

Connecting indigenous Ainu, university and local industry in Japan: The Urespa Project

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This paper examines how collaboration amongst university, indigenous community and private sector companies can promote Ainu participation in higher education, drawing on a case study of the Urespa Project in Sapporo University, Japan. In this project, the university offers scholarships to Ainu students, requiring them to take a special course in Ainu culture and history and develop collaborations with partner private sector companies.

We suggest that ‘the two-way learning’ that the Urespa Project advocates signifies a challenge to the conventional approach to Ainu education, which has long centred on the majority wajin providing uni-directional assistance to the Ainu in order to help them achieve the national educational benchmarks. The ‘mutual learning’ approach (sodateai in Japanese, urespa in the Ainu language) stresses a nurturing environment in which both Ainu and non-Ainu students feel included. That such initiatives came from private universities, rather than the national government, is indicative of how Ainu education is perceived as a local, rather than national, issue in Japan.

Keywords: indigenous students, Japan, higher education, collaboration.

The Ainu are an indigenous people of Japan, who were integrated into the newly created modern nation state of Japan in the mid-19th century. The Ainu share many experiences with other indigenous peoples, including internal colonisation, dispossession of their land, and exploitation as cheap labour; and remain marginalised to this day. It was only in 2008 that the Ainu gained official recognition from the government as indigenous people. Ainu are physically almost indistinguishable from the majority Japanese (even though the Ainu’s physical appearance is more akin to Caucasians), and many pass as majority wajin Japanese. Ainu people have gradually raised their retention rate to post-

compulsory education to almost the national average; but a significant gap remains in retention to, and completion of, higher education.

It is important to note that the exact size of the Ainu population is unknown. Since the national census has never collected data on ethnic heritage amongst Japanese citizens, we can only gain an indication from local government data. The estimated population of self-identified Ainu people in Hokkaido was approximately 24,000 in 2006 (Hokkaidô-chô-kankyôseisaku-bu, 2013); but Teruki Tsunemoto, the head of the Hokkaidô University Centre for Ainu and Indigenous Studies, estimates that the real number is close to 50,000 (Tsunemoto, 2009). Many Ainu reside outside Hokkaido, in particular in metropolitan cities, as implied by the existence of Ainu organizations in Tokyo. Tokyo is estimated to have 5000 Ainu resident (Tsunemoto, 2009).

It is the absence of official data on the ethnic heritage of Japanese citizens that is at least partially responsible for a lack of attention to Ainu people in the prevailing political and public discussion on multiculturalism in Japan. This lack has caused the public debate to frame Japan's ethnic diversity in the discourse of 'foreigners in Japan' (*zainichi gaikokujin*) (Okano, 2012). For example, when the media discuss increasing ethnic diversity, they list the number of registered foreign nationals and their nationalities. The public is constantly reminded of how many foreigners exist in Japan but has little idea about the number of Ainu people.

The aim of this paper is to examine how Ainu participation in higher education can be promoted; and discuss this in the context of the United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We will draw on a case study of Sapporo University's Urespa Project. Under this Project, the university offers scholarships to Ainu students (who then take a special course in Ainu Culture and History) and developed collaborations with private sector companies, in order to assist Ainu students' transition to employment. We can see the university's commitment to this collaborative approach in the project's name, 'Urespa', which means 'mutual nurturing' in the Ainu language.

We suggest that 'two-way mutual learning' signifies a challenge to the conventional approach to Ainu education, which has centred on the majority wajin providing uni-directional assistance to the Ainu in order to achieve the national benchmarks. The 'mutual learning' approach (*sodateai* in Japanese, *urespa* in the Ainu language) stresses a nurturing environment in which both Ainu and non-Ainu students feel included and learn from each other. That such initiatives came from private universities, rather than the national government, is indicative of how Ainu education is perceived in Japan.

