Shamans and Imu: *Among Two Ainu Groups*

Toward a Cross-Cultural Model of Interpretation

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The Tungic term *saman* has long been with us in anthropology and other disciplines in Western academia. During the first half of the 20th century, however, shamans, as the term became anthropologized or Anglicized, were regarded primarily as "primitive" magico-religious specialists who carried out so-called individual rituals. They were regarded as less important or impressive than monks, priests, and other religious specialists who represented a body of people or a religious institution and who officiated in elaborate rituals. With respect to individual personalities, shamans were often regarded as mentally ill, although anthropologists were quick to recognize that many of the technologically less advanced peoples were more tolerant than their highly industralized neighbors in not ostracizing their deviants, but rather providing them with a culturally sanctioned role.

In the recent past, there have been significant findings and insights both in the study of shamanism and mental disorders in general and culture-bound reactive syndromes in particular. Scholars

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continue to be concerned with the individual personality of shamans as well as with culture-bound reactive syndromes despite a rapid decrease in the frequency of their occurrence. If there is a possibility that shamans are psychologically disturbed, on one hand, and that the culture-bound syndromes are expressions of psychological problems, on the other, then there is a need to look closely at the relationship between the two. Yet we have seldom seen such studies.

The aim of this paper is to suggest possible ways of understanding the interrelationships between shamans and culture-bound syndromes as well as to examine the sociocultural correlates of these phenomena. While I hope that the present interpretation may serve as a model with cross-cultural applicability, my immediate goal is to understand these phenomena among the Ainu. For this purpose, I compare two Ainu societies—the Ainu of the northwest coast of southern Sakhalin and the Ainu of the Saru River region in Hokkaido. Remarkable contrasts are seen between these two Ainu groups both in the nature of shamanism and in *imu:*, which scholars have referred to as the culture-bound syndrome of the Ainu.

While the topic of this work lies at the interface between anthropology and psychology or psychiatry, the nature of evidence presented in this paper is more anthropological than psychological, with the purpose of interpreting significant correlations in cultural institutions.

The data on the Ainu of the northwest coast of southern Sakhalin were obtained during three separate periods of fieldwork in Wakasakunai and Tokoro in Hokkaido (one year in 1965–1966, three months in 1969, and another three months in 1973). The shamanistic practices and associated cultural phenomena discussed in this paper are those of the Ainu who, during the first half of the 20th century, inhabited the northwest coast of southern Sakhalin, extending from north of Rayčiska (Japanese designation: Raichishika) to the former Russo-Japanese border. Together with the rest of the Sakhalin Ainu, they are now relocated in Hokkaido. Information on the Hokkaido Ainu of the Saru River region is derived from various published sources. Although publications on the Hokkaido Ainu are almost innumerable, the bulk of work pertains to the Ainu of the Saru River region in the Hidaka-Tokachi region of Hokkaido during the first half of the 20th century. The largest concentration of the Hokkaido Ainu has been found in this region and their Ainu way of

life has remained intact much longer than elsewhere in Hokkaido.

My discussion starts with a brief description of the two Ainu societies, followed by a presentation of major characteristics of shamanism and *imu:* in these two societies. In the last section of this paper, I present hypotheses regarding the interrelationship between the phenomenon of shamanism and that of *imu:* in these two societies so as to offer a cross-cultural model. Throughout the paper, I use the ethnographic present.

THE SOCIETIES

Despite a common assumption that Ainu culture is monolithic, not only are there significant differences between the three major Ainu groups—the Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and Kurile Ainu—but there also are significant intracultural variations within each group. All of the Ainu, however, share some basic cultural features, such as the high development of oral tradition and the basic subsistence economy which consists of hunting, fishing, and gathering plants. My presentation here is confined to major differences between the northwest coast Sakhalin Ainu and the Hokkaido Ainu of the Saru River region in Hokkaido as they relate to shamanism and *imu:*. In what follows, the two groups will often be referred to simply as the Sakhalin Ainu and the Hokkaido Ainu, unless further specification is necessary.

