

Ainu on the Internet: Learning the Ainu Language in Community

Kazumi Katayama

The Ainu people have lived and spoken Ainu from Tohoku in the north to Hokkaido, Sakhalin (Karafuto) and Chishima (the Kurile Islands). However, when ‘wajin’ settlers (Japanese other than Ainu) migrated to Hokkaido, Japanese became the compulsory language for work and other official purposes.

As a result of discrimination and persecution, Ainu themselves abandoned the use of the Ainu language. As fluent mother tongue speakers of Ainu diminished, in the 1980s, a movement arose among Ainu themselves to stop the decline and maintain the Ainu language. With a particular focus on young learners Ainu language classes were established. As a result, Ainu language classes have spread throughout all parts of Hokkaido.

In 1997, a law was enacted, the ‘Law for the Promotion of Ainu Culture and Dissemination and Advocacy of Knowledge about Ainu Traditions.’ The measures included in this policy were to designed promote the Ainu language, Ainu music, dance and crafts. This also led to the establishment of Ainu language classes in locations outside Hokkaido. Recently, together with the spread of the internet, changes have occurred in language learning style where Ainu language instructors and learners can assemble in a manner not hitherto seen. This talk will describe the role of Internet Telephone Services such as SKYPE, and other visual-based learning sites that I myself have used, to facilitate Ainu language learning in a variety of new ways.