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REVIEW ARTICLE

The *Inaw* of Ishikawa

Ainu Religious Implements in Japanese Shrines and Temples

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IMAISHI Migiwa 今石みぎわ, ed. *Umi o watatta inau: Ainu to Wajin no bunka kōshōshi no kenkyū* 海を渡ったイナウ—アイヌと和人の文化交渉史の研究. Tokyo: Kokuritsu Bunkazai Kikō Tōkyō Bunkazai Kenkyūjo Mukei Bunka Isanbu, 2019. 168 pages.

In 2015, the researcher Imaishi Migiwa discovered a group of Ainu religious implements called <code>inaw</code> イナウ in Shinto shrines in two coastal villages in Ishikawa Prefecture, some thousand kilometers from Hokkaido. Upon close examination, these nine <code>inaw</code> were recognized to have been brought to Honshu by a similar process that brought twenty-four <code>inaw</code> to Engakuji 円覚寺, a Shingon Buddhist temple on the west coast of Aomori Prefecture. These <code>inaw</code> were collected from multiple locations across the islands of Sakhalin and Hokkaido over the period of 1868 to 1888 by Wajin 和人 (non-Ainu Japanese) merchants doing regular business with the Ainu. While this period is known for the seizure of Ainu lands by Japan and Russia and the imposition of Western-style colonialism, the <code>inaw</code> viewed as a group of artifacts paint a very different picture.

Imaishi assembled a team of experts specializing in *inaw*, maritime trade, and Ainu-Wajin interaction, who together published a research report in 2019, *Umi o watatta inau* (IMAISHI 2019). Its contributors describe every aspect of the process that brought these *inaw* to the island of Honshu, including Ainu ritual practices, the religious customs of Wajin merchants on the northern seas, and power

relations between Ainu and Wajin. This review article summarizes the contents of this report to contextualize this important new discovery.

The Shape and Original Function of Inaw

Inaw are wooden branches scraped into curled designs using a delicate process, using methods passed down from father to son, or occasionally to daughter. The earliest close descriptions and illustrations of *inaw* date to 1823 and match examples photographed in the twentieth century, showing that *inaw* tradition was preserved meticulously over the generations (KITAHARA 2014, 144). Because regional styles were purposefully made to differ from one another, the provenance of *inaw* can be determined to a high degree of accuracy by morphological analysis.

The nine Ishikawa *inaw* were originally offered to two Shinto shrines in five pairs, each pair mounted on wooden plaques. One of the pairs is now missing a mate. The *inaw* expert Kitahara Jirōta Mokottunas classifies the nine Ishikawa *inaw* as originating in various places throughout the northern seas. The pair designated A1 originates from the Ainu settlement of Nayoro (now the Russian town of Penzenskoye) on the west coast of Sakhalin. The pair A2 emerged from an undetermined part of Sakhalin, possibly on the east coast. A3 emerged from an inland part of northern Hokkaido, near the present-day city of Asahikawa. A4 is characteristic of the west coast of Hokkaido. Plaque A5, which is missing half its pair, is actually inscribed with the words "Made in Yoichi," which is a settlement northwest of Sapporo, and the morphology of the remaining *inaw* confirms that it was likely made there (KITAHARA 2019, 44). We can, therefore, posit that the *inaw* offered to these two shrines were collected in pairs from completely different parts of the greater Ainu lands.

TABLE 1 shows the seven *inaw* groups described in Imaishi's edited volume. Besides the five pairs in Ishikawa Prefecture (A1–A5) and the group of twenty-seven *inaw* found in Engakuji in Aomori Prefecture (A7), Imaishi's survey includes an *inaw*, A6, which is treated as a sacred relic in a shrine on the eastern coast of Japan in Iwate Prefecture. This *inaw*, which Kitahara traces to eastern Hokkaido, will be treated separately below.

