

Learning Through Ainu Tools – the Ainu Tool Collection in the Museum

16

Related Sheets: 1, 22, 41, 42

National Important Tangible Folk–Cultural Properties

Part of the Ainu artifact collection exhibited in the Municipal Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum is designated as National Important Tangible Folk-Cultural Properties under the name "Ainu Tools Collection of Nibutani, Hokkaido and the surrounding area." Among the 1,121 designated items, 919 of them are in the Ainu Culture Museum, and 212 of them are housed in the Kayano Shigeru Ainu Archives. These artifacts have been widely studied as educational material for learning about Ainu culture in the Saru River region.

Many of the objects in the archives have written histories attached to them, much akin to a family registrar. The information on these records describes how the items were used, when, and by whom. This kind of knowledge is especially important in understanding the locality of Ainu culture.

Most of these nationally designated items are collected from the 50s-60s, and 92% of them come from the region surrounding Saru River. This collection of artifacts is known to have the most supplementary information even though many of the objects date back to the Showa Era.

Understanding the Thoughts Behind the Objects

Women were usually taught crafts such as needlework, weaving, and mat making, whereas men traditionally passed on the craft of woodcarving. Many of the women put a lot of thought into the things they made.

"I put my heart into creating a marvelous dress for my daughter to wear to her lover's feast." (Photo 2: Kayano, 1974).



Photo 1 This museum opened in April of 1992 with the philosophy of passing down Ainu traditional culture. The main body of the exhibition has been taken from the predecessor to this museum: the Municipal Nibutani Ainu Archives.

The handiwork of men was similar: the *menokomakiri*, a short dagger with marvelous engravings in the sheath and handles has been said to be a sign of love and courtship (Photo 3).

The ability to create these beautiful shapes and patterns were also a sign of maturity for Ainu people, as many of these Ainu handiworks brandish a pattern called *moreunoka* (quietly, curved, shape), which took years to master.*

※ "Many scholars and researchers have been naming these patterns with names like parenthetical crests and what not, but it is Mo-Rew-Noka (quietly, curving, shape) in Ainu." (Kayano 1974)

Kayano describes the thought behind ritual instruments as follows: "The *tukipasui* faithfully and carefully



Photo 2 *Chikarkarpe* (Ainu kimono with Kirifuse embroidery). This was owned by Shiranpeno Kaizawa, Arentoku Kaizawa, and Kiyotaro Kaizawa.



Photo 3 *Menokomakiri* (woman's knife) by Yayukkore Kawakami. Previously owned by Tekaran Kawakami.

Table

National Important Tangible Folk-Cultural Properties (Related to Ainu Culture) 2014

1. Ainu Canoe: Designated in 1957, Housed in the Hokkaido University Northern Biological Gardens, Field Science Center Library Botanic Garden
2. Ainu Living Tools Collection: Designated in 1959, Housed in the Hakodate Northern Peoples Museum
3. Nibutani, Hokkaido and other surrounding Areas Ainu Living Tools Collection: Designated in 2002, Housed in the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum

communicates the wish of the Ainu to the gods." (Kayano, 1974) *Tukipasuy* (Photo 4) is a necessary piece of equipment for a *kamuy nomi* (prayer to the *kamuy*), and it is considered one of the most important tools in passing on Ainu culture today. Through it, we can also understand the modesty of Ainu, explains Kayano: "This tool represents the humble way of thought that the Ainu had. They would never have directly asked the gods for anything." (Kayano, 1974)

Understanding the thought and feeling that went behind these specific objects give us a different perspective on these tools. The traditional views of the Ainu, wisdom, and lessons are all imbued in these artifacts.

Understanding the Information Behind These Objects

These Ainu artifacts can be roughly divided into two categories: home made items (such as wood carvings, clothes, and *inaw*), and foreign products (such as ironworks, lacquer ware, and glass beads).

Among the imported artifacts, the lacquered objects such as the *sintoko* (food box), *patch* (pot, photo 5), and *tuki* (goblet, photo 6) are known to have come from a large area around the Tohoku, Hokuriku and Kansai region. In particular, researchers have determined that these objects mostly came from Aizu, Wajima, Kyoto and

Kishu. Among the data available, objects mostly came from the early modern period, or the Edo era, but the dates of origin can range all the way back to medieval times, or the pre-Edo era.

Traditionally, valuables such as lacquered objects were placed in the *iyoikiri* (treasure box). Some of these objects were treated as *ikor* (treasures) and were passed down through generations. As a result, researchers still find some of these traded goods from hundreds of years ago in pristine conditions.

Understanding Historical Events through Ainu Objects

There is a set of *tuki* (cup) and *oyushipe* (tea bowl stand) that is representative of the history of Hokkaido (photo 6).

These lacquered objects were given to Shiranpeno Kaizawa (died in 1940) as a reward after a year of forced labor in Akkeshi.

Back in the latter half of the early modern period, the operation of fisheries were taken over by Japanese people in Ezo (Hokkaido), which laid the groundwork for the eventual location contract system, a distribution system that allows a merchant the right to trade with Ainu and tax for a sum of money for the landowner.

Bunemon Yamada, who was the merchant in charge of the Saru region,

also ran operations in Yufutsu, Akkeshi, and Nemuro. This is precisely why there are many people around the Saru region who have a history of being forced to work in faraway places such as Akkeshi.

Information Available to the Public

The data regarding the year the artifact was collected, and the year the object was made along with other historical information is an incredibly valuable learning material for understanding the regional history of the Ainu. While the museum exhibits many of the designated Ainu artifacts, some of the data is published on the museum website.



Photo 4 *Tukipasui* by Shiranpeno Kaizawa. Those created around the Saru River region have the distinct three lines on both sides.

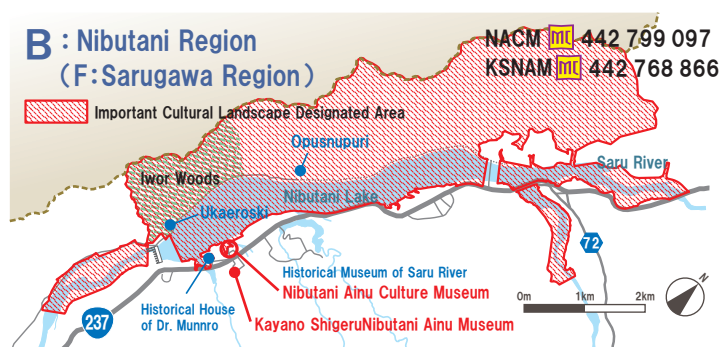


Photo 5 *Putaupachi* (Lacquered bowl with lid). Created around the mid-late Edo era in Kyoto.



Photo 6 *Tuki* (cup) and *oyushipe* (stand) previously owned by Shiranpeno Kaizawa. This was the reward for a year of labor.

"Cultural landscapes of the Saru Valley formed by Ainu tradition and modern development"
Designated as Important Cultural Landscape as of July 26th, 2007

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