THE ARTICULATION OF AINU IDENTITY THROUGH WOMEN’S ACTIVITIES IN MENOKO MOSMOS ASSOCIATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the ways of Ainu women in the community articulating their identity as resistance from discrimination by the Japanese ethnic majority. One of the Ainu women’s communities is the Association of Menoko Mosmos which was recently established in 2017. This qualitative research is conducted to analyze the process of articulation through the activities organized by Ainu women who are involved in the Ainu Women’s Association of Menoko Mosmos. I focus on viewing the activities of Ainu women in order to understand how the Ainu women articulate their identity in this community and how their roles as women in revitalizing and promoting the Ainu culture which is considered endangered. The results of this research reveal that the Ainu women attempt to exist in the community of Menoko Mosmos Association as a resistance form in facing discrimination. The Ainu women who are involved have found a way to express their identity by engaging in cultural practices in particular related to traditionally domestic sphere activities, such as the events and workshops of Ainu food. These activities are carried out by Ainu women as a form of articulation that emphasizes their identity and positioning as Ainu women in Japanese society.

KEYWORDS: Menoko Mosmos, Ainu women, Gender roles, Articulation

INTRODUCTION

Ainu is one of the minority indigenous people in Japan who historically lived in Hokkaido and the Northern part of Honshu as Japan’s main island. They also can be found in several areas which part of Russian territory that encompassed Sakhalin (Karafuto in Japanese), the Kuril Islands or Chishima, and the Southern part of Kamchatka (Okada, 2012; Rahwati, 2021). Ainu became part of Japan (Siddle, 2008) because of the internal colonialization by the Japanese or Wajin (refer to a statement of Uzawa, 2018) began with the arrival of the Matsumae clan at Hokkaido to establish a trading contract with Ainu in the Edo period (1603-1868). In the beginning, the trading between Ainu and the Japanese was fair. Ainu needed Japanese trade goods, as like as rice, tobacco, and sake (rice wine) while the Japanese looking for salmon, furs, and other natural products from Ainu who practices fishing and hunting as its subsistence. In order to get big
After Matsumae, the Japanese invasion in Hokkaido was continued by Meiji Government (1868-1912) which enacted several policies. The development of Hokkaido land, namely Kaitaku and cultural assimilation in order to Japanize the Ainu were two of the policies that made the Ainu people suffer. For the implementation of the Kaitaku program, the traditional Ainu lands were taken, fishing and hunting activities as their subsistence were prohibited and they were forced by the Japanese government to do farming or work as poorly-paid laborers at factories and mines. Meanwhile, to enforce cultural assimilation, teaching at school was conducted in the Japanese language and Ainu people were encouraged to learn it. They also were not allowed to use their language in daily life and the practice of Ainu traditional culture, such as men wearing earing and women getting tattooed was banned. (Okada, 2021; Watson, 2010). As a result of being forcefully assimilated, the Ainu language and its traditional culture were almost vanished, so that the Ainu known as a “dying race” (Watson, et al, 2014). In addition, assimilation also caused the emergence of the inherent stereotype of Ainu people as primitive and barbarian which caused systemic discrimination to them.

Although Ainu was officially recognized by the Japanese government as indigenous people in 2008 (Seaton, 2017), however their struggle to release from discrimination is not over yet. They still face the social stigma and stereotypes from another majority of Japanese ethnic, particularly for Ainu women who were confronted by double discrimination based on their ethnicity and gender. In other words, they are not only discriminated against by the other Japanese ethnic majority, but also by Ainu men themselves. According to this situation, Tahara (2018) as an Ainu women activist also mentions that ethnic minority status and gender combine to emerge special problems that Ainu women like her come to acknowledge as double discrimination. Ainu women have discrimination experienced throughout the history of Japanese colonialization. Tahara (2018) said that the Ainu women have been targeted for men’s sexual desire. While the Ainu men were forced to work under threats, the Ainu women were exposed to sexual violence by Japanese merchants who ran the fisheries in Hokkaido. After being raped, some of them committed suicide, and others were infected with a venereal disease such as syphilis by Japanese men. The infected Ainu women were finally abandoned by the Japanese men without food or medicine. Even now, Ainu women also still have to face challenge the discrimination and poverty, lack of access to education, low living standards, and get unstable incomes is still continue to the day (Tahara, 2018; Takayanagi & Shimamura, 2013).