Inaw are general-purpose votive objects offered "at any time when soliciting or thanking spirit powers." They are made from specific trees, especially willow, preferred for its ability to accumulate *ramat* (*mana*, spiritual energy), and are offered to specific spirits around the home, or during specific ceremonies (Munro 1962, 29–30). *Inaw* are gendered, but the markings of gender vary from place to place. In southwest Hokkaido, a flat cut on the top of the branch is considered male while a diagonal cut is female, but in other regions different markings are

DESIGNATION IN IMAISHI (2019) (# OF INAW, TREE GENUS)	PROBABLE ORIGIN	DATE OF	CURRENT LOCATION
A1 (2, willow)	Nayoro, Sakhalin	1887	Wakamiya Hachiman Jinja, Kuroshima, Wajima City, Ishikawa Prefecture
A2 (2, willow)	Sakhalin (east coast?)	1888	Wakamiya Hachiman Jinja
A3 (2, willow)	Inland central Hokkaido	1890	Wakamiya Hachiman Jinja
A4 (2, willow)	West Hokkaido	_	Wakamiya Hachiman Jinja
A5 (1, dogwood)	Yoichi area, Hokkaido	1868	Fujisawa Jinja, Hakusan City, Ishikawa Prefecture
A6 (1)	East Hokkaido	_	Ozaki Jinja, Ofunato City, Iwate Prefecture
A7 (27)	Throughout Ainu lands	1880s?	Engakuji, Fukaura Town, Aomori Prefecture

TABLE 1. Inaw found in Japanese shrines and temples in the twenty-first century.

used. In Sakhalin, local alder and fir trees were used to make female *inaw* and spruce and birch trees to make male *inaw* (KITAHARA 2019, 33, 43).

Initiated men carve *inaw* with hand tools. Sometimes substitutes are made by women with silk or other materials, but wooden *inaw* are the most common by far (KITAHARA 2019, 31). The Polish anthropologist Bronisław Piłsudski witnessed the production of *inaw* for a bear sacrifice ceremony on Sakhalin in the 1890s, which he describes as follows:

Several men... were sitting on the floor carving with curved knives willow sticks, making the so-called *inau*.... Sixty such *inau sapa* ("the head of *inau*") had to be manufactured, and it was on that day that they were completing their production. Tamkin, as a skillful master in all work with knife or axe, was busy with two more complicated *inau* with links, horizontal bars, and shavings falling from them. These two should go onto the tall fork-shaped pole to which the bear before its killing was to be fastened. (Piesudski 1998, 452)

Inaw are often carved down from the top of the stick producing whorls of curled shavings, but of note is the symbolism of central and northeast Hokkaido, which also produced "winged" (*shutu*) *inaw* carved entirely on one side, used to plea for intercession. However, while at least sixteen of the thirty-seven *inaw* donated to shrines and temples can be judged from their morphology to

originate in these areas of Hokkaido, not one of them is winged. All of these inaw are of the standard type for offering, which leads Kitahara to conclude that they were all created as offerings to the god of the sea. Such offerings were traditionally thrown into the sea from specific sacred points (KITAHARA 2019, 47; Munro 1962, 31).

Since inaw did not circulate among the Ainu, the variety of inaw in Wajin temples and shrines could not have been procured from a single source. Furthermore, since there was no practice of giving them to passersby, it could not have been an easy endeavor to find inaw at any given location. Rather, we must conclude that among Wajin sailors from dates inclusive of 1868-1890, there was a trend for collecting inaw when their ships made calls in Ainu lands, and that they must have been familiar enough with Ainu religious customs to know how to obtain specific types of *inaw* in different parts of Ainu lands. What was their intent in doing so?

The Value of Inaw for Wajin Sailors

Inaw groups A1-A5 were found in the merchant ports of Kuroshima 黒島 and Hakusan 白山 on the coast of Ishikawa Prefecture. They are inscribed as being offered by three merchant households and one crew in the second half of the nineteenth century. Several of the plaques also have a stated intent inscribed on them: kaijō anzen 海上安全, meaning "for safety at sea," a common offering for sailors (IMAISHI 2019, 6). As above, plaque A5, which predates the others by some twenty years, does not have any intent inscribed on it but has the curious inscription "Made in Yoichi," evidencing that the donor wished to advertise a distant Hokkaido connection. Together, the five plaques tell a story of exotic, powerful objects being harnessed for their ability to ensure safety.