We begin with a brief description of Ainu social conditions, in terms of employment and educational achievement. We then examine the Japanese government's deliberations on Ainu policies, following the United Nation Declaration of the Rights on Indigenous Peoples, and the views by the main Ainuorganisation. Our discussion will turn to how the relevant articles regarding Ainu education can be understood in the context of Ainu people in contemporary Japan. This paper then presents a case study of the Urespa

Project and discusses future possibilities for university contributions to empowerment of Ainu and non-Ainu students.

AINU PEOPLE IN JAPANESE SCHOOLS: A HISTORY OF ASSIMILATION AND MARGINALISATION

The Ainu lived in the dense forests of Hokkaidô prior to the arrival of mainland Japanese from the south in the 13th century. Over the next 500 years, they traded with *wajin* on an individual basis. When Japan emerged as a modern imperial state in the mid-19th century, it politically incorporated the indigenous peoples of Hokkaido. As Japan acquired external colonial territories, people living on the Korean Peninsula and in Taiwan also became imperial subjects, some of whom moved to mainland Japan. Imperial Japan hence had a multi-ethnic population (for example, Weiner, 1997; Oguma, 1998; Lie, 2001).

The national government created the Development Commission (1869) to oversee the development of Hokkaidô (which the state regarded as *terra nullius*); and directed migration of mainland Japanese to the new land. Ainu people (who until then had depended for their livelihood on the forests and waterways) had no choice but to resettle and work as cheap labour for the immigrants. Informed by the social Darwinist view of race prevalent at the time, the government enacted the Hokkaido Former Native Protection Act in 1899; and expected that Ainu people would become small farmers and assimilate as Japanese imperial subjects. Imperial Japan lost its colonial territories as well as colonial subjects at the end of the Second World War. The post-war Japanese state created a single category of Japanese citizens (which included indigenous Ainu and Okinawans), designating the remaining ethnic groupings 'foreign nationals' (for example, former colonial subject Koreans and Taiwanese living in Japan).

The modern system of state education has effectively forced Ainu children to abandon the language and culture of their parents, to learn to see the world in ways determined by the mainstream Japanese, and to conform to what has long been considered the 'Japanese way'. From the beginning the imperial government considered schools a central instrument for Ainu assimilation, which then enabled Ainu people to contribute to Japan's modernisation project. Initially adopting a policy of segregated schooling, the government provided a simpler curriculum for Ainu children than that for *wajin* children. In 1937, there was a switch to co-education (of Ainu and *wajin*), which imposed further damage on Ainu children in the form of routine bullying and discrimination at the hands of *wajin* children. Schooling reinforced the then prevailing view of Ainu inferiority amongst all children. Schools became alienating and fearful places, which then encouraged many Ainu children to leave. Even in the 1960s, the number of compulsory-age students with long-term school absences remained high (Takegahara, 2010).

The Ainu have not been passive recipients of this discriminatory system. Ainu activism emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, and led to the formation of Hokkaido Ainu

Association (*Ainu Kyōkai*) in 1930, later named the Utari Association (*Utari Kyōkai*) in 1961. From the outset, the Association saw welfare measures as central to solving the problems of Ainu people.

The Association has widely been considered one of the largest and most influential organisations of Ainu people. It is an organisation of Ainu people in Hokkaido, and states as its mission to promote the social status and cultural maintenance of Ainu with the ultimate goal of establishing Ainu dignity. The Association has actively implemented various programs to improve Ainu people's living conditions, employment and education (including the institution of loans), to research Ainu culture, and to promote interaction with other minority groups. The Association is currently represented in the government committee to promote Ainu policies (*Ainu seisaku suishinn kaigi*).

In 1961, the Utari Special Welfare Project was implemented to improve living conditions and employment and education levels. When it was found that Ainu living conditions remained inferior to those of non-Ainu, another welfare package, the First Hokkaido Utari Welfare Measures, was implemented, at a cost of 12 billion yen over the period 1971–80 (Siddle, 1996). The Utari Welfare Measures are still being implemented, having been repeatedly renewed since their initial implementation in 1971 (renewals took place in 1981–7, 1988–94, 1995–2001, 2002–2008, 2009–) (Hokaidō-chō-kankyōseisaku-bu, 2013). These special measures considered education to be a key pillar for the improvement of Ainu lives, and provided financial assistance to Ainu children to attend upper secondary schools and tertiary institutions.

