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The Ainu Bear Ceremony and the Logic behind Hunting the Deified Bear

ABSTRACT All nations have their own view of the world in which they live, of nature, of society, and of the human self. The Hokkaido Ainu's world view, for example, is deeply connected with their way of life, backed by man–nature relationships, and what this relationship symbolizes is always part of their rituals. The Ainu are known as one of the peoples, like the Sami, the Khanty, and the Nivkh, who perform a bear festival, although they deify the bear and refer to it using the term *kamui* ['deity' or 'spirit']. Moreover, the Ainu and the Nivkh perform the bear ceremony for a bear cub reared by them, although the meaning of the ceremonies differ between them. This paper aims to reveal the Ainu conception of the bear and bear ceremony, which enables them to hunt the deified bear, in terms of the Ainu bear ceremonial, their conception of *kamui*, and human-*kamui* relationships. The study reveals that the Ainu logic for hunting the bear, or *kamui*, is encapsulated in an idea about the necessity of maintaining the complementary and reciprocal relationship between humans and the *kamui* and, as such, the bear ceremony is a symbolic representation of this relationship.

KEYWORDS Ainu, bear ceremony, sending-off ritual, complementary reciprocity

Introduction

All nations have their own view of the world in which they live, of nature, of society, and of the human self. As shown in the ethnography of the Hokkaido Ainu (Yamada 2001), their world view is deeply connected with their way of life and grounded in man–nature relationships, which are always symbolized in their rituals.

Considering northern cultures, the pioneer work of Hallowell (1926) suggests that the ritual treatments of the bear, or “the bear ceremonialism” as he describes it, is one of the significant characteristics. As is revealed by Watanabe (1994), the sending-off ceremonies for a variety of animals, including the caribou, the seal, and the whale, are commonly observed among northern hunting–gathering peoples. Moreover, considering the northern cultures in terms of the relationships between religion and ecology, Irimoto suggests two significant characteristics: first, the notion of reciprocity that exists between man and the game spirits, and, second, the original oneness of both sets of beings (Irimoto 1994: 425–427).

It has been documented that the Sami, the Khanty, the Nivkh, and the Ainu perform a bear festival. I even learned during my field trips among the Khanty in 2000 that they consider the bear to be a spiritual being. Although these peoples have traditionally performed some sort of bear festival, its meaning differs greatly among them. By comparing the bear ceremonial of the Sami and the Khanty, Rydving reveals that the focus is different between them: for the Sami the most important element was the feast and the burial, while the Khanty focus more on the festival and the entertainment (Rydving 2010: 42). Glavatskaya suggests that the Khanty bear festival, whose name means ‘dancing a bear,’ seemed to be “pure folk art” and played an integral role within the extended family, clans, and community (Glavatskaya 2005: 183–188).

In contrast, the bear festivals of the Nivkh and the Ainu are performed for the bear cub which was reared by them, although the meaning of the sending-off ritual for the bear cub differs greatly between them. The Nivkh, who regard the bear as their ancestral spirit, perform the ritual of sending-off the bear cub in the memory of a deceased member of their patrilineal lineage (Kreinovich [1973] 1993; Black 1973; Shternberg 1933), while the Ainu bear festival is intended to send the bear cub back to its own world because it is believed to be an embodiment of a deity after having been

reared as a guest in the Ainu village. Among the Ainu sending-off rituals for animals, the bear ritual was one of the most important.

Although it is suggested by Watanabe (1993: 26; 1994: 61–62) that bear ceremonialism in the north is best understood as an ecological-supernatural adaptation to the northern environment, not much has been revealed as to why the bear, which is a spirit or deity, is then hunted and how they justify the reasons for the hunt. This paper is an attempt to reappraise the Ainu bear ceremony in terms of their reasoning behind the hunt of the deified bear.

The Ainu bear ritual has been recorded by various explorers and researchers. It was so famous and attractive that it was performed in the presence of Emperor Meiji in the Shiraoi village in 1881 (Mitsuoka 1924). There remain not only ethnographic documents on the *Ainu no kuma matsuri* ['Ainu bear festival'] (Batchelor 1932; Natori & Inukai 1939; Natori 1940; Kuramitsu 1953; Kitagawa 1961), but also at least two documentary films shot by Neil Gordon Munro in 1931 and another by Itsuhiko Kubodera in 1936.

