

Ikupasuy*: Offering Sticks to Commune with *Kamuy

In Ainu culture, the realms of humans and *kamuy* (spirit-deities) are intertwined, and *ikupasuy* serve as vital tools in maintaining this connection. *Ikupasuy* are ceremonial objects used to convey human prayers to *kamuy*.

Traditionally, *ikupasuy* are crafted from Japanese yew or willow wood. Between 30 and 40 centimeters in length and 3 to 4 centimeters wide, they have a flattened shape with rounded edges, tapering at one end. Each *ikupasuy* is adorned with carvings that represent the owner, so that the *kamuy* will recognize their prayers. The carvings range from realistic depictions to abstract designs, often featuring animals revered in Ainu culture, such as bears, orcas, otters, birds, fish, and snakes.

During rituals, Ainu men dip the tip of *ikupasuy* into alcohol and sprinkle it over wooden prayer sticks (*inaw*), which are implements that mediate

between humans and *kamuy*. Through *ikupasuy*, Ainu express gratitude, seek guidance, and pray for good fortune.