The twenty-seven inaw at Engakuji in Aomori Prefecture (A7) also have a possible connection to a recorded offering. The *inaw* do not appear on the temple's lists of gifts offered by parishioners, but the temple preserves a nineteenth-century register for goma fire ceremonies, where thin strips of wood called gomagi 護摩木 are burnt in a sacred fire, and it records requests "for safety at sea" by a sailor from Kuroshima on multiple occasions from 1884 to 1889 (IMAISHI 2019, 12). This was not the only merchant visiting at this time, but the records are suggestive to this reviewer. In my experience, gomagi are arranged in piles at the time of offering and not necessarily burnt during the same ceremony where they are offered. If *inaw* were presented at a *goma* 護摩 ceremony they would not fit in the piles and it is conceivable that they might be set apart and later preserved. However, since Imaishi found no record of these inaw in Engakuji's historical archives, we do not have conclusive evidence that the inaw

found at Engakuji are connected with these *goma* ceremonies. I have included the plaque inscriptions and the *goma* ceremony records in TABLE 2.

As above, an additional *inaw*, A6, was already linked to a Shinto shrine before Imaishi Migiwa's research began in 2015. This *inaw* is treated as a sacred treasure of Ozaki Jinja 尾崎神社 in Ōfunato 大船渡 City, located on the coast of Iwate Prefecture, and is attested in written documents dating to the beginning of the twentieth century. (The shrine's earlier records were lost in a fire.) A tradition dating to that time presumes that the *inaw* was a link between the shrine and the lost Ainu heritage of northern Honshu, but since Kitahara's morphological analysis shows an origin in East Hokkaido and Imaishi's comparative survey shows that collecting *inaw* was a fad among sailors in the second half of the nineteenth century, Imaishi concludes that Ozaki Jinja's *inaw* was an offering left by a sailor around that time (IMAISHI 2019, 16). In any case, the treatment of the *inaw* as "sacred treasure" shows that, as with the *inaw* on the western coast, the recipients at the shrine believed *inaw* to be powerful objects in their own right.

A final entry in TABLE 2 refers to a probable *inaw* which no researcher was able to see for themselves. When Imaishi returned to Kuroshima for a close analysis of its *inaw* in 2017, the objects became a topic of interest in town and the heir to another mid-nineteenth-century merchant family, the Taruya 樽屋, remarked that he used to have a similar object in his household. He told a local researcher that the object had been hung from the central column of his family home alongside a traditional sailors' votive object called *funadama* フナダマ, which his parents warned him was watching his every move. If this was indeed an *inaw* it may have been obtained in Sakhalin where the Taruya are recorded to have taken their ships in the 1870s and 1880s. The Taruya *inaw* was reportedly discarded after the family home was damaged in the 2007 Chūetsu earthquake, and the Taruya heir himself passed away a few months after he was interviewed (IMAISHI 2019, 3).

Written and oral evidence shows that *inaw* were not simply treated as exotic souvenirs but were associated with a real belief in ritual power by five known merchant households, countless anonymous sailors, and shrine priests. However, this act of donation makes it obvious that merchants were bringing *inaw* into their own cultural sphere, as Ainu as a rule did not offer *inaw* to Wajin places of worship. Additionally, one of the pairs of *inaw* in Kuroshima is actually mounted backwards, with the back part of the *inaw* facing front, which shows that the people making the donation were unfamiliar with Ainu usage of the objects. But if the Wajin merchants did not see the *inaw* as the Ainu did, why did they find them valuable?

The consensus reached by Imaishi and her group is that these *inaw* were sought after owing to their similarity to *gohei* 御幣 paper streamers used to represent the kami Konpira, which had become an object of worship for sailors.

DESIGNATION	DONOR	PURPOSE/ USE	ASSOCIATED VESSEL	DATE
A1	Shibata Tokusanrō	For safety at sea	New ship Tenshamaru	1887
A2	crew of Tenshamaru	For safety at sea	New ship Tenshamaru	1888
A ₃	Shichino Hakusae- mon	For safety at sea	Kōtokumaru	1890
A ₄	— (no inscription)	_	_	_
A ₅	Katoya Jinbei	— ("Made in Yoichi")	Itokumaru	1868
A6	_	Treated as treasure	_	_
A ₇	Hamaoka Kiemon*	For safety at sea*	Senjumaru*	1880s*
n/a	Taruya (not donated)	Treated as treasure	_	_

TABLE 2. Wajin uses of inaw according to written and oral evidence. * = uncertain connection derived from Engakuji *goma* records.

