AINU ETHNICITY AND THE BOUNDARIES OF THE EARLY MODERN JAPANESE STATE*

Ethnic and cultural homogeneity, and the strong sense of nation it has presumably fostered, has long been a given in both scholarly and popular perceptions of Japanese history. In fact, however, Japanese homogeneity is very much a product of history, a political construct that emerged during the process of state formation and re-formation in the Tokugawa (1600-1868) and Meiji (1868-1912) periods. To illustrate this point, this article will examine changes in the ethnic identity of the Ainu during the Tokugawa era. It will argue several things. First, that the demarcation of an “ethnic boundary” — to use Fredrik Barth’s term — between the Ainu and the Japanese was a critical element in determining the political boundaries of the early modern Japanese state. Secondly, that the historical relationship between the Ainu and the Japanese confirms Barth’s observation that “ethnic distinctions do not depend on the absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundation upon which embracing social systems are built”. ¹ Thirdly, that the nature of the ethnic boundaries that separated the Japanese from surrounding peoples distinguishes Tokugawa Japan from both the medieval society that preceded it and the modern one that followed. Finally, that only by examining the political meaning of ethnicity in the Tokugawa period can we understand the place of ethnicity in contemporary Japan.

The ethnic boundary at question here was drawn in Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan’s four major islands. The Ainu are the

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indigenous people of Hokkaido; until recently they were culturally, linguistically and physically distinct from the mainstream Japanese population. For most of the Tokugawa period the 20,000-30,000 Ainu were under the suzerainty of Matsumae, an autonomous domain under the authority of the Tokugawa shogunate. In principle, the entire island of Hokkaido, save a small area in the south, was reserved for exclusive Ainu habitation. In practice, however, Japanese fishers and merchants established outposts throughout the coastal areas, which they began to populate permanently in the 1840s.

Although this article is concerned foremost with the formation of Japanese national identity, it is worth pausing to note at the outset the extent of Japanese influence on the internal workings of Ainu society. Anthropologists endeavouring to portray Ainu culture at its most "authentic" have tended to understate the transformative power of contact with the Japanese before the modern period. The organization and leadership of Ainu communities are a case in point. Traditional Ainu society, as reconstructed by ethnologists, centred on the river systems of inland Hokkaido, in which communities (kotan) of just a few households each co-operated in the day-to-day business of subsistence, principally salmon-fishing, deer- and bear-hunting and the gathering of edible plants. Beyond the kotan political organization was weak. Communities scattered about a river system shared kinship ties and occasionally access to hunting territories (iwor), but their central function was to join in the performance of the bear ritual (iyomante), the principal religious observance of the Ainu people.²

Missing from most ethnographies are both the broad, regional alliances under the leadership of charismatic chieftains that characterized Ainu society before the end of the seventeenth century and the settlements that grew up around Japanese-operated commercial fishing outposts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The latter were organized in a manner similar to Japanese agricultural villages: leaders recognized by the Japanese authorities supplied Ainu workers for the fishery in exchange for steady supplies of Japanese commodities. Relocation to the coast thus affected both the ecology of Ainu society, as hunting, fishing and gathering were supplanted by manual labour under Japanese

supervision, and the nature of Ainu communities, as a hierarchical leadership structure emerged to mediate relations with the Japanese.

Despite their small numbers and the remoteness of their homeland, the Ainu were important to the formation of a Japanese national identity during the Tokugawa and Meiji periods. The Tokugawa shogunate was the first regime in Japanese history to draw clear physical borders for itself. But rather than establish a dichotomy between Japan and the rest of the world, it surrounded itself with peripheral areas that were neither fully part of the polity nor completely independent of it. The resultant contrast between the dependent yet non-Japanese peripheral peoples, including the Ainu, and the inhabitants of the core spurred the formation of a Japanese identity even before the emergence of a modern nation-state in the mid-nineteenth century.

The remainder of this article will examine the relationship between state formation and ethnicity in Tokugawa Japan in general, and the nature of the ethnic boundary between the Ainu and the Japanese in particular. An introductory discussion of Ainu ethnicity in the broader context of early modern Japanese history will be followed by an explication of the ties of mutual dependency that bound the Ainu and Japanese peoples. The discussion will then turn to a more detailed examination of, first, the ritual relationship between the two peoples and, secondly, the incorporation of Ainu ethnicity into the early modern Japanese social-status system. Finally, a brief conclusion will relate the issues of ethnicity raised in the article to the formation of a homogeneous Japanese national identity in the modern period.

I

STATE FORMATION AND ETHNICITY IN EARLY MODERN JAPAN

Much of the literature on early modern Japanese history has been concerned with the nature of the Tokugawa state, a problem that has important implications not only for our understanding of the Tokugawa era, but for interpretations of Meiji and contemporary Japan as well. In 1600 the military government of the Tokugawa shoguns, backed by about 270 autonomous regional lords, or daimyos, reunified Japan after a century and a half of civil war and imposed a sort of centralized feudalism on the country while cutting most ties with the outside world. The Tokugawa hege-
mony thus established prevailed until 1868, when the nascent Meiji regime brought Japan into the modern world order. Because political authority and legitimacy before 1868 were dispersed among the shogunate, the imperial court and the daimyos’ autonomous domains, some scholars have questioned whether “state” is even an appropriate term to describe the Tokugawa polity. In fact the shogunate did indeed function as a state apparatus, as revealed in the way it had, by the middle of the seventeenth century, achieved a virtual monopoly over the formation of political and social institutions. The creation of a homogeneous Japanese ethnicity by the shogunate was especially critical for the process of state-building because it served to define the boundaries of the Japanese polity.