Irimoto recently published a book entitled *The Ainu Bear Festival* (Irimoto 2010; Irimoto 2014) based on extensive reading on the Ainu bear festival as well as his own field studies, in which he details the bear hunt, the entire ritual process, its regional and historical differences in Hokkaido, and its origins and dynamics. However, little is discussed as to why the Ainu can hunt the bear even though it is a deity. This paper aims to reveal the Ainu's conception, which enables them to hunt the deified bear. I will reappraise the Ainu bear rituals in terms of the Ainu's view of deities and the human–deity relationships (cf. Yamada 1994; Yamada 2001). Hereafter, I will use the terminology for rituals suggested by Håkan Rydving (2010: 37): “ritual,” the generic term for any kind of religious behavior; “rite,” the minimum significant unit of ritual behavior; “ceremony,” the smallest configuration of rites constituting a meaningful ritual as a whole; and “ceremonial,” the total configuration of ceremonies performed during any ritual occasion.

Cultural Background of the Hokkaido Ainu

The Ainu were hunter–gatherers living in Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and the Kurile Islands. Prehistoric remains show that Hokkaido has been populated since the Paleolithic period. In Hokkaido, the Paleolithic culture was followed by the Jomon culture, which spread throughout Japan and was then succeeded by the Satsumon culture, and finally by the Ainu culture. Archaeologists generally believe that the full formation of the Ainu culture in Hokkaido began between the late fourteenth and the early fifteenth centuries, distinguishing the Ainu culture from the cultures of earlier inhabitants in Hokkaido (Hanihara & Fujimoto [eds.] 1972: 246–253).

Although the major food source consisted of deer and salmon, bear hunting was one of the important subsistence activities. Besides the trading activities between mainland Japan and the eastern coast of Siberia which date back to the 1350s, several types of millet, such as the barnyard grass millet and foxtail millet, have also been cultivated at least since 1790 (Irimoto 1987: 6, 25).

The enactment of a law named the “Protection Law of the Former Natives (Aboriginals) in Hokkaido” (*Hokkaido Kyu-Dojin Hogoho*) by the Meiji government in 1899 marked the beginning of full-scale agriculture on land granted by the government. This led to a shift in subsistence activities from hunting, gathering, and fishing to agriculture. Since the introduction of salmon hatchery enterprises in Hokkaido by the government, salmon fishing in the river has been forbidden. Thus, the subsistence activities of the Ainu in Hokkaido have changed and are now indistinguishable from those of the Japanese.

Hokkaido Ainu society was structured into different levels of social groupings including the settlement group, the local group, the *shine itokpa* group (a group of people possessing the same mark of male ancestry), and the river group (Watanabe 1972: 10–17). The local group was a territorial unit and was socio-politically integrated. A local group consisted of one or several settlement groups brought together under a common headman. The local group participated collectively in certain rituals such as the chum salmon ceremony for the first catch. The *shine itokpa* group usually consisted of several local groups found next to each other along a shared river. Although the *shine itokpa* group had neither common leadership nor common territory, its members acted collectively only on the occasion of the bear ceremony, namely the sending-off ritual for the bear cub. The river group was an aggregation of all the local groups located along a river and appears to have observed collective rituals to prevent catastrophic natural phenomena. The Ainu bonds within these social groupings were strengthened through socio-political affairs and participation in different rituals.

It is distinctive that the Ainu in Hokkaido have kept a well-developed oral tradition consisting of songs and stories handed down over the years. These are exemplified by *kamui-yukar* (epic songs concerning nature deities), *oina* (epic songs which focus largely on the Ainu cultural hero Oina-kamui), *ainu-yukar* (epic songs relating to humans), *kamui-uwepeker* (prose stories about deities), and *ainu-uwepeker* (prose stories about humans). These stories and songs provide us with a lot of valuable information on Ainu cosmology: the concept of *kamui* [‘deity’ or ‘spirit’] and belief in *kamui*, which is essential to their religion (Yamada 1994: 2001).