Influenced by the activism, primary and secondary school teachers began to question the existing practice of Ainu education. They subsequently produced a guidebook in 1982 entitled 'Discussing minorities in Japan with students: the current situation and guides for teaching' (*Hokkaido-kôtōgakkō-kyōshokuin-kumiai* – Hokkaido High School Teachers Union, 1982). Then in 1983, a professional association of teachers, the Research Association for Ainu Education was formed within the Hokkaido Education Board. The Association produced two publications to guide teachers in the teaching of Ainu history in primary and middle school (1984) and senior high school (1991) (Ueno, 2001).

In the 1980s, Ainu activists started to connect with global indigenous rights movements, by for example, attending the 1981 Third World Conference of Indigenous People in Australia in 1981, and the 1992 UN International Year of World Indigenous Peoples. Such global alliances not only fostered Ainu self-perceptions as an indigenous people but also offered them a means to challenge domestic marginalisation by appealing to international covenants (Sjoberg, 1993).

Ainu children's school attendance has gradually risen to almost the level of national average in the last three decades, helped by the Utari Welfare Measures mentioned above. This is a general perception amongst teachers, confirmed by surveys conducted by the Hokkaido prefectural government (Hokkaidō-chō-kankyōseisaku-bu, 2007) and by Hokkaido University's Centre for Ainu and Indigenous Studies (Sanai, 2010).

The post-compulsory retention rate of Ainu children (that is, into upper secondary school) has almost caught up to that of their non-Ainu counterparts, with a five per cent gap remaining in 2006. Of Ainu under 30 years of age, 95 per cent has completed 12 years of schooling; the figure falls with age, however (87 % of those 30–40 years old and 24 % of those over 70) (Nozaki, 2010). The difference is greatest in tertiary entry rates: in 2006, fewer than 18 per cent of Ainu students went on to university while nearly 40 per cent of non-Ainu students took up tertiary study (See Table 1). The older generations of Ainu have much lower levels of education.

Table 1: Retention of Ainu Children to Universities Compared with Non-Ainu Cohort in Hokkaidô, 1979–2006

Year	1979	1986	1993	1999	2006
Ainu (%)	3.8	8.1	11.8	16.1	17.4
Non-Ainu in the same township (%)	31.1	27.4	27.5	34.5	38.5

Source: Hokkaidô-chô, Kankyôseikatsu-bu (2006). *Heisei 18-nendo Hokkaidô Ainu seikatsu jittai chôsa hōkokusho*. **Sapporo: Hokkaidô-chô.**

We need to look at completion rates, as well as retention rates. Ainu children are still more likely to leave senior school before graduating. In 2009, 13 per cent of Ainu senior high school students left before graduation; and this percentage is lower compared with the previous generations (Nozaki, 2010). In that year, one in five Ainu university students left before gaining a degree. The figure for those under 30 years old was 11 per cent, while for those aged 60–70 it was 59 per cent (Nozaki, 2010).

The majority of Ainu people aspire to further education. For example, 56 per cent of those under 30 wanted to go to university (Nozaki, 2010, p. 63). Sixty four per cent of Ainu parents want their children to attend university (that is, post-secondary) and only 21 per cent aim for only upper secondary school (Nozaki, 2010). The most frequently stated reasons for giving up a desire to pursue further education are financial (78%), the need to obtain employment (25%), academic achievement (14%), and parental opposition (particularly in the case of girls – 11%). Studies reveal cycles of poverty in Ainu families over generations (for example, Nakamura, 2008). The income gap continues: in 2006, average of annual Ainu income was 3.69 million yen, compared to 4.06 million for the average Hokkaidô family and 5.8 million for the average family nationally, although the gap has narrowed recently (Nakamura, 2008). Ainu are more likely to be receiving government living protection allowances (*seikatsuhogo*) provided for low-income families. In 2009, 5.2 per cent of Ainu in Hokkaido received this welfare payment, compared with 3.9 per cent for the Hokkaido population as a whole and 2.2 per cent nationally (Nakamura, 2010).