The relationship between the Ainu people and the Tokugawa state is significant in part because the ethnic boundaries drawn and redrawn in Hokkaido during the Tokugawa and Meiji periods helped to determine the location of “Japan” and the character of the “Japanese”. The Japanese state situated itself within a changing international environment by defining itself in relation to the peoples on its geographical and cultural peripheries. In addition to the Ainu, the dual process of ethnic delineation and state formation affected the inhabitants of Ryukyu (Okinawa), an archipelago to the south of the main Japanese islands that was a semi-independent kingdom until its annexation by Japan in 1879, and the outcasts (Burakumin), who were culturally, physically and linguistically indistinguishable from the mainstream population, yet lived in segregated communities scattered throughout the main islands.

The subordination of ethnicity to the political process of state formation in Japan was the product of a clearly defined historical process. Before the Tokugawa house rose to hegemony at the outset of the seventeenth century Japanese ethnicity was at best loosely defined, particularly in peripheral parts of the country, in large part because central political authority was weak or nonexistent. Part of the process of political integration involved what

amounted to a sorting-out of the population by the shogunate, with most people being put into one of the categories of the new social-status hierarchy (warriors-peasants-artisans-merchants), while groups like the Ainu, Ryukyuans and outcastes were excluded not only from the direct political authority of the shogunate, but also from formal membership of the Japanese population. The excluded groups occupied an inferior position relative to other Japanese, but were subjected only to the indirect rule of the shogunal government, as they were granted nominal political and economic autonomy.

The decision to include or exclude groups was the sole prerogative of the shogunate, even when, as in the case of the Ainu, the affected groups lived in areas under the ostensible control of autonomous lords. The shogunate was able to do this because, for the first time in Japanese history, an effective central power claimed and exercised control over a clearly defined territory. The Tokugawa shogunate’s political centralization was incomplete, to be sure — the regional lords retained their autonomy and the emperor remained an enigmatic presence in Kyoto — but as a practical matter there was no question as to who held authority and where the physical limits of that sphere of authority lay.

This articulation of the shogunate’s political authority occurred within a rapidly changing international environment. The sixteenth century saw the arrival in East Asia of the Portuguese, the Dutch and other European powers, who brought with them Christianity, firearms and a hunger for trade. In the 1590s the Japanese hegemon, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, tried twice to invade China via Korea, a disastrous misadventure that disrupted Japanese relations with its two most important East Asian neighbours long after his death. In 1644, moreover, the Ming empire collapsed and was replaced by the Manchu Qing dynasty.

It was within the context of these changes that Tokugawa Japan distanced itself from full participation in trade and diplomacy in East Asia. Japan entered what is usually known as its period of “seclusion” (sakoku), although, as Ronald Toby has demonstrated, the term does not accurately reflect the character of the Tokugawa regime’s foreign policy. It would be more appropriate to think of the shogunate as having created a replica of the Chinese world order, centred on itself.4 In any case, the shogunate

maintained direct trade ties with Dutch and Chinese merchants in Nagasaki, but delegated responsibility for foreign relations with Korea, Ryukyu and the Ainu respectively to the Tsushima, Satsuma and Matsumae domains.

A by-product of the "seclusion" of the Tokugawa era was that the political boundaries of the state did not coincide with the geographical boundaries of Japan. The Ainu, Ryukyuans and outcastes lived in communities autonomous from — but subordinate to — the mainstream population. They were considered to be not fully Japanese — or, in the case of the outcastes, not even fully human — and their communities were not part of Japan: Ryukyu and the Ainu homeland in Hokkaido were treated as semi-independent foreign entities, while the outcaste communities were considered technically not to exist at all, as seen in the way they were expunged from maps and computations of distance along highways.

During the Tokugawa period determining who was "Japanese" was thus mostly a question of deciding who was not, and then finding some political space into which those who were not Japanese could be placed. This is not to say, however, that the groups excluded from Japanese ethnicity were not integral to the functioning of the state. By delineating the ethnic boundaries between the Japanese and the Ainu, Ryukyuans and outcastes, the Tokugawa state asserted complete sovereignty over those who remained on the Japanese side of the fence. At the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868 Japan was not yet a modern nation-state, though it became one in astonishingly short order. The redefinition of peripheral peoples, including the Ainu, as Japanese was an important facet of that process of nation-building. But the bigger problem, determining where "Japan" was and who could be considered "Japanese", had already been resolved by the Tokugawa shogunate, which had appropriated Japanese ethnicity and tied it to the state.

II
THE FORMATION OF MUTUAL DEPENDENCY IN HOKKAIDO
Ties of mutual dependency ordered relations between the Ainu and the Japanese during the Tokugawa period. The Ainu's dependence on the Japanese was economic: they relied on the Japanese for commodities they could neither produce for them-
selves nor acquire by any other means. Conversely, for the Japanese, the Ainu occupied a critical bit of political space that at once defined the position of the Matsumae domain within the Tokugawa state and, more broadly, clarified the nature of state authority. In other words, Matsumae’s standing within the Tokugawa state was predicated upon its continuing relationship with the Ainu people. Indeed, as we shall see below, the Ainu were so important to Matsumae that the domain proved willing to create them if there were not enough “real” Ainu to go round.

The two types of dependency — economic for the Ainu, political for the Japanese — were qualitatively different, but nevertheless inextricably linked. By the end of the seventeenth century Ainu culture had nearly lost its capacity for independent survival. The Ainu needed commodities like ironware, lacquerware, weapons, cloth, sake, rice and tobacco that were available only through trade with the Japanese. Economic necessity had by then been sanctified by cultural practice, as particularly rare goods were elevated to the status of “treasures” (ikor), which not only represented a person’s wealth but could be “offered as indemnities in case of quarrels”. Given the Ainu’s inability to procure other regular sources of needed commodities or to extract them forcibly from the Japanese, they had little choice but to submit to the overlordship of the Tokugawa shogunate and its agent, the Matsumae domain. For their part, the Japanese did not hesitate to make the most of their economic and political advantages over the Ainu.