The Concept of *Kamui* (Deity or Spirit)

Before moving on to describe the Ainu bear ceremonial, I will briefly refer to the Ainu concept of *kamui*. The Ainu have had an animistic idea in which divinity is recognized in nature most of all. In the Ainu language, *kamui* is the most important and common term referring to supernatural beings with spiritual power or divine nature, which can be translated as ‘deity’ or ‘spirit.’ It is pointed out that *kamui* is a general word whose linguistic similarity with the Japanese word *kami* has often been noted by scholars (cf. Kandaichi 1925: 284).

The names of *kamui* are mostly compound words which include the terms *kamui* [‘deity’], *kur* [‘man’], or *mat* [‘woman’]. Because the Ainu language is a polysynthetic language that frequently employs the compounding of root morphemes in order to form a single word, the names of *kamui* also comprise several lexemes. For example, the name *Nupurikorkamui* consists of three lexemes: the noun form *nupuri* meaning ‘a mountain,’ the verb form *kor* signifying ‘to own’ or ‘to rule,’ and the noun form *kamui*. The name thus indicates ‘a deity who rules the mountain’ as a whole. Another name, *Apekamui*, consists of two lexemes: the noun *ape* meaning ‘the fire’ and *kamui*, signifying a fire deity who is considered to be female. In this paper, Ainu words are transliterated by marking off into lexical units with Japanese translation: for example, *Nupurikorkamui* as *Nupuri-kor-kamui* [literally, ‘mountain-to rule-deity’] and *Kamuimoshir* as *Kamui-moshir* [literally, ‘deity-world’].

The concept of *kamui* includes a few *kamui* who have no incarnation in the real world, but most *kamui* are embodied in living beings, natural objects, or natural phenomena in the real world. *Nupuri-kor-kamui*, also referred to as *Kim-un-kamui* [literally, ‘mountain-living-deity’], for example, is embodied by the bear. *Atui-kor-kamui* [literally, ‘sea-to rule-deity’], also called *Rep-un-kamui* [literally, ‘offing-living-deity’], is embodied in the killer whale, while *Kotan-kor-kamui* [literally, ‘village/world-to rule-deity’] is represented by the Blakiston’s fish owl. It is characteristic in the Ainu conception of *kamui* that each *kamui* has an individual and separate relationship with humans by embodying itself into an animal or a plant (Yamada 2001: 191–192). The world of living beings is commonly referred to as *Ainu-moshir* [literally, ‘human-world’], while the supernatural world where deities or the dead reside is *Kamui-moshir*.

Ainu Bear Ceremonial

The bear ritual has two types. One is the “sending-off of the hunted bear,” which is performed after bear hunting in the mountains and is called *kamui-hopnire* [literally, ‘deity-to make going’]. The second type is the “send-

ing-off of the reared bear cub,” which is referred to simply as *i-omante* or as *kamui-i-omante* [‘deity-it-to make going back’]. The latter is performed in a village accompanied by the ceremonial killing of a bear cub which was captured alive and raised for one or two years in order to return the bear’s soul to his home world. This bear ceremonial includes a series of rituals involving the very start of the hunt, the preparation for the bear ceremony, and the bear ceremony as a farewell to the bear cub. The bear ceremony was the most important ritual occasion for the group and was generally performed for three days, even though the procedures of the ceremony varied slightly from region to region (Natori & Inukai 1939; Natori 1940; Irimoto, 2014).

The Bear Hunt

The Ainu hunted the bear using specific techniques: fixed automatic devices (spring bows) and/or hand bows with arrows tipped with poisons. Aconites were the most important materials for arrow poisons. Bear hunting was carried out generally in the spring and autumn. In the spring when the mountain snow became hard enough to walk on and the bear cubs had been born in the dens, the Ainu would hunt the bears in their hibernation dens with bow and arrows. As the mountain snow began to melt, the hunters started hunting bears by means of spring bows, which were set on their tracks. In the autumn, once the bears began to enter hibernation, spring bows were set on the tracks along the small valleys where foods for the bears were plentiful (Watanabe 1972: 38).

Hunting bears in hibernation dens occasionally resulted in hunters finding cubs if the bear was female. When the cubs taken were brought to the village, they were allotted for rearing amongst the members’ families, or taken on in one lot by the leader’s family. The bear cub was kept in a cage and carefully and dearly reared by a housewife as if hosting a deity, generally for about one year (from March or April till January or February of the next year) (Watanabe 1972: 74–75). The rearing of a cub marked the beginning of the bear ceremonial.

