

Ainu Activists

From the late nineteenth century onwards, Ainu suffered many hardships as they were forcibly displaced from their lands and assimilated into Japanese society. Despite this, activists found ways to fight for the language, culture, and lands of their people.

Fighting for Ainu rights

Arai Genjiro (1901–1991) was a scholar and activist from the city of Asahikawa. He was also the first Ainu to work in local government. In the 1930s, he traveled to Tokyo with Sunazawa Peramonkoro (1897–1971) and Sunazawa Toa-kanno (1893–1953), the parents of artist Sunazawa Bikky (1931–1989), to protest for the return of Ainu land. Throughout his life, Arai fought for the repeal of the Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act of 1899. This act was enacted under the guise of protecting Ainu but led to land confiscation and erosion of their traditional culture. It was finally abolished in 1997.

Preserving language and culture

Textile artist Sunazawa Peramonkoro supported Ainu women by teaching them sewing and embroidery. She was revered for her knowledge of oral epics and stories, which she passed on to Ainu scholars. She and her husband Toa-kanno were featured in Arai Genjiro's book *Ainu Jinbutsuden* (Ainu Biographies).

Monno Nanke (1881–1963) and his wife Harue (1887–1968) were among the last generation of Ainu to speak the Ainu language. Monno Nanke

inherited traditional practices and culture from his grandfather, village leader Kucinkoro (1792–1867). Kucinkoro is revered for persuading government officials in 1869 to abandon plans to relocate the Ainu of Asahikawa from their ancestral lands along the upper Ishikari River.