Dependence on the Japanese was a defining characteristic of early modern Ainu culture, and it distinguishes the Tokugawa Ainu from their predecessors in earlier periods. By the thirteenth century the Satsumon culture — the precursor of Ainu culture — had developed a rudimentary agriculture and was showing the beginnings of a political organization that, unimpeded, might eventually have developed into a proto-state structure. Indeed by the thirteenth century the Satsumon culture of southern Hokkaido had absorbed the continentally derived Okhotsk culture.

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5 Not every Japanese commodity was regarded as a treasure by the Ainu, but some, especially eating utensils and swords with decorated sheaths, were treated as heirlooms: Donald L. Philippi, Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans: The Epic Tradition of the Ainu (Princeton and Tokyo, 1979), p. 178.

6 For a similar instance of outside manufactures taking on an increasingly important cultural role, see Richard White, The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees and Navajos (Lincoln, 1983).
of northern Hokkaido and Sakhalin and had come into political and economic contact with the Mongol empire in Sakhalin and the Amur river basin of Manchuria.\textsuperscript{7}

At the same time, the Satsumon culture came under the political, economic and cultural influence of the Japanese in northern Honshu and southern Hokkaido.\textsuperscript{8} From the Japanese standpoint these contacts were a continuation of their subjugation of the “eastern barbarians” (the Emishi and Ezo), a process that dated back to at least the seventh century. These unassimilated peoples, incidentally, can be identified unequivocally as Ainu only after the mid-fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{9} In any case, relations between the Japanese and “barbarians”, Ainu or not, were marked by considerable conflict. As a result, the Ainu were virtually eliminated from northern Honshu and southernmost Hokkaido by the beginning of the Tokugawa period.

The immediate causes of the major disputes between the two groups were economic. The Genkei Rebellion of 878, for example, was a reaction by the Emishi of north-eastern Honshu against the unfair trade practices of the Japanese, who provided cloth and iron to the native people in exchange for slaves, falcons, animal pelts and especially horses. Koshamain’s Rebellion of 1457, which initiated more than two centuries of intermittent warfare between the Japanese and Ainu in southern Hokkaido, was sparked off by an argument over the quality of a short sword sold by a Japanese blacksmith to an Ainu youth — a trivial incident, perhaps, but one emblematic of the increasing importance of iron in Ainu culture. Finally, Shakushain’s War of 1669-72, the last serious attempt by the Ainu to preserve their political independence, was caused by a combination of economic factors, including competition among Ainu chieftains for access to fish and animal pelts to trade with the Japanese, a dispute over Ainu access to markets outside the Matsumae domain and discon-
tent concerning the size of rice bales used by the Japanese in trade.10

Interestingly, contact with the Japanese seems to have encouraged the native people of Hokkaido to accentuate the distinctly “Ainu” elements of their culture. Whereas the Satsumon people appear to have practised agriculture until the thirteenth or fourteenth century, their Ainu successors all but gave it up, relying instead on hunting and gathering for most of their subsistence needs and trade with the Japanese for the rest. This seems in part to have been a response to Japanese demand for fish and animal pelts in trade, which induced the Ainu to concentrate on hunting to the exclusion of cultivating.11 Moreover, according to Emori Susumu, military conflict with the Japanese encouraged the Ainu to close cultural and linguistic ranks, which resulted in greater uniformity within a culture that was, after all, an amalgam of Satsumon and Okhotsk elements, spread thinly over a broad geographical area. In other words, the threat posed by the intrusion of the Japanese made the Ainu more coherent as an ethnic group than they would have been otherwise.12

The emergence of the Ainu as a unitary, yet dependent, culture was not, however, simply the result of internal changes. The Japanese in northern Honshu and southern Hokkaido redefined their own identity during the process of ethnic contact, in part by distinguishing between themselves and the Ainu. They did this by strengthening cultural and political ties to the metropolis that until then had been extremely tenuous.

Ethnic identity in medieval Japan was more a function of pragmatic political considerations than of language, culture, religion or other “objective” ethnic markers. Simply put, anyone owing ultimate allegiance to the imperial court at Kyoto was Japanese; everyone else was a “barbarian”. Thus merchants, adventurers and exiles in southern Hokkaido were called “cross-

11 A similar situation can be seen among the Choctaws of Mississippi in the eighteenth century, though they did not embrace market relations with the English and French until the Europeans introduced rum into trade: White, Roots of Dependency, chs. 1-4. Sake may have played a similar role in Japanese-Ainu relations.
ing-party barbarians” (watarittō Ezo), despite their Japanese origins. Conversely, many former “barbarians” became loyal, tax-paying imperial subjects; after a transitional period as imperial “captives” (fushū) the erstwhile “barbarians” blended anonymously into Japanese society.¹³

Matsumae’s political dependence upon the Ainu must therefore be understood in the context of the expansion of the Japanese feudal state from the medieval to the early modern periods. Medieval military leaders in northern Honshu maintained only tenuous political and cultural ties to the imperial court and its proxies, the Kamakura (1192-1336) and Ashikaga (1336-1573) shogunates. In their relations with the centre, strongmen such as the Andō, based at Tosaminato on the Tsugaru peninsula in northernmost Honshu, represented themselves as suzerains of the Ezo. While this sometimes served to locate them within the medieval institutional order, distinct from the Ezo themselves — as in their adoption of the Kamakura shogunal title of governor (kanrei) of the Ezo — in other instances the Andō assumed titles such as “shogun of Hinomoto” that seemed to give them a non-Japanese identity.¹⁴

In fact the Andō were apparently descended from Emishi military leaders who had been assimilated into Japanese society. But it hardly matters whether the Andō were “really” Japanese or not. They assumed titles that placed them within the central institutional hierarchy or outside it as political or economic conditions warranted, and not as a declaration of ethnic allegiance.¹⁵ The same was true even of men of impeccable lineage like Fujiwara no Kiyohira, the self-proclaimed “chieftain of the eastern barbarians” (tōi no ensha), and his grandson, Hidehira, who described himself as a “barbarian” (iteki) as a way to secure court sanction for his economic control over northern Honshu.¹⁶ This was possible only because the notion of mutually exclusive Japanese and Ainu ethnicities had not yet emerged.