The Ainu on the northwest coast of southern Sakhalin are semisedentary, engaging at least in seasonal migration between their coastal summer settlement and the interior winter settlement. Their population is extremely small, with most settlements consisting of less than five nuclear families. The Hokkaido Ainu of the Saru River region, on the other hand, enjoy the largest population of all Ainuland. A few settlements there consist of close to 30 families, and the population of more than half of the settlements in the valley exceeds 5 families (Izumi 1952:34; Watanabe 1972:264).

The nuclear family is the basic social unit among both the Sakhalin Ainu and the Hokkaido Ainu. A settlement in both regions consists of male agnates as the core members with patrilineal descent and patrilocal postmarital residence as the rule.

As a corollary to the small size of the population, formal political structures and social stratification of any kind are little developed among the Sakhalin Ainu. Even in the case of larger settlements, two communities may share a common political organization. In

contrast, the formal political structure is more developed among the Hokkaido Ainu, each settlement having its autonomous political organization.

There has been no systematic study of the status of men vis-à-vis that of women in any Ainu society. Scholars note that men as a group enjoy a much higher status than women in Hokkaido (Kindaichi 1961:44) and that the difference of status between men and women is greater among the Hokkaido Ainu than among the Sakhalin Ainu (Chiri 1973:153). We might guess that the presence of a more formalized political structure among the Hokkaido Ainu necessarily creates a greater power differential between women and men, who alone have access to the political authority. In other words, the distance between the public and the domestic sphere becomes greater in such a situation (for the definitions of "domestic" and "public," see Rosaldo 1974:23). Among the Sakhalin Ainu, meager development of the formal political structure structurally reduces the distance between the two spheres. Furthermore, greater flexibility in role assignments and in other structural features which govern the lives of men and women in society is required by the ecological conditions. These conditions include the small population size, necessitated by the environment in which the Ainu live and by their methods of hunting and gathering, and the semisedentary settlement pattern which results from the climate and the fluctuation in available resources.

It must be stressed, however, that unlike the assumption of some scholars that all hunting-gathering populations enjoy sexual egalitarianism, the Sakhalin Ainu are highly sexist in their ideological norm. There is an explicit ranking based upon sex and age, with male elders on top of the apex and young females at the bottom. The ideological norm is meticulously supported by daily behavioral rules such as the seating arrangement at the hearth in the house and various other manners. In other words, political power vested in males is of no great significance due to the meager development of political organization, and, therefore, the formalized power differential between men and women is not great; yet their ideological structure which governs the day-to-day behavior of the Ainu is quite nonegalitarian, placing males as a group above women. (For details of the differences between the two Ainu groups, see Ohnuki-Tierney 1976; for details of the social ranking, see Ohnuki-Tierney 1974:84–85.)

SHAMANISM

Shamanism Among the Sakhalin Ainu

Among the Sakhalin Ainu, shamanism receives high cultural valuation. The shaman's rites are performed only after sunset inside the house beside the hearth with glowing embers as the only source of light. The Ainu regard the hearth as a miniature universe as well as the residence of Grandmother Hearth, without whose mediation no human prayers would ever reach the deities. A shaman, male or female, starts a rite by beating a drum, whose sound invites good spirits to aid the shaman and chases away evil spirits which attempt to interfere with the rite. Amidst smoke and aroma produced by three plants (a branch of spruce or larch, a mildly narcotic plant called *nuhča,* and a minced dried leek)[1] placed on embers and aided by a salty drink (sea water or river water with tangle coated with salt)[2] which the shaman takes, he or she reaches the climax. At this point he or she becomes possessed by a spirit and reaches a state of trance or at least semitrance. The spirit, then, speaks through the shaman delivering messages from the deities about the illness or whatever matter for which the rite is performed. Characteristically, a spirit decides upon which particular shaman to possess and a shaman has no say in the matter. Although these spirits are difficult to identify, they are mostly small animals; major deities of the Ainu pantheon such as bears do not become spirits in shamans.

