

Racial Issues of the Ainu in Japan

Based on the Comparison Between the USA and JPN

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ABSTRACT

The Ainu who lived in Japan had been discriminated against for hundreds of years by the Japanese. Compared with race in the United States, the ethnic problems faced by the Ainu people are special. It is argued that the essence of racial issues should be explored from historical, cultural, economic, political elements of different human populations rather than the physical features. This paper focuses on the cultural, economic, and social aspects of racial issues in the United States and Japan.

Keywords: *Racial Issues, Ainu, USA, Japan.*

1. INTRODUCTION

People's ideology about race usually believes races are groups defined by natural differences. In other words, they think the cause of racial ideology results from physical features. It's very hard for Americans to leave the idea that races are naturally occurring groups. From a scientific perspective, however, the common sense about race is false or, at best, largely wrong.

Biological anthropologists argue that races don't exist as biologically meaningful entities, and the reason is that human genetic variation is not organized according to racial categories. To be more specific, there is much more biological difference within so-called racial groups than between them. Since racial categories do not capture human biological variation, race does not exist as biologically meaningful categories. Even though race does not exist as coherent biological groups. Nevertheless, people's ideology or social idea about race assumes races do exist as a biological entity. At the beginning in *Race in North America*, Smedley claimed, "to comprehend the real meaning and nature of race in American society, it is necessary and essential to distinguish naturally occurring physical diversity in the human species from culturally-based perceptions and interpretations of this diversity"[1]. So the premises of his arguments hold that to explore the nature of race, it is vital to look at the

historical, cultural, economic, political elements of different human populations rather than the physical features.

Based on Smedley's point of view, this paper focuses on the cultural, economic, and social aspects of racial issues in the United States and Japan. As we all know, the race issue in the United States has a long history, and it has been very concerned and discussed by the academic circles. This paper will focus on the ethnic problems faced by the Ainu people in Japan.

The Ainu are indigenous to the lands of northern Japan, who mainly live in Hokkaido. They were culturally and physically distinct from most Japanese Yamato until the second part of the 20th century.

They have their traditional clothes, mode of production, and religion as well. The Japanese began to colonize Ainu territory in the 1st millennium. Over the centuries, and despite armed resistance, these Ainu lost most of their lands, and eventually, they were resettled in the northernmost reaches of the Japanese archipelago, geographically against Russia.

After the Meiji Restoration (1868) and with the Japanese' control of Ainu was strengthened, the racial discourse became increasingly negative and pejorative. Throughout the 20th century, intermarriages between Ainu and ethnic Japanese were encouraged and popular. In 2008, Japan officially announced that the Ainu are

the indigenous people, reversing the 1899 action that had declared them "former Aborigines." But the discrimination remains with around 20 thousand people, and there are plenty of great flaws still appearing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The nature of racial ideology in America

It is reasonable to believe American racial ideology is a contingent product of history and society. The race was an ideology that naturalized inequality by positing a hierarchy of social groups. In Smedley's theory, racial ideology is false beliefs about the human differences people have. Even though they don't describe real human differences, racial ideology is socially true and helpful when people practically attempt to make sense of the world. There can be little doubt that distinctive features of slavery in the United States directly influenced the development of racial ideology.

According to Smedley, race ideology emerged during intensified slavery and formed its roots in North American attitudes toward slaves. In European countries, Spain and Portugal started the slave trade very early. Like the two countries, the English went to Africa primarily as traders and engaged in the slave trade. Historically, race helped explain the social contradiction between the new idea of freedom and that some people in America were not free due to slavery.

Contemporary US society is characterized by significant racial inequality. African Americans typically suffer the most severe racism, though other racially defined groups. Slavery and second-class citizenship produced stark inequalities in wealth, income, education, etc. Since capitalist societies tend to reproduce and magnify inequalities, such inequalities well tend to persist over time. It is widely acknowledged that for almost two and a half centuries, from her early roots to the years before the American Civil War, America was structurally racist. Today, they derive a set of seven systemic metrics: political, legal, criminal justice, educational, health care, employment, and wealth to establish the answer to whether racism remains structural in America.

