

The 8th World Archaeological Congress (WAC-8), Plenary Session
Presentation by Tadashi Kato, Executive Director, Ainu Association of Hokkaido

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Kambaikan Hardy Hall, Doshisha University Muromachi Campus

Distinguished members of the World Archaeological Congress from around the world, ladies and gentlemen, *irankarapte!* *Irankarapte* is an Ainu greeting meaning “hello.”

I am very honored and pleased to be given this opportunity to speak at this session as a representative of the indigenous Ainu people.

The Ainu Association of Hokkaido has continued its activities in view of the history of nearly 150 years during which the Ainu people and their lives, including their land, resources and culture, were subjected to restrictions under Japanese and international legal frameworks. The restrictions started when the Japanese government implemented a land reclamation policy for Hokkaido in the name of national modernization, forcing the Ainu people to assimilate into the Japanese society, discriminating against them and appropriating their land as *terra nullius*, a Latin term meaning “nobody’s land.”

Like indigenous peoples in other countries, the history of the Ainu represents the sufferings of a minority group that cannot be wiped from their memories.

At the outset of my presentation, I’d like to stress that it is impossible to completely overcome those sufferings by the Ainu people alone, no matter how hard they work or try.

With this in mind, I’d like to offer my views based on my experience today. That is, in order to clarify the positions of indigenous peoples in their countries, academic societies in the concerned research fields should engage in practical studies and actively share related information with society in consideration of ethical, social and human rights implications. It means that they should return the results of their interdisciplinary studies to society to provide assessments and positively influence all educational fields and legal systems while maintaining the fairness and impartiality of their research.

Particularly, the results of archaeological and anthropological studies may provide empirical evidence essential for the development of an ethnic identity of indigenous Ainu people. Such research results also add diversity and richness to the history of mankind.

In the past, archaeologists, physical and cultural anthropologists, historians, linguists and other scholars in Japan were engaged in research within their own disciplines. They were also categorized into the areas of the humanities, science and medicine.

Their research interests were not what the Ainu people had been wishing for and caused major divisions between the researchers and the subjects of their studies. Accordingly, the relationship between researchers and the Ainu people was viewed as the relationship between subjects and objects. In fact, this viewpoint was considered to be entirely natural and became a stereotype.

As a result, the skeletal remains of Ainu people, their funerary objects and other materials were disinterred and collected for research purposes without regard for their human dignity. In the 1930s, the collection of such remains was promoted as part of a national project, and concerns stemming from such collection have remained unanswered to date.

In late July this year, the Japanese government announced that the remains of 1,636 Ainu individuals are presently housed at 12 universities, and that those of at least 73 individuals are kept at 13 museums in Hokkaido and elsewhere in the country. This was found as a result of an investigation involving the national government, universities and other related organizations. However, a complete picture of the situation and the specific conditions of those funerary objects have yet to be clarified. In fact, many of the skeletal remains and materials are stored under conditions that make it impossible to return them to their Ainu communities. There are not clear records of how they were collected, in many instances the skulls are kept separate from the other bones, and funerary objects have also been separated from the skeletal remains.

Furthermore, private-sector investigations into records that had been made by world-leading researchers in Europe as far back as the 1870s revealed that the skulls of 72 Ainu individuals had been transferred from Japan, which in those days included Sakhalin, to Germany and Russia.

According to the oldest existing record of the collection of Ainu remains, an 1865 case of grave robbery in southern Hokkaido escalated into a diplomatic row with Great Britain. The whole picture of how Ainu skeletal remains and funerary objects were collected and handled, as well as their position in the legal framework, has not yet been elucidated.

It seems that research in those days was performed to obtain one-sided scientific values in the name of the pursuit of truth, and that the ultimate goal of sharing results for the common good was neglected.

Clear evidence of such negligence is the nominal restoration of Ainu rights; The Japanese government recognized them as an ethnic minority only 25 years ago and as an indigenous people as recent as eight years ago.

The government refused to recognize the indigenous nature of the Ainu people and even legalized discrimination against them despite the fact that they had continued to live in Hokkaido, Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands for generations. As a result the research interests did not satisfy the Ainu people's expectations, and were not fair or impartial either.

The Japanese Archaeological Association was established after World War II. Before the war, anthropologists and other scholars were engaged in studies that transcended the boundaries of academic disciplines. However, the postwar establishment of academic societies in individual disciplines fragmented the research, increasing the ambiguity concerning the fundamental question of why research is performed and for whom. Consequently, researchers lacked a fundamental perspective with which to consider challenges facing the Ainu as indigenous issues, and therefore their research failed to help boost Ainu peoples' self-esteem.

The lack of such a perspective is not only seen in the delayed recognition of the Ainu, but also in the ambiguity of the name of Japan's majority ethnic group. The group used to call itself the "Yamato people," and this name even appeared in government-designated school textbooks before World War II. However, it became obsolete after the war, and the group's name still remains ambiguous.

The ethnic majority group still has not recognized its origins or clarified its ethnic or racial framework. Its perception is limited to a government-installed framework, for example, whether the people speak the Japanese language and whether they have Japanese nationality.

It is essential that Japan develops a common view of the attributes and lineages of its ethnic majority and minority groups. The interpretation of the fundamental human rights stipulated in the Japanese Constitution should also essentially be consistent with that of the human rights stipulated by international human rights laws.

Therefore, research of these matters, including studies on initiatives to protect human rights and eliminate discrimination, must be conducted with due consideration for society.