Descriptions of shamanistic performance reveal that the Ainu shamans carry out at least four roles, all of which may be in operation simultaneously. Shamans are theatrical performers, religious specialists, health care specialists, and also covert politicians. Of the four roles, only the one of religious specialist and that of health care specialist are formalized; they are given "formal status and recogni-

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[1] The three aromatic plants are (listed here in order of their closeness to the embers) a branch or two of Yesso spruce or, if the shaman is a woman, of larch; a plant called *nuhča;* and minced dried leek. Yesso spruce is *Picea jezoensis* Carr (Chiri 1953:236) and is *sunku* in Ainu. Larch is *Larix dahurica* Turcz (Chiri 1953:237) and is *kuy* in Ainu. *Nuhča* is *Ledum palustre* var. *dilatatum* Wahlb (Chiri 1953:53), and is reported to be narcotic (Miyabe and Miyake 1915:308). The Ainu use this plant for tea and also as medicine and it does not seem to be strongly narcotic, although to my knowledge there is no chemical analysis of this plant available in publication. Leek is *Allium victorialis* var. *platyphyllum* Makino (Chiri 1953:195) and is called *kito* in Ainu.

[2] They use sea water during the warm season. During the cold season when they are in the settlement further inland, they use river water in which dried tangle coated with salt is soaked. Tangle is *Laminaria ochotensis* Miyabe (Chiri 1953:253) and is *ruru kina* in Ainu.

tion" by the Ainu (see Chiñas' definitions of formalized and nonformalized roles in Chiñas 1973:93-94; the nonformalized roles may be referred to as "functions" or "dimensions").

Shamans as theatrical performers have received much attention in recent anthropological literature (e.g., Beattie 1977; several articles, especially Leiris, in Beattie and Middleton 1969; Firth 1966-1967). Indeed, Ainu shamanistic rituals are the only type of regular communal entertainment for which almost everyone in the settlement gathers at the beat of the shaman's drum which announces the commencement of a rite. The performance of miracles in particular has a large element of theatrical performance. These performances include such feats as fetching the soul of a sick person that has already migrated to the world of the dead, fetching the mouthpiece to a pipe lost in a sea storm, and the like (for details of these performances, see Ohnuki-Tierney 1973). In the past they played an even more important part in the repertoire of male shamans, and their legends seem to provide a significant proof of the power of shamans in general.

As religious specialists, shamans are unimpressive. They are passively possessed by spirits, which are minor members of the Ainu pantheon. They perform the rites only as individuals for individual clients in a house. Their "humble" status becomes obvious when contrasted with a male elder, a politico-religious leader of the community, who holds an elaborate ceremony for the supreme deity, the bear. Not only the entire community, but also members of adjacent settlements and even distant east coast communities are invited to participate in the ceremony, which lasts for several days. The elder, acting as host, receives much admiration from all the participants for his generosity in holding the ceremony.

Shamans are also the only kind of health care specialist available in northwest coast Ainu society. Although the role of medical doctor is critical in any society, there is an additional dimension in the Ainu shaman's role as a medical doctor. Thus, Ainu shamans are doctors for the illness of an individual but they are also in charge of the healing of social ills. This dimension becomes apparent when we take a close look at Ainu definitions of illnesses for which shamans are consulted and the process by which diagnoses are reached. Ainu shamans are asked to diagnose and cure illnesses, all of which are characterized by the involvement of most of the important members of the Ainu universe—demons, deities, souls, and spirits—in the

etiology, as pathogens or sources of cures. For example, *kamuy iramohkari* (punishment by the wrath of a deity) strikes when an Ainu engages in some form of disrespectful behavior towards a deity. Or, *aymawko ahun* (entrance of the spirit of an arrow) takes place when a member of the community utters angry words about someone else in the community. The words then become an arrow which is shot into the victim's body, thereby causing this illness. These illnesses are usually not characterized by a standard set of symptoms and only shamans can identify and provide the cures. Or, even when a set of symptoms immediately identifies the illness, the particular etiological circumstance which led to this instance of the illness must still be identified by a shaman who then can provide instructions for the cure. In all of these cases, however, the victim who falls ill may not necessarily be the one who violates the Ainu moral and social codes. (For details of these illnesses, which I label "metaphysical illness," see Ohnuki-Tierney 1980a, 1980b.)