2.2. The characteristics of racism in Japan

The idea of racism had even embedded into the legislation of Japan and their law creation. The state membership and biology are related. In Japan's racial identity law, the Japanese's citizenship can only be qualified if the person has at least one parent with Japanese's nationality. Blood matters when it comes to citizenship, which is racial thinking[2]. A report made by Kay Hammond analysis the experience of racial discrimination experience an EFL (Japanese English as a foreign language) students, which also indicated the

relationship between language usage and pedagogical implications[3]. The article written by Yuko Kawai emphasized the interrelationships among Japanese and the concept of race in Japanese society, the concept of Honshu and minzoku are also being discussed. She also discussed the overlaps between racism in Japanese other racism in the west [4].

According to Koichi Iwabuchi and Yasuko Takezawa, the feeling of racism had been pointed towards certain ethnic minorities, and there were also some social problems related to racism caused by the tension between Japan and China South Korea and North Korea for some historical and territorial problems[5]. The article by Jasmine Mitchell argued that the transformation of Japan to democratic countries and the U.S occupation forces in Japan after the surrender of Japan in 1945 had a negative effect on the African American-Japanese relationship[6]. The study made by Tomomi Yamaguchi on the right-wing, xenophobic movement in Japan showed that the racist discourse toward Koreans and other ethnic minorities in Japan had increased since the early 2000s, which resulted in a new nationalist and xenophobic movement[7]. Sara Park discussed racism in Japan, especially toward the minorities and the Koreans, and is being spread by the use of the internet[8]. Lee E.J argued in his article that the major rationale of Japanese racism is to distinguish between the "pure" Japanese and the non-Japanese from a biological aspect. Even today the Japanese racism is still pointing toward the Koreans.

3. RACIAL PROBLEMS FACED BY THE AINU

3.1. Racial issues at the cultural level

The background and how the culture shaped the racial ideology in Japan and the United States. Culture is a huge part which can shape others' perspective among a specific group, as it plays a huge role on racial concepts.

The definition of culture is that it is a social institution or manifestations of a particular social group. The formation of them can be traced back to the origin of that social group. But how can the culture possibly be linked to the racism idea and race ideology? There are several reasons for that.

First of all, learning the culture of a social group provides background information for further study, telling how the racist idea is possibly being formed. The culture is going to shape a social group, so the racist is going to be shaped. The cultural similarities can also be found between the African Americans who were being oppressed in the U.S for hundreds of years and the Ainu people who lived in Japan, Hokkaido, being discriminated against for hundreds of years by the

Japanese. It is similar in ways that they are being thought of for having specific physical appearances and different from the majority groups in their nation. They both somehow had a different or partially different language than the majority groups of the nation. They have their own culture in daily life. And these differences will be enlarged and emphasized by the racist feeling, reinforced discrimination against them by claiming they are naturally different.

A huge reason is causing the racial ideology, which helps the racist idea to function in real life, is having a way to distinguish that specific group easily. In both racial discrimination in the United States and Japan towards the African Americans and Ainu people, these groups both have a physical identity as a stereotype. Others have stereotypical thinking about their physical appearance when they talk about these groups; they believe that it will be possible to draw a line between them by looking at them. In the case of African Americans in the United States, most people believe that they all share some similar appearance. For example, African Americans are always thought of as having a darker skin color. They have bigger nose and thicker lips, their hair is curly, and they have dark eyes and dark hair. Similarly, most people in Japan shared stereotypes about the appearance of the Ainu people. The Ainu people are always thought of as having lighter skin, blue eyes, brown hair, and facial structure that looked more like a European than Asian. The stereotypical belief in their appearance formed by the major group will shape the racial ideology by creating more and more differences among them with the majority groups of people.