Nevertheless, while the oppression from the majority of Japanese ethnic that they have to face in their daily life, some Ainu women strive to resist the double discrimination. In order to face this condition, they considered attending the meetings, talking to each other, and sharing their bitter experiences regarding discrimination. Some Ainu women are involved in kind of activities by playing their roles as women actively in a community such as Menoko Mosmos, an indigenous Ainu women’s Association. Menoko Mosmos which means ‘Women’ and ‘Awaken’ in the Ainu language has the aim of breaking away from complex discrimination by empowering Ainu women in various activities. Based on the official Facebook of Menoko Mosmos, this community which was established in 2017 has contributed significantly to revitalizing and promoting Ainu culture.
Several events have been organized by Menoko Mosmos Association, for instance, the events of the Ainu food festival particularly, the Ainu folktale story show, dances, and music performance (Iwasaki, 2018; Sunuwar, 2019).

By participating actively in various events in this community, I assume that Ainu women are trying to articulate their identity and to show their resistance to survive from discrimination of majority Japanese society. Hall (1986b, as cited in Slack, 1996) defines articulation as the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements in certain through representation. Similar to Hall, Rodman (2017) states that articulation can be formed from the unity of two different elements which connected through specific linkage and under certain conditions. In addition, articulation can happen across any or all forms of cultural text and practice. Hall (2013) also mentions that articulation is the production of identity which has double meaning relating to the process of identity construction and positioning. However, I prefer to use the term of articulating as the reproduction of identity as Watson (2010) mentioned before in his article discussing place and the articulation of Ainu identity in Tokyo. I think the argument of Watson is acceptable because as also Hall (2013) states that identity is never-ending and continues to process through the articulations made by a person or community for particular interests.

According to the study of articulation, Watson (2010) argues that articulation is the way a person or group negotiates to strengthen political identity and cultural awareness. Watson conducted his research regarding the articulation of Ainu identity in and around Tokyo by examining three sites of urban social interaction which are Rera Cise, an Ainu restaurant, Ainu Cultural Exchange, and the Kanto region it is self where a kind of Ainu events, performances, and ceremonies are held throughout the year. According to his research, Watson suggested that Ainu as an indigenous people can emplace themselves in cities like Tokyo and negotiate attachment individually and collectively to their identity and to their culture. Unfortunately, in his study, Watson did not discuss specifics about how Ainu women articulate their identity as a strategy for facing double discrimination because of ethnicity and gender. I think it is important to discuss this topic in order to understand how Ainu women articulate their identity as a way to resist discrimination. What kind of activities which is related to their roles as women in expressing their identity and how are their roles in reviving the Ainu culture which is almost vanished. This paper examines the articulation of Ainu women’s identity by reviewing their activities in an Ainu women’s community. As a study case, I choose the Ainu women’s Association of Menoko Mosmos as a community that provides for Ainu women to express their culture and identity. I attempt to show how the Ainu women involved in Menoko Mosmos articulate their identity and how their roles as women in revitalizing and promoting the traditional culture of Ainu which is almost extinct due to cultural assimilizing policy.

This qualitative study uses articulation as a theoretical framework to analyze the activities of Ainu women in the Menoko Mosmos Association-, and requires some steps of the process as follows. First, I describe a brief historical background of Ainu communities by focusing on the community of Ainu Women’s Menoko Mosmos Association and their activities organized by this community. Furthermore, I continue to explain how the Ainu identity is articulated through those activities-, and to answer this question, I am paying particular attention to the concept of kamuy which mean “gods or spirits” in the Ainu language as a basic guideline for Ainu people in all aspects of life, including in classifying of work based on gender. After that, I attempt to explain
the connection between the concept of *kamuy* with the activities of Ainu women in *Menoko Mosmos*.

**THE ARTICULATION OF AINU IDENTITY THROUGH THE WOMEN’S ACTIVITIES IN MENOKO MOSMOS**

The result of cultural assimilation policies and discrimination experienced by the Ainu people for a long time as I mentioned before, made it difficult for them to maintain their identities such as traditions, culture, language, and ritual beliefs. The generation of Ainu people is unfamiliar with their own culture due to discrimination and the inherent stereotype of Ainu as primitive and uncivilized. Okada (2012) said that some Ainu people prefer to hide their identity in daily life to avoid discrimination and feel ashamed of their cultural heritage, so that, they are not interested at all. Therefore, it is no wonder (Shinoda, 2018) that some Japanese politicians even said that the “Ainu people do not exist anymore” or “it is doubtful that the Ainu are indigenous”. Shinoda (2018) said that it is certain that they tend to ignore their own culture because they have been suffered from social and economic discrimination for a long time. In particular for Ainu women which Tahara (2018) mentioned that they have found themselves subject to severe discrimination and she criticized the discrimination that they have suffered for generations (Grau, 2020). Tahara and many Ainu women realized what they face are called double discrimination and finally, they have been motivated to cope with this condition by attending study meetings, facing the situations with encouraging each other to eliminate discrimination against Ainu women.