We saw above that equality of educational opportunities based on a simple equality principle and affirmative action in terms of financial assistance and scholarships for Ainu children have been insufficient in enabling them to benefit more fully from schooling. This is because of: (1) the limited resources (economic, social and cultural) of Ainu families to facilitate this process; (2) the experience of schooling of both Ainu and the majority Japanese children, and negative interactions in the school grounds; and (3) the school culture, all of which centre on the dominant Japanese institutions and culture (Okano, 2013). We also saw that the achievement gap between Ainu and the majority *wajin* has narrowed considerably up to upper secondary education but not in relation to university. Our focus in this paper is tertiary education.

CONTEMPORARY AINU POLICIES, AND THE IMPACT OF THE UNITED NATION DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has had a significant impact on Japanese government policies on the Ainu. The process leading to the 2007 UN Declaration began in 1982 when a study group on indigenous peoples was established within the Committee on Human Rights. Of particular note is that representatives of indigenous peoples of many countries participated in the study group, which created a transnational collaborative and cooperative relationship amongst indigenous peoples globally. While the UN Declaration has no legally binding obligations, its impact has been significant in Japan. It provided a normative framework for policies on indigenous peoples and for multicultural and multi-ethnic societies. How the UN Declaration has affected domestic policies on indigenous peoples is of global interest; and Japan's case provides an insightful example.

In 2008 for the first time, the Japanese government officially recognised the Ainu as an indigenous people. Both houses of the parliament unanimously adopted the resolution to acknowledge the Ainu as 'an indigenous people who have resided in the northern part of the Japanese archipelago, in particular, Hokkaidô, and who maintain their own unique languages, religions and culture'. Within one month of the passing this resolution, the government established an expert study group on Ainu policies (*Ainu seisaku no arikata ni kansuru yûshikisha kondankai*), and began research and discussion towards the formulation of Ainu policies which would include education. The UN Declaration was thus a trigger in opening a way for subsequent deliberations on Ainu policies (Maeda, 2011).

The study group presented a report in July 2009, and proposed future directions for Ainu policies. In December of the same year, the Committee to Promote Ainu Policies (*Ainu Saisaku Sokushin Kaigi*) was established with the cabinet secretary as its chairperson, and began discussing concrete measures to address the July proposals. The committee was then divided into two groups with specific roles: one group to discuss multiethnic co-living, and the other group to research the lives of Ainu people living outside Hokkaidô. The committee continues to work to this day. The

latter group confirmed that Ainu people living outside Hokkaidô were also relatively disadvantaged in terms of income and educational achievement.

Higher education has not been raised in reports prepared by any of the abovementioned study groups or the Committee. This ignores the wishes expressed by the Hokkaiô Utari Association's draft proposal (*Ainu-minzoku ni kansuru Hôritsu an*), which argued for learning about Ainu culture and affirmative action for Ainu youths in higher education.

Universities will establish courses in Ainu culture and history. Teachers of these courses should be recruited from ethnic Ainu people who excel in these fields and appointed as professors, associate professors and lecturers. Such appointments require a degree of flexibility in normal academic requirements. Universities should provide special consideration for Ainu children so that they can enter universities and focus on their respective studies (Hokkaidô Utari Kyôkai, 1984).¹

This statement conveys the Association's desire for tertiary-educated Ainu experts who can actively participate in decision making in Ainu matters, and ultimately pursue self-determination. In order to achieve this, they want universities and/or governments to provide a quota for Ainu applicants at universities.

To date these initiatives have been received positively. For example, Shikoku Gakuin University which began offering a special entry system in 1995, whereby there is a quota for minority students (including Ainu) with admission via school recommendation (instead of examinations). In 2010, Tomakomai Komazawa University (in Hokkaidô) began offering a course in Hokkaido-Ainu culture in the Faculty of International Cultures. The former's focus was to enable Ainu student access to university, while the latter assisted Ainu students in completing the course by offering scholarships and considering their ethnic background.