The racisms are upholding another difference in linguistics regarding these social groups. In the United States, some people do believe that African Americans have their kind of accent, being called the "black English" or the "African American English". It is sometimes referred to as the Ebonics, the African American vernacular English, or the Gullah. The origin of African American English is disputed. There is no clear answer for that. But according to the creole hypothesis, it developed from a creole language when the Africans first interacted with the Europeans, and the creole was being spread despite the uncertainty of the origin, the fact is that African American English was being widespread and used by the African American. Similarly in the Ainu group also have their kind of language called the Hokkaido Ainu. This is a unique language that is largely different from Japanese and was used as a traditional language for the Ainu peoples for a long time. But the Japanese government had oppressed and banned the usage of this language, and there are only a few people around the world who know about the Hokkaido Ainu. This language wasn't being preserved. The differences in languages are another factor that also possibly factor that contributes to the racial

discrimination towards them. The feeling of differentiation among them with the majority groups will create distances and gaps between the group and make the racist have self-justification for the oppression since their language is being thought of differently.

There are some other factors and cultural differences among the Ainu people, African Americans, and the major Americans and Japanese. For example, the Ainu people believed in nature's spirit. They hunted bears and lived in a relevantly natural way of life. The female Ainu also have tattoos on their mouth. This creates a gap between them and the Yamato Japanese, who are the majority groups in Japan. The lack of modernization made this group passive when conflict occurred with the Yamato Japanese. They became the weaker social group. Like the African Americans in the history of the United States, they were once enslaved and put in lower social status. This weakened them and also made them passive. Since both these two groups were being out in lower social status, the oppressions and racial thinking will grow more and lead to racial discrimination, or in the other word, the creation of racial ideology.

Despite the similarities between their culture and background, there is still some difference between their view of themselves and the position of their minority group. In the United States, most people, including African Americans, have a clear sense of the history of oppression and the unfair treatment of African Americans. In other words, there is a common sense among the society that African Americans have been the oppressed group. The African Americans do have a clear understanding of themselves as the group being oppressed in the history of the United States, and they are willing to challenge and fight for their rights. Obviously, the people in the United States care a lot about racist ideas and making efforts to make changes. But it is not the same case in Japan with the Ainu peoples. According to Tsunehira Furuya, the Japanese people, including the Ainu people themselves, have a weak understanding of oppression and invasion among the Ainu peoples in Japanese history. Most Japanese do have a sense of respect toward the Ainu peoples but barely consider or realize themselves as an aggressor. The public organizations even openly justified and advocated their invasion of the Ainu people's lands, calling it an exploration instead of invasion, claiming it is harmless to the Ainu people. This weird phenomenon may possibly result from the assimilation of the Ainu people and glorifying their invasion. The Japanese government forced the Ainu people to assimilate into the major Yamato culture and society after they invaded their land and weakened their understanding of the Japanese invasion of their lands through education. On the other hand, it is also possibly a result of the Japanese government's propaganda about the idea that the Japanese people are never the aggressors. The government wants to uphold ethical naiveness and

justness. But even though people do not pay more attention to the racial problems, there are still discriminations and difficulties for the Ainu peoples. According to the survey and study Nakamura Yasutoshi conducted, the Ainu people averagely have a relevantly lower standard of living and a higher poverty level. The average family income of the Hokkaido area is already under the average income of the average income of a family; the Ainu people are even under the average of the Hokkaido family average income. Despite that, the average level of education of Ainu people is relevantly lower. People in Japan have to compete for the opportunity to access higher education, but most of the time, during this competition, a certain level of economic support is required. Since the Ainu people have a lower income level, it made them become the vulnerable group during the competition. So, the Ainu people tend to have a more unstable life and a smaller chance for educational access.

3.2. Racial issues at the political system level

By comparing the ethnic policies of the Japanese and American governments, we find that both of them have adopted extreme policies, which are polar, to benefit the groups of high social status.

