and bone (Ohnuki-

Tierney, *The Ainu of the Northwest Coast*). Besides iron, other objects acquired through trade include glass beads from China and Russia, and lacquerware from Japan.

Whalebone is now rarely seen in tools, but whalebone is examined and discussed regarding knives in this chapter and the next.

## **Wood**

Reflecting Ainu animistic beliefs, wood has *kamui* within it, and the *kamui* may transform when a piece of wood is sculpted into a new object. Different woods have different properties, both spiritually and functionally. The Ainu Association of Hokkaido recognizes Urakawa Tahachi, an Ainu carver known worldwide for his knife-sheath carvings. He cites the importance of using maple, a hardwood, for knife sheath and handles. Although he is considered by the association to be an Excellent Artisan, Tahachi says his work cannot compete with that of his Ainu ancestors, though his tools and techniques are similar:

I would also like others to carefully select materials for woodcarving. I began producing knives for my own use, and trying them out during hunting made me realize that painted maple (*Acer mono*) is the best material. I believe that most old knives are made from this because it is the only material hardy enough for practical use. (East-West Center 2013).

Hilger notes that maple was used for tools over other woods when she visited the Ainu (126). Yew is also a predominant material found in the collection of Ainu artifacts at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. Both maple and yew are

hardwoods and would therefore be the best choices for tools and kitchen utensils because they are the most durable (Meier 2016).

Willow,<sup>1</sup> dogwood, and Amur cork are used for the prayer sticks called *inau* (Keira & Keira 1999). Willow is significant because it is mentioned in the *yukar*, the Ainu epic poems, as having been set into the ground by one of the *kamui*. Strong includes spindle wood as one of the woods used for *ikupasuy* (127). Munro performed the most extensive research into the spiritual lives and traditions of the Ainu people. He examines a myriad of *inau* and speaks in depth about the properties, purposes, and materials of each that he includes in *Ainu Creed & Cult*.

About fifteen kinds of tree are used in making winged *inau* for good *kamui* and three or four for the *inau* of evil spirits. First and foremost comes the willow, used only for good *kamui*. For special purposes, or because a willow is not at hand, trees of good repute, such as lilac, dogwood, oak or magnolia, are sometimes used (Munro 30).

Munro goes on to say that lilac wood is most associated with the *Chisei-koro Kamui*, which is the deity of the home. This *inau* is spiritually tied to the owner of the house. Lilac is used because it resists decay. If there is an accident in the home, or if the

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<sup>1</sup>Willow is discussed in Chapter II, pg. 17: “Willow is used because of the story of *Kotan-Koru-Kamui*. After making the world, he left his chopsticks behind. So that they would not rot, he turned them into willow trees, and the Ainu have made *inau* from willow ever since” (Hilger 91-92).

*inau* shows signs of rot, it is “dismissed” through a sending ceremony, and a new *inau* is created for the protection of the home and its inhabitants (45).

## **Iron**

According to Munro, the Japanese established a headquarters on southern Hokkaido Island by 1599 CE (1). Trade prior to that would have been sparse and it is likely that it is around the sixteenth century that metals are introduced into Ainu culture. The Matsumae clan had exclusive trading rights with the Ainu during this time. The Ainu provided salmon, animal skins, and some goods obtained from Mainland China. In exchange, the Japanese gave “rice, rice wine, tobacco, salt, pans, knives, axes, needles, thread, lacquerware, trinkets, etc.” to the Ainu (Munro 2).

In Ainu tradition, iron plays a significant role when a boy changes into a man. Several events, besides the biological changes of the body, are steps in the rites of passage into manhood. The young Ainu boy makes changes that are expected of Ainu men. One is a change of clothing and hairstyle. Another is killing his first bird with a bow and arrow to prove that he is able to provide. During this time the most important symbol of this rite of passage is when the boy receives two knives. One knife is exclusively used for carving *inau*, and the other knife is for all other purposes (Ohnuki-Tierney, *Ainu of Northwest Coast* 59). A third knife is used for heavy work while out in the forest, called a ‘mountain knife.’ There are fewer examples of mountain knives, and it is more of a utilitarian instrument, although handles and sheathes are decorated with carvings similar

to the *makiri*. Ainu knives are the artwork of Ainu men as textiles are the artwork that represents Ainu women.

With the use of iron blades, knife handles and sheaths are necessary. These are made from a variety of woods and carved by the bearer for their own use and to give as matrimonial gifts. Knives, as objects of traditional Ainu artwork, will be discussed in depth in the following chapter.

### **Whalebone**

The Ainu used both stranded and hunted whales (Iwasaki-Goodman & Nomoto 222). Meat, fat, and bone were all consumed. When a whale became stranded, the event was seen a gift from *kamui* and seen as a spiritual time. There are dances and songs performed to express gratitude while the carcass is butchered and shared among the Ainu village. After WWII, Japanese law prevented the Ainu from taking whales that had been stranded on shore and instead took the whales for themselves, thereby removing one of the major Ainu resources for food, oil, and tools.

Prior to having iron from trade, bone and stone were used for carving tools. Whalebone is the most widely used of all animal bones. It is made into needle cases, knives, and sometimes knife sheaths. The orca is the most revered whale, the most sought after and has a strong *kamui* (Iwasaki-Goodman & Nomoto 222-226). Notably, in the next chapter, objects will be examined in detail with the orca represented in carvings of familial crests.



## Foreign Goods

Glass beads were introduced into Ainu culture through trade. According to Kodama, many were used for jewelry worn by Ainu women and were mostly from China and Russia (325). Relating to the artwork of Ainu men, Glass beads were often used on a thong that fastened the *makiri* (knife) to the man's belt (Keira & Keira 236). Since glass is not a significant work from Ainu tradition, the glass beads are not discussed at length in this writing, but they are included as part of the knives which are of traditional Ainu tools.

Trade with Japan brought the most traditional and recognizable of Japanese goods: lacquerware. It is the only item used in religious Ainu ceremonies that is not made by Ainu men. Prior to knowledge about the integration of Japanese goods into the Ainu culture, museum collectors did not include Japanese lacquerware in Ainu collections because they were so clearly different from and not original to the Ainu (Howell, "Ainu Ethnicity and the Boundaries" 100). Current installations exhibit large lacquerware storage containers with Ainu objects of art because they are considered treasures and family heirlooms that are now part of the Ainu culture.

Lacquerware originated in China during the Neolithic period. Color, traditionally red or black, is painted onto a bamboo or wooden object and then urushiol lacquer from poison oak sap is layered up to thirty times. The tree resin is filtered, painted onto the object, and then the object is allowed to cure in a warm, humid room. After this process is complete, the object has a durable finish that is impervious to acid or alkali, and the

lacquer finish is almost inert. Lacquerware has been used for food serving dishes for over 5,000 years (Department of Asian Art).

