

Ainu and the Northern Peoples

Indigenous peoples around the Sea of Okhotsk have engaged in trade and cultural exchange for many centuries. This has resulted in distinct similarities in their clothing, tools, and crafts. Ainu traded with several groups, including Nivkh of northern Sakhalin and the lower Amur River, Uilta of northern Sakhalin, and Ulch of the Amur River.

The traditional clothing of these northern peoples shared common designs suited to the arctic climate and their lifestyles. Boots and tunics made of seal skin and deer hide kept them warm, while salmon skin, with its flexible and watertight properties, made for effective rainwear in milder seasons.

These garments featured decorative cuffs and hems. The spiral, thorn, and geometric patterns on the cuffs and hems of Ainu clothing resemble those on clothes worn by peoples in the Amur River basin and the Sakhalin regions.

Accessories, made of materials from across the Eurasian continent, provide further evidence of trade. Ainu exchanged animal pelts and hawk feathers for glass beads from China, Russia, and Central Asia, as well as large metal medallions from Honshu, the main island of Japan. These items were made into necklaces worn by Ainu women during ceremonies. Similar medallions have been found at sites of Nanai, an ethnic group living around the Amur River basin.

The northern peoples had similar musical traditions. The *tonkori*, a five-stringed zither used by Sakhalin Ainu, is similar to the Nivkh *tunkuroon*.

The Ainu *mukkur*, a mouth harp made of bamboo, resembles metal versions from Sakhalin, Siberia, and Europe.