Preparation for the Bear Ceremony

A sending-off ritual for the bear cub generally took place in January or at latest in February before the spring bear hunting set in. However, some were carried out in late November or mid-December (Watanabe 1972: 75, 156). When the date was determined, one of the elders, who are generally called *ekashi* [literally, ‘an old man’], was chosen among the villagers to preside over the entire ritual. Women started making *sake* from barnyard millet about 10 days before the ceremony as well as cooking millet cakes (or dumplings called *shito*), dried salmon and sautéed vegetables, while men began to prepare ritual

implements which included a variety of *inau* (sacred offering sticks with special carvings) in order to arrange the altar (Irimoto 2014: 49–50).

The day before the ceremony is the day intended for preparing the bear cub for the sending-off ritual. Special prayers and libations were offered to the deities in the house as well as those enshrined on the altar for their protection so that the ceremony would be performed successfully.

The Bear Ceremony on the First Day. The Ritual Killing of the Bear Cub

The first day of the ceremony is the day when the bear cub was ritually killed. After appeasing the bear cub inside the cage by giving it prayers and libations, the bear was taken out from the cage and brought to the ceremonial open space by leading it with a stick containing a bunch of bamboo grass. Occasionally the bear was shot with decorated blunt arrows, which they called *hepere-ai* [‘cub arrow’] and it was finally led to a stake driven into the ground, to which the bear was tied securely.

Then, the bear was shot in its heart with real bamboo-headed arrows without arrow poison. While prayers were chanted by the elders to give the soul of the bear cub a chance to rest, the slain bear was dissected outside, near the altar. Men, women, and children engaged in various games including the imitation of the bear, a tug of war, catching scattered walnuts (which was considered to bring good luck), and dancing in the open space.

The whole carcass was skinned and the bear’s blood was put aside in a bowl and later drunk by attendants as divine medicine. After the bear was dissected, its head (with the hide still attached) was placed facing west at the altar, in front of which the elders sat and offered prayers and libations while drinking the sake that remained after being given to the bear. During the last part of prayers to the deities, a ritual in memory of the ancestors (*shinnurappa*) was held by each family who brewed sake. In principle, a ritual of *shinnurappa* cannot be the theme of the bear ceremony. However, it is characteristic of the Ainu that they add on such a ritual to the ceremony: they generally perform a *shinnurappa* ritual on every ritual occasion. The combination of *shinnurappa* with every ritual occasion indicates an Ainu idea that a ritual is an occasion in which not only deities, but also the deceased that have become *kamui*, gather together to communicate with the living humans (Yamada 1996: 61–62).

After this, the bear’s head was taken into the village chief’s house through the sacred window—which is like an entrance through which only deities enter into the house and is located on the innermost wall of a house facing *nusasan* (an altar)—and placed on the seat of the spirit. Next comes a “grand feast” or a drinking party, which was generally held all throughout the night until the morning on the second day. Men and women sang

and danced, while some recited epics. The Ainu believed that the soul of the bear as *kamui* did not depart for his parents in the world of deities on this night, but rather stayed on the head between his ears conversing with *Ape-kamui* who invited him, enjoying himself with Ainu prayers, offerings, songs, and dances. It is considered important for the Ainu to make the bear god feel reluctant to return to his home world.

On the Second Day. Sending-off of the Bear Deity

The feast continued on the second day, when sharing bear meat, decorating the bear skull, and sending off the bear spirit were performed (Irimoto 2014: 79–83). The decoration of the bear skull was an important rite to prepare the bear for his return to *Kamui-moshir*. It involved removing the skin, meat, and brain and adorning the bare head with wood shavings. The skull was also decorated with a sword if the bear was male and a necklace if it was female.

The decorated skull was placed facing west on the eastern side of the hearth in the house. After the master of the house that had reared the cub had chanted the prayers to send off its spirit, the skull was taken outside through the sacred window and placed facing west on the forked pole erected at the altar, and prayers and libations were offered. After the farewell prayers, the west-ward-facing forked pole with the bear skull was turned to face east—the direction in which *Kamui-moshir* was located. At the same time, the most beautifully decorated arrow was fired into the eastern sky to purify the path to the world of the deities. After the spirit had been sent off outside, a drinking party was held inside the house.

