

A Joint Statement by the Presidents of Three Academic Societies on Ainu Hate Speech

Research findings accumulated over the past 150 years in fields such as biological anthropology, cultural anthropology, archaeology, history, and linguistics have clearly established that the Ainu people are an indigenous group possessing their own distinct culture and society. However, in recent years, we have observed content that may constitute hate speech (unjust discriminatory remarks) in which research findings are misinterpreted or distorted to imply the existence of academic grounds for denying the indigenous status of the Ainu people. As academic societies that have contributed to elucidating the origins and realities of the peoples and cultures of the Japanese archipelago, we cannot overlook this situation.

For example, some claim that because the “Ainu cultural period” in Hokkaido’s archaeological chronology is said to begin in the 13th century, there is no continuity between the bearers of culture prior to this period and the Ainu people, and therefore that the Ainu were not originally present in Hokkaido and cannot be regarded as an indigenous people. However, the term “Ainu cultural period” is an archaeological designation that refers solely to a cultural phase. It denotes the point at which, based on archaeological research, “cultural traditions linked to modern Ainu culture become clearly discernible.” A change in cultural terminology does not imply the cessation of continuity with preceding periods, nor does it indicate a replacement of populations.

Furthermore, while some acknowledge existing research showing that the Ainu people trace their roots to the northern Jōmon populations, they argue that because the Jōmon are also ancestral to the “Wajin” (the non-Ainu majority population of Japan, also called the “Yamato” people), the Ainu cannot be considered indigenous. However, from the current academic perspective, which distinguishes between Wajin society, shaped by substantial genetic and cultural influence from migrants arriving primarily from the continent via the Korean Peninsula after the Yayoi period, and Ainu society, which maintained a distinct culture with relatively little such influence while interacting with northern groups such as those in Sakhalin, the indigenous status and distinctiveness of the Ainu people are clear.

The Ainu people have long inhabited regions centred on the northern areas of the Japanese archipelago as an ethnic group with their own culture, from a time predating

the formation of Japan as a modern nation-state. During the establishment of that nation-state, the Ainu were subjected to domination and discrimination against their will, suffering serious disruption to the transmission of their distinctive culture. Nevertheless, the Ainu people remain an indigenous people who even today continue to inherit and live by their Ainu ethnic identity and unique cultural traditions. Hate speech undermines the present-day lives of the Ainu people, shaped by this history, and negates the principle of coexistence.

It is our hope that research findings contribute to the realisation of a healthy, robust, and secure society in which individuals understand, accept, and respect the diversity of peoples both within and beyond the Japanese archipelago, without such findings being distorted or misused. The three academic societies therefore jointly declare our commitment to disseminating accurate understandings of facts and realities grounded in research findings and to working to correct unjust and discriminatory discourse concerning the Ainu people. At the same time, we recognise that some of the academic insights discussed above are based on past research that was ethically inappropriate. We hereby declare that, while confronting this history and exercising appropriate self-restraint, we shall endeavour to fulfil the social mission of our three societies by rectifying unjust misunderstandings and prejudices towards others and addressing discrimination.

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