Other universities have offered subjects in Ainu language and culture, and organised guest lectures by advisers from the Ainu Culture Promotion and Research Centre (*Ainu Bunka Shinkô Kenkyû Suishin Kikô*) under the Centre's scheme to send advisers on request. The Centre was established to implement the 1997 Ainu Culture Act (Law for the Promotion of the Ainu Culture and for the Dissemination and Advocacy for the Traditions of the Ainu and the Ainu Culture, *Ainu no bunka no shinkô narabini Ainu no dentô nado ni kansuru chishiki no fukyû oyobi keihatsu ni kansuru hôritsu*) in Tokyo. These efforts, while providing the curriculum which enables both Ainu and the majority *wajin* Japanese students to learn about Ainu culture and history, remain initiatives of individual academics or universities, rather than the result of a systematic effort to provide assistance for Ainu students on campus.

Sapporo University's Urespa project, which we will examine in detail, presents a new direction. It attempts to assist Ainu students through the university's institutionalised collaboration with the Ainu community and private sector corporations.

COLLABORATION ADVOCATED IN THE UNITED NATION DECLARATION

The 2007 United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples touched on several aspects concerning education of indigenous peoples. They are: (1) access to schooling, (2) access to ethnic education, (3) special measures to remove discrimination, and (4) special measures to ensure unexploitative employment. The Declaration emphasised the state's collaboration with indigenous communities, as seen below. [Emphasis by authors].

Article 14-2

Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.

Article 14-3

States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

Article 15-2

States shall take effective measures, in consultation and cooperation with the indigenous peoples concerned, to combat prejudice and eliminate discrimination and to promote tolerance, understanding and good relations among indigenous peoples and all other segments of society.

Article 17-2

States shall in consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples take specific measures to protect indigenous children from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development, taking into account their special vulnerability and the importance of education for their empowerment (United Nations, 2007).

We can make several interpretations from the above in designing concrete measures regarding the education of indigenous peoples. Firstly, the government will provide financial assistance in order to ensure indigenous people's 'entitlement to education without discrimination', given that poverty has long prevented indigenous children from receiving higher levels of education. Secondly, the government will provide education to promote intercultural understanding in order to eliminate ethnic discrimination. Thirdly, the government will ensure that indigenous people can learn their ethnic language and culture in the way acceptable to them. Fourthly, the government will instigate special measures to provide the kind of learning that can empower indigenous students. All of these specific measures will be best achieved if a collaboration between the state and indigenous peoples is fostered.

These recommendations are applicable to the Ainu in Japan. The government, with Ainu people, should promote social network based on ‘mutual assistance’, improve conditions of schooling that is inclusive of Ainu culture and history, and establish a system of schooling which potentially empowers Ainu. Ironically, however, it is private universities, rather than the national government, that have taken initiatives in this direction, on the strength of the greater degree of autonomy that private universities enjoy under the Private School Act (*Shiritsu gakkô hô*). Sapporo University, which we study below, is one example. As 75 percent of Japanese universities are private institutions, this gives some optimism that such initiatives will be widely taken up, but this is a simplistic view, which will be discussed later in the paper.

THE URESPA PROJECT: ‘MUTUAL NURTURING’

The Urespa Project began at Sapporo University’s Faculty of Humanities in 2010. ‘Urespa’ means ‘mutual nurturing’ in the Ainu language, and reflects the Faculty mission, ‘co-living and harmony’. The project aims to produce potential Ainu leaders, by providing scholarships to Ainu young people who demonstrate enthusiasm and capacity, and by promoting their employment in local companies which support this project.