On the Third Day. A Day for a Small Feast

On the third day, a small feast was held at the village chief's house to make the deities aware that the bear ceremonial was successfully concluded, to thank them, and to pray for continued protection in the future. At the same time, millet cakes, fish, soup, and other dishes were served. Along with singing and dancing, heroic Ainu epics (*yukar*) were also narrated. If the master had an ominous dream in the following days and felt that the cub's spirit had not yet returned to his parents, he prayed first to *Ape-kamui*, and again to the hunting deity to ask her to help the cub return home and to protect him.

It needs to be noted here that *Nupuri-kor-kamui* is not the game owner in a strict sense, although the Ainu believe that the failure of *Nupuri-kor-kamui*'s visit signifies a future famine. *Nupuri-kor-kamui* is not, so to speak, a game owner who sends a bear to human beings, but rather an individual *Nupuri-kor-kamui* who willingly visits the human world, *Ainu-moshir*, of his own volition. Thus, the Ainu conceptualize that reciprocal exchanges exist between *Ainu-moshir* and *Kamui-moshir*, particularly between human

beings and deities (Irimoto 1988: 146–148; Yamada 1991: 348; Yamada 2001:40). Importantly, the relation between the two worlds is characterized by its complementary nature. It is significant for the concept of *kamui* that, based on the immediately aforementioned complementary reciprocity, *kamui* would keep contributing to the peace and order of the daily life of the Ainu, including hunting and fishing (Yamada 2001: 81–85). It is essential for the Ainu to maintain communication with deities symbolically and practically.

Therefore, *Nupuri-kor-kamui*, who was welcomed to visit the Ainu village as a cub, needed to be sent back to his world, *Kamui-moshir*. He needed to be killed by men in order to return to his world. In the Ainu bear ceremonial, the ritual killing of a bear cub is the most essential part of the ceremonial since it evokes the returning of the bear god to his world with gifts. The bear ceremonial is thus a configuration of ceremonies in which *Nupuri-kor-kamui* visits the human world, is raised for a while, and is then returned to the world of the deities, which represents the essential part of the Ainu idea on human-*kamui* relationships.

The Ainu Idea on the Relation between Humans and *Kamui*

In order to understand the Ainu ideological background behind hunting the sacred bear, in this section I will examine their ideas on the relation between humans and *kamui* as depicted in the Ainu oral tradition. The Ainu considered that *Ainu-moshir* and *Kamui-moshir* are not disconnected but rather communicate with each other. This idea was based on a reciprocal and complementary relationship (Yamada 2001: 10–11, 36–40). How then is the relation between humans and *kamui* reasoned to be reciprocal and complementary? The context of *kamui-yukars* clearly depicts the Ainu ideology in regard to this relation that is present even today and serves as their guiding principle for daily life. A *kamui-yukar* of *Nupuri-kor-kamui* recorded by Kubodera, aptly talks about the Ainu idea on the relation between *kamui* and human beings (Kubodera 1977: 67–71; Yamada 1994: 79–80).

This *kamui-yukar* narrates that *Nupuri-kor-kamui* makes a living in the realm of deities near the top of a sacred mountain with his family in the form of a human being and in the same manner as the human beings who live in *Ainu-moshir*. He sometimes feels like visiting *Ainu-moshir* and pays a visit from *Kamui-moshir* to *Ainu-moshir*, bringing a bear hide and meat as a gift (that is, taking the form of a bear). Thus, *Nupuri-kor-kamui*, dressed in a bear hide, visits the world of human beings. On the way, as he descends to *Ainu-moshir*, he meets the Aconite Deity and the Pine Resin Deity who convey an invitation message from *Ape-kamui*, the fire deity.