The visual resemblance between *inaw* and *gohei*, although superficial, is often remarked on in Wajin sources, and in fact the A7 group of inaw were found in a bin marked with a fairly recent laminated label reading "Ainu gohei." However, offering gohei (or inaw) to shrines and temples was not a universal practice, so we need a precise historical context to understand why these *inaw* were offered.

Luckily, the exact occasion for the offerings A1 through A3 can be precisely identified through local records. In 1885, the Japanese government prohibited the construction of traditional one-masted coastal traders (bezaisen 弁才船) in order to spur the adoption of Western sailing technologies. A loophole in the law, however, encouraged the construction of small "half-breed ships" (ainokobune 合いの子船), which mixed Western and Japanese elements to obey the letter of the law while minimizing costs. Wakamiya Hachiman Jinja 若宮八幡神社, to which the inaw plaque A3 was offered in 1890, contains a careful drawing of the Kōtokumaru 高徳丸, the donor's ship. The drawing shows that she has been rebuilt with a jib and a spanker, allowing her greater navigability in rough northern waters, but retains a single mast and small size (Toma 2019, 104, 111).

The records of the Kadomike 角海 family, owners of the Tenshamaru 天社丸 for which A1 and A2 were donated, show that in 1886, the Tenshamaru was rebuilt along similar lines. The term "new ship" on plaques A1 and A2 therefore indicates that the Kadomike have also made a significant investment in a remodeled ship. Hori Misato's (2019) research confirms that both ships had formerly made the trip to Sakhalin as one-masted coastal traders and that the *inaw* were likely obtained at that time. Behind the *inaw* offerings A1 to A3, then, are Kuroshima merchants taking economic risks on new, Western-influenced models of ships to ensure the safety and success of future trips. The *inaw*, all picked up on recent journeys, likely serve the purpose of seeking Konpira's blessing for a good outcome.

The other shrines and temples which received *inaw* offerings are also devoted at least in part to Konpira. Fujisaki Jinja 藤崎神社 has housed a Konpira hall since 1777, commissioned by Katoya Kyūbei 加登屋久兵衛, father of Katoya Jinbei 加登屋巷平, who donated the oldest recorded *inaw* offering (A5). Inside this Konpira hall there are many offerings of three-pointed swords mounted on plaques. Three-pointed swords are symbolic of the Shingon Buddhist protector Fudō Myōō 不動明王, who is seen as Konpira's original Buddha-essence (*honji* 本地), and in the mid-nineteenth century these swords were sold near the head Konpira temple of Kotohiragū in Shikoku (Toma 2019, 112; Thal 2005, 35).

Engakuji's Konpira hall, built in 1836, is still standing today and houses many votive images of ships donated by sailors on the northern trade route. Here, Konpira is more explicitly worshiped as a *daigongen* 大権現, the emanation of the Buddha-essence of Fudō Myōō. The *goma* ceremonies available here were also conducted near Kotohiragū. Ozaki Jinja, which houses the "sacred treasure" *inaw* A6, enshrines several kami alongside Konpira, but notably, it also received many offerings of three-pointed swords from the 1840s to the 1920s. Additionally, a tree branch resembling crab claws was offered to the shrine during that period and hung on a plaque which identifies it as coming from Sakhalin (Toma 2019, 112).

Up until 1900, merchant ships sailing between Ishikawa and Ainu lands had a custom of making their own votive scraped sticks, called *oki no takuhi gongen* 隱岐の焼火権現, lighting them on fire, and throwing them into the open sea as an offering, quite akin to how Ainu treated the *inaw* offered to the sea god. There is even a possible mention of this custom in the *Man'yōshu* as early as 700 CE. It is unclear whether any of the sailors that collected and offered *inaw* actively participated in this custom, but it provides additional evidence that scraped sticks would not have been unfamiliar to Wajin sailors as votive objects (IMAISHI 2019, 130–132).

