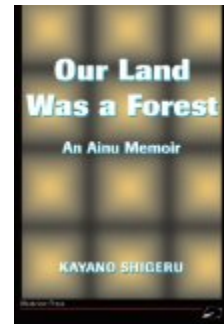


Shigeru Kayano. *Our Land Was A Forest: An Ainu Memoir*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994. xiv + 172 pp. \$50.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8133-1707-6; \$34.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8133-1880-6.

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## On Being and Becoming Ainu

1 July 1997 saw the attention of the world focused on Hong Kong. For the Ainu, the indigenous people of Japan, however, this date will be remembered as a historical milestone for other reasons. On this day the Act for the Protection of the Hokkaido Former Natives (*Hokkaido kyudojin hogoho*, enacted 1899) and its lesser known cousin, the Act for the Disposition of the Former Native Reservation in Asahikawa City (*Asahikawashi kyudojin hogochi shobunho*, 1934), were finally abolished by the Japanese Diet. In their place was enacted new legislation in the form of an Ainu Cultural Promotion Law (*Ainu bunka no shinko narabi ni Ainu no dento nado ni kansuru chishiki no fukyu oyobi keihatsu ni kansuru horitsu*) that recognises the Ainu as a separate ethnic nation (*minzoku*) within Japan and pledges assistance in maintaining and transmitting Ainu culture. Not all Ainu are satisfied, however. There is no mention of indigenous rights, guaranteed political representation, a self-reliance fund, or the other legal and financial guarantees that Ainu leaders have been actively campaigning for since 1984. Applications still have to be made to various government agencies for funds, and non-Ainu also sit on a special government panel to oversee these grants. For many Ainu, then, the struggle for justice and rights is far from over.

Since the 1970s, Kayano Shigeru has been a leading figure in this Ainu campaign for human rights, cultural preservation, and recognition as an indigenous people. In 1994 he achieved national prominence by becoming the first Ainu to be elected to the Diet, entering the Up-

per House as a member of the Socialist Party (now *Shakai minshu to*). During the 1990s Kayano has also been involved in a long running legal battle over the construction of a dam in his home community of Nibutani which ended recently in an ambiguous decision by the Sapporo High Court rejecting his suit but recognising Ainu grievances. Kayano is also well known as an authority on Ainu language and culture and has published widely on these topics, most recently in the form of a detailed Ainu-Japanese dictionary. In short, he is perhaps the most well-known Ainu both inside and outside Japan.

In the book, Kayano has given an honest and moving account of his life and the awakening of his sense of identity and heritage. Born into the Ainu community of Nibutani in 1923, Kayano's early childhood was spent on the banks of the Saru River among "kind, though poor, people" (p. 21). His grandmother, Tekatte, spoke to him in Ainu and entertained him with numerous folktales (*uwepekere*) containing the wisdom of a hunter-gathering people. After entering school Kayano's experiences of poverty and humiliation led to prolonged absences, but since the majority of children were Ainu he did not experience the discrimination that was rife (and still exists) in other schools with few Ainu pupils. Certain early experiences, however, were formative to his sense of identity as an Ainu. Perhaps one of the most important (which I have heard him refer to many times in speeches and lectures) was the arrest of his father, Seitaro, for "poaching" salmon for food. As Kayano points out, while the Ainu depended on salmon as a staple it was *shamo* (im-

migrant Japanese) overfishing that was depleting salmon stocks; as a hunting people the Ainu never took more than they needed. Hokkaido was originally the territory of the Ainu, and the multitude of Ainu place names for every creek and hollow bear ample witness to this. The Japanese occupation of this land, *Ainu Moshir*, was an outright invasion since it was never sold or leased by the Ainu (pp. 59-60). Yet Kayano's father became a criminal in the eyes of the Japanese state merely for feeding his family in the traditional way. Seitaro retained a traditional orientation as a hunter all his life; unable to adapt he rarely worked and lost himself in alcohol. One of the most moving incidents in the book is the scene of three elders, including Kayano's father, discussing how the luckiest would be the one who died first, since those remaining would be able to conduct a proper Ainu funeral and guide him to the other world (pp. 106-108).

Most Ainu of Kayano's generation, however, went out to work in the *shamo* world. After losing his elder brothers to tuberculosis, a disease introduced by the immigrants, Kayano took on the role of breadwinner. After a long struggle against poverty, by the early 1950s Kayano had worked himself up to becoming the boss of a forestry subcontracting team. As he himself admits, in this period "I had tried to discard everything Ainu and even forget that I was Ainu" (p. 99). This extended to a hatred of the scholars who would often visit Nibutani. But after his discovery that his father had sold an important item to a visitor, Kayano suddenly awakened to the need to preserve Ainu traditional culture. This was strengthened by his experiences of travel and work as a "tourist Ainu". What meagre extra money he saved went on the beginnings of a collection of Ainu material culture, and he also began to record oral literature from elders. Encouraged by famous scholars like Chiri Mashiho, himself an Ainu, and Kindaichi Kyosuke, Kayano embarked on his career as an anthropologist that continues to this day. One of his dreams was realized in 1972 with the opening of a museum in Nibutani to house his collection. As a result he also became involved in the political struggle for the restoration of Ainu rights as an indigenous people.