集合の男女あふ
言さすく神のおま
ふ口をさく衣
袂をい着く耳環
を新ひいささ
きか新あくと祝
し神酒飲ゆ
ぬのあり

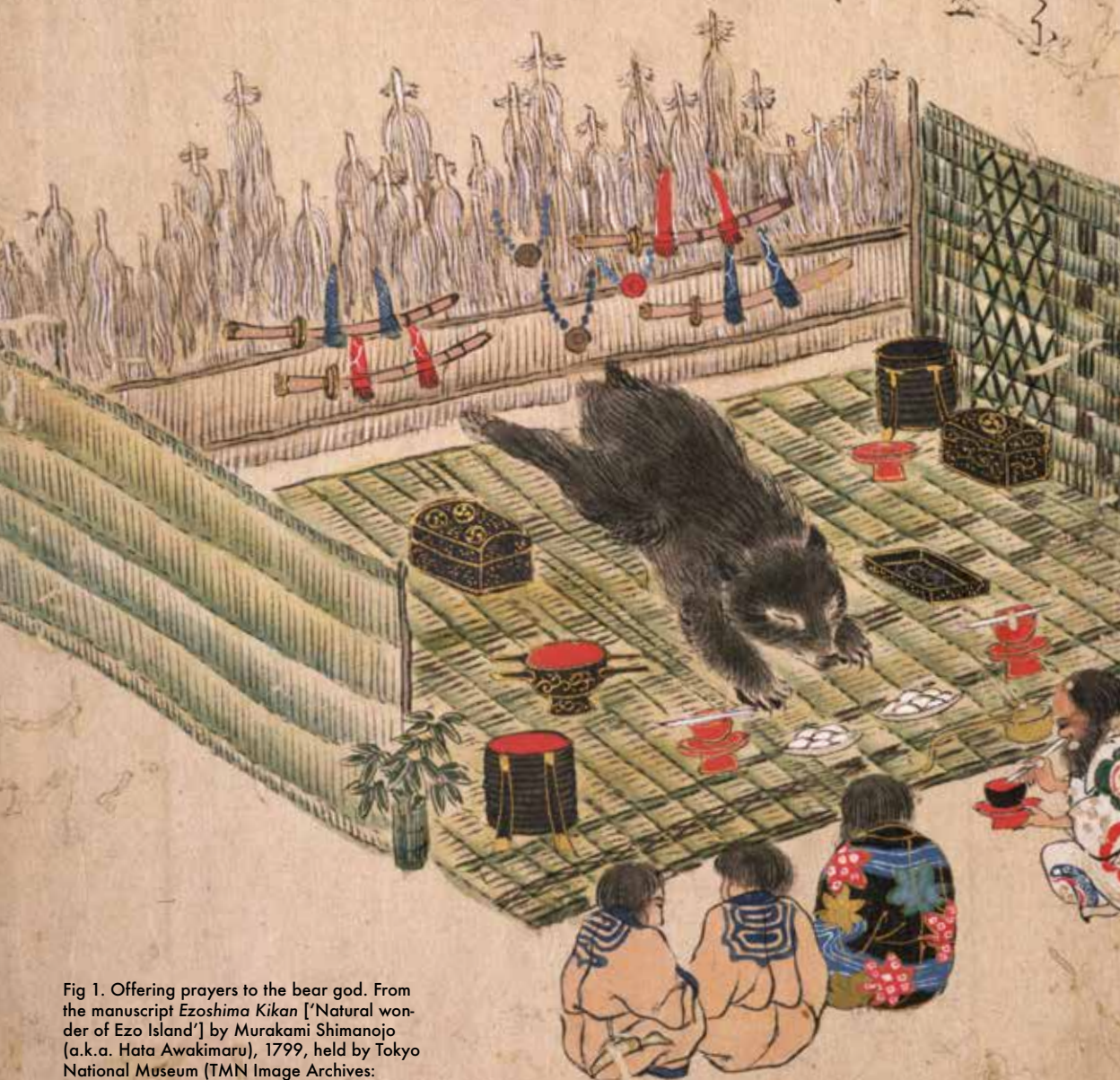


Fig 1. Offering prayers to the bear god. From the manuscript *Ezoshima Kikan* ['Natural wonder of Ezo Island'] by Murakami Shimanajo (a.k.a. Hata Awakimaru), 1799, held by Tokyo National Museum (TMN Image Archives: <http://TnmArchives.jp/>).

