

Ainu People

The Ainu are the indigenous people of northern Japan. Their culture is rooted in a spiritual reverence for the natural world and what has historically been a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, as well as extensive contact with surrounding cultures. The Ainu have unique customs, language, and beliefs.

From the end of the Jomon period (500 BCE) on, Hokkaido's culture developed separately from the rest of the Japanese archipelago. Rice cultivation was adopted on the islands of Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu to the south, but the hunter-gatherer lifestyle continued in Hokkaido. Ainu culture likely developed from this post-Jomon culture through trade and contact with northern communities around the Sea of Okhotsk, and communities on Honshu.

The Ainu of Kushiro lived in villages along the Kushiro River. Records from the late Edo period (1603–1867) show there were around 10 villages along the river at that time, each with up to a dozen dwellings.