This is the story that Kayano tells. He tells it simply, with a moving sincerity. While there is anger in abundance, anger at both the sufferings inflicted upon his family and at the dispossession of his people, hatred is singularly lacking. Alongside its personal interest, however, the appeal of this book lies also in the insights it gives into the broader picture of Ainu history. Kayano himself is keenly aware of this issue; while wishing to

leave a "monument to the Ainu" he worries that "writing too much would make this into self-aggrandizement, whereas writing too little would not help people trying to comprehend our truth" (p. 157). He has negotiated this conflict neatly. By including the stories of his grandparents and parents, Kayano has provided us with an exquisite miniature of modern Ainu history, of how the Ainu have been dispossessed, marginalised and incorporated into the modern Japanese state as "racially" inferior "former natives" (*Kyudojin*). All the main elements of that history are here: forced labour for the fishing stations in Edo period Hokkaido; the destruction of traditional lifeways as Hokkaido was then colonised as *terra nullius* and its natural resources depleted; forced relocation under the euphemism of "protection"; Japanization in "native schools" and the armed forces; the ravages of imported tuberculosis; the image of the Ainu as a "dying race" propagated by scholars and tourism; and discrimination and poverty in wider settler society. Equally importantly, through the story of Kayano and his family we come to see not just the operation of these powerful historical forces and agents but also their human costs, as individual Ainu struggle against their enforced marginality. Some, like his father, are crushed and seek refuge in alcohol, while others, especially the women, strive to adapt while preserving their dignity.

But Kayano's story is more than just that of simple "ethnic" conflict between an indigenous people and the settlers who take their land. It has underlying subtexts, not always explicit, that deal also with the destruction of rural life by modernisation and the nature of ethnic identity in a modern state. Those seeking the narrow stereotype of nature-loving indigenous peoples battling the exploitation of Mother Earth by rapacious capitalism will be disappointed. Indeed, Kayano's own enthusiastic participation in that exploitation as a woodcutter and forestry boss make such stark distinctions difficult to maintain. One of the values of Kayano's book is that through his individual experience he undermines the rigid categories that have obscured our understanding of the Ainu.

One of these is the perennial image of a "vanishing people" and "dying culture" that scholars resort to in their descriptions of the Ainu (including some irritating comments on the jacket of this book). This is less an "objective" fact than a point of view embedded in relations of knowledge and power. It is a peculiar historical blindness that denies that any "real" or "pure Ainu" are left (I have lost count of the number of times I have been asked such darwinist questions) just because the modern Ainu is as different from his or her forebears as a

salaryman from his great-grandparents who toiled the fields of peasant Japan. Urbanisation, industrialisation, and the institutions of the modern state destroyed the “traditional Japanese” as much as the “traditional Ainu”. Even Kayano himself was moved to collect rural agricultural implements regardless of origin. But the Ainu did not “vanish” or “die out” despite the rigorous assimilation policies of the authorities and the desire of many Ainu themselves to become good Japanese. Local prejudice, grounded in folk attitudes towards bloodlines and nurtured by an official discourse that was overtly social darwinist, ensured that it was difficult to escape categorisation as Ainu as well as perpetuating Ainu poverty. Since the 1960s many Ainu have been seeking to redefine themselves and their identity for the contemporary world. Their struggle draws attention to how “ethnic” identities are not static or tied inexorably to particular cultural, linguistic or “racial” attributes but are narrated (or denied) within historically specific junctures of material and power relations. After all, the modern Japanese state itself succeeded in moulding individual and collective memory into a historical continuity that obscured the cultural discontinuities caused by modernisation and the wholesale importation of western technologies, institutions, foods, clothing and thought. At the same time, new boundaries were drawn that defined “Japaneseness” in terms of the imperial family-state. Locked into an ahistorical past as a “dying race” it is only recently that Ainu leaders have come up with a new cultural and historical narrative of their own—as an “indigenous people”—to legitimise their contemporary existence. Kayano has been a key figure in this redefinition of being Ainu, and his story tells us something about the fluidity and dynamism of ethnic categories. He sees no contradiction, for instance, in the fact that he has at different times in his life both denied and affirmed his origins.

Since many in the English-speaking world come to know of the Ainu and their culture solely through the work of Kayano, perhaps it is also necessary to put the man himself into perspective. Kayano’s role in the Ainu political and cultural movements cannot be underesti-

mated. His prominence and authority, however, have led to criticisms that Ainu culture is now “Kayano culture”. As the Ainu embark on the process of selecting those “portable” aspects of their culture and language to take forward into the 21st century - tools, costume, oral legends, ceremonies— the debate has to be widened to include Ainu from other regions and backgrounds. This is especially important now that official funding will be provided for this task via the Cultural Promotion Law. But many Ainu still doubt the value of such activities. As with powerful leaders in any community, Kayano has detractors as well as admirers among his own people. Such conflicts are not just to do with culture but are also generated by local issues such as the Nibutani dam. A younger generation of Ainu is also emerging with ideas and views that differ from those of Kayano and other elderly leaders. So while this book is one story of the Ainu, it is not the whole story.

Nevertheless, Kyoko and Lili Selden have done the students of modern Ainu and Japanese history a great service by translating this book, and translating it well. Although it is some years since I read the Japanese version (*Ainu no ishibumi*), to the best of my recollection the translation is faithful to the tone and style of the original. Glitches are few (Atsukeshi instead of Akkeshi, for instance), but some of the historical notes in the Glossary could have been more carefully written (was the leader of the fighting in 1457 a mere “Ainu rebel?” [p. 167]). These are minor items that do not detract from the overall value of the book. Given the prevalence of “vanishing Ainu” stereotypes and the relative lack of material on the Ainu in English, I can only hope, along with the author himself, that this book will enjoy a wide readership.

I am grateful to Professor Okuda Osami of Sapporo Gakuin University for these and many other ideas about the transmission of Ainu culture.

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