The definitions of these illnesses clearly indicate that they are seen as expressions of disjunction in the network of social relations among the beings of the universe, caused by human misconduct. Thus, in the Ainu medical scheme, an illness of an individual is an expression of a social ill (cf. Turner 1975:159). The role of shamans is to examine the behavior of their fellow Ainu to locate the seat of these disarticulations. As judge of the moral and social behavior of fellow Ainu, however, a shaman cannot be autocratic. Before reaching a diagnosis, shamans ask their patients about their dreams, feelings, and thoughts about themselves and others. They may also receive pertinent information for diagnosis from others in the community. When a shaman reaches a diagnosis, it must be convincing not only to the patient but also to the rest of the community. The process of diagnosis thus indicates that the diagnostic ability of shamans rests heavily on their knowledge of the behavioral patterns and personalities of the members of the settlement and of interpersonal relations among them. For example, anybody who is ill tempered, apt to provoke others verbally, or generally antisocial must be a likely suspect in the case of *aymawko ahun,* the illness caused by harsh words. For shamans to blame some other type of person is not convincing, and may cause the loss of their credibility and even their profession. Ainu shamans, therefore, must be skillful social analysts, although this ability may not have to be as extensive as that of the

Ndembu doctor (Turner 1967:359-393) and the Chinese soul raiser (Elliott 1955:134-140), who operate in much larger societies.

This discussion leads us to another important role which Ainu shamans play—their role in social control. They can even act as covert politicians, subtly directing the course of events in the community by evaluating the conduct of others, thereby affecting the behavior of offenders of Ainu moral codes and nonoffenders who are nevertheless reminded of the outcome of misconduct. Their nonformalized power in this area takes on even greater significance when we consider the absence of elaborate legal codes and the meager development of a formal political structure. It should be reiterated, however, that the role of the shaman as politician is a covert and nonformalized role, which some shamans can play if they so choose.

Although an individual must receive a call before becoming a shaman, both men and women can become shamans. The Ainu do not regard shamans either as cunning, mysterious, or abnormal in any negative sense; they are simply ordinary Ainu who have a special gift for interacting with the spirits and deities.

Until recently, male and female shamans were equal in number, but since World War II, female shamans far outnumber male practitioners, possibly as a result of the more rapid acculturation of Ainu men than women. Although my sample is too limited to suggest it as a rule, Ainu men barred from access to the regular routes for political success are attracted to a shaman's career. For example, a noted shaman of the Rayčiska settlement was blind and therefore could not engage in hunting, fishing, and other male activities which provide the means for males in Ainu society to achieve power. The Ainu situation corresponds with the involvement of politically peripheral males in shamanistic/medical professions in other societies (Lewis 1971:100-105; Mair 1969:216; Needham 1973, 1976; Turner 1967:371; Worsley 1968:ix-xxi). Shamanistic practices provide the practitioners neither with economic gains nor with political power. Only when a male shaman happens to be already politically powerful does his shamanistic ability add to his reputation and power. This was the case with a political leader at the Hurooči settlement. (For details of northwest coast shamanism, see Ohnuki-Tierney 1973, 1980b.)