The *tuki* is a lacquerware bowl on a pedestal. It is used as a wine vessel for offerings to the *kamui*. It is one of the three main ritual items used by Ainu men in prayer ceremonies. The other two are the *inau*, the shaved stick that sends the prayers, and the *ikupasuy*, which is the carved stick that is dipped into the wine like an offering utensil to serve wine to the *kamui*. Unlike the *inau* and the *ikupasuy*, the *tuki* is of Japanese origin and therefore does not have the traditional Ainu *aiushi* and *moreu* (barb and whorl) patterns. The Museum of Anthropology of British Columbia University in Vancouver does have a set of *tuki* that were carved by an Ainu artist, but they are not lacquered. These were made after the Japanese-made *tuki* became integrated into Ainu ceremonies, centuries ago and significant in that they are a return to traditional Ainu carving, pre-Japanese influence.

Ainu boys are raised to be woodcarvers, hunters, and representatives to the *kamui*. After traditional rites of passage, Ainu men become providers, shamans, and artists. Their artwork manifests in the carvings they create that carry on the patrilineal symbols of their lineage, while adding their own life tales to the canon of their family history. As a subsistence culture, they took what they gathered and traded, and added foreign elements into their artwork and into their spiritual lives. Objects made by, and used by, Ainu men are examined thoroughly in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VII  
THE SACRED WORK OF AINU MEN: TOOLS AND RITUAL OBJECTS  
OBJECT ANALYSIS

**Analysis and Discussion of Garments by Category**

The designs and motifs that make Ainu objects unique to their culture tie men's and women's artwork together. Ainu designs by gender are similar but are not the same. One notable difference is the use of representational designs on spiritual tools made exclusively by the men in Ainu culture, and one notable similarity is the use of the aforementioned *moreu*<sup>1</sup> motif in both men's and women's work. For the purpose of the discussion of traditional Ainu artwork, this analysis will focus on three types of knives: *makiri*, *menoko-makiri*, and *tashiro*, and three types of ritual objects: *inau*, *ikupasuy*, and *tuki*.

These designs are patrilineal, passed from father to son. While a young Ainu girl begins to learn patterns from her mother, passed from her grandmother, a young Ainu boy learns to use a knife to carve wood and begins to learn the designs that symbolize his family, homeland, and lineage. He will be given simple tasks at first, and as he grows and matures, he will eventually learn how to make nails to hold houses together, create *inau* to implore *kamui* for help, carve the sacred *ikupasuy* for offerings, and carve the sheath

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<sup>1</sup>*Moreu* is described in detail in Chapter III of this thesis. It is defined as spiral shapes, or curves, that are never made up of more than one and a half turns.

and handle of a knife to give to his betrothed when he is a man. The following two sections examine, separately, the physical tools (knives) and the spiritual tools (*inau*, *ikupasuy*, and *tuki*) of Ainu men.

## **Knives**

Arguably the most important tool for a hunter-gatherer society is the knife. Whether it is used as a tool or a weapon, it is essential for survival. Each Ainu man has his own knife, and the Ainu word for this specific type of knife is *makiri*. Ainu women carry a smaller version of the man's knife, and it is referred to, literally, as "woman's knife" or *menoko makiri* (Katsuichi 151). As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a larger knife called a "mountain knife," and it will be briefly discussed. Ainu men do carry swords, but they are outside the scope of this examination.

### *Makiri*

Traditional Ainu men's knives are personalized with designs similar to those in Ainu textiles. However, in knives, there is less space for design, so the pattern covers the entire surface of the knife and sheath, as opposed to garments in which there are large amounts of negative space where no motif is stitched. The pattern not only identifies the owner and his lineage, but also adds texture to the handle to insure a firm handgrip. Dubreuil discusses the societal and physical purpose of the *makiri*, saying that an Ainu man is judged by the level of carving skill and beauty of the knife which he wears at his hip at all times.

Ainu men always wore the *makiri* at their sides, usually encased in an intricately carved wooden sheath. The design on a sheath and hilt was carved with devotion by Ainu men, whose carving skill was judged by the quality of both design and technique found thereon. When he had mastered the skills needed to use the *makiri*, a man was considered to be an independent carver as well as an adult in the community. Displaying the *makiri* was a statement of a right of passage (Dubreuil 295).

*Makiri* are used to carve sacred objects, during hunting, and as basic utensils to carve all other wooden items needed in traditional Ainu life. Typically *makiri* are approximately eleven inches in length and double bladed meaning the blade is sharpened on both sides of the blade rather than just one (Kayano 165). Most *makiri* have a slight curved shape similar to a common fillet knife.

The wood of many *makiri* that are in museum and private collections is not identified; therefore some descriptions are without mention of the specific material. Such is the case with the first *makiri* specimen (Fig. 28). This is in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and the materials as listed are: “wood, metal, bark, bone, and cloth” (Dubreuil 293). It was purchased from the Ainu in 1904 in St. Louis at the Louisiana Purchase Centennial Exposition (Dubreuil 293).

The metal listed is the blade of the knife, not shown in Fig. 28. The wood is a warm light brown color and bone caps the ends of the sheath, making them the brightest elements. Cloth refers to the thong around the middle of the knife that allows it to be

attached to a man's belt. Many *makiri* sheaths have a dorsal fin shape on the convex side, with a hole so that the fabric can pass through. In Fig. 28, an unidentified material creates a ridged pattern around the sheath under the fin shape. The material is shinier than the rest of the knife and is a deep cherry red. It is likely cherry-bark wrapping, as can be seen in Fig. 30, the Ainu *tashiro*.

Similar to the textiles discussed, *aiushi* and *moreu* can be seen on the sheath and knife handle in Fig. 28. On the knife handle is the curvilinear form of the *moreu* that follows the rule of never completing as a whole circle, or more than one and one half turns of a spiral. In the center of the outside curve is an *aiushi* creating a barb shape. To the right of that shape is an image that looks like a whale's tail with perhaps the body of the whale the farthest carving to the right at the end of the handle. With that in mind, combining these two shapes, one may be the side of the whale while swimming and the shape closer to the hilt may be the whale jumping out of the water, with the *aiushi* as a dorsal fin. Unlike the patterns on textiles, the artist filled in the different shapes throughout the handle and sheath with a consistent pattern of crosshatching. As explained previously, it is not taboo for Ainu men to represent animals on their property because it either ties to the power of that animal or because it is part of their familial design that represents their lineage.

The bone elements of Fig. 28 have *moreu* carved into them as well, and the inside is crosshatched as on the wood. Patterns on the sheath and handle of the knife are broken into sections through the use of lines made up of rings that circle different points along

the sheath and handle. Besides the repetition of the *moreu*, the design also includes soft diamond-like shapes carved into the bone portion on the hilt of the knife sheath, and then repeated once again just below that in the wood of the knife sheath. Lines created with the carved rings separate each area, which gives emphasis to the patterns in each area. In total, there are four of these designs. The pattern on the fin portion of the sheath is very similar to the designs found around the openings of Ainu textiles. There are slight curves that create an almost scalloped pattern. Barbs jut out from it, and one barb turns in toward the crosshatched pattern.

