

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ Social Science Study Group



February 5th, 2020, 18:30h

Assimilation Policies and Ainu Identity

Questioning Japan's Recognition of the Ainu People as Indigenous

Uwe Makino, Chuo University (Tokyo)

In April 2020, the Japanese government will open the "Symbolic Space for Ethnic Harmony" in Shiraoi (Hokkaido). The "Symbolic Space" will consist of a National Ainu Museum, a National Ethnic Harmony Park, where Ainu culture can be practiced, and a central depot for Ainu remains. The government is expecting one million visitors per year. According to the official reading, Ainu indigenous rights will be implemented here incrementally, supported by the New Ainu Law, which was adopted in April 2019. Against this backdrop, the talk asks whether the recognition of the Ainu is in accordance with an international understanding of the term "indigenous".

The lecture addresses the process of colonization (after 1590) and will give a summary of the treatment of the Ainu in Japanese legal history. Policies of assimilation already began a century prior to the modern Meiji state as is evidenced by the Bakufu guidelines for officials in Hokkaido (1799). The "Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act" of 1899 had the objective of forcing the Ainu into a farming existence, and schooling and welfare policies were additional measures. This law was repealed only a century later, in 1997, with the recognition of the Ainu as a group with a distinct culture and history. In 2007, Japan supported the "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples", and the "New Ainu Law" of April 2019 now addresses the Ainu as "indigenous" for the first time in Japanese legislation. Following this outline, the contribution analyzes the question whether Japan is actually fulfilling its commitments to UNDRIP. Relevant criteria are land, fishing/hunting, and language rights as well as the repatriation of stolen human remains to Ainu communities, among others.

***Uwe Makino** is Professor at the German Department, Faculty of Law at Chuo University (Tokyo). He has worked for a human rights organization before moving to Japan in 1990. He has been publishing on Ainu culture and history for over a decade, but also worked on the Nanjing Massacre and on Holocaust Denial in Japan. In 2016, he spent a sabbatical year at the University of Victoria (BC, Canada).*

About:

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is a forum for scholars conducting research on contemporary Japan. Meetings are held once a month and are open to speakers from all disciplines of the social sciences. The event is open to all. Registration is not necessary but appreciated, via ganseforth@diجتokyo.org.

Venue:

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)
Jōchi Kioizaka Bldg. 2F, 7-1 Kioichō,
Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-0094
Phone: 03-3222-5077

For directions visit diجتokyo.org/access.