Inaw as a Point of Religious Exchange

Having addressed the question of why these *inaw* were offered to shrines and temples, we must now ask why Ainu gave these *inaw* to Wajin. Here, again,

understudied historical records contribute to our understanding. The earliest example of an inaw being presented by an Ainu to a Wajin is in 1810, when a Sakhalin Ainu elder offered an inaw to the surveyor Matsuda Denjūrō 松田 伝十郎 as a gesture of worshipful respect after he helped save a ship from being wrecked in a storm (KITAHARA 2019, 47).

In the early modern period, the Matsumae clan were granted a monopoly on Ainu trade and issued orders to maintain distinctions in clothes, cultural practices, and even prohibitions on agriculture. While Wajin knew the forms and religious uses of inaw at this time, we have no records of them actually using one themselves, as it would not accord with the mandates of cultural and technological segregation. We do have records of Ainu and Wajin praying side by side, with inaw and liquor offerings respectively, for safety at sea. Wajin living in Ainu lands also used the phrase "inaw pass" (inao tōge 稲尾峠) for mountain passes where Ainu offered inaw (TANIMOTO 2019, 87, 95, 96).

In 1855, the central government in Edo took control of Ainu governance from the Matsumae clan. The explorer Matsuura Takeshirō 松浦武四郎 (1818–1888), authorized by the shogunate to explore Ainu lands, envisioned a new realm of Japan where Ainu culture would join with Wajin culture, and made use of inaw to that end. He began offering inaw during his Sakhalin tour in 1856, immediately after the seizure of Ainu lands by the shogunate. Visiting the Ainu settlement of Oha-kotan, he offered inaw at the Wajin shrine Kashima Jinja 鹿島神社, while at two other settlements, Cikap-e-oro-ush-i-nay and Tosso, he threw inaw into the ocean following Ainu custom. He explained that this was one way of incorporating formerly segregated Ainu religious practices into "Great Japan," and during this tour he relied on Ainu guides and slept in Ainu homes, anticipating an integrated nation (IMAISHI 2019, 128-129).

TANIMOTO Akihisa's (2019, 89) contribution to the research report suggests that Matsuura joined a rapid thawing of religious segregation that occurred during the 1850s and 1860s. A record of a festival at the Yoichi contract fishery in 1864 shows that Ainu there were offering *inaw* to the fishery's shipping agent. In 1868, the same year when Katoya Jinbei offered an inaw "made in Yoichi" to his ancestral shrine in Ishikawa, Wajin offerings at a festival in Yoichi were mixed together with the Ainu practice of kamuynomi (ritualized libations before the inaw) in a single event. These records reflect the situation at the end of shogunate rule.

Following the 1868 Meiji Restoration, Ainu lands were declared terra nullius, and the relations between Ainu and their imperial neighbors became explicitly colonial. The region that had been known for centuries as Ainu lands (Ainu mosir) was divided between a Japanese-controlled territory, named Hokkaido and controlled by a Colonization Commission (Kaitakushi 開拓使), and a Russian penal colony called Sakhalin. The Colonization Commission quickly set about outlawing traditional Ainu use of natural resources and banning Ainu cultural practices such as tattooing and piercing, as well as obstructing their economic activities to the extent that they were frequently destitute (SIDDLE 1996, 52–56, 61–63).

Although Japan ceded its claims to Sakhalin in 1875 and Wajin residents evacuated the island, it remained deeply impacted by the Japanese presence. Japan obtained trade rights in the region, and Wajin merchant boats made regular trips to Sakhalin and even to the mouth of the Amur River in Siberia. Several thousand Ainu remained on Sakhalin, banned from entering Hokkaido and made to reorder their lives as Russian citizens. Historical documents show that although Sakhalin was not Japanese territory at this time, some Sakhalin Ainu were envious of the privileges and luxuries enjoyed by Japanese merchants and changed their own customs to more closely imitate the Japanese (IMAISHI 2019, 19).

We have a hint from the written records of the 1860s that Ishikawa merchants may have learned about the religious power of *inaw* from Wajin-Ainu interactions at specific contract fisheries, but the surviving artifacts show that this turned into a widespread custom among sailors of requesting and obtaining *inaw* when they made landings in Ainu lands, well into the 1880s when Japan had imported American experts to initiate a settler colonialist program in Hokkaido. This is a type of interaction which sparks the imagination. Even if it was a simple sale, it would be the sale of a religious item imbued with power that the Ainu recognized as originating in their own ritual practices, at a time when these ritual practices were being denigrated and outlawed. IMAISHI (2019, 21) concludes that sailors sought after these *inaw* specifically for their religious value, since "they are neither valued as curios nor do they have any particular practical use."

Why were the *inaw* consistently collected and offered in pairs? This is a fascinating question because it broadens the possible sphere of exchange even further. Kitahara indicates that the Uilta people, who lived alongside the Ainu on the island of Sakhalin, had their own version of *inaw* called *illau*, which was used principally by sailors. At the time of Natori Takemitsu's 名取武光 1941 visit, the Uilta would attach two *illau* to the bows of ships, representing male and female as distinguished by size and markings. In stormy weather when the sailors feared for their lives, the *illau* were detached and thrown into the sea as an offering. This more closely resembles the Wajin artifacts than do the Ainu sea practices, which generally involved throwing a single *inaw* into the ocean from the shoreline, although in some areas there are records of *inaw* being attached to Ainu vessels (NATORI 1947, 27; KITAHARA 2019, 29–31; IMAISHI and KITAHARA 2015, 92).

There is no physical evidence that Wajin sailors ever collected *illau*, but nowhere else in the known literature do we see pairs of scraped branches being carried onto a ship and kept there. Did Wajin learn about this practice from a

Uilta informant, and then decide for themselves that *inaw* made by Ainu were just as powerful? Conversely, could the Uilta of 1941 have picked up this practice from Wajin? Were Wajin sailors throughout Ainu lands tying pairs of inaw or illau to the fronts of their vessels, advertising a hybrid religious construction every time they stopped at a port? We cannot answer these questions from what is currently known, but already the possibilities of this maritime world seem very different from the settler colonial discourse that associated Ainu and Uilta cultural practices with shame and othering during this time period.

Conclusion

In 1887, Tsuboi Shōgorō 坪井正五郎, an anthropologist at Tokyo Imperial University, claimed that the Ainu tradition of inaw was introduced by Wajin, offering examples of scraped wood from around Japan and giving the dubious etymology that derived inaw from the Japanese inaho ("rice ear") (IMAISHI 2019, 122). Tsuboi was not the first to make this claim, as Matsuura Takeshirō had a similar theory, and the box of the "sacred treasure" A6 also reads inaho. Other intellectuals responded to Tsuboi by claiming that the Ainu brought the practice to the Wajin, and the folklorist Yanagita Kunio 柳田國男 (1875-1962) concluded that the two practices are unrelated and their similarities are coincidental, although there is more overlap than he suggested (IMAISHI and KITAHARA 2015, 50–87).

Imaishi Migiwa's research report tells a very different story about Ainu-Wajin relations. Rather than a question of whose culture is more ancient or more primitive, Imaishi and her group discover within the provenance of modern inaw a hidden story of friendly exchange between Wajin and Ainu and an apparent Wajin belief in the power of Ainu objects unrecorded in the extensive literature. If Tsuboi Shōgorō had been interested in these questions, he would have had plenty of opportunity to interview living sailors and ask them what compelled them to collect inaw and what sort of interactions they had with Ainu. It is regretful that cultural anthropology was not attuned to these questions at that time.

The material evidence, however, is able to resurrect quite a bit of information about these relations. We can identify some of the specific Ainu communities that produced these inaw and some of the specific Wajin merchants who obtained them. We also know the exact circumstances under which six of them were offered, along with the larger socioeconomic context. From this information we can draw inferences and make connections to the religious history of Japan. Japanese religious history continues to have major gaps regarding this kind of popular exchange, but the researchers in Imaishi's volume have done much to fill them.

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