Fig. 28 is an excellent example of *makiri*. Each knife sheath and handle is a personal expression from an individual Ainu man that identifies his skill as an artisan and holds designs that represent himself and his lineage. Although they follow a basic shape, size, and structure, they are individual works of art just as the textiles are for Ainu women. The *moreu* and *aiushi* may work in each design to keep away evil kamui and protect the carrier. Similar designs will be seen on the woman's knife and the mountain knife.

#### *Menoko-Makiri* (Woman's Knife)

In Fig. 29, a *makiri* and a *menoko-makiri* are shown side by side. The woman's sheath and knife handle have been made out of a much darker wood than the man's knife. These artifacts are part of the City of Sapporo's collection of Ainu objects for public education. The type of wood is not mentioned in the description, nor is the artist.

*Menoko-makiri* are made from the same materials as men's knives; the only difference is that they are slightly shorter.

An Ainu marriage proposal and engagement consists of a trade of handmade items between the couple. When an Ainu man proposes partnership to a woman, he creates a small knife specifically for her, similar to his own *makiri*. If she accepts his proposal, she wears her new knife at her waist. She then offers him her own woven items in return, such as hand covers or a strap to hold his sword, with her own familial designs on them (Katsuichi 151).

#### *Tashiro*

Similar to the *makiri* is used as a general utility and hunting tool, the Ainu *tashiro* (mountain knife) is used as a tool while in the mountains to defend against bears and to clear brush, similar to how a machete is used. Approximately twenty inches in length *tashiro* are twice as long as *makiri* (Kayano 167), Fig. 30 is an exceptional specimen. Whalebone makes up the knife handle and sheath and has been darkened over time to a rich brown color. Like the *makiri* (see Fig. 28), there are thin bands of wrapping on the sheath and handle that separate areas of patterns. The rings are made from cherry bark (see Fig. 30). The only other material, besides the iron of the blade inside the sheath, is a leather thong that holds the knife to the Ainu man's waistband.

Positive and negative space is created throughout the design. Motifs of curving shapes that end in points, some like thick crescents, are visible throughout the entire



sheath and handle. Fine crosshatch patterns create fish scales inside of the motifs, while some bone is left bare and smooth.

Like women's textiles, men's knives are necessary tools that become objects of art through the application of traditional Ainu motifs. If the *aiushi* and *moreu* are designs to thwart evil, then this same protection must be imbued into these objects made for physical protection and survival. *Sermaka omare*, the motif of protection, appears in designs on both genders' work. Ainu women care for their loved ones with protective designs on garments. Ainu men carve similar designs into the knives that they use to provide for and protect their families and give the same protection to their wives through these designs on *menoko-makiri*.

### **Spiritual Tools**

Three specific objects are used in traditional Ainu religious ceremonies. *Inau* are carved sticks that act as a medium between the Ainu and the *kamui* (Ainu gods) to help send prayers or requests. *Inau* are less intricately carved than other traditional Ainu objects and are sometimes destroyed through ritual (Munro 29). Some authors refer to *inau* as "prayer sticks." The second sacred object to be examined is the *Ikupasuy*,<sup>2</sup> an instrument used during religious ceremonies in which libations are made. *Ikupasuy* is a long stick that is carved with an Ainu man's lineage motifs and other patterns, which

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<sup>2</sup>*Ikupasuy* is spelled differently depending on the author or publication. In *Ainu Creed and Cult*, Munro spells it *ikubashui*. Katsuichi leaves off the "iku" and uses *pasui*, and Strong conflates the two objects together as one unit to call it *tukipasuy*. Kayano notes, "...*pasuy* is etymologically related to *hashi* (chopstick)" (167).

show his skills as a carver, with the designs acting as a symbol of his place in the world. The third sacred object is a lacquered wine cup called *tuki* used during libations within religious ceremonies. It is one of the few traditional Ainu objects gained through trade with the Japanese that has been assimilated into Ainu religious customs. Together, these three objects are essential to Ainu religious ceremonies.

### *Inau*<sup>3</sup>

“One could say, as the Ainu themselves do, that there existed an *inau* for each and every incident in the life of the Ainu” (Sjoberg 65). Ainu have created *inau* (see Fig. 2) since their ancient times, as mentioned in the Ainu epics called *yukar*. Munro refers to *inau* as “effigies,” and he posited that they might represent human beings (28). Some *inau* represent human sacrifice, while some are receptacles for the spirit of ancestors (28). Munro goes on to describe the use of *inau* as “messengers... or intermediaries between the Ainu and the *kamui*”(29). Each *inau* serves a specific purpose, for a specific prayer. Therefore, *inau* are innumerable and each is unique. Despite this uniqueness, they do have a basic structure that identifies them as *inau*.

Fig. 31 shows a sample of *inau* from *Ainu Creed and Cult* (Munro Plate III. *INAU*). Munro states that *inau* are cut from a branch of wood and then carved and marked, and some are decorated with shavings called *kike* (see Fig. 31) (29). *Inau* sizes vary in length but not very much in width. Plates throughout Munro’s writing show *inau*

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<sup>3</sup> *Inau* is spelled differently depending on the author or publication. In *Ainu Spirit of a Northern People*, it is spelled *inaw*.

that range in length from twelve inches to at least six feet (Plates II and XIII). Features of *inau* consist of a few carving techniques that result in decorations. As mentioned, *kike* are the wood shavings that create curls (see Fig. 2). “Snakes” are made from both grasses and wood that create a rope-like element similar to the rope-like tendrils (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 31. b), but much tighter. *Itokpa* are shallow cuts made into the wood that designate which deity the *inau* is intended for (Munro 30). These are v-cut shapes that cross the grain of the wood. With the lack of lineage and other specific individual designs, it can be deduced that their use in prayer supersedes a need for self-expression.

#### *Ikupasuy*

Like *makiri*, *ikupasuy* is a traditional Ainu object upon which men’s carving skills are displayed. Motifs on *ikupasuy* are similar to women’s textile designs in that they mark lineage and place, and exhibit personal expression. Thanks to the influence of Japanese culture in modern Ainu writing *ikupasuy* is described as a “ceremonial wine-offering chopstick.” (Kayano 167). During Ainu religious ceremonies, the tip of an *ikupasuy* is dipped into the wine in a *tuki* (wine-cup), and the wine is allowed to drip from the *ikupasuy* into the fire pit during a prayer to the *kamui* (Kayano 167). Wine is then sipped by the elder, giving the prayers to their family and then to others in attendance of the ceremony (Kayano 167).

*Ikupasuy* were erroneously termed “mustache lifters” by Westerners because they were normally seen resting on top of the *tuki* and therefore assumed to block the wine from facial hair (see Fig. 32) (Dubreuil 294). Strong describes *ikupasuy* as a “piece of

carved wood usually about a foot long and an inch and a half wide” made of yew, willow or spindle wood (127). Lacquered *ikupasuy* are less common (see Fig. 32). Normally these prayer sticks are carved from wood and left to patina naturally, which creates a positive-negative composition like the one seen in the top half of Fig. 33. The cuts, and some relief carving, are deep enough that light does not enter, and some of the fine cuts are similar to finely drawn lines. After trade, the Ainu assimilated some common Japanese traditions, like the interest in lacquered items. On occasion, an Ainu carver will carve his *ikupasuy* and have it lacquered by Japanese artisans (Kendall, *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People* 182). The *ikupasuy* shown in Fig. 32 is a visual pun in that there are *ikupasuy* carved onto the top of the *ikupasuy*.