One of the key features of this project is a ‘two-way mutual learning approach’. It aims to assist young Ainu people and concurrently educate the majority Japanese to respect and accept the ‘differences’³. This is a departure from the prevailing trend of minority policies, whereby the majority offers one-way assistance to minority groups (Tsunemoto, 2011). Applicants must have participated in maintaining and developing the Ainu culture, and demonstrate an enthusiasm for contributing to society. The university provides Ainu students with guidance and assistance in completing a curriculum specifically designed for Ainu students, and then in gaining post-graduation employment. How then does the Urespa Project create a system of learning which enables Ainu students to acquire a commitment? How does the project try to realize a ‘nurturing community’ of mutual learning that is inclusive of Ainu culture? Below, we shall examine specifics of the Urespa project: its development process, curriculum, learning strategies, and measures to assist students.

The project was initiated by Yûko Honda. She was born on mainland Japan and studied Anthropology at Hokkaidô University, before moving to Biratori-town Nibutani, where she lived amongst Ainu for the next 11 years. She worked with Shigeru Kayano, an Ainu elder, teaching the Ainu language to Ainu children and creating an Ainu language dictionary. Kayano was an Ainu activist, who became the first Ainu MP (as a Japan Socialist Party candidate) in 1994. Honda was the Dean of the Faculty of Cultural Studies when the Urespa project started, and is now the vice-president of the university. She recalls what drove her to this project.

The majority *wajin* Japanese can maintain their mother tongue and own history without much effort. How many Ainu children are like that? There are very few Ainu children familiar with even one Ainu legend. They would have grown up

in extraordinary environments, for example, having a family with an exceptional commitment to Ainu education, or having attended Ainu language courses. The vast majority of Ainu children have no opportunity to learn about their ethnic culture. The majority *wajin* need to know that it is a ‘privilege that they take for granted’ and that their fellow Ainu should be entitled to have the same... (Honda, 2011, p. 94-5).

Honda was keen to see Ainu people enjoy the same privilege that the majority *wajin* children take for granted... to learn their own language and culture as part of their daily lives. She wanted the majority *wajin* to recognise that the Ainu do not have such a simple privilege.

Under the Project, the university accepted a quota of young Ainu people, and is educating them to be the future Ainu leaders, while attempting to create a model of ‘multicultural co-living’ within the university. The missions of the Urespa Club can be summed up as follows:

- to promote understanding of Ainu society and culture amongst Ainu and non-Ainu students through studying Ainu history and culture and being involved in activities to revitalise Ainu culture
- to train leaders of Ainu people, and to provide the space for future social activities by creating a system of cooperative support with local companies and indigenous communities

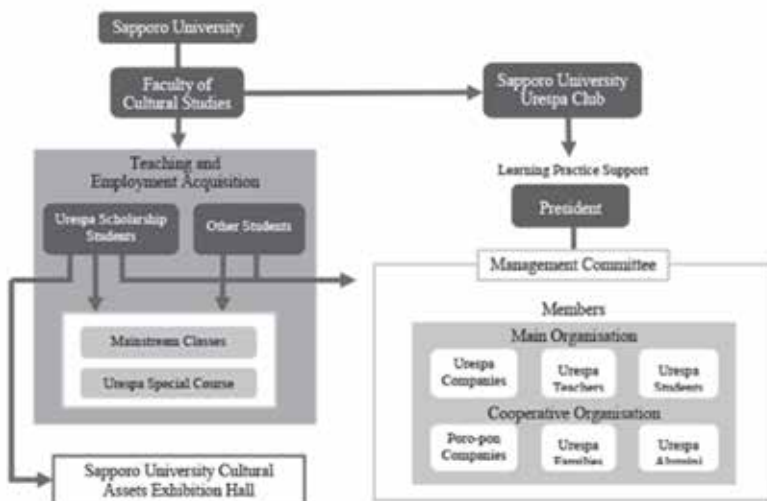


Figure 1: Urespa Project

Source: Sapporo-Daigaku. 2012. *Urespa Kurabu* 2012 [cited January 28th 2012]. Available from <http://www.sapporo-u.ac.jp/department/ureshipa/>.

- to construct mutually trustful relationships based on intercultural understanding and a model of multicultural community, and to promote this to the public (Sapporo Daigaku 2012).