Dating to the political actions in the history of Japan, as the Tokugawa shogunate colonized Hokkaido, it eventually took control of the entire territory of Hokkaido, formerly known as Kampei Yidhi. During the last two-thirds of the Tokugawa period (1603-1867), the Ainu were under the jurisdiction of the Matsumo-san. Matsumo-san separated the Japanese and the Ainu settlements and forbade marriage between the Ainu and the Japanese. In the late 18th century, Daimyo Matsumae divided the Ainu settlement into 78 places, which he gave to his courtiers. The population of the Ainu declined rapidly under the occupation of the government and merchants. In the 60 years before the Meiji Restoration (1804-1868), the number of Ainu in the areas under the jurisdiction of the Matsuzen Fanshan decreased by nearly one-third. In the second year of Meiji(1869), the Japanese government set up a pioneering mission in Shi Yidi, officially renamed Hokkaido. In 1899, Hokkaido Former Aboriginal Protection Act (HFAPA) made provisions on granting property, relief, medical treatment, education, and other aspects to the Ainu people. The Ainu people broke away from the fishing and hunting life and the traditional way of living for generations and lost the subjectivity and possibility of their independent development. "The HFAPA's 'protection' largely consisted of paternalistic social-welfare measures to assimilate the Ainu into Japanese society." [9] This Act has lasted for a century.

The current attitude of the Japanese government towards the Ainu group is obvious, which is to assimilate the Ainu minority and disguise it as a kind of

cultural heritage. In modern times, under the leadership of "Japan is a single nation", the pace of assimilation of the Ainu was accelerated. The government had ordered many times to prohibit the tattooing and sacrificial rites, which had been formed for a long time and implemented a series of measures, such as pacifying the blind, ruling, teaching, educating, and reforming customs, to turn the Ainu people into Yamato people. They asked the Ainu to shave their beards, cut their hair, change their names to Japanese names, and learn to wear kimonos and uniforms. This assimilation policy tries to gradually destroy the foundation supporting the identity of the Ainu people with the advantage of population and cultural and economic status and completely dissolve the Ainu people in the dominant Yamato cultural flood. Besides, Interracial marriage encouraged by the Japanese government is an important way to weaken ethnic boundaries. According to the 2006 Hokkaido Population Survey, there are 23,782 Ainu people in 72 municipalities, of which the main population is Hokkaido's Rizekoshi and Danzhenzhi Prefecture accounts for 59.5% of the total population. The reason behind this was that Ainu, as a distinct, non-assimilated population in Japan, challenged the discipline of a single-nationality state in Japanese policy and the governance of the Kyokai.

The occurrences of the significant e Ainu Culture Promotion Law in 2008 Japan were noticeably progressive, but the inequality remained. This act was established under the pressure of the global indigenous peoples' movement's collective agency, which supported the Ainu identity in the face of Japanese claims of assimilation. Implementing the Ainu Culture Promotion Law means that the Ainu policy of the Japanese government has changed and means that its cultural policy has been greatly adjusted, that is, from cultural unification to cultural diversity. However, the act does not include Indigenous rights, such as rights related to land, resources, occupation, and independence. Instead, with ethical tourism established simultaneously, the government focused on "turned the Ainu heritage into a museum display for people to visit". [10]

3.3. Race issues at the socioeconomic level

Since economic circumstances and ecological features are important determinants of human actions and decisions, this paper will discuss the economic inequalities between the Ainu group and Yamato group in Japan with the comparison of the case between African Americans and European Americans in the following paragraphs. By analyzing historical events, including Hokkaido kaitaku shi (1896-1881) and Land Reform (1947) in Japan, the racial inequality strengthened by wealth distribution will be further demonstrated. Meanwhile, the following paragraphs will refer to differences and similarities between African

Americans in American society and the Ainu group in Japanese society. It is to argue Smedley's perspective that racial ideology only exists in American social structure and clarifies that the Ainu is a racial group rather than an ethnic group.