Shamanism Among the Hokkaido Ainu

Very little information is available on Hokkaido Ainu shamanism, due in part to the lack of significance assigned to shamanism both by the Ainu themselves and by outsiders. Scholars point out that Hokkaido Ainu shamanism is not as developed as Sakhalin Ainu shamanism (e.g., Kindaichi 1944:299; Hanihara et al. 1972:178). Among the Hokkaido Ainu, shamans are reportedly all women (Kindaichi 1961:45; Segawa 1972:192), although in the past there were some male shamans (Chiri 1973:23; K. Wada 1971:19). Batchelor (1927:275-285), on the other hand, notes that he met both male and female shamans. Hokkaido shamans also enter into a possession trance. In sharp contrast with the possession trance of Sakhalin Ainu shamans, a Hokkaido Ainu shaman becomes possessed only if a male elder induces it in her by offering prayers to the deities (Kindaichi 1961:45; K. Wada 1971:18-19). Their role is also to diagnose illnesses. It is to be noted, however, that their function is confined to diagnosis, after which male elders take over and engage in the healing process (Munro 1963:10; Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi 1938:36).

Available information on Hokkaido Ainu shamanism, then, suggests two major features which distinguish it from Sakhalin Ainu shamanism. First, it is the exclusive territory of women at least during the recent past (roughly during the 19th century and early 20th century). Second, Hokkaido Ainu shamans play a much more minor role—they are no more than assistants to male elders and are not autonomous or full-fledged specialists in medicine or religion.

Shamanism in Ancient Ainu Society

In order to further interpret the shamanism in these two Ainu groups, I now refer to information available about shamanism in the past. Using oral tradition, Chiri advances an interpretation that the culture hero, who is a central figure in the Ainu oral tradition in most regions, represents Ainu political leaders who necessarily were shamans in the ancient society of the Ainu (Chiri 1953:90; 1960:111). As Chiri (1973:19) points out, a shaman-chief is often accompanied by his "sister," who is also a shaman. These female shamans are the ones who, during their possession trance, deliver instructions from the deities with regard to political, economic, and

other decisions that males were about to make. At that time, the shamanistic ability of a wife, sister, mother, or of any close female relative was essential for the success of a male who was or who strived to be politically successful (cf. Kindaichi 1961:45-46). In the recent past, however, major decisions have been made by the males without the consultation of shamans, thus demonstrating the diminishing importance of shamans in the workings of Ainu society. Chiri (1973:8) places a special emphasis on the fact that at the time of shaman-chiefs, an element of theatrical performance was much greater. Chiri (1973:23) suggests that shamanism lost its importance in Ainu culture between the 17th and 18th centuries.

Even in northwest coast Sakhalin Ainu society, in which shamanism continued to enjoy a favorable cultural valuation up to the ethnographic present, there are some indications that shamanism received even higher cultural valuation in the past. In a tale from the oral tradition of the northwest coast, two brothers, who lived at the Rayčiska settlement at the beginning of the world and are regarded by the Ainu as their great ancestors, are said to have been powerful shamans. One of them was married to the Goddess of the Sun and Moon and could travel to the sky while performing a shamanistic rite. In a sacred tale from the east coast, the culture hero during his battle with female demons is saved by a woman whom he subsequently marries. She is depicted as being a "deity-like" young woman with shamanistic ability (Kindaichi 1914:103-104). In another story, also from the east coast, the culture hero himself is described as being a powerful shaman (Pilsudski 1912:149-155). The story implies that he is expected to excel in miracle performances rather than in the ordinary curing of illnesses.

In short, both in Hokkaido and Sakhalin, it seems that shamanism received a high cultural valuation in the past and that shamans enjoyed high social standing. Also, there were both male and female shamans. Although male shamans alone were at the same time political leaders, female shamans played an integral and vital role in the decision-making processes of male shaman-chiefs.

Although a reconstruction of the ancient society of the Ainu must remain speculative, there is enough evidence to suggest that Ainu societies in the past were very small; on the basis of historical resources, Watanabe (1973:93-100) presents an excellent summary of demographic figures of Ainu settlements in the past, which ranged between a few to a dozen houses in a settlement.