The Project consists of three pillars as discussed. The first is the Urespa scholarship for which Ainu students wishing to attend Sapporo University can apply. It includes the four years' of tuition fees (770,000 yen per year), and the entrance fee (200,000 yen). In 2011, there were six recipients. Eligibility for the scholarship centres on Ainu ethnicity; but given the lack of official records of individual ethnic heritage amongst Japanese citizens, demonstration of Ainu heritage can be achieved in one of four ways. In order to be eligible for the scholarship, an applicant must satisfy one of the following conditions: (1) have a recommendation by the Hokkaidô Ainu Association, (2) have a recommendation from an Ainu culture protection organisation endorsed by the national government, (3) demonstrate five years of involvement in a similar organisation that does not have official government endorsement and receive its recommendation, or (4) demonstrate Ainu heritage by such means as family registration (*koseki*), if unable to satisfy one of the above criteria⁴.

The second pillar of the Urespa Project is to create a 'mutual learning' environment where Ainu students learn to be leaders. The Urespa scholarship holders are required to complete Urespa special course, as well as another major course. The Urespa special course includes Ainu language, Ainu culture and traditions, and the history of Hokkaidô and the Ainu (Sapporo-Daigaku, 2012). In addition, the students are required to play active roles in the university's Urespa Club. They are involved in designing and implementing twice weekly study sessions on Ainu language, culture and history, and festivals which present to the public the achievements of their learning; in editing the club's newsletters; and in organising excursions to local Ainu communities in order to promote interaction.

The club had 18 students in February 2012. Seven of them were Ainu scholarship holders, while the others comprised Ainu, *wajin* and international students. A total of 12 scholarships have been issued in 2010 and 2011, but several recipients discontinued their course mid-way, after struggling to combine study with earning a living. This occurred if they failed to gain financial assistance towards living expenses from the Hokkaidô Ainu Association, since the Urespa scholarships cover only tuition fees. Diaspora Ainu outside Hokkaidô are not eligible for such assistance from the Association, and do not apply for scholarships.

The Urespa Club also approaches local primary schools to share learning about Ainu culture and environmental protection, through such activities as Ainu dancing and Ainu language playing cards. It is expected that Ainu students' active engagement in learning through both mainstream courses and the Urespa Club will cause student to see the Ainu presence as a natural part of the Faculty, and encourage them to mix more with Ainu students (Honda, 2011).

The case of one Ainu scholarship student provides us an insight into how the Project can impact on personal development. Akiko (a pseudonym) is a 38 year old mature age student who was interviewed by one of the authors (Maeda). Akiko excelled academically since her primary school days. When her primary school teachers told her to aim at university education, her mother regretfully responded that it was beyond the family's means. Akiko then gave up the idea of going to university, went to vocational college, and became a skilled carpenter coming second in Hokkaidô in a carpenters' competition. Akiko had never revealed her Ainu heritage until interviewed for the scholarship, and her comments below show how she is negotiating her Ainu identity in the university setting.

'It has been demanding to keep up with university study. I know that I will not be able to speak the Ainu language without a commitment to study. I was mentally drained at the beginning, but now feel better since I know my friends like Ainu people. I had never been able to reveal my Ainu identity before coming to university because of a fear of discrimination. But now I feel better about it and take it for granted to be living as an Ainu. I even forget to mention that I am Ainu when visited by people from other universities. Yes, studying at university was a challenge, but the most challenging is to accept my Ainu heritage and talk about it with others. I could learn to do this because I came to trust that I'm supported by, and learn together with, others. We have mutual assistance here.'⁵

Akiko seems to have gained a positive self-perception through the learning process based on 'mutual nurturing' (*sodateai*), which has resulted in her motivation for academic study and active participation in extra-curricular activities. Akiko was the top academic student in the last two years.