Walker notes a specific format for pattern placement on *ikupasuy*: Cuts at either end of the libation wand denote the lineage and clan of the carver so that the *kamui* receiving the prayers know from whom they were sent. He also notes that in between the end markings are the work of the artist and these designs are the Ainu man’s personal expression (105). Two of the three *ikupasuy*, shown in Fig. 33, have these distinct cuts. End marks, denoting lineage and clan, are seen on both objects clearly in the far left and center sticks (Fig. 33). The *ikupasuy* on the right, however, has less discernable cuts. There is a small slash on the bottom end but is not mirrored at the top. After a survey of a myriad of *ikupasuy* images, it is evident that all do not follow this rule, but it is a norm in the designs. Some *ikupasuy* only have the lineage marks on the pointed end, referred to as the “tongue” that is dipped into the wine (Kendall 182).

*Aiushi* and *moreu* are found on all three objects as seen in Fig. 33. The far right example has more traditional *aiushi* (brace shapes) on the upper half, with more geometric designs on the bottom half, including linear dividers between patterns, floral motifs with four petals, and a diamond shape at the bottom. Patterns on the center example in Fig. 33 reflect more marine and leaf designs. On the upper half is a circular motif with five gently curving barbs emanating from its perimeter and a circle with an x-shape in the center of two concentric circles. It is reminiscent of a turtle. Below, and flowing up into the turtle-like design, is a long, pod-shaped object with more of the gently curving barbs protruding from its perimeter. The pod-shape's outline meets underneath and then encircles a hole in the stick, which creates another object in the design using physical negative space.

As on the knives, there are linear patterns crossing the objects that act as pattern dividers. Above the turtle-shape, on the center *ikupasuy* of Fig. 33, are shallow diamond-shaped depressions, and the overall pattern lightens into simple curved lines before the top dividing line. Notable is that although there is depth in the motif in the center of the body of this *ikupasuy*, the dividing borders contain simple diagonal cuts as though not to take away from the main design. The end cuts that identify the carver and his lineage are three ellipses with sides that touch each other.

The example on the left in Fig. 33 has organic, vine-like *aiushi* and *moreu* at the top under the lineage marks. Again, ellipses are used to identify the carver, but they are not touching as in the previous example. Dividing marks are made with two deep v-

shaped cuts that connect to the main motif on the majority of the *ikupasuy*. The main motif is a deeper and more defined relief than the previous examples. A circle inside of an oval connects to a diamond shape, and then that pattern is repeated once. Inside the border of the ovals are lines that draw the eye into the circles. Both the two diamond shapes and the two circles have a crosshatched basket-weave pattern inside their boundaries that add a more intricate element to the overall design. It is unclear if *sermaka omare* (protection) is intentionally infused into *ikupasuy*, or if it is present on them simply because they are traditional Ainu designs. It can be said that *ikupasuy* are instruments of protection for the Ainu because they connect to the gods during prayers for every intention.

### *Tuki*

Partner object to the *ikupasuy* is the *tuki*, similar to a cup and saucer set. Prior to trade with Japan, the Ainu made wine from brewing barley or millet. Rice was introduced from the Japanese culture and *sake*, rice wine, became more prominent as a libation to *kamui* (Crawford). The overall shape of the *tuki* resembles Japanese design more than older traditional Ainu food vessels. Ainu food vessels that have been preserved in museum collections consist of trays and oblong bowls rather than round cups. It can be inferred from the difference in vessels that *tuki* are another traditional Japanese object that have been assimilated into Ainu tradition.

*Tuki* and *Ikupasuy* are always presented together, with the *ikupasuy* resting across the *tuki*, “tongue” end to the left (see Fig. 32) (Strong 127). Fig. 32 is an Ainu-made

*ikupasuy* with a Japanese-made *tuki*. Both are lacquered with black and red, but the *tuki* has a Japanese motif of gold shells with red tasseled cords strung through holes in the shells. From the lack of *aiushi* and *moreu* on traditional *tuki*, it may be inferred that the offering of wine, given through prayer from the *ikupasuy*, needs no protection as it goes directly to the *kamui*.

A newer Ainu version of the *tuki*, made in 1995, is shown in Fig. 34 (Museum of Anthropology, catalogue record). Similar in size to other *tuki*, it is approximately eight inches tall and six inches across. Different from most *tuki*, however, the object in Fig. 34 is not lacquered. It is carved from pagoda wood and clearly displays *aiushi* and *moreu*. The pedestal-type base that includes the saucer portion is fluted with grooves widening outward from the center. The center of the saucer has its own cup in which the foot of the *sake* cup rests. The bottom half of the cup portion has a continual pattern of *aiushi* creating three bands that encircle the cup. The top half of the *tuki* is a deep relief carving of two curving lines that cross over each other at the center of the band. This pattern creates circular designs around the cup. Each circular design has a simple, round medallion in the center with cross cuts that create an asterisk, or star, style of motif. At each junction of the circle-creating lines is a small hemisphere. This is a unique piece in that traditional Japanese-made *tuki* are not carved with relief patterns and do not have *aiushi* or *moreu* on them.

Ainu women create protection for their loved ones with *aiushi* and *moreu* on traditional Ainu clothing by placing a barrier to block evil spirits from entering the

clothes. Likewise, Ainu men create objects using these traditional motifs, seen upon a variety of knife sheaths and handles, *ikupasuy*, and some *tuki*. *Inau* are not decorated with motifs and patterns, but are created with their own vocabulary of religious symbolism for the gods to recognize. *Aiushi* and *moreu* patterns are found on the sacred *ikupasuy* libation wands, and these wands become intricate sculptures created by Ainu men on which they identify their families to the *kamui* while expressing their carving skills with images and motifs that are sacred to Ainu tradition. Early *tuki* are lacquered Japanese-made pieces collected through trade between the Ainu and Japanese, and they become family treasures. These four objects: knives, *inau*, *ikupasuy*, and *tuki*, are made by Ainu men, while the variety of Ainu textiles are made by Ainu women. Both genders create objects with motifs intended for the protection of one another.



## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

A thorough examination and critical discussion of the visual arts takes into account the history of the culture from which the artwork is produced. In Western art history, it is rarely necessary to delve into the deep past because these facts have been studied and included in the canon of art historical knowledge. Throughout Western history, though, industrialized societies have taken over indigenous cultures and forced them to assimilate to Western ways. The history of indigenous artwork is therefore fragile with ephemeral ideas and motifs often lost in the creation of history.

In the eighth-century Japanese book, *Kojiki: A Record of Ancient Matters*, the first account of the Japanese discovering the Ainu is recorded. By the nineteenth century, the Ainu and their culture were made to assimilate into the dominant Russian or Japanese cultures. With no written history prior to the reference in *Kojiki*, the history of the Ainu is technically barely one thousand years old. Logically, this is incorrect, but they are not the first nation of people to be almost erased from history by a more industrialized culture.