送飾トウシヨクしるす又シヤサシヤサカクカク幣代ヒイととかかりり大オホ刀タガ
 短刀ミジカ玉タマ罫ハシ具ツグ外ソト令シヨウ銀ギン飾シヨクるる若ニホ後コト飾シヨク

ああままのの何ナニもも宝タカラももああままのの

態タマシをを中ナカ央ウチ小コ置オキ夷ヒ腋アキをを
 著ツキささのの耳ミミ環ワタリ又また太オホ刀タガをを

若ニホささのの酒サケ會カヒをを供ツケへへ

拜イハヒ神カミ孝コウをを小コしし酒サケ長ナガ

そそのの者モノ祝イハヒ初ハツメのの日ヒ

我ワガ神カミ 至今イマニ 為ナリ神カミ

今イマ日ヒ 送オウ兄ケイ 送オウ兄ケイ 送オウ兄ケイ 送オウ兄ケイ

再マタ神カミ而シテ来キ 明アカ年トシ

我ワガ日ヒ執ツク之ノ



Another *kamui-yukar*, “The Song Sung by the Owl Deity Himself” in *Ainu Shinyo Shu*, the anthology of *kamui-yukar* by Yukie Chiri ([1923] 1976), depicts the same idea. The *yukar* narrates the very moment of hunting an owl, namely *Kotan-kor-kamui*, as follows: “The small arrow flew beautifully towards me. So, I stretched out my hand and caught the small arrow. Twirling, I swiftly descended.” Here again, it is indicated that a successful hunt is achieved only by the will of the animal being hunted. It further narrates that the hunted *Kotan-kor-kamui* is well entertained by human beings, returns to *Kamui-moshir* taking *inau* and sake as gifts, and there invites other deities to a drinking party.

Again, a prose story about the heartleaf lily (*Lilium cordatum*), whose bulb was the most important of foods, tells how the Creator, *Kotan-kar-kamui* [literally, ‘world-creating-deity’] created the heartleaf lily as an edible herb for human beings and that *Turep-kamui* [literally, ‘the heartleaf lily-deity’] can return to the divine world only after being eaten by humans. The Heartleaf Lily Goddess visits villages trying to teach human beings to use this bulb as food. Finally, she succeeds in making a person eat *ratashikep* (a kind of stew) with the bulb of the heartleaf lily at a house in Urashibetsu village, and says the following in a dream of the villager:

Because a person like you with a good mind has eaten my flesh, I can go back to the world of deities. [...] A long time ago, when *Kotan-kar-kamui* created *Ainu-moshir*, he created the country, herbs, and human beings, and then, thinking that there must be food, he created an edible herb: the heartleaf lily. *Kotan-kar-kamui* also created the fish in rivers and the deer, bears, and various animals on the mountains. He taught the Ainu how to catch and eat these animals, and then went back to the world of deities.

[...] I grow in this country to be eaten by the Ainu, but they will not do so and I am left only to decay, so I cannot go back to the world of deities. (From “Kasabuta no Megami” [“The scab goddess”], see Kayano 1977: 95–96; Yamada 2001:114–115)

As these three stories show, the Ainu believe that *kamui* live in the form of human beings in their own world *Kamui-moshir* and that they dress in their specific costumes when they visit the *Ainu-moshir*. Plants and animals in this world are regarded as temporary forms of the *kamui* which are endowed to humans by deities themselves as gifts. Kindaichi ([1936] 1949: 346) states that the *kamui* who came down to *Ainu-moshir* can return happily to *Kamui-moshir* only by willingly being eaten and being respected.

Importantly, the epic illustrates the Ainu idea that a successful bear hunt, which is the starting point of contact between humans and *kamui*, is

made possible by *Nupuri-kor-kamui*'s unquestionable will to accept an invitation from *Ape-kamui*. It also shows that after *Nupuri-kor-kamui* has been hunted down by Ainu hunters, he is well entertained, leaving a bear hide, and returns back to the world of *kamui* again after receiving gifts such as *inau*, sake, and rice cake offerings that he cannot get in his world. The Ainu explain that *Nupuri-kor-kamui* visits *Ainu-moshir* desiring for *inau* and sake made by humans.

Thus, the Ainu consider the relation between humans and *kamui* to be one of complementary reciprocity. Backed by an idea of a complementary reciprocal relation between humans and *kamui*, it is considered essential for the Ainu to perform rituals in connection with all forms of sending-off, irrespective of whether they involve animate or inanimate beings.

At every Ainu ritual, prayer offerings to the *kamui* are performed at *nusasan* outside the house opposite the sacred window where a cluster of *nus* (*inau* tied up to a pole), each symbolizing a *kamui*, is set up like a fence. It is indispensable for the Ainu to renew *nusasan* with new *nusas* and to brew sake at every ritual ceremony, since both were considered the most important and essential offerings to *kamui*. Since the Ainu consider *Ape-kamui* to play a mediating role between deities and humans, they always offer prayers first to *Ape-kamui* residing inside the house to ask her for mediation. Next, the prayers and sake are offered for each *kamui* enshrined in *nusasan*. Thus, each ritual is an occasion to symbolically represent the complementary reciprocal relationship between humans and *kamui*.