Actually, there are several Ainu communities and associations that are used as media to support and improve the social status of the Ainu people. Many Ainu associations which are located in Hokkaido such as the Ainu Association of Mombetsu, the Ainu Association of Biratoriri (Grau, 2020), and Hokkaido Ainu Association formerly known as Hokkaido Utari Association, it was the largest Ainu association in Hokkaido (Watson, 2010). Through those of the associations, they have been campaigning for Ainu’s rights, for example, Satoshi Hatayama as a President of The Ainu Association of Mombetsu which struggling to win their ancestor’s rights to fish since 2009 (Grau, 2020). The aim of the campaign was that they want to hold the ceremony of welcoming Salmon, a ritual called *Kamuy-chep-nomi* every year without them having faced a police investigation. Besides in Hokkaido, according to Uzawa (2018), there are also Ainu communities in the Kanto region (in Tokyo and surroundings) such as Ainu Association of Rera and Ainu Utari Renrakukai (Ainu Companions Liaison Group) which support to urban Ainu in Tokyo and for those interested in Ainu food and culture, and want to share and experience it.

Nevertheless, among those communities and associations that I mentioned above, there is no one of the community, in particular, supporting Ainu women, while they have difficulty improving their situation due to double discrimination in a work office or household. Many Ainu women realized that they need a place for expressing their identity, speaking the Ainu language freely, and talking to each other about what they felt like a way to eliminate their problems and to encourage themselves to survive from double discrimination by sharing their experience among the Ainu women in the community. Then, the Ainu Women’s Association of *Menoko Mosmos* was finally established in April 2017 with Tahara Ryoko, an Ainu women activist becomes a chairperson of this community. An article from Hokkaido Newspaper (as reposted in
Ramekorkorhapa, 2017) noted that the general meeting for the establishment of the Ainu Women’s Association Menoko Mosmos conference held on Sapporo city on the 23rd and approximately fifty activists Ainu women from cities in Hokkaido which are Sapporo, Kushiro, Shiraoi, and Iburi participated in the meeting as a member of the establishment. According to Tahara Ryoko’s statement, Menoko Mosmos which means ‘waking up of women’ in the Ainu language aimed to relieve complex discrimination by working together to empower Ainu women’s work to spread to the world.

There are kinds of activities to empower Ainu women as their focus of attention in Menoko Mosmos Association. The members in this community can play their roles as women to act in various events, in particular of Ainu traditional food and the others of Ainu culture, such as the traditional clothes and embroidery. The events are widely disseminated the unique Ainu culture inherited by their ancestors to utilize the wisdom of indigenous Ainu people, especially traditional Ainu food and cuisine. Since its establishment in April 2017, Menoko Mosmos has been working actively in collaboration with Slow Food Nippon to promote authentic Ainu food. As a piece of news officially shared on their web community on Facebook, they also created a prototype of ‘Menoko Mosmos Bento’ (lunch box of Menoko Mosmos) and a strap with an illustration of Pirika Menoko (means beautiful women) in Ainu language. This lunch box was prepared for the “1st Ainu Food Festival” organized by Menoko Mosmos and “Slow Food Nippon” in Sapporo on October 29th, 2017 (Menoko Mosmos, 2017). The lunch box was made and sold prior to participating in that event to let people know the taste of the authentic Ainu food. Besides promoting traditional Ainu food and cuisine, they also present the Ainu folk song performance and kind of workshops such as embroidery, dance, and herbal medicine related to food.

In order to promote the Ainu food worldwide, since being established in 2017, Ainu women from Menoko Mosmos started to participate in the Slow Food event held by Indigenous Terra Madre Asia and Pan-Pacific to commemorate World Food Day in 2018. It was the world’s largest food festival and over 150 countries gathered for this event held in Turin, Italy to share their experience how the protection of their traditional foods, languages, and cultures from generation to improve the quality of indigenous life. The first event of indigenous Terra Madre was held in Jokkmokk, Sweden, as the land of Sami people in 2011. The commemoration of World Food Day being held by Terra Madre aims to observe worldwide in order to raise awareness about food systems, production, and distribution (Sunuwar, 2019).

