Indigenous Peoples as Tools of the Nation

Fitting the Ainu into Modern Japan
Nation Building

- The processes of a state developing a national group
- Most vital resource for this is people
- Definition by contrast, “us” against “them”
- In colonialist states, indigenous groups often “them”
The Ainu

Indigenous peoples of Ainu Mosir

An Ainu woman shows her facial tattoos while holding a live bear on her lap. - Juliet Bredon, National Geographic
Ainu Mosir

- “Land of humans” in Ainu language
- Also used to distinguish the traditional lands of the Ainu
- Modern day Northern Japan and parts of Southern Russia
Meiji Imperialism

- Meiji reforms involved efforts to strengthen national borders
- Hokkaido officially annexed in 1872, year four of the Meiji era
- Ainu were a nationality problem because they were not like the Japanese
- But also a necessity to fully utilize the land
Assimilation of the Ainu

- Meiji policy focused on forced assimilation of the Ainu into Japanese culture
- Distinctive markers of Ainu culture forbidden e.g. clothing, visible markings
- Ainu schools established by government to teach Ainu students Japanese language and culture
Indigenous Rights

- Defined in the United Nations Declaration of Rights for Indigenous Peoples
- Major themes of the articles include
  - Right to self-determination
  - Preservation of culture
  - Economic independence
  - Land rights
- Accepted by 143 member countries including Japan
- Not legally binding
Modern Status of the Ainu

- In 2019, Japanese government passed act to “protect the pride” of the Ainu
- Ainu indigenous status legally recognized
- 2019 act brings Japanese Ainu legislation in-line with UNDRIP articles
- At least officially…
Research Goal

- Assess if there has been a change in the genuineness or performativity of Ainu representation by Japanese public broadcaster (NHK)
- Genuine = An attempt at accurate representation
  - Not necessarily accurate; the intent is what matters
- Performative = Representation curated with some ulterior motive
  - Ainu representation curated to develop Japan’s foreign image
Implications & Significance

- Who Ainu indigenerity is truly serving in Japan
- Situation with Ainu reflects problems for similar indigenous groups globally
- Japanese state’s actions may reflect actions of similar states
- Suggests the efficacy of United Nations declarations such as UNDRIP
Overextending or:

How I learned to start worrying and hate myself
The Undergrad

Eyes bigger than their stomach
Theory cometh...

- No shortage of problems in the world
- Free to pursue a passionate topic
- Everyone wants to make a difference
.. before a fall

- Shortage of hours in a day
- Things take longer than anticipated
- Lots of passion, not enough experience
- Inexperience = Underestimation
The Phantom Menace

● The unexpected
  ○ Illnesses and general malaise
  ○ New opportunities and responsibilities

● Miscalculations
  ○ Hardest tasks in imagination = easiest tasks in reality
  ○ Time estimations will be wrong
A New Hope

- Failure is only when you fail to take something away
- Understand what went wrong to do better next time
  - Budget your time with room to spare
  - Don’t be intimidated by difficult tasks; they are probably easier than you think
  - Be careful not to take on too many obligations
  - Don’t get lost in theory; remember the research
Thank You
Bibliography