Discussion. Sending-off Rituals and the Bear Ceremonial

The sending-off ritual of the Ainu has two types: one for inanimate objects, such as boats or tools, which is called *i-wakute* [literally, 'it-to make returning back'] and the other for hunted animals which is generally called *i-omante* [literally, 'it-to make going back']. The most grand and splendid occasions among *i-omante* rituals are the ceremonies for the bear and for the Blakiston's fish owl.

As stated in the introduction, the sending-off ritual for game is one of the common characteristics among northern hunters and gatherers. Moreover, among northern hunters the relation between man and game animals is often described as a game animal sacrificing itself to be hunted, which Henry S. Sharp describes as an "inverted sacrifice" among the Chipewyan of north-central Canada (Sharp 1994: 264–265).

As described in the previous section, the Ainu also have the same idea as the Chipewyan. The bear can be hunted by the Ainu only when it, as

a *kamui*, willingly sacrifices itself. Although the hunting behavior in itself requires special techniques and procedures, the Ainu consider hunting behavior not simply a technical matter, but rather a means of communication with *kamui* by receiving its consent. Accordingly, the bear hunt is a means to open communication with *kamui*. It is a responsibility for the Ainu to make this communication as good as possible by respecting the *kamui* and its willingness to be welcomed, entertained, and sent off to *Kamui-moshir*. The bear ceremonial is one of the rituals that represents the way which enables the Ainu to communicate with *kamui* in order to gain future successful hunting, gathering, and fishing. Thus, as long as the Ainu observes the right way to respect *kamui*, they can “hunt” the sacred bear.

Concluding Remarks

I remember an answer, when I asked a Khanty about bear hunting: “Why do you hunt the bear even though you worship the bear as spirit?” The answer was: “We hunt the bear when it appears near the reindeer herd. It is a sign of consent from the bear to be hunted.” The Khanty consider the appearance of the bear near their camp to be a most dangerous sign that makes their reindeer disperse. A Khanty gave me a more ecologically reasonable explanation for hunting the sacred bear. In contrast, although the Ainu also have an ecological reason to hunt the bear, their logic for hunting the bear as *kamui* is more encompassed by their idea on keeping the complementary and reciprocal relationship between humans and *kamui* in the context of their animistic world view.

Based on their animistic world view, the Ainu regarded each bear individually as the embodiment of a *Nupuri-kor-kamui*, or simply a *Kim-un-kamui* in *Ainu-moshir*. In other words, each bear represents a bear deity’s visit to *Ainu-moshir*. As stated in previous sections, bear hunting is a point of contact in which the Ainu directly meet with a bear deity. Bears’ receiving of an invitation from *Ape-kamui* is conceptualized as bringing the Ainu the success of hunting. Accordingly, the bear hunt is ideally an occasion when the Ainu can receive the consent of the bear god to be hunted in order to return back to his world. On the basis of this conceptualization, the Ainu can hunt the bear as *kamui*. Then, the bear ceremonial is needed to assure communication between a bear god and humans that symbolizes the complementary and reciprocal relationship between humans and *kamui*, which makes the Ainu recall this relationship between humans and nature as well.

It should be noted here that the Ainu bear ceremonial has undergone changes over the years. The bear ceremony that is commonly known in Japanese as *kuma matsuri* [‘bear festival’] was seriously criticized during the 1950s by Japanese animal rights activists for its barbarism because of the killing of

a live bear cub at its climax. Responding to the activists' claims, Hokkaido local government issued an administrative notification in 1955 on the ban of the bear ceremony involving killing the bear cub. Since then, even though the Ainu occasionally perform the bear ceremony, they perform it with an already dead bear. The very significant meaning of the killing of a bear cub has become lost in contemporary bear festivals.

During the cultural revitalization movements in the 1990s, the first salmon ceremony has become positioned as the main target for cultural revitalization. The bear ceremony no more plays a publicly significant role as the symbol of their traditional culture.

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