Most Japanese people don't know that a 1910 Japanese law that allowed land ownership by aliens exempted Hokkaido because of its status as a colony of Japan like Sakhalin and Taiwan. Most Japanese people also don't know that under the international convention on the preservation and protection of fur seals that was concluded in 1911 between Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan, the Ainu were considered as aborigines, just like the Indians and Aleuts, and were given comparable hunting rights

Most Japanese people also don't know that the Japanese government suddenly changed its stance after World War II, refusing to recognize the Ainu people as an ethnic group, and continued discriminatory measures from 1945 to 1991.

During the 1904 Summer Olympics held in St. Louis, Ainu representatives participated in the Anthropology Days event, in which they competed with representatives of other indigenous peoples from around the world. This was eight years before Japan first participated in the Olympics. Japanese people should be aware of the background of this event and its meaning.

In 1956, when the International Labour Organisation (ILO) conducted a 98-item questionnaire on the living and working conditions of indigenous populations in independent countries, the Japanese government provided answers that were far removed from the truth, making the indigenous Ainu people virtually non-existent under the present constitution.

Against this background, we at the Ainu Association of Hokkaido requested the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology, formerly known as the Japanese Society of Ethnology, and the Historical Science Society of Japan to announce statements in support of the enactment of a new Ainu law. We also informed the Japanese Archaeological Association and the Anthropological Society of Nippon how their past research activities, public education initiatives and efforts to share research results for the common good have not been adequate.

We hope to improve the situation and make greater efforts through discussion and consensus-building with the representatives of those organizations. A report on the discussion is scheduled for publication in March next year.

Similarly, to improve public education in Japan, we submitted a written request to the Ministry of Education so that necessary improvements will be made when the government revises the curriculum guidelines for elementary and lower secondary schools that are currently under discussion.

We'd also like to continuously call on academic societies in history, linguistics, sociology and other fields to actively share their research results to benefit public education and other aspects of society.

The Ainu Association of Hokkaido believes that the use of international human rights systems is the answer to addressing the challenges facing the Ainu people. Since 1987, the year after the prime minister at the time called Japan a mono-ethnic nation, representatives of the association have participated in the U.N. Working Group on Indigenous Populations, continuously reporting on the human rights situation of the Ainu people in Japan.

Despite such efforts, the situation still needed improvement. In 1992, even when the executive director of the association made a speech as the representative of the Ainu people during the ceremony marking the International Year of Indigenous People held at the U.N. General Assembly Hall, the Japanese government refused to recognize the Ainu as an indigenous people, saying that the definition of indigenous people was not clear.

In 1997, the government enacted a new law to promote Ainu culture, and implemented a range of measures to enhance public understanding of the culture. They produced some visible effects, but comprehensive indigenous policies have yet to be established.

The domestic situation changed after the 2007 adoption of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. After the Japanese Diet adopted the Resolution to Recognize the Ainu as an Indigenous People in 2008, the Chief Cabinet Secretary established an advisory group called the Advisory Council for Future Ainu Policy. The government is now studying indigenous policies based on recommendations made in the final report of that council

The government clearly stated its basic approach to the development of indigenous Ainu policies in a document prepared for the meeting of the Council for Ainu Policy

Promotion held on July 28 this year. At the behest of Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, the document stated that new Ainu policies should be developed from the standpoint of the Ainu people, and by eliminating past stereotypes and preconceived notions. We hope that the examination of fundamental issues facing the Ainu people will pick up speed toward the development of comprehensive indigenous policies.

To promote the transmission and revival of indigenous cultures and improve the social status of indigenous peoples, it is imperative to establish legal foundations to support their livelihoods, including education and employment. By implementing legally binding measures based on the certification of Ainu ethnicity of individuals, we can breathe life into policies and achieve the goal of ethnic coexistence as well as the revival of Ainu culture.

Such measures will bestow true meaning to the national center for the revival of Ainu culture, which the Cabinet has decided to build by the time of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. The national center will be named the Symbolic Space for Ethnic Harmony, and will include a National Ainu Museum, a National Ethnic Harmony Park and a memorial facility that will allow dignified memorial services for the unclaimed skeletal remains of Ainu people.

With the support of academic societies and the public at home and abroad, we can help the Ainu people develop their ethnic identity as an indigenous people and lay the foundations for a society of ethnic harmony.

When the Japanese government ensures that all relevant organizations will make sincere efforts to return the skeletal remains of Ainu ancestors and funerary objects to their condition prior to disinterment, we can pay our respects to our ancestors in an ideal way. We believe that it will become increasingly realistic to solve the issues, including the return of skeletal remains, without sowing seeds of future problems.

I hope all members of the World Archaeological Congress will continuously support and monitor Japan's efforts to implement comprehensive indigenous policies, and that you will consider developing a system whereby the results of research on archaeological sites, structural remains and traces of ancestral activities can help indigenous peoples look back on and revive their spiritual and philosophical values, and improve their lives in the years and decades to come.

To help address the challenges, indigenous peoples have been involved in the development of national frameworks and the promotion of public understanding of race, ethnicity and the relationship with neighboring countries and the U.N. system. More recently, they have also given their best efforts to promote international forest certification systems. We at the Ainu Association of Hokkaido hope to share with you information on how indigenous peoples, particularly the Ainu, who had once been caught up in the country's rapid modernization, have promoted their human rights. We believe this will provide an opportunity for our collective consideration and mutual understanding, which we sincerely hope will encourage you to help protect human rights and create a multiethnic society where the rights of minorities are protected.

I hope my presentation has helped you and the members of Japanese and international archaeological organizations understand some of the causes for which the indigenous Ainu people have worked. I would like to conclude my speech by asking once again for your warm support. Thank you.