The Matsumae house traced its own lineage to the Andō. By the time it was ready to declare a place for itself on the national institutional map at the end of the sixteenth century, “Japanese”

¹³ See Kaiho, Chûsei no Ezochi; Ōishi, “Chûsei Ō no reimei”.
¹⁴ See the discussion in Kaiho, Chûsei no Ezochi, esp. pp. 134-45.
¹⁶ Ōishi, “Chûsei Ō no reimei”, pp. 36-7.
and "Ainu" referred to clearly distinguished groups, and the Matsumae were unequivocally Japanese. If the Hokkaido climate had permitted the development of rice cultivation, the founder of the Matsumae house, Kakizaki (later Matsumae) Yoshihiro, and his descendants might have ended up as typical regional lords, enfeoffed by the Tokugawa shogunate on the basis of the agricultural productivity of their landholdings. In that case we may speculate that all the Ainu would eventually have been assimilated into Japanese society, as they were in southern Hokkaido and northern Honshu. But because agriculture was impractical in Hokkaido, Yoshihiro had to justify his status as domain lord in other terms. He therefore followed the precedent established by his forebears and asserted himself as an intermediary between the Japanese and the Ainu. Yoshihiro represented himself to Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, who successively reunified Japan at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries, as suzerain of the Ainu by including Ainu troops in a force he led on Hideyoshi’s behalf and by wearing Chinese brocades (Santan nishiki) obtained through Ainu trade contacts in the Amur river basin to a meeting with Ieyasu.\footnote{Emori, \textit{Hokkaidō kinseishi no kenkyū}, pp. 159-61.}

In short, the delineation of Ainu and Japanese ethnic identities took place within the context of centuries of contact, both economic and military, in a region that embraced the northern tip of Honshu and the Oshima peninsula in southern Hokkaido. Ethnic labels like "Ainu" and "Japanese" are both anachronistic and misleading when applied to the people of northern Japan before around 1450. But by the conclusion of Shakushain’s War in 1672 the Ainu and Japanese were distinct and readily recognizable ethnic groups, living in clearly demarcated cultural zones. Southern Hokkaido was solidly part of the newly established Tokugawa state, while the militarily subjugated Ainu were relegated to economic dependency in their constricted homeland north of the Oshima peninsula.

III
THE RITUAL FRAMEWORK OF AINU-JAPANESE RELATIONS

Most of the time, it would have been difficult to tell that Iwanoiske, an eighteenth-century Ainu resident of Kennichi village in south-western Hokkaido, was anything but Japanese: he
had a Japanese name, he lived in a Japanese village and he wore his hair in a style popular among Japanese dandies. Every winter, however, Iwanosuke underwent a curious metamorphosis. He let his hair and beard grow long so that he might look properly Ainu when he went to pay his respects to the lord of the Matsumae domain on the seventh day of the new year. As a representative of the Ainu people, Iwanosuke participated with the Japanese in a trade relationship known in Ainu as the uimam, or “audience”, in which a ritual show of submission on the Ainu’s part was rewarded by grants of gifts that had little value to the Japanese, but were often regarded as treasures by the Ainu.

Iwanosuke’s annual rediscovery of his ethnic roots was a “remnant of the old Ezo [Ainu] customs”, according to the explorer Mogami Tokunai, who visited Kennichi village in 1784. In fact just the opposite was true: Iwanosuke assumed what had become for him a false identity for reasons that had little to do with old Ainu customs and everything to do with the institutions of the Matsumae domain. The practice of uimam and the related umsa, or traditional “greeting” ceremony, was indeed rooted in Ainu culture, but by the time Iwanosuke appeared on the scene the rituals had long lost their original significance.

An examination of the uimam and umsa rituals serves as a convenient point of departure for a study of the meaning of Ainu ethnicity in the formation of the early modern Japanese state. The uimam and umsa were the crucial ritual manifestations of the relationship between the Ainu people of Hokkaido and the Japanese state during the Tokugawa period. Traditional Ainu practices were reconstituted to legitimate the mutually dependent, yet profoundly unequal, relationship between the Japanese and Ainu. They were adapted to serve as tools for Japanese domina-


tion of the Ainu in an instance of what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger call an "invented tradition". 20

The content of the uimam and umsa rituals changed in response to shifts in the political relationship between the two peoples. Uimam originally referred simply to trade conducted between relative equals. Indeed the word never lost this sense, even after the ceremony assumed a political character, and for the Ainu the trade element always remained extremely important, if not paramount. The umsa, on the other hand, was originally an elaborate greeting exchanged by Ainu reuniting after a long separation. After the old friends had embraced and exchanged courtesies, the host made an elaborate show of hospitality in the gregarious manner of the Ainu people.

The Matsumae domain co-opted and gradually transformed the two practices after it established hegemony over southern Hokkaido in the late sixteenth century. Attempts to manipulate the rituals could be seen as early as 1633, when domain officials had Ainu residents of Otobe and Kuroiwa, villages at the remote western and eastern extremities of the area of Japanese habitation, perform the uimam for the benefit of shogunal inspectors. In general, however, the domain came to stress Ainu submission to Japanese authority over trade in its perception of the function of the uimam only in the eighteenth century. This change in attitude occurred as commercial fishing began to supplant trade with the Ainu as the basis of the domain economy. 21

The content of the uimam ceremony, too, evolved only gradually as an assertion of Japanese political domination of the Ainu. For example, Ainu chieftains visiting Matsumae's Fukuyama castle around 1700 were seated near the domain lord during their audience, an indication that little social distance separated the participants in the ritual. In contrast, their successors a century later were made to kneel on straw mats in the garden. Moreover, in the early Tokugawa period uimam trips to Fukuyama were relatively rare and confined to Ainu living in southern Hokkaido. On the other hand, by the late eighteenth century the practice had become highly systematic, with appearances fixed on a regular

21 On the 1633 performance of the uimam, see Inagaki, "Kinsei Ezochi ni okeru girei shihai no tokushitsu", p. 114; for a general discussion of changes in the significance of the ceremony over time, see Takakura, Ainu seisakushi, pp. 77-85, 172.
schedule and predetermined gift lists the rule. Ainu chieftains from throughout the island were expected to appear for an investiture uimam upon their succession, and others, like Iwanosuke, were called in at regular intervals to commemorate events important to the Japanese, such as the New Year.\(^{22}\)

In contrast to the uimam, which was always performed for the benefit of the lord, the umsa greeting was a less formal affair. After being adopted by Japanese merchants and officials at fisheries and trading posts as an exchange of greetings between equals, the ritual was eventually transformed into a sort of celebration to commemorate the successful completion of the fishing or trading season. The Japanese merchant or official hosting the umsa made a display of hospitality to his Ainu workers and clients, who by this time were clearly not perceived as the social equals of the Japanese.\(^{23}\) Moreover by the late eighteenth century operators of Japanese fishing outposts had assumed important administrative functions from the domain, with the result that the umsa served as an opportunity to read domain laws and injunctions to the gathered Ainu. As a domain-sanctioned assertion of Japanese power over the Ainu, the umsa thus became a local ancillary to the uimam ritual.\(^ {24}\)

Ainu continued to participate in uimam and umsa ceremonies staged for the benefit of domain officials and merchants until the end of the Tokugawa period. The Meiji state had little use for the rituals, which it saw as impediments to Ainu assimilation into Japanese society. It accordingly abandoned them quickly, though the umsa seems to have survived under the auspices of individual merchants as late as 1875.\(^ {25}\)

The assertions of Japanese power and authority conveyed

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\(^{23}\) The dominance of the Japanese was acknowledged even in cultural practices still under the control of the Ainu, such as the iyomante, or bear ritual. Japanese in attendance — typically fishing contractors and/or their agents — were given the place of honour among the guests. Sasaki Toshikazu, “Iomante kō: Shamo ni yoru Ainu bunka rikai no kōsetsu” [Thoughts on the Iyomante: A Study of Japanese Perceptions of Ainu Culture], Rekishigaku kōkenkyū, no. 613 (1990), pp. 111-20.

\(^{24}\) See Takakura, Ainu seisakushi, pp. 219-23, for samples of injunctions read at various umsa. See also the discussion of official gatherings of Ainu and Japanese at the Nemuro fishery in 1858 in Kikuchi Isao, Bakuhan taisei to Ezochi [The Bakuhan System and the Ezochi] (Tokyo, 1984), pp. 108-12.

through the *uimam* and *umsa* rituals were not directed primarily towards the Ainu, but rather were designed to reassure the Japanese themselves of their own legitimacy. The portrayal of these rituals as Ainu rather than Japanese in origin, despite the fact that by the end of the eighteenth century their form owed more to Japanese bureaucratic protocol than to Ainu tradition, represents an effort by the Japanese to ground their domination of the Ainu in history and the "timeless" traditions of Ainu culture.

Matsumae’s declarations of legitimacy became increasingly urgent as the Tokugawa period progressed. By the end of the eighteenth century a burgeoning fishing industry and its attendant commercial development had rendered simple trade between the Japanese and Ainu unimportant to the Matsumae economy. Instead of being founded on a genuine role as intermediary between Japan and the Ainu, the legitimacy of the Matsumae house rested increasingly upon a symbolic base, exemplified by the *uimam* and *umsa* rituals. Moreover legitimacy was more than an abstract principle for Matsumae, as the shogunate stepped in twice (1799-1821 and 1855-8) to assume control over most of Hokkaido in response to a perceived threat from Russia.

The Ainu almost certainly did not accept at face value the Japanese reading of their role in the rituals. Because they had no written language we have no direct knowledge of their attitude, but there is ample indirect evidence to suggest that they assigned their own meanings to the ceremonies. For instance, although the Japanese assumed the word "*uimam*" was derived from the Japanese "*omemie*", meaning "audience", in Ainu it refers exclusively to "trade", without the subservient overtones of the Japanese term. Certain the references to *uimam* in the yukar, the Ainu oral literature, have no sense of defeat or submission about them. If, as this suggests, the Ainu saw the *uimam* and *umsa* rituals primarily as positive opportunities to trade, their


leaders may have been able to enhance their own standing in the community by distributing the commodities received from the Japanese among their people. Japanese accounts of umsa held in the late eighteenth century support this view with descriptions of crowds of Ainu waiting eagerly for the elders to emerge with sake, rice, tobacco and other goods. On the other hand, however favourably they may have viewed the economic aspects of the ritual relationship, the Ainu were rightly suspicious of the Japanese. They knew that, unless they were careful, fishers and petty officials might try to cheat them out of their goods.

In any case the Ainu needed the commodities provided by the Japanese and thus had little practical choice but to participate in the uimam and umsa ceremonies. This was particularly true of the Ainu leadership, many of whom received privileged treatment in return for providing steady supplies of Ainu workers for Japanese fishing operations. Indeed the posts occupied by local elders were not native to Ainu society, but rather corresponded to offices in self-governing Japanese agricultural villages. The reliance of Ainu leaders in north-eastern Hokkaido on Japanese support was so great that when badly mistreated fishery workers rose in rebellion in 1789, one Ainu chieftain, Tsukinoe of Kunashiri, not only took the initiative in notifying the Matsumae domain authorities of the uprising, but also persuaded his own son, an organizer of the rebellion, to surrender to the Japanese. This is perhaps an extreme example; other leaders apparently co-opted by the Japanese may simply have been trying to make the best of a bad situation by securing goods from the Japanese at terms as favourable as possible. The salient point is that how-


30 For example, Mogami, “Ezo no kuni fūzoku ninjō no sata”, p. 451, relates how Ainu participants at an umsa in 1785 carefully checked the contents of the sake barrels given to them. See also Philippi, Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans, pp. 247-53, for a yukar about a treacherous Japanese interpreter.


32 See ibid., pp. 242-3, for a description of the exact correspondence between the posts held by Ainu and Japanese peasant officials.

33 The uprising, known as the Kunashiri-Menashi rebellion, was the most serious instance of Ainu resistance to Japanese control after 1672. For a brief summary, see Kikuchi Isao, Hoppōshi no naka no kinesi Nihon [Early Modern Japan in the History of the North] (Tokyo, 1991), pp. 303-13.
ever the Ainu interpreted their role in the uimam and umsa rituals, as a practical matter they were subject to the political, economic and military domination of the Japanese.

IV
THE INCORPORATION OF AINU ETHNICITY INTO THE JAPANESE SOCIAL-STATUS HIERARCHY

Despite the imbalance in military and economic power, the relationship between the Japanese and the Ainu after the Tokugawa settlement of 1600 was not simply one of subjugation and submission. The lords of Matsumae needed the Ainu almost as much as the Ainu needed them. Unlike other Tokugawa period lords, the heads of the Matsumae house formally held no land in fief from the Tokugawa shogun; rather their status was derived from the monopoly they held over trade and other contact with the Ainu.34 The Japanese in Hokkaido could allow neither the assimilation nor the extermination of the Ainu population because, quite simply, if there were no Ainu, the Matsumae house would have no formal reason to exist. The Ainu’s alien ethnicity was thus a cornerstone of the feudal institutional structure of the Matsumae domain.

Matsumae went to considerable lengths to ensure that the Ainu’s alien ethnicity remained intact. First, it made the division of Hokkaido into areas of exclusive Japanese and Ainu residence a cornerstone of domain law. Formally, the Ainu territory, which comprised almost 95 per cent of the island’s land area, was not part of Japan and its Ainu inhabitants were not Japanese. Japanese could make seasonal trading or fishing forays into the Ainu territory, but they could not settle there permanently. Ainu were similarly prohibited from travelling outside their own areas except to perform the uimam at Fukuyama castle. Furthermore the domain tried to prevent most Ainu from using the Japanese language and adopting Japanese customs. As Mogami Tokunai noted, “If [the Ainu] should happen to speak Japanese, the interpreters rebuke them, saying that they have committed an unforgivable offence, and demand an indemnity in recompense; likewise if they should wear straw raincoats, straw sandals, or leggings. In all matters the policy of not allowing the Ezo [Ainu]

34 Kaiho, Bakuhansei kokka to Hokkaidō, pp. 9-34.
to adopt Japanese customs is the law of the Matsumae house".\textsuperscript{35} With his usual insight, Mogami attributed this policy to Matsumae’s desire to prevent the Ainu from taking up agriculture or other industries that would free them from their economic dependence on the Japanese.\textsuperscript{36}

Matsumae’s effort to maintain an absolute distinction between the Japanese and Ainu highlights the arbitrary aspect of ethnic boundaries, whether geographical or cultural. The delineation of Japanese and Ainu spheres in Hokkaido did not reflect actual residence patterns, but rather was an \textit{ad hoc} response to Matsumae’s incomplete military victory in Shakushain’s War.\textsuperscript{37} By the time war broke out in 1669, a small number of Japanese gold miners and falconers had established themselves so firmly in the interior of Hokkaido that they fought as Ainu in the conflict. Indeed one of them, Shōdayū of Dewa province, was Shakushain’s son-in-law.\textsuperscript{38} Similarly, Ainu troops fought alongside Matsumae samurai in battle.\textsuperscript{39} Ainu left on the Japanese side of the border after the war were cut off from native society and hence ceased to function as Ainu, with the result that by the end of the eighteenth century only twelve of them (including Iwanosuke) retained even an ambivalent vestige of their former ethnic identity.\textsuperscript{40}

Matsumae’s attitude towards visible symbols of ethnicity, such as language and clothing styles, similarly reveals the nature of the ethnic boundary in Hokkaido. As we have already seen, by the end of the seventeenth century the Ainu’s dependence on Japanese commodities was so profound that the culture could not function without them. In that regard, the domain’s efforts to keep the two cultures completely distinct were doomed from the beginning. The emergence of the commercial fishing industry in the eighteenth century exacerbated the Ainu’s economic dependency, inasmuch as Ainu workers comprised the bulk of the labour force. At the same time Japanese fishery workers from north-

\textsuperscript{35} Mogami, “Ezo no kuni ninjō fūzoku no sata”, p. 460, as cited by Kikuchi, \textit{Bakuhan taisei to Ezochi}, p. 155.
\textsuperscript{36} Mogami, “Watarishima hikki”, p. 523.
\textsuperscript{37} Kaiho Mineo, \textit{Kinsei no Hokkaidō} [Early Modern Hokkaidō] (Tokyo, 1979), pp. 72-3, 75.
\textsuperscript{40} Emori, \textit{Hokkaidō kinseihi no kenkyū}, pp. 74-139. See also the discussion of the Ainu of Satsukari village in Kaiho, \textit{Bakuhansei kokka to Hokkaidō}, pp. 225-31.
eastern Honshu took to wearing items of Ainu clothing with such enthusiasm that officials of the Nanbu domain issued repeated prohibitions of their use.41

Provided that the Ainu’s economic dependence on the Japanese remained intact, however, the actual degree of cultural difference was not so important as the maintenance of political and institutional distinctions between the two peoples. After all, ethnic boundaries persist despite occasional or even systematic breaches.42 More interesting than the success or failure of particular aspects of Matsumae’s segregation policy is an examination of those cultural characteristics that the Japanese considered to be the most significant markers of Ainu ethnicity.