In 2019, Slow Food and the Indigenous Terra Madre Asia and Pan-Pacific conducted a particularly special event of Slow Food in Hokkaido and the Ainu women’s Association of Menoko Mosmos became a host for this event. It was the first time in Ainu history where it is represented by the Ainu Women’s Association of Menoko Mosmos to organize a cultural workshop such as a large-scale international event. One of their main events organized indigenous food workshop series collaborated with Ainu as an indigenous people of Japan and Slow Food Nippon. Over 200 indigenous leaders from around 27 countries, including China, Australia, the USA, and India participated in this event. They came to Hokkaido and gathered to share their traditional knowledge and wisdom to raise awareness of how their knowledge and indigenous people of the sustainable food systems can play a role in adhering to global challenges such as climate change and world hunger. Through this event, entitled “Indigenous People’ Food System: Climate Change, and sustainability”, the indigenous leaders discussed health and nutrition, education, spirituality,
livelhoods, and opportunities, nature, and conservation of culture as well as all with focus on how those topics related to food. By concerning climate change and future food crisis as the goal of the event, a lot of people recently pay attention to the unique food culture of indigenous people including the traditional food from Ainu (Sunuwar, 2019, Slowfood, 2019).

Viewing various activities and events organized by the Ainu women team in Menoko Mosmos as I explained above, it seems those activities are closely related to the roles of women who tend to work in the domestic area. In Ainu society just like the other societies that adhere to patriarchal ideology, Ainu women have traditionally performed domestic duties as opposite with men which completely in a public area. Lewallen (2017) notes that Ainu men have traditionally played leadership in the offering of ceremonies, hunting, deep-sea fishing, and carving. Otherwise, women were entrusted with producing textiles, bearing children, caring for their families, and all food gathering and production as well as they also participated in ceremonies for taking sake (rice wine) and preparing foods for the offering to Gods.

Keira & Keira (1999) said that a year in Hokkaido was divided into two seasons, summer and winter. In the summer season, Ainu women while they are caring for their family, go into fields and mountains to pick and gather wild plants for processing food and herbal medicine. They also collect and peel bark as material for making clothes and other utilities. Meanwhile, the winter was the time for hunting bears and deer as men’s work and before the winter is coming, Ainu men are also fishing salmon in the late fall. Hence no wonder for reflecting that fact, Ainu people say that ‘the winter is the men’s season while the summer belongs to women’ (Keira & Keira, 1999). Based on the classification of work between men and women, it strongly seems that the ideology of gender roles is that men’s work is closely related to social and religious affairs while women’s work is limited in the domestic area.

In Ainu society, the classification of work between women and men is based on the traditional idea of gender which is closely related to the concept of kamuy (gods or spirits) in Ainu belief. In the Ainu language, ‘Ainu’ means human or people by comparison to kamuy for gods and they live alongside in harmony and close to nature. Kamuy refers to every object in the world both physic and immaterial entities who possess abilities superior to those of men. Ainu people believe that living things and non-living things have the spirit of God. Thus, Gods can be animals, plants, minerals, or other geographical and natural phenomena (Fujimura, 1999; Rahwati, 2019). I pay attention to the concept of kamuy (Gods) that are embodied in every object is placed on earth, because those Gods like humans and animals are characterized by their gender, therefore they are metaphorically represented gender ideology.

Many pieces of literature of Ainu folk stories are portraying about kamuy with its gender characteristic. As Yamada (2001) explained that in the Ainu myth, the gods’ gender characterized behave just like human males and females. For example, that the God of Mountain who is embodied in a bear is a male god (kamuy) whose role is to take rule over mountainous areas. Then, the fox is a God who is good at hunting is also regarded as the incarnation of the male god. Thus, most male gods are generally represented in animal origins. On the other hand, the gods which are useful for Ainu subsistence, such as the God of Fire, God of Water, and God of Tree are worshipped as female gods. Yamada (2001) also mentions the Ainu myth which illustrated the roles of male gods and female gods. The roles of male gods go hunting and fishing, build a house, cut down a big tree, and go trading aboard in their boats as Ainu men do, while female gods do all
kinds of housework, such as preparing food, collecting plants, and doing all kind of needlework as the same as Ainu women which related to the domestic sphere. According to Yamada’s statements, it is clear that the Ainu myths are reflected gender roles in kamuy (gods) are used as an ideological framework to justify the gender differences between men and women in Ainu society.