Figure 1 summarizes the information presented so far on shamanism in three Ainu societies: (1) ancient society; (2) the society of the northwest coast of southern Sakhalin; and (3) the society of the Saru River region in Hokkaido. When the society is small, as in the case of the ancient society and the northwest coast society, both men and women are shamans. Significantly, in both societies, shamanism receives high cultural valuation. An important distinction between the two societies is that male shamans were also political leaders in the ancient society, while the two roles are independent in the northwest coast society. In fact, some male shamans are politically marginal, since shamanistic ability is not automatically translated into political power. Disparity between political authority and shamanistic power, however, is not as significant as it may seem, since, as a corollary to small population size, formal political structure is not well developed and hence not as much authority is vested in political leaders. Although the ideological norm of the northwest coast Ainu subscribes to sexual stratification, as I discussed earlier, political power vested in males is not great, and therefore inequality between the sexes is reduced in practice. Furthermore, basic flexibility rules required by ecological factors necessarily mitigate the degree of stratification of any kind in the society. Since it shared

Society	Ancient Ainu	Northwest coast of southern Sakhalin	Saru River valley in Hokkaido
Size	small	small (5-25 people)	larger (25-150 people)
Political organization	meagerly developed	meagerly developed	well-developed
Sexual stratification	meager development?	meager development	well-developed
The sex of shamans	men and women	women and (politically marginal)men	women only
Shamans and political arena	politically central	politically marginal	outside of political structures
Cultural valuation of shamanism	very high	high	low

Figure 1. Shamanism in Three Ainu Societies.

similar ecological conditions, my guess is that, in regard to political structure and sexual stratification, a similar picture holds true for the ancient society.

Shamanism as a cultural institution in the society of the Saru River Ainu in Hokkaido, on the other hand, is significantly different. In this larger society, with a more developed political organization, all shamans are women and shamanism receives low cultural valuation.

This three-way comparison of shamanism suggests a possible cross-cultural generalization in terms of the relationship between shamanism and political power. In a very small society shamanistic ability is an important component of political power. When a society becomes larger and a group religion or an institutionalized religion develops, as in the case of Hokkaido Ainu society in the recent past, the group religion (e.g., the bear ceremony) takes over political functions and shamanism loses its high cultural valuation. In a larger and more complex society, the distance between the public and the domestic domain is greater, with the public domain receiving much higher cultural valuation. The allocation of activities often starts to follow the sex line more strictly, relegating the activities in the public domain exclusively to men. As a corollary, the role of shaman is assumed by women who have no access to the political arena, whereas males claim the leadership in group religions that lie in the public domain. The northwest coast Ainu society occupies a position midway between ancient Ainu society and Hokkaido Ainu society. In the northwest coast society, this separating out of the political from the shamanistic power is already starting to take place, but shamanism continues to receive high cultural valuation and is open to both sexes.

IMU:—A CULTURE-BOUND REACTIVE SYNDROME OF THE AINU

In order to discuss its possible relationship to the personality of shamans, I describe in this section a temporary psychobehavioral departure from the norm, referred to as *imu:* in Ainu. At least a brief description is justified because details of *imu:* have been published only in Japanese (for more detail than space permits in this paper, see Ohnuki-Tierney 1980b: Appendix III). Of particular interest to the topic of this paper is that, as in the case of shaman-

ism, the nature of *imu:* demonstrates several significant differences between the Sakhalin Ainu and the Hokkaido Ainu—a fact that has never been systematically pursued in any language. In what follows, I rely primarily on my own data on the northwest coast Sakhalin Ainu and the data gathered by Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi (1938) for the Hokkaido Ainu, although all other available sources have been consulted and are presented when pertinent.

The meaning of the Ainu word *imu:* is not clear (Chiri and Wada 1943:67; see also Uchimura, Akimoto and Ishibashi 1938:9-10). Neither the northwest coast Sakhalin Ainu, nor the Hokkaido Ainu regard *imu:* as any type of illness. They simply regard the behavior during an *imu:* seizure as amusing, and they often make fun of it. If a respected shaman or a political leader happens to be a victim of *imu:*, it in no way affects the respect which the person commands; the others laugh at the victim of *imu:* only during the seizure. In this regard, the Ainu attitude is similar to the one held by the Eskimos toward *pibloktoq* (Wallace 1972:374, 379) or the Malay and Indonesian attitude toward *latah* (Kenny 1978:209).