An introduction to the origins of the Ainu culture and history is important to this thesis because of the little research that has been done to develop and maintain an understanding and awareness of their culture. Ainu are genetically neither European nor Asian in origin. A detailed understanding of their beginnings, linking them to the Jōmon and Satsumon, and then later connections to other cultures through trade, contributed to

the knowledge base for a fuller understanding of traditional Ainu artwork and the motifs that are common in their cultural objects.

*Sermaka omare* is the Ainu motif of protection from one person to another that has been examined and discussed extensively in this thesis. Ainu society is egalitarian, and perhaps their isolation from other cultures made was impetus for protection foremost in their culture. Ainu women, left alone in the villages while Ainu men went into the forest to hunt for food or to the sea to fish for resources, carry the knives their husbands have made for them which have *aiushi* and *moreu* designs: a motif of barbs and swirls to repel evil spirits. As Ainu men carry on their work outside of the home, they wear this motif of protection, *sermaka omare*, especially on their backs, where Ainu women place the patterns most heavily. Both genders carry the intentions of protection from the other through the motifs that are stitched or carved onto personal objects.

This information would not be possible without the few explorers that took interest in Ainu culture, such as John Batchelor, a missionary who was so taken by traditional Ainu culture that he lived with them for sixty-four years, wrote the first Ainu-English dictionary, and became an outspoken supporter of the Ainu people. Kayano Kayano was the first Ainu to hold a seat in Japanese politics, one of the last native speakers of the Ainu language, an activist for Ainu rights, and a prolific author who preserved much of the traditional Ainu *yukar* in his writings. Honda Katsuichi, who wrote *Harukor: An Ainu Woman's Tale*, and Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, who wrote *The*

*Ainu of the Northwest Coast of Southern Sakhalin*, give Ainu women's perspectives of Ainu culture and deeper insight into a more secretive side to Ainu tradition.

However, the most important contribution regarding Ainu culture and artwork is a collection of essays called *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*. Dr. William W. Fitzhugh and Dr. Chisato O. Dubreuil edited this collection of essays. Fitzhugh is the director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and the Arctic Studies Center. His academic interest in circumpolar environments and northern cultures led his research into Ainu culture. Dubreuil is an Associate Professor of Art History at St. Bonaventure University and specializes in non-Western, Japanese, Asian, and Ainu artwork. She is both a scholar and an activist and focuses her research on contemporary Ainu artists, and she is, herself, Ainu.

*Sermaka omare*, as a motif, helps one understand the Ainu culture and their artwork at a deeper and more substantial level. Future research may include: a detailed investigation of Ainu jewelry, which reveals insight into trade and influence upon Ainu cultures; an examination of Ainu swords and the textiles taken in to war; and a discussion over the myriad accessories important in Ainu culture, such as headwear, gloves, and even shoes. There are unmistakable similarities between Ainu designs and those found on objects made by the first nations peoples of the American Pacific Northwest. Divided by the North Pacific Ocean and the Bering Sea, the Ainu and Pacific Northwest peoples share latitudes, similar landscapes, climates, flora, and fauna. The similarities in cultures suggest a necessity for research utilizing anthropology, archeology, and art history to

fully understand and compare the traditional motifs from these cultures. Using the idea of *sermaka omare*, cultural preservation through the lens of art history is possible for Ainu artwork.



Fig. 1. "Sea of Okhotsk."

*World Atlas*. Graphic Maps, n.d. Web. 2014.



Fig. 2. Two Kinds of *Inau*, illustration from *Harukor: An Ainu Woman's Tale*, Honda Katsuichi (1993) pg. 185.



Fig. 3. Ainu Women's Tattooed Lips . Maybury, Reba. "Ainu's Women's Tattooed Lips". *Sang Bleu Magazine*, 14 Dec. 2013.



Fig. 4. [Jōmon] Clay Figure.

Paine, Robert T. Jr. "An Ainu Clay Figure." *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts* Vol 45.

No. 259 (1947): pp. 14-17.



Fig. 5. Embroidery on *Attush*

Japan Textile Color Design Center. *Textile Designs of Japan: Designs of Ryukyu, Ainu and Foreign Textiles*. Vol. 3. Osaka: Japan Textile Color Design Center, 1966. pl. 64, #3.



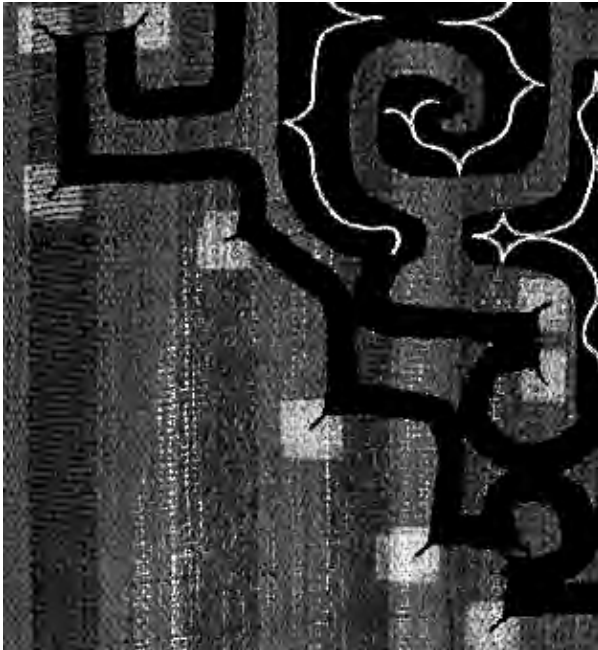


Fig. 6. *Aiushi* (Barb/Thorn) Detail

Koplos, Janet. "A Long View from a Hilltop." *American Craft Council*.

American Craft Council, 1 Jul 2009.

Web. 10 Oct 2012.

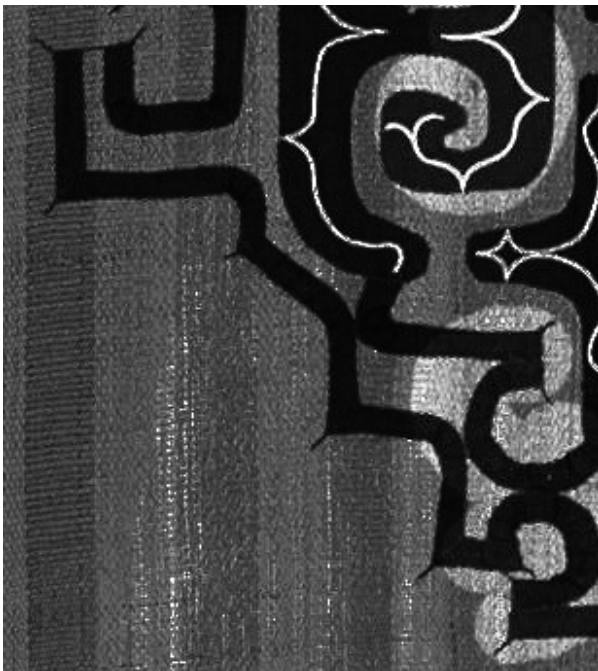


Fig. 7. Spiral/Curve *Moreu* Detail

Koplos, Janet. "A Long View from a Hilltop." *American Craft Council*.