Nowadays, although the Ainu people live in modern life, they in particular the elders still hold on to the Ainu values and traditions of mutual respect between kamuy (gods) and Ainu as humans to get along in harmony with nature. The Ainu cultural heritage in spite of considering endangered due to cultural assimilation, however, fortunately (Yamada, 2001) there are a few elders remaining, and most of them are women who still possessed knowledge of Ainu culture and tradition. They act as lively cultural transmitters teach the younger generations of Ainu who have the awareness to revitalize their own culture. In addition, recently many Ainu including women make an effort to revive their culture by expressing their identity through cultural practices that are appropriate to their roles.

As resistance against the discrimination, Ainu women attempt to preserve and promote Ainu culture through performing ethnic dance and traditional domestic activities, such as preparing food, making clothes, and embroidery. Today many Ainu women actively participate in cultural maintenance and revitalization activities by participating in communities like the women who are involved in Menoko Mosmos. They choose to be active in the community not only for sharing their experiences and supporting each other-, but also as a place for them to empower their abilities by carrying out the kind of activities related to their roles as women.

Ainu women in Menoko Mosmos Association have been actively involved in many activities, such as the preservation and promotion of traditional Ainu food in particular and also the others of Ainu culture. In this community, women can participate in food workshops to teach others or learn how to make traditional Ainu food and also can join in cultural workshops of embroidery, Ainu traditional music such as mukkuri and tonkori, and Ainu dance performances. In the past, ethnic dances were performed generally by women during ceremonies while men lead offering rituals to gods. In ceremonies, women were also entrusted with making sake and preparing food (Keira & Keira, 1999; Yamada, 2021). For Ainu women, preparing food, making clothes, and embroidery as well as performing traditional Ainu songs and dances are important because those activities not only related to their traditional roles as women but also to remain their memory of ancestors, Ainu culture, and spirituality that significantly expressing their connection with kamuy (gods).

The tradition of making clothes and embroidery by women is extremely important to Ainu-, because the pattern of embroidery on clothing content many symbols of Ainu culture and is spiritually based on the spirit of kamuy (gods). Regarding how important embroidery is to Ainu, Chikap as an Ainu artist ((1986, as cited in Lewallen, 2014: 181) write “Ainu women have always resisted colonization and cultural homogenization through insisting on Ainu – specific motif inherited from their ancestors: “Every being with a form has a spirit. With this belief, women worked on their embroidery transforming being into living kamuy (spirit) with special power”. Similar to Chikap, Shinoda, an Ainu young woman who learns traditional embroidery, consider that the activity of embroidery is the way for her to express her identity as Ainu. Shinoda (2018) said that even though cultural assimilation has continued to oppress the Ainu people and their
culture, but Ainu did not lose their identity. Ainu women have succeeded in transmitting the technique of making Ainu clothes and doing embroidery from mother to child at home or from other Ainu women in the community.

Besides making traditional clothes, Ainu women have also a domestic task which is preparing food for the whole family. The young Ainu women seem can learn how to cook traditional Ainu food and make sake for rituals from her grandmother at home or elderly women also in Ainu communities. Traditional Ainu cuisine is closely related to nature because most ingredients are taken from around. In the past, when the spring it comes, women went into the mountain to pick up wild plants for food. Shinoda (2018) tells her experience when she was going into the mountain to harvest enable wild plants in early spring, and she says her prayers to the kamuy (god) of the mountain for sharing the blessings of nature with the gods. Shinoda said that this ritual helps her to remain that they are part of nature and they have to take everything from the land in gratitude. In addition, Keira & Keira (1999) explained that Ainu women participated in making sake (rice wine) to be used for offering and preparing traditional food, while Ainu men play an important role as leaders in those rituals and ceremonies. In the ceremonies, the women perform songs and dances after the men had finished praying to the gods. According to the Ainu women, traditional domestic tasks in the past as Shinoda and Keira & Keira’s statement shows that Ainu women have important roles to sustain their family life as well as a leading performer to serve kamuy by offering traditional food and sake in Ainu ritual ceremonies.