Not being an illness, *imu:* requires neither diagnosis nor cure among the northwest coast Sakhalin Ainu. Among other Sakhalin Ainu groups, however, *imu:* is said to be caused by possession by a spirit, called *imu: kamuy (kamuy* = deity) (K. Wada 1964:112). The Niputani Ainu in the Saru River region of Hokkaido, under Munro's investigation, also link *imu:* with possession by a snake. Thus an *imu:* victim would usually consult a shaman and "a frequent diagnosis is that the illness is due to possession by an evil snake spirit" (Munro 1963:161). It is somewhat unclear whether *imu:* is identified as an illness by the Niputani Ainu or its reference as an illness is done by Munro himself.

The Sakhalin Ainu see two distinct categories of *imu:*. The first category involves a mild state in which an individual becomes surprised, but not necessarily frightened, and mumbles meaningless sounds. Each individual *imu:* Ainu, when surprised, almost always utters the same nonsensical phrases, such as "Ačikapahse," which has no meaning in Ainu. While in the field, I once stood up, bumped my head on a bare light bulb hanging from the ceiling, and uttered an English exclamation, "Oops." Those Ainu present thought that I was experiencing an *imu:* state, since they had never heard the English expression which was of course meaningless in either Ainu or Japanese. (In fact, this incident precipitated a series

of discussions on *imu:* which provided rich ethnographic information.) The manner in which an *imu:* victim reacts to a mild shock is seen as analogous to the way in which a seed pod of a certain plant snaps open and expels the seeds; this plant has been identified by Chiri (1953:81) as *Impatiens noli-tangere* L. The plant is thus named *imu: kina (kina* = grass in Ainu). Individuals with an *imu:* tendency seem to become *imu:* whenever they are surprised. One informant stated that she became more susceptible to an *imu:* stimulus when she was tired.

The second category of *imu:* constitutes a more severe state during which the individual loses touch with reality and has no control over him or herself. The Sakhalin Ainu refer to these individuals "who do *imu:* in a grand way" as *sikutu,* and terminologically distinguish them from the milder *imu:* Ainu. Each individual exhibits a definite pattern during the *imu:*. According to B. Wada (1956:45), the Sakhalin Ainu *imu:* is characterized by manifested automatic obedience—doing what one is told to do. In the samples listed by Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi (1938), the compulsive imitation of what one observes (echopraxia) and compulsive imitation of what one hears (echolalia) are also noted.

The symptoms of the Hokkaido Ainu *imu:* are more varied. According to B. Wada (1956:45), the Hokkaido Ainu *imu:* is characterized by negative automatic obedience, thus being in sharp contrast to the Sakhalin Ainu *imu:*. Although Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi (1938:13) report one case of manifested automatic obedience among their Hokkadio Ainu samples, their description of symptoms of individuals is so incomplete that it is hard to conclusively affirm or deny Wada's statement. Other symptoms include echolalia and echopraxia, as well as copropraxia and coprolalia—involuntary utterances or behavior that is obscene or sexual in nature. Chiri's examples of coprolalia include "A filthy looking person had diarrhea," or "Let your penis have a drink" (Chiri 1952:56, 1953:84-85). Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi (1938:26) report that coprolalia and copropraxia take place usually at a drinking session. (For further discussions of symptoms, see Tsuboi 1889:457-458; Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi 1938:19-28; K. Wada 1965:264-265; Winiarz and Wielwaski 1936:184.)