American Craft Council, 1 Jul 2009.

Web. 10 Oct 2012.



Fig. 8. Detail of Foreign (Japanese) Motif in Embroidery on *Attush*

Japan Textile Color Design Center. *Textile Designs of Japan: Designs of Ryukyu, Ainu and Foreign Textiles*. Vol. 3. Osaka: Japan Textile Color Design Center, 1966. pl. 64, #3.



Fig. 9. “Jar with Sculptural Rim” (Low-fired clay) 2500-1000 B.C.  
Japan, Jōmon period, c. 10,500-300 B.C., Kimbell Art Museum.

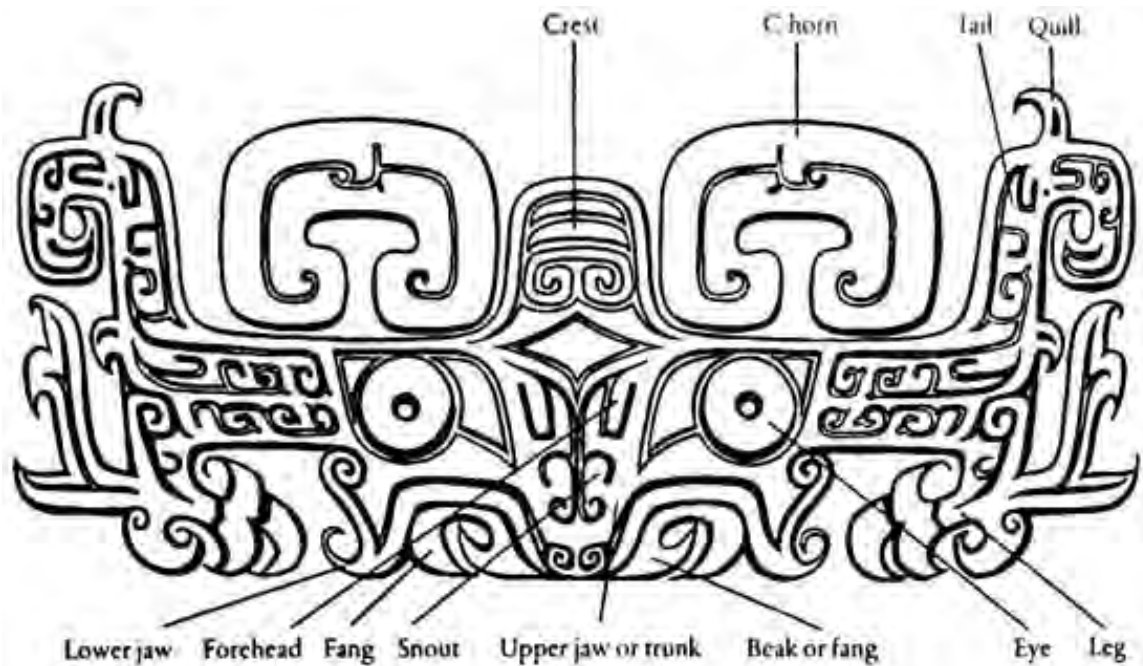


Fig. 10. Drawing of a *Taotie* bronze vessel design from the Shang dynasty of China (ca. 1200 B.C.)

Metropolitan Museum of Art. (2004). "Shang and Zhou Dynasties: The Bronze Age of China." *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*.

[www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/shzh/hd\\_shzh.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/shzh/hd_shzh.htm). Accessed 10 March 2016.



Fig. 11. Side by side comparison of Chinese *Taotie*, Jōmon and Ainu designs from above images.



Fig. 12. Collection of *Ikupasuy*

Moes, Robert. *Mingei: Japanese Folk Art from the Brooklyn Museum Collection*. New York: Universe Books. 1985. Pg. 181.



Fig. 13. Ainu Woman at Loom

Museum of Fine Arts Boston. (2002). "Ainu Woman Weaving: Custom of Hokkaido

Tribe" (antique postcard, nd). *Collections: Postcards*.

[www.mfa.org/collections/object/ainu-woman-weaving-419600](http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/ainu-woman-weaving-419600). Accessed 21 September 2013.





Fig. 14. Embroidered Salmon Skin Coat

Sakhalin Regional Museum. (2013). Aino "Pink Salmon Leather" Garment, 1861.

*Pilsudski Collection*. [www.sakhalinmuseum.ru/exhb\\_id\\_11012.php](http://www.sakhalinmuseum.ru/exhb_id_11012.php). Accessed 3 March 2015.



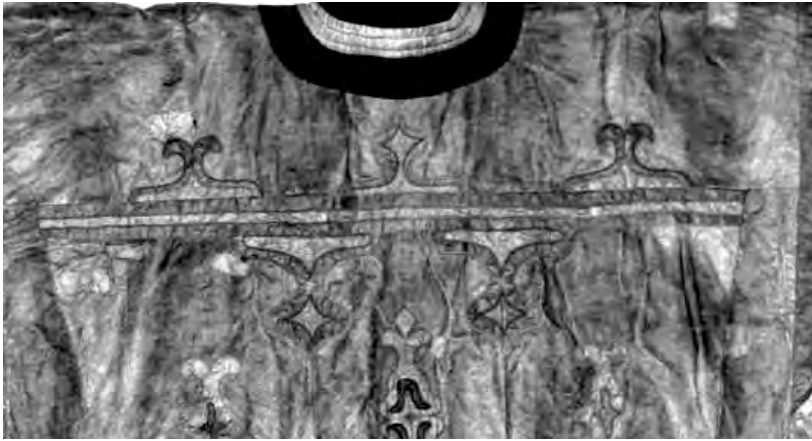


Fig. 15. Embroidered Salmon Skin Coat (detail of upper back, black and white to enhance line details).



Fig. 16. Embroidered Salmon Skin Coat (detail of lower back, black and white to enhance line details).



Fig. 17. Child's Salmon Skin Coat (back view)

Dubreuil, Chisato O. "Ainu Art: the Beginnings of Tradition." *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*. Edited by William W. Fitzhugh and Chisato O. Dubreuil, University of Washington Press, 1999, p. 292.



Fig. 18. Child's Salmon Skin Coat (front view)

Dubreuil, Chisato O. "Ainu Art: the Beginnings of Tradition." *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*. Edited by William W. Fitzhugh and Chisato O. Dubreuil, University of Washington Press, 1999, p. 292.