Hokkaido kaitaku shi, which began in 1869 and lasted until 1881, was triggered by severe economic difficulties in Japanese society. The actions carried out by the Japanese government aimed to improve the situation of the Ainu group so that the economic development of Hokkaido would be accelerated. However, the fact after implementing Article 16 of the Hokkaido Land Act was not ideal. Nevertheless, due to becoming rivals with China in Korea, the Meiji government's economic difficulties were not relieved. As a result, the economy of Japan was immersed in a new depression.

At the same time, the Meiji government tried to encourage agriculture in Hokkaido to foster economic growth. The offspring lived in Hokkaido and lived on hunting and fishing without limitation as to the Yamato group in Japan. Nonetheless, the specific freedom became a turning point in their peaceful life. Since the number of hunters and fishermen was rigidly restricted on the mainland of Japan, many of these people migrated to Hokkaido around 1877, striving to find their ways of living. Moreover, this immigration brought dramatic devastation to the ecosystem of Hokkaido. Consequently, the Japanese government passed a series of laws in 1877 to protect games and fish. Unfortunately, with adaptation to hunting and fishing, the Ainu group did not change their way of life, undermining the laws, which led them to severe living conditions.

The burdensome condition of Ainu caused by lacking food supply was mainly due to Japanese policies. The Meiji government-administered new agricultural policies and restricted hunting and fishing activities in Hokkaido without considering Ainu's lifestyle and interests, eventually making Ainu fall into stringent economic conditions. From this standpoint, the egocentrism of the Meiji government seems distinctive. However, the original intention of the Japanese government was not with an ulterior motive; their willingness to recover Japan's economic power was cheerful. The fact is that their less consideration of the living situation of Ainu reveals inequality between the Yamato group and the minority. Furthermore, the economic recession within the Ainu group further strengthens the class gap between Ainu and Yamato, which potentially intensifies the racial ideology of Ainu in Japanese society.

The Land reform in 1947 can be considered as the continuation of Hokkaido kaitaku shi. Under the Protection Act passed in 1899, many lands received by the Ainu group were rented to Japanese tenant farmers

by themselves due to unfamiliar agricultural methods to acquire finance for living. Since tenants cultivated the abundant lands over decades, it was tough to determine who owned what land at the time of the Land Reform in 1947. The situation did not change until the Land Reform. However, Ainu's large proportion of lands in Biratori located in the upper Saru region, one of the most sterile regions in Biratori. Therefore, the explanation why contemporary Ainu own such few lands and property can be reasonable and transparent.

Apart from these two factors, most Ainu farmers lost some of their lands in the Land Reform because of the new laws enforced by the Japanese government about land distribution. As a result, the seemingly positive Land Reform virtually left subtle real improvements toward the living situation and economy of Ainu. Instead, it probably helped increase the Yamato group's economic power by renting many fertile lands in Biratori, government policies, and inevitable natural events. Therefore, the difference in economic power between Ainu and Yamato was exacerbated after the Land Reform, which intensified the wealth supremacy of Yamato and put the Ainu group in a disadvantageous position for future economic development. Hence, it can be one more potential that aggravates the racial ideology in Japan toward Ainu.

4. CONCLUSION

The Ainu who lived in Japan, Hokkaido, had been discriminated against and exploited economically and oppressed politically for hundreds of years by the Japanese. However, the ethnic problems faced by the Ainu people are different from those in the United States in cultural, political, and economic aspects.

What is gratifying is that in February 2019, Japan publicly recognized the Ainu's identity as a Japanese Aboriginal nation through legislation and took the realization of a "national symbiotic society" as the policy goal. The Ainu people finally acquired the national identity of the Japanese locals. The Ainu people have always stressed that the Ainu people have a unique language, culture, and common economic life and history. They publicize the Ainu language and culture, encourage compatriots of all ethnic groups to have a sense of national pride, establish Ainu civil legal organizations, strive for political and cultural rights, adjust their own national psychology, and adapt to Japanese society.

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