In regard to the precipitating factor or stimulus, there is a marked difference between the Sakhalin Ainu and the Hokkaido Ainu. In the case of the milder form of *imu:* for the Sakhalin Ainu, the

stimulus for induction seems to be a mild but unexpected shock incurred by various phenomena and objects. In the case of the more severe *imu:*, a verbal suggestion alone seems to suffice to incite the individual into the *imu:* state. For example, in the case of a male *imu:* whose initial occurrence of *imu:* took place at the sight of a writhing reindeer which he had shot, he immediately entered the state of *imu:* when someone asked, "What happened to the reindeer you shot?" In contrast, the precipitating factor for the Hokkaido Ainu *imu:* seems to be almost always the sight of a snake or the Ainu word for snake, *tokoni.* Thus, for all of the 77 Hokkaido Ainu *imu:* individuals listed in Figure 1 by Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi (1938:10-13), the stimulus was the hearing of the word *tokoni* or seeing a snake, a toy snake, or a picture of a snake. Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi (1938:28, 46) report a case of a male Hokkaido Ainu who talked about a snake by referring to it as "a long worm" or "an abominable worm," without being incited into an *imu:* state, until one of the investigators asked if he meant *tokoni,* using the Ainu term for snake, upon which he became seized with *imu:*. Other items which serve as a stimulus to some Hokkaido Ainu include a frog, an octopus, and a crab.

An important category of stimuli is foreign objects that are newly introduced or otherwise unfamiliar to the individual. For example, metal washing pans newly introduced from the Japanese at the time of investigation or neon signs which an Ainu saw for the first time while visiting Tokyo served as stimuli (Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi 1938:29). Unfamiliar foreign objects serve as stimuli also for the Sakhalin Ainu, as in the case of a Sakhalin Ainu woman whose initial occurrence of *imu:* took place at the sight of a Japanese domesticated cat which she had never seen before.

The Sakhalin Ainu do not regard *imu:* as sex-linked, although out of nine cases described to me, seven were women. On the other hand, the two males also had severe cases of *imu:*. This situation again contrasts with the Hokkaido Ainu, among whom Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi (1938:29) found no male *imu:* Ainu, although they do refer to other scholars' observations which testify very infrequent cases of males in the past. Jimbo (1901:1) also states that *imu:* afflicts only women. It should be pointed out that one of the two males in my sample had originally come from Hokkaido when he was young, perhaps before his first seizure of *imu:* Thus it seems that although *imu:* affects some men, especially in Sakhalin,

it affects women with a much higher frequency among any Ainu group.

The age of those who suffer from *imu:* is decisively old. In fact, the mental image which the Sakhalin Ainu have of these individuals is that of people in their late 50s or 60s. When the age of individual *imu:* Ainu was examined, however, it was found that some had begun to have seizures as early as in their 40s. Among the Hokkaido Ainu at Hidaka, out of 45 cases, 17 were in their 50s, 14 were in their 40s, and 10 were in their 60s, although the onset of *imu:* takes place predominantly in people who are in their 20s and 30s (Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi 1938:33). According to Jimbo (1901:7-8), of 12 individuals under his investigation, 3 experienced the first seizure in their teens. Evaluation of Jimbo's information is somewhat difficult since his investigation is fairly limited in scale and depth.

My data are too inconclusive to provide meaningful speculation about the percentage of *imu:* in the total population of the northwest coast of southern Sakhalin. The investigation of Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi (1938:15) shows the highest frequency, 3.91%, at the Piratori settlement in the Hidaka district, 2% elsewhere in the Hidaka area, and less than 1% outside of the Hidaka area of Hokkaido. The Hidaka district exhibits the highest density of Ainu population in Hokkaido, and its Piratori settlement is referred to as the Ainu capital because of its large Ainu population and high retention of the Ainu way of life in the community.

As the highest frequency of *imu:* at the Piratori settlement suggests, there seems to be a definite correlation between its frequency of occurrence and the degree of integrity of Ainu way of life; the retention of the Ainu way is often facilitated by the great distance of the settlement from a Japanese city, as in the case of the Piratori settlement (Kumasaka 1964; Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi 1938:13-14). As a corollary, with the rapid process of Ainu acculturation into the Japanese way of life, *imu:* is quickly disappearing, at least in its classical form, just as in the case of *latah, amok,* and other culture-bound syndromes elsewhere. