

# Cultural Identity of Ainu In Shizukana Daichi Written By Ikezawa Natsuki

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## **Abstract**

Ainu is one of Japanese indigenous tribe which lived in an area of Hokkaido that was colonized internally by Japanese people (*Wajin*) in Edo period. This history can be found in *Shizukana Daichi* (2007), a novel by Ikezawa Natsuki. The novel tells the story of Saburo and Shiro Munekata, sons of Tokushima Samurai, who forced to immigrate to Hokkaido in early Meiji to settle and exploiting its natural resource. They made a relationship with Ainu while other Japanese preferred to reject them. By using Hall's concept related to cultural identity, articulation, and positioning, this paper aims to show how the structured narrative builds the cultural identity of Ainu in this novel.

**Keywords:** Shizukana Daichi, Ainu, Cultural identity, Articulating, Positioning

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Ainu is one of the Japanese indigenous tribes who lived in Hokkaido, the Northern part of Japan, and the Kuril Islands, Shakalin, Kamchatka, which included in the Russian Territory [1]. Onishi [2] said that the ancestors of the Ainu were known to dwell in Hokkaido since the Jomon period (third century BC – seven-century AD). Ainu people were commonly hunting and collecting food in the mountains for their livelihood and were selling and buying with a barter system. The word of Ainu was taken from Ainu language, which means “Human“ that is related to the Kamuy (神) or deity of God. In the Ainu belief, they assumed that every object, whether living things or non-living things, have a spirit of God. Therefore, the Ainu lived in harmony and closed to nature, and They believed the elements of life, such as water, fire, snow, and the animal. It likes bear and fox, as well as the tools that we usually use in daily life, cannot be separated from human life so that for the Ainu, every object in the world has the name of God.

Recently, the condition of Ainu, as well as other tribes, are still struggling to face discrimination from the majority of Japanese society. Htun [1] stated that "The Ainu people still face a long struggle to become part of the everyday awareness of the Japanese public". According to Howel [3] Ainu population is still concentrated in Hokkaido, especially in the Hidaka and Iburi regions in the Eastern part of Hokkaido's island. However, their culture has increasingly vanished due to the pressure of assimilation carried out by the Japanese government. Their standard of living and educational level is lower than most Japanese people. This condition is a result of the discrimination they have been faced in their offices and economic relations.

## DISCUSSION

### The Ainu's Identity in Japanese Literature

In Japanese literature, several novels portray about Ainu's identity. One of them is *Shizukana Daichi*, a novel written by Ikezawa Natsuki that was published for the first time in 2007 [4]. Ikezawa Natsuki is one of the authors who have special attention to articulate the Ainu's identity through his perspective as a Japanese. He was born in Hokkaido in 1945. Hence, He had kept in touch emotionally to Hokkaido and got along with colonial events that occurred in that region.

*Shizukana Daichi* tells the story about historical events regarding the interactions between Ainu as indigenous people dwelled in Hokkaido with Japanese (Wajin) who came to settle and to occupy Hokkaido land in Meiji period (1868-1912). The interaction between them in this novel is represented by the character of Munakata Saburo and his younger brother, Munakata Shiro, the sons of a samurai family from Sumoto, Awaji Island. After the Meiji Restoration (1868), this family, along with a huge group of Japanese, moved to Shizunai of Hidaka region, Hokkaido. Among the Japanese who came to Hokkaido, only the Munakata family wanted to interact with Ainu's people, while the other Japanese reluctant to keep in touch with them. Saburo and Shiro made a friend with Oshiankuru and other Ainu's people and grew together and tried to understand each other's culture. After they grew up, Saburo, who succeeded in agricultural and farming technology from America, cooperated with Oshiankuru to open agricultural land and horse farm by employing many Ainu people who were considered more entitled to Hokkaido land which was recognized as Ainu land. However, a good relationship between the two of Munakatas and Ainu people made the Japanese people (Wajin) became the envy and dislike their relation. In the end, they tried to destroy the farm that Saburo built by burning it. *Shizukana Daichi* try to show Ainu cultural identities, such as Yukara (Ainu traditional songs), Iomonte ceremonies (ceremonies that send spirits to the 'God' world), and Kamui (God) entities which become the arena of negotiations between the characters of Japanese representative and the characters of Ainu. Furthermore, through the analysis of *Shizukana Daichi*, I assume that I can reveal how the cultural identity of Ainu, which presents through the *positioning* and articulation of the characters in the novel.

