

3 Ainu Oral Tradition



アイヌ語ってどんなことば？

The Nature of the Ainu Language 愛努語是什麼樣的語言呢？
愛努語是什麼樣的語言呢？ 아이누어란 어떤 말인가? Айыык айыык

かつてアイヌ民族は、自分たちのことばであるアイヌ語で生活していました。明治以降、日本による教育をはじめとする同化政策が盛られた結果、人びとは、入前ではアイヌ語を話さず、子どもにもあえて教えずうとほしくなり、くらしのなかからアイヌ語はすたれていきました。アイヌ語を復興する動きは1980年代からさかんになりましたが、教えることのできる人材の育成や、社会全体でアイヌ語の復興をささぐるしくみを考えることなど、多くの課題が残されています。

The Ainu people once used their own language in their daily lives. Beginning in the Meiji era (1868-1912), assimilation policies such as Japanese-language education resulted in a growing reluctance of the Ainu to use their own language in public, so teach it to children. This language gradually faded from daily use. Efforts to revive the Ainu language began in earnest in the 1980s, but have faced a number of serious issues, such as the difficulty of training potential language teachers, and the lack of general social systems to support the language revival.

See and Hear the World of Ainu Culture

Here, you can view video footage of actual Ainu oral traditions and performing arts. Subtitles are provided only in Ainu and Japanese, but you can still enjoy the performance as you watch and listen to the sounds.

The large monitor features short video clips introducing some of the main oral literature, dances and musical instruments of the Ainu people. The small monitor provides more in-depth information about various types of stories and songs, as well as differences between regions. You can also watch an animated short film about Ainu tales.

The Ainu have cultivated much oral literature, as well as various performing arts and other aspects of their culture using the Ainu language.

As opposed to the reading a written text, oral literature produces a richness in artistry and entertainment for the audience, who further pass on these traditions to the following generation. Various forms of Ainu oral literature exist. For example, mythic epics have repeated refrains, making them endearing even for first-time listeners.

Traditional songs, dances and instruments of the Ainu have been passed down by each region and household through ceremonies and daily life. Dancing and singing together is not only an enjoyable pastime, but is also believed to please the kamuy. Traditional instruments such as the mukhuri, a jaw harp made of bamboo, and the tonkori, a five-stringed instrument of the Sakhalin Ainu, are still played quite often even today.

Beginning in the Meiji period (1868-1912), due to Japanese policies intended to assimilate the Ainu through Japanese language education and other means, many Ainu became reluctant to speak their language in public or teach it to their children. As a result, the Ainu language has disappeared from their daily lives. This trend was accelerated by the emergence of new forms of entertainment, such as radio and TV, which has resulted in fewer and fewer opportunities to listen to stories or sing and dance together.

Despite this, there were Ainu, as well as Wajin researchers, who preserved these stories and songs by recording or writing them down. There were still others who carefully preserved these traditional songs and dances in their communities and homes. Entering the 1970s, a number of initiatives sprung up to recover and pass on the Ainu language, oral traditions and performing arts. Today, whenever we experience oral traditions or traditional performing arts of the Ainu, we must not forget this background and history from the Meiji Period (1868-1912) onward, and we must be aware that the efforts to restore and pass on these important forms of cultural heritage are still far from complete.



History of Recording and Researching the Ainu Language

Even during the time when the Ainu language was no longer spoken, over the years many people, Ainu and otherwise, have continued to record and research the Ainu language. In this corner, you will find an introduction of some of the noted researchers and other people who have preserved the writing of the Ainu language and recorded tales and songs from elders in various communities. On display you will also find various artifacts that tell the history of recordings and research, such as memos written about Ainu tales and traditional life, a record from the 1930s, and the microphone used to record it.



Try Your Hand at Playing the Tonkori

Here, you can try your hand at playing the *tonkori*, a five-stringed instrument traditionally used by the Sakhalin Ainu. Softly pluck the strings to hear the sound it makes. Photographs describe how the *tonkori* is held and played.