

# Indigenous Peoples as Tools of the Nation

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Fitting the Ainu into Modern Japan



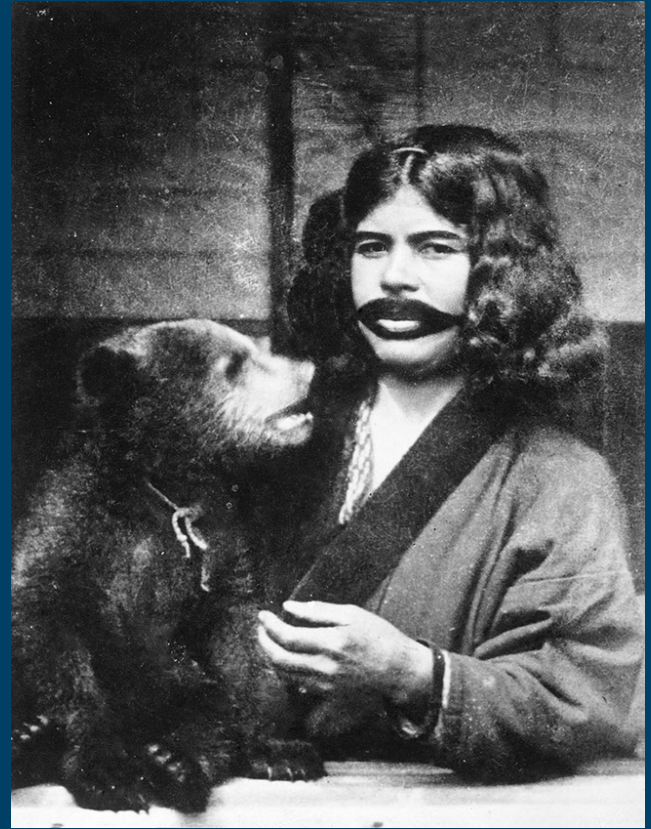
# Nation Building

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

# The Ainu

Indigenous peoples of Ainu  
Mosir



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

# Ainu Mosir

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



# Meiji Imperialism

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

# Assimilation of the Ainu

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

# Indigenous Rights

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

# Modern Status of the Ainu

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



# Research Goal

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

# Implications & Significance

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



# Overextending or:

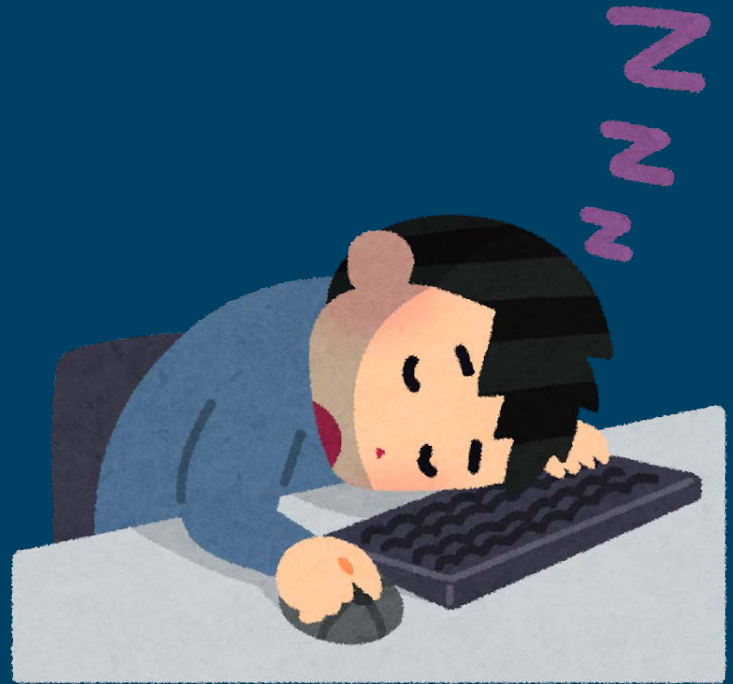
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How I learned to start worrying and  
hate myself



# The Undergrad

Eyes bigger than their stomach



# Theory cometh...

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



# ..before a fall

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



# The Phantom Menace

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- The unexpected
  - Illnesses and general malaise
  - New opportunities and responsibilities
- Miscalculations
  - Hardest tasks in imagination = easiest tasks in reality
  - Time estimations will be wrong

# A New Hope

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



Thank You

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