### The Concept of Cultural Identity

Identity is one of the issues that often present in many culture products, like movies and literary texts. Identity is not static, because identity as 'production' is never complete; it is always in a process and is constructed in a representation [5]. This process is called as a cultural identity,' which consists of two different ways of thinking relates to the process of *being and becoming*. The process of *being* as a concept of cultural identity that seeks the similarity of collective identities, such as historical and ancestral similarities that are universal and refers to unchanging identities. While the concept of *becoming* emphasizes identity that is unstable and always in the process of *becoming*, not only seeks about similarities but also 'differences' that determine identity as something unique.

The concept of *becoming* like a second term of cultural identity can happen because of articulation and position that always continues to process through representations. Hall said that the articulation has a double meaning, and its process will occur if there are collective interests related to social, political, economic, and natural conditions. Furthermore, this interest finally will present a *positioning* toward a person or society through the process of articulation in many representations adjusted with a group of interests as well as articulation and position of the Ainu's cultural identity in *Shizukana Daichi*.

## Cultural Identity of Ainu in *Shizukana Daichi*

*Shizukana Daichi* tells a story of Saburo Munakata and Shiro Munakata, the two siblings of the samurai family in Tokushima who came and settled in Shizunai, an area in Hokkaido. The story is presented by one of the Japanese characters, namely Yura, the daughter of Shiro Munakata, who retells the story of the interaction between Saburo Munakata and Shiro Munakata with Ainu people based on his father's story and his childhood memories. This novel begins the story about the arrival of samurai and their family from Tokushima, in Awaji Island to Shizunai in Hokkaido, which at that time still known as Ezo land and was not recognized yet as part of Japanese territory.

Then Saburo asked his father, "Is Ezochi Japan? "Yes, it is," Said his father. (This story is based on Yura's father's information). "That's just it", his father said. "Ezochi was not Japan at that time. No daimyo and no farmers were working there to work on a rice field. The temperature was too cool there so that we could not produce rice there." [6].

Based on the quotation above, it shows that the people who dwelled in Ezochi had a different identity from Japanese people. The cultural identity of Ainu seems formed by traces of Japanese arrival history, which at that time was known as *Wajin*. The Japanese people of Matsumae Clan came to Hokkaido to establish trade cooperation with Ainu. At that time, Hokkaido named Ezochi, which meant 'Ainu Land' and officially was not included yet in Japan's territory. Besides, the arrival of the Matsumae Clan to Hokkaido is also a form of implementation of the Tokugawa government policy to stem the threat from the Russians who tried to expand their power through the imposition of Ezochi.

The position of Hokkaido is a border region between Japan and Russia, which had significant interests there, and Hokkaido became an area of their contestation. So that for winning the contestation, Japan needed to *positioning* the identity of Ainu through representation as a process of articulation, which was to be constructed by the Japanese perspective based on geopolitical interests. Hokkaido, as a land of Ainu, is located between those countries. It makes Ainu as an "object" among their interests, which was Japanese as "self" and Russia as "other", while the Ainu position is the lowest hierarchical level. The following quote below can be seen as a representation of Ainu's identity through the Japanese perspective.

For the first time, I thought they were big-black face people. Half of his body seemed naked. Among the people on the boat, there was a noise running around. I heard they said, "*Dojin ... Dojin.*" The two people on the round wooden boat had their hair left long and not tied up and all over their faces filled with beards. Because of that, their faces looked big and black [6].

The identity of Ainu was represented as a *Dojin*. It refers to people who were regarded as primitive tribes and barbarian. The representation of their identity, which was articulated by the Japanese collectively, seemed to be a permissive reason to make Hokkaido as a land of Ainu became a Japan territory. The Japanese settlers controlled the land and carried out the policy, namely *Kaitaku* (開拓), which implemented by the Meiji government to open and to develop agriculture and farming in Hokkaido [6]. In this novel, Saburo Munakata, the main character, became a pioneer in developing the land program in Hokkaido after he studied with the experts who came from America for supporting agriculture development. During the Meiji government, the land was owned by the Ainu before the Japanese controlled it. Since

that time, Ainu people began to lose their rights to manage their land, and this event was called as internal colonization. As a result, they lived in fear and lack of food, as felt by Oshiankuru, an Ainu character who finally changed his name into Japanese name Akiyama Goro [6].

Besides, Japanese people also made an effort to strengthen their position through a strategy of eliminating the 'identity' of Ainu by labeling Ainu as inferior tribes regularly, like in *Shizukana Daichi*, which portraying the Ainu people who always became a loser when they fought with *Wajin* [6]. Ainu became a minority of Japanese indigenous people who lived in Japan, but the Japanese government had not recognized their existence until 2008 [7]. The impact of this *positioning* produced discrimination acts from the Japanese to Ainu people, even as a resistance, the Ainu tended to hide its identity, like Oshiankuru as Ainu people who also negotiate with his identity by changing his Ainu name into Akiyama Goro as a Japanese name.

The eliminating of Ainu identity continued to be carried out by Japan as a strategic object to prevent the spread of Russian influence. This policy was carried out by the Meiji government (1869-1912) through an assimilation process by formalizing Japan's territory and fusing Ainu people as Japanese [8], so that many Japanese considered Ainu people already vanished in the Hokkaido region. The process of elimination of Ainu's identities also can be seen in this novel, like in the quotation below.

You know about the ban which regarding the burning of the deceased's house, the woman who was tattooed, and also the men who wear earrings [4].

The ceremony of burning the deceased's house became an Ainu tradition for a long time ago. In Ainu's peoples' belief, for those who died, it is not only the spirit needs to be delivered to the God realm, but also all the daily equipment, such as household furniture and clothing. His former home is also needed for his spirit towards the God realm. Besides, the Meiji government also prohibited women from decorating their mouths with tattoos and men wearing earrings.

In Ainu's culture, when an adult woman is making a tattoo in her mouth, it was a symbol that the woman was ready to get married. This novel shows that the Meiji government wanted to erase this culture through the affirmation of Ekarian as an Ainu woman character who refused to decorate her mouth by tattoo [4]. Ekarian also changed her name into Yukino, a name which showed the Japanese identity for a reason to be able to marry with Saburo Munakata. It seems that *positioning* toward Ainu by Japanese through kinds of representation presented in this novel is an articulation process that was adjusted with Japanese political interests in Hokkaido.

## CONCLUSION

In analyzing *Shizukana Dichi's* novel by using Hall's concept of cultural identity shows that the identity in this novel is not static. Through the articulation of Japanese characters, it seems that there are *positioning* to Ainu's stereotypical identities by labeling Ainu's identities into some of the representations, such as *Dojin* (primitive people) that were attached to the Ainu collectively and constantly was successfully constructed the Ainu's identity. The presence of Japan as a colonial nation that controlled Hokkaido as the land of Ainu, played a role in shaping the identity of the Ainu tribe, which has continued to process. The identity, as said by Hall as 'production' which is never complete, will always be in the process and constructed through various representations. The identity process known as a 'cultural identity' manifests based on two processes, namely *being* and *becoming*. The process of *being*

a concept of cultural identity seeks a common collective identity, such as historical and ancestral similarities that are universal and refer to unchanging identities. Regarding the Ainu identity, the process of *being* can refer to the similarity of identity as an Ainu who lives in Hokkaido with his identity attributes. That attribute can lead to the similarity of ancestors, such as the Ainu people who are depicted with thick beards and Ainu women who made tattoo around their mouths. Yet, identity can also be formed through the process of *becoming*, which emphasizes differences. The Ekarian figure as an Ainu woman who refuses to decorate her mouth with a tattoo is a form of *becoming* an identity that is different identity and unstable.

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