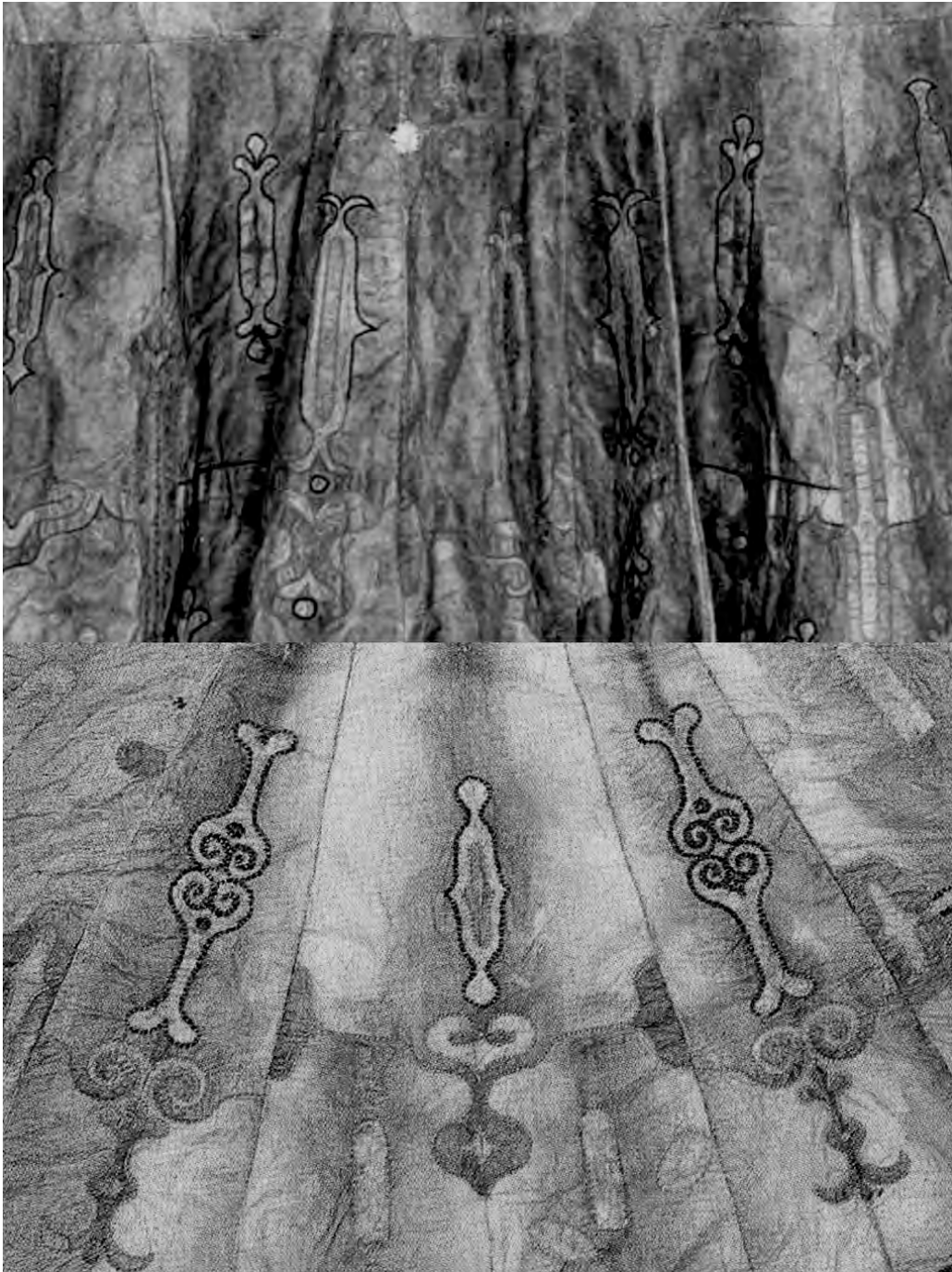


Fig. 19. Comparison detail of Fig.14 “Embroidered Salmon Skin Coat” and Fig. 17 “Child’s Salmon Skin Coat” (black and white to enhance line details).





Fig. 20. Collection of three *Attush* robes, Japan Textile Color Design Center, Plate 49

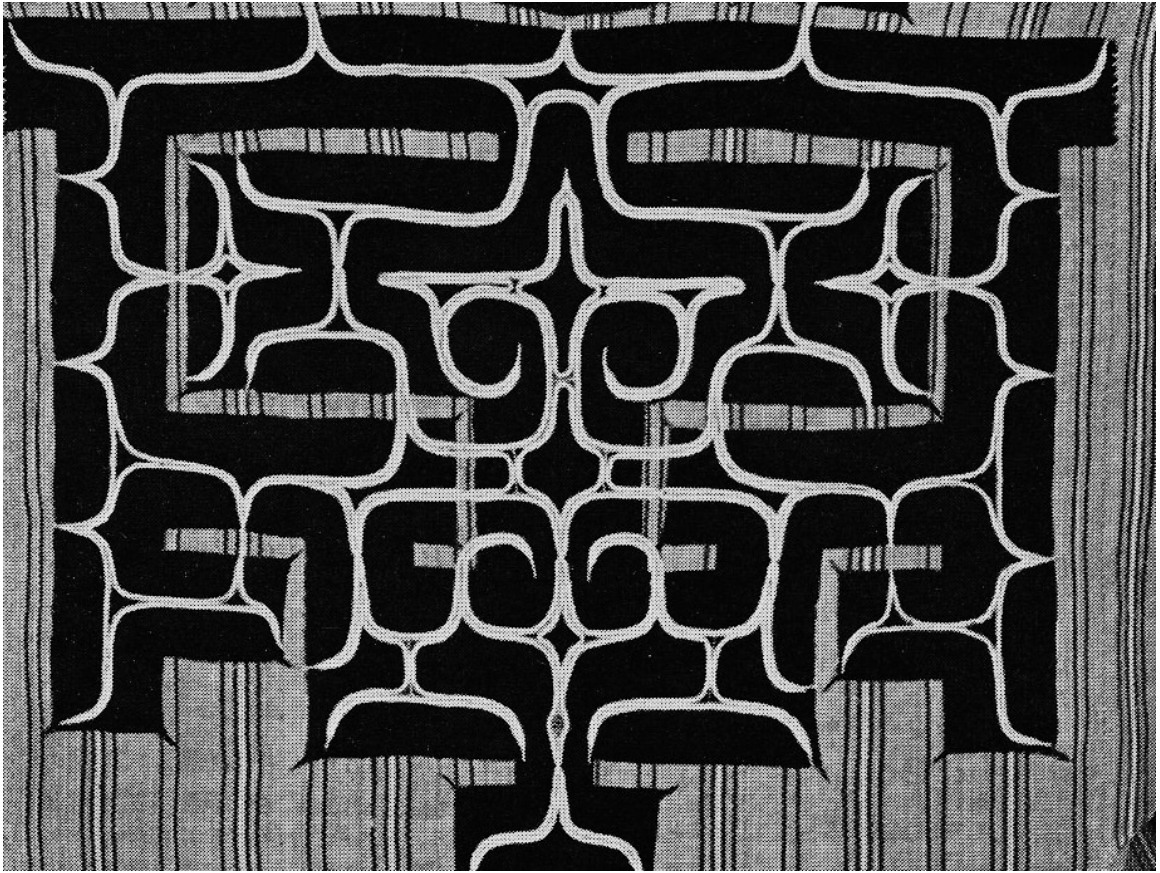


Fig. 21. *Attush* robe (detail of Fig. 20, upper back)

Japan Textile Color Design Center, Plate 49



Fig. 22. *Retarpe* (nettle fiber) Robe

Poster, Amy. "Batchelor, Starr, and Culin: The Brooklyn Museum of Art Collection."

*Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*. Edited by William W. Fitzhugh and Chisato O.

Dubreuil, University of Washington Press, 1999, p. 161.





Fig. 23. *Chikarkarpe* Robe (back view)

Kotani, Yoshinobu. "Ainu Collections in North America: Documentation Projects and the Frederick Starr Collections." *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*. Edited by William W. Fitzhugh and Chisato O. Dubreuil, University of Washington Press, 1999, p. 145





Fig. 24. *Chikarkarpe* Robe (front view of Fig. 23)

Kotani, Yoshinobu. "Ainu Collections in North America: Documentation Projects and the Frederick Starr Collections." *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*. Edited by William W. Fitzhugh and Chisato O. Dubreuil, University of Washington Press, 1999, p. 145.



Fig. 25. *Kaparamip* Robe

Japan Folk Crafts Museum. “Ainu Crafts – Patterns with a Prayer”. *Japan Folk Crafts Museum*. 2015. [www.mingeikan.or.jp/english/exhibition/special/201304.html](http://www.mingeikan.or.jp/english/exhibition/special/201304.html). Accessed 10 May 2016.



Fig. 26. *Ruunpe* Robes

Japan Textile Color Design Center. *Textile Designs of Japan III: Designs of Ryukyu, Ainu and Foreign Textiles*. Japan Textile Color Design Center, 1966. Plate No. 63





Fig. 27. *Chijiri Style Ruunpe Robe (back view)*

Japan Textile Color Design Center. *Textile Designs of Japan III: Designs of Ryukyu, Ainu and Foreign Textiles*. Japan Textile Color Design Center, 1966. Plate No. 62



Fig. 28. *Makiri*

Dubreuil, Chisato O. "Ainu Art: the Beginnings of Tradition." *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*. Edited by William W. Fitzhugh and Chisato O. Dubreuil, University of Washington Press, 1999, Collection of American Museum of Natural History (New York), acquired 1904. p. 293



Fig. 29. *Menoko-makiri* (Woman's Knife)

City of Sapporo. (2016). [Makiri] knife, [Menoko-makiri] knife for women. *Craft of Arts Ainu*. [www.city.sapporo.jp/shimin/pirka-kotan/en/kogei/makiri/](http://www.city.sapporo.jp/shimin/pirka-kotan/en/kogei/makiri/). Accessed 2 February 2017.

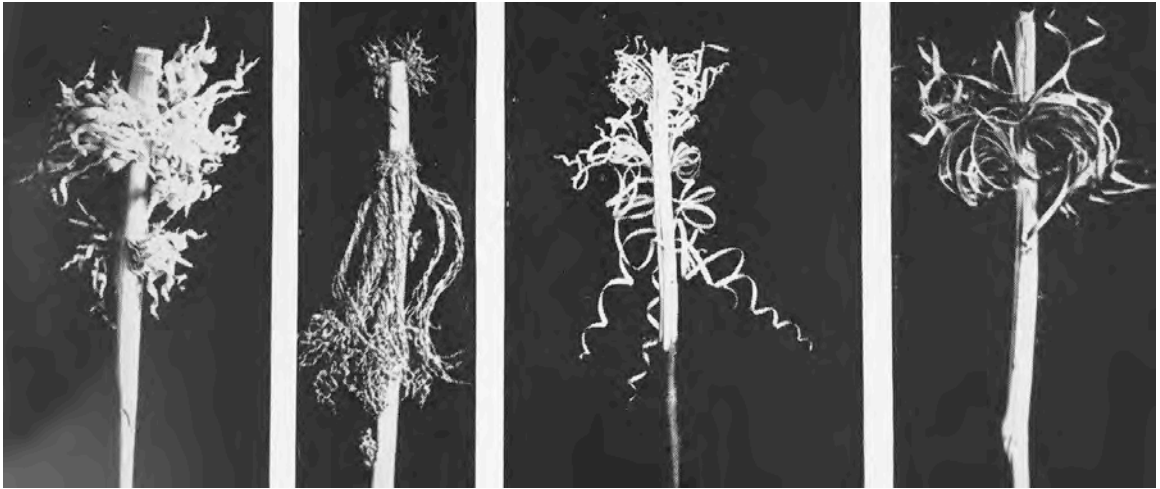


Fig. 30. *Tashiro* (Ainu Mountain Knife)

Iwasaki-Goodman, Masami & Nomoto, Masahiro. "The Ainu on Whales and Whaling."

*Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*. Edited by William W. Fitzhugh and Chisato O.

Dubreuil, University of Washington Press, 1999, p. 223 (Photo-shopped to remove superfluous visual information).



a.

b.

c.

d.

Fig. 31. Sample of *Inau*

Munro, Neil Gordon. *Ainu Creed and Cult.* Columbia UP, 1963.





Fig. 32. Lacquerware *Tuki* and *Ikupasuy*

Kendall, Laurel. "From Snowshoe to 'Corn Mortars': Early Ainu Collections at the American Museum of Natural History." *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*. Edited by William W. Fitzhugh and Chisato O. Dubreuil, University of Washington Press, 1999, p. 182



Fig. 33. *Ikupasuy*

Kendall, Laurel. "From Snowshoe to 'Corn Mortars': Early Ainu Collections at the American Museum of Natural History." *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*. Edited by William W. Fitzhugh and Chisato O. Dubreuil, University of Washington Press, 1999, p. 171



Fig. 34. Tuki (“sake cup”) from the Museum of Anthropology of the University of British Columbia’s Ainu objects collection. Photo by Kristie Hunger (2014).

**Table 1. Jōmon Periods**

Incipient	13,680-9250
Initial/Earliest	9250-5300
Early	5300-3360
Middle	3360-2580
Late	2580-1260
Final/Latest	1260-410
Incipient	13,680-9250
Initial/Earliest	9250-5300
Early	5300-3360
Middle	3360-2580
Late	2580-1260
Final/Latest	1260-410

Source: Pearson, Richard. “Jōmon Hot Spot: Increasing Sedentism in South-Western Japan in the Incipient Jōmon (14,000-9250 cal. BC) and Earliest Jōmon (9250-5300 cal. BC).” *World Archeology* Vol. 38. No. 2 (2006): 239-258.

**Table 2. Dyes Used for Textiles**

Plant Name	Part of Plant Used	Color Produced
Rosa Rugosa	Petals of flower	Red
Japanese Yew	Wood	Yellow
Japanese Elm	Bark	Brown
Black Crowberry	Fruit	Purple
Woad	Stalk	Blue-green
Sweet Oak	Bark	Dark Brown and Black

Source: Japan Textile Color Design Center. *Textile Designs of Japan III: Designs of Ryukyu, Ainu and Foreign Textiles*. Osaka: Japan Textile Color Design Center, 1966. (p 21).

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