The Matsumae authorities were more concerned to regulate visible emblems of ethnicity, such as clothing and hairstyles, than matters of diet, religion or the organization and reproduction of households and communities. Formal intrusion into the deeper levels of culture would have revealed the fundamental contradiction that lay at the heart of Matsumae’s relationship with the Ainu. On the one hand, the domain’s legitimacy was founded upon the Ainu’s non-Japanese ethnic identity; on the other hand, however, its ability to control the native people hinged upon their continued reliance on Japanese commodities, a reliance that entailed the incorporation of Japanese elements into Ainu culture. This explains why, for example, Matsumae officials encouraged the Ainu to eat rice, yet never tried to require consumption — much less production — of the grain: to do so would have undermined the fiction that the Ainu were exclusively a hunting-and-gathering people. Similarly, the domain actively manipulated the Ainu leadership through the uimam and umsa rituals, yet refrained from intervening directly into decision-making processes within the Ainu community, for fear of revealing the Ainu’s lack of meaningful autonomy. Language, clothing and hairstyles, on the other hand, could be regulated without impinging upon the economic bases of the relationship between the two peoples.

The preoccupation of the Matsumae authorities with specific cultural markers was not, however, solely a response to political


and economic imperatives internal to the Japanese-Ainu relationship. As Kikuchi Isao has argued, Japanese notions of "civilized" physical appearance were reflected in policy towards the Ainu. Here let us look at men's hairstyles as a case in point. Ainu men traditionally had long, unbound hair and full, flowing beards. Men in Tokugawa Japan, in contrast, generally remained clean-shaven and wore their hair in a topknot, usually with the pate shaved. Although there was some leeway for changes in fashion and personal taste, subtle variations in Japanese men's hairstyles reflected differences in social status, so that samurai were readily distinguishable from peasants, peasants from townsmen and so forth. Exceptions to the basic rules were both quite systematic and limited to men who were somehow removed from mainstream society: Confucian scholars sometimes wore beards; court nobles, doctors and masterless samurai did not shave their pates; and Buddhist priests shaved their heads entirely. Only members of certain outcaste groups did not bind their hair at all.

Given the importance of hairstyle as a symbol of status and participation in Japanese society, the long, unbound hair of the Ainu was necessarily more than an incidental "native custom". According to Kikuchi, in the eyes of Japanese observers the Ainu's hair was as much a symbol of their social status — or rather, their pointed lack of status — as a mark of a specific ethnic identity. Matsumae's policy of regulating Ainu hairstyles represented an attempt to preserve the Ainu's alien ethnicity while simultaneously (and paradoxically) incorporating that alien ethnicity into the Japanese social-status hierarchy. Ethnicity in early modern Japan was thus subsumed within the concept of social status. It follows that the shaved pates of Iwanosuke and other partially assimilated Ainu gave them a new identity not merely as "Japanese", but as "Japanese" of a very specific sort (in this case peasants [hyakushō]).

The Ainu's "status" of lacking status resembled the position of the outcastes within Tokugawa society. The outcastes were not a single group, but rather a broad category of statuses that included travelling entertainers, certain religious mystics and her-

44 Kikuchi, "Kinsei ni okeru Ezo-kan to 'Nihon fuzoku'", p. 226.
editary servants of Shinto shrines, as well as leather-workers, butchers, executioners and others engaged in occupations that exposed them to ritual contamination. These groups were the object of social segregation before the Tokugawa period, but they did not acquire their official outcaste status until the 1660s.  

Tokugawa-period commentators theorized on the possible Ainu origins of the outcaste community and on occasion even advocated "reuniting" the two groups by forcibly resettling outcasts in Hokkaido as agricultural colonists. This line of thinking was consistent with other attempts to rationalize discrimination against the outcastes by attributing Korean or other non-Japanese origins to them. Of particular interest for our purposes is that this attempt to link the outcastes with the Ainu was based on perceived similarities in the outward physical appearance of the two groups. In addition to their unbound hair, the Ainu's custom of wearing their kimono folded to the left — a practice appropriate for dressing corpses, not living humans, in Japanese eyes — and the bare-footedness enforced by Matsumae domain regulations regularly elicited unfavourable comment.

Ironically, by incorporating the Ainu's alien identity into the social-status hierarchy of the Tokugawa state, Matsumae paved the way for the shogunate and its successor, the Meiji regime, to negate the validity of Ainu ethnicity entirely. In 1855 the shogunate assumed direct administration of Hokkaido in response to the threat posed to Japanese sovereignty over the island by Russia. Magistrates dispatched to Hokkaido oversaw an assimilation programme designed to win international recognition of the Ainu's Japanese identity and hence to secure Japan's territorial rights to areas inhabited by the Ainu, including the Kurile Islands and southern Sakhalin, as well as Hokkaido. The Meiji state continued this policy after it succeeded to power in 1868.

The shogunate targeted the same visible markers of ethnic identity as the Matsumae domain. For instance, Kasahara Gengo,

46 Kikuchi, "Kinsei ni okeru Ezo-kan to 'Nihon fûzoku' ", pp. 224-6.
47 Ibid., pp. 208-16; Kikuchi, Bakuhan taisei to Ezochi, pp. 166-8.
48 For the magistrates' basic statement of policy, see "Shihaimuki ichidô kokoroekata narabi ni basho basho ukeoinin moshiiwatashi an" [Proposed Policy of Administration and Instructions to the Operators of Contract Fisheries] (1855) and "Ijin satoshigaki an" [Proposed Admonishments to the Ezo] (1855), cited in Takakura, Ainu seisakushi, pp. 343-5, 345-6.
an official posted to the village of Shiraoi in 1856, persuaded local elders to promise to stop wearing earrings and tattooing women’s faces and hands. The Ainu also vowed to wear their kimono folded to the right, take Japanese names and learn to speak Japanese. Officials dispatched throughout Hokkaido similarly advocated assimilation (kizoku) to local Ainu.49