The third pillar of the Urespa Project is the university's active collaboration with private sector employers. To be more precise, the Urespa project aims to create a network of companies which support the project's missions on the grounds of 'corporate responsibility for society (*kigyô no shakaiteki sekinin*). Urespa companies are those that support the project's missions, gain membership of the project by paying annual fees, and participate in various activities of the project. These companies work with Urespa students and develop close collaborative relationships (Sapporo-Daigaku, 2012); and are currently considering plans to accept Urespa students as interns, and to provide quotas for new permanent positions. The companies already registered with the project include leading companies such as Japan Railway Hokkaido, Fuji, Hokuyô Bank, Sapporo Breweries, and Nippon Travel Agency Hokkaidô. Company presidents actively participate in Urespa-organised activities such as Urespa Fiesta (Honda, 2011, 97), and are involved in nurturing scholarship students.

Interviews with these companies reveal a strong sense of 'social responsibility' in relation to their local communities. For example, Sapporo Beer, as a leading local company, is currently exploring ways the Urespa Club can present their learning outcomes at a company annual event⁶. Another prominent local company, Hokkaido Clean System Inc. believes in the benefit of discussing indigenous issues through its involvement with the Urespa students, in that such discussion encourages employees'

critical thinking⁷. The ultimate goal of involving private sector companies is to further expand such corporate networks, whereby a Urespa company invites other companies to join; and to disseminate to the wider public what Urespa does.

Reliance on private university initiatives to promote tertiary education for Ainu students, and their partnership with private sector companies to empower young Ainu contrast with initiatives in some other countries. For example, in both Australia and Taiwan, the national governments play major roles in promoting participation of indigenous peoples in higher education. In Taiwan, for example, the national government has provided affirmative action for indigenous student admission to universities since 1987, by adding extra marks to their examination scores, through special entry schemes without entrance examinations, or by allowing institutions to take extra numbers of students if they are indigenous (Taiwan, Council of Indigenous Peoples, 2012). In Japan, absence of concrete initiatives from the national government may be due to the fact that the Ainu only gained official recognition as an indigenous people in 2008, and because Ainu issues had been addressed by the local Hokkaidō government as local.

CONCLUSION

We have examined how the Urespa Project attempts to address the following aspects relating to access to higher education: (1) access to schooling, enabling progression to higher education; (2) access to ethnic education; (3) special measures to remove discrimination; and (4) special measures to ensure unexploitative employment. These issues were raised in the 2007 United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Sapporo University offers scholarships to Ainu students, who are required to take a special course in Ainu Culture and History as well as mainstream courses. The University takes seriously the notion of collaboration, creates active partnerships with private sector companies and the Ainu community, and acts as a effective mediator between them. Such collaboration is expected to assist Ainu students' transition from university to the workforce. The commitment to a collaborative approach is apparent in the project's name 'Urespa', which means 'mutual nurturing' in the Ainu language.

We suggest that 'mutual learning' signifies a challenge to the conventional approach to Ainu education, which has centred on the majority Japanese (including governments) providing one-way assistance to the Ainu to help them reach the majority children's educational achievement. In contrast, the 'mutual learning' approach stresses a nurturing environment where both Ainu and non-Ainu students feel included and comfortable, and where each group assists the other's learning. This is important in particular for the Ainu students who have often felt isolated on campus.

Rather than waiting for national government leadership, private universities have taken initiatives in promoting the Ainu's participation in higher education, utilising the greater degree of institutional autonomy that private universities enjoy. Since three

quarters of Japanese universities are private, there is hope that the successful example of the Urespa Project will mean that such initiatives will be adopted elsewhere.

NOTES

- Included in Utari-Mondai-Konwakai (ed., 1988).
- We would like to acknowledge those who were interviewed for this study, in particular, students and staff members involved in the Urespa Project.
- Interview with Yuko Honda, the vice-president of Sapporo University, and Hideyuki Kanazawa, Associate Professor of Hokkaido University, February 22nd 2012.
- Ibid.
- Interview with a student in the Urespa Project, January 22nd 2012.
- Interview with Toshihiko Izumiyama and Hideki Obata, representatives of Sapporo Beer Corporation, February 23rd 2012.
- Interview with Managu Kuromiya, Tatsumi Nohiro, representatives of Hokkaido Clean System, February 23rd 2012.

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