The Ainu Food Festival and workshops in which as the main activities in Ainu Women’s Association of Menoko Mosmos seem to present the mutual relation between Ainu people and their kamuy (gods) who protect nature in harmony. As explained in the workshop on Ainu food held by Menoko Mosmos, traditional Ainu food usually uses the local plants or herbs as main ingredients because in the past Ainu people only eat what is around them. In Ainu cuisine, meat is not dominant even though the image of Ainu people is a hunter. The main ingredients that are important in Ainu cuisine are fish like salmon and trout, seaweed, and kind of plants that are all given as a blessing to Ainu Moshiri (Ainu land) by kamuy. In the Slow Food Indigenous events, Tahara Ryoko as the Chairperson of Ainu Women’s Association of Menoko Mosmos also explained that “the Ainu people think that every single thing from natural phenomenon to animals, from food to tool – has soul, and comes from the world of gods – kamuy” (Tahara Ryoko interviewed by Slow Food, 2019).

Ainu people believe that gods down to Ainu land called as Ainu Moshiri in Ainu language as guests and bring the present through its embodied objects, for instance, if the object is bear or deer, people can eat its meat or use its fur as a present from god, thus the Ainu have to gratitude to gods by sending them rituals and appreciate everything that the land gives to Ainu (Segawa, 2015). In gratitude to kamuy (gods), the Ainu hold the ceremonies and send rituals by offering sake (rice wine) and food for the kamuy as gifts prepared by women while men lead rituals and ceremonies dedicated to their kamuy. Ainu people believe that kamuy will be happy to return to Kamuy Moshiri which mean the “World of Kamuy” while brings gifts from Ainu and the kamuy will be a pleasure to come back again to Ainu Moshiri (the world of Ainu) with the gift according to kamuy’s embodiment such as a bear with its meat. In addition, the spirit of kamuy is believed that embodied in every object including trees, rivers, and mountains. Therefore, the Ainu people are strongly respected and protect their nature as well as always think about the sustainability of nature in the
year after because related to their kamuy. For this reason, when they harvest fish or plants, they would always leave some part of the plant, so it will continue to grow.

According to serving food is one of women duties which related to kamuy, Tahara Ryoko and the Ainu Women who involve in Menoko Mosmos realized that preparing Ainu food in every event is the way to show their expression of thankfulness to nature and kamuy as their gods who protect their land of Ainu. Thus, it means that the Ainu women really appreciate everything that nature gives. Besides that, the most important that being a participant in cultural activities is a way for Ainu women to articulate their identity by empowering them into reviving the Ainu culture by spreading the Ainu culture to the next generation worldwide. They feel free and enthusiastic to express their identity through activities of preserving indigenous Ainu food as one of their cultural practices. By the promotion of traditional Ainu food spread to the world, it can be one of the strategies for Ainu women to bring attention to the plight of Ainu to highlight their identity, language, a cultural practice, particularly Ainu food traditions. Ainu women can develop their ability through participating in a community such as Menoko Mosmos. Their activities in the community indirectly emerged a sense of pride in their identity as Ainu women who were considered inferior. Besides that, they also can take the opportunity to continue their cultural practices by performing their roles as women in the domestic sphere, such as preparing food, making clothes, and embroidery in an effort to eliminate discrimination. Furthermore, for Ainu women who explore their culture and participate in workshops and community such as Menoko Mosmos, they have found spaces where they are able to express their identity and the meaning of being Ainu for those who are minority indigenous people in Japanese society.

CONCLUSION

The examination of articulation of Ainu identity with the study case of the Ainu women’s activities in Menoko Mosmos has shown the effort of Ainu women to face the discriminations and oppressions by participating in kind of activities organized by the Ainu Women’s Association of Menoko Mosmos. This community provides various activities for Ainu women as a place for expressing their identity freely. Ainu women can play their roles as women by engaging in cultural practices in particular related to traditionally domestic sphere activities, such as the workshops of embroidery and events of traditional Ainu food. Preparing food and making embroidery are important duties for Ainu women which are related to their traditional roles as women who are entrusted with producing textile and cooking food for their families. Those activities are also remaining them of their memory of ancestors, Ainu culture heritage, and spirituality that significantly express their connection with their gods (kamuy).

According to the activities of Ainu women who are involved in this association, I highlight a major point that the Ainu women make an effort to express their identity as negotiation against discrimination by engaging in reviving and promoting traditional Ainu food as their traditionally domestic duty. The activities which are related to revitalizing traditional Ainu food to the world, seem like indirectly emerging the pride of being Ainu women who are considered inferior. These activities are carried out by Ainu women as a form of articulation that emphasizes their identity and emerging awareness of belonging to and being a part of Ainu and put their position properly in Japanese society.
REFERENCES