The response of the Ainu to the admonishments of the officials was mixed. Local leaders, under pressure to maintain close economic ties to the Japanese, were generally quicker to accommodate the authorities than other members of the Ainu community. Japanese officials, anticipating the reluctance of most Ainu to forsake the outward symbols of their cultural identity, offered material incentives to co-operate. At Shiraoi, for example, Kasahara Gengo distributed about eighteen litres of brown rice to each of the fourteen or fifteen Ainu who volunteered to be registered, the first step towards being incorporated into the local administrative structure as peasants. Those who further agreed to “assimilate” were given a quantity of cotton cloth in addition to the rice.50 Although tactics like this resulted in initial success rates of 70 per cent or more in a few villages, more commonly the officials encountered men who fled to the hills rather than cut their hair, or others who readily consented to “assimilate” in return for Japanese commodities, only to return to their customary ways as soon as the officials had moved on.51

The reversal of policy can also be seen in the shogunate’s attitude towards the uimam and umsa rituals. Ainu continued to perform the uimam at Fukuyama castle and the umsa at other locations, including the shogunate’s Hakodate magistracy, despite the fact that the Matsumae domain had lost its monopoly over trade and other contact with them. The avowed purpose of the officials in charge in preserving the rituals was to impress the Ainu with the material wealth of the Japanese and to promote assimilation by giving “assimilated” Ainu markedly better treatment during the ceremonies and more valuable gifts afterwards.52

50 Kasahara, “Ezojin fûzoku no gi môshiokuri sho”.
51 Takakura, Ainu seisakushi, pp. 382-3.
52 Ibid., pp. 375-6. For a contemporary account of a uimam held during the period of shogunal control, see “Dojin omemie ni tsuki nikki” [Diary of the Natives’ (cont. on p. 91)
After the Meiji state came to power it immediately launched a vigorous programme of agricultural and industrial development in Hokkaido. The assimilation of the Ainu was an integral aspect of that policy. The Meiji regime was not known for the subtlety of its administrative techniques, whether in Hokkaido or elsewhere, and its treatment of the Ainu was no exception. During its first decade in power, the new regime not only banned visible markers of Ainu ethnicity, such as earrings and tattoos, but also forbade the Ainu to practise their religion or to hunt in their ancestral hunting-grounds. In November 1878 the state stripped the Ainu of their ethnicity in legal terms by renaming them “former aborigines” (kyū dojin); during the next several years the Ainu became subject to taxation, civil and criminal law and conscription under the same conditions as other Japanese subjects. The Meiji state’s policy towards the Ainu culminated in the 1899 enactment of the “Law for the Protection of Former Hokkaido Aborigines” (Hokkaidō Kyū Dojin Hogohō), which “protected” the Ainu by forcing them to become petty farmers on marginal land. The law remains on the books in amended form to this day.53

If the historical relationship between the Japanese and the Ainu had been different, these attempts to manipulate the Ainu’s ethnicity might have had little lasting impact. Such was the case in Korea under Japanese rule, where an attempt to undermine the people’s Korean identity by assigning them Japanese names and compelling them to speak Japanese failed miserably.54 But because the Ainu’s political and economic independence had already been thoroughly undermined during the Tokugawa period, the Meiji state’s manipulation of their ethnic identity really did matter. Today the Ainu language is dead, the culture is moribund and the Ainu people themselves are on the verge of a sort of extinc-
tion, as a century or more of intermarriage has reduced the number of people of unmixed Ainu ancestry to close to zero.

V

CONCLUSION

A major aim of this article has been to highlight the role of state institutions in, on the one hand, giving meaning to ethnic identity and, on the other hand, locating that identity within the political structure of the state. Ethnic boundaries drawn in the seventeenth century between the Japanese and the peoples on their geographical and social peripheries — and the institutional structure established on the basis of those boundaries — bracketed the identity of the Japanese and held it in place. With the physical and cultural boundaries of “Japan” established, it became possible to develop a national discourse that applied unequivocally to all those deemed to be “Japanese”. Those excluded from the polity were not simply ignored, however; deliberate policies of dissimilation effectively incorporated their ethnicity into the early modern social-status hierarchy, with the result that the Ainu and other peripheral peoples acquired the “status” of lacking status. This in turn laid the foundation for the Meiji state’s aggressive assimilation programme.

The Meiji Restoration rendered the Tokugawa world order defunct, and the new regime had to redefine Japan’s political boundaries in terms of Western notions of international law. The state asserted full sovereignty over both Hokkaido in the north and the Ryukyu islands in the south for the first time. At the same time, it formally redefined members of outside groups as ethnic Japanese and thus brought them within the purview of the Japanese state. Hence the outcastes were called “new commoners”, the Ainu were renamed “former aborigines” and Ryukyuans simply became residents of Okinawa prefecture. While the process of redefinition was immediately motivated by practical considerations — if Hokkaido and Ryukyu were to be recognized internationally as part of Japan, their inhabitants had better be Japanese, after all — it is also true that the newly centralized state could not tolerate the persistence of mediating identities between itself and its subjects. This helps to explain the need to reclassify outcastes as well as Ainu and Ryukyuans as ordinary commoners. It is, however, important to remember
that their formal acquisition of citizenship notwithstanding, all three groups have been subjected to considerable discrimination and mistreatment.

In sum, the Restoration rendered the ethnic boundaries between the Tokugawa state and the Ainu, Ryukyuans and outcastes obsolete. The old boundaries that had located the Tokugawa polity within the Japanese archipelago were replaced by new ones that situated Meiji Japan within a broader international order, governed by Western conceptions of sovereignty. This led to the absorption of peripheral peoples and the homogenization of ethnicity that characterizes Japanese society today. Ironically, then, homogeneity is so central to the contemporary political order precisely because the juxtaposition of Japanese and non-Japanese ethnicities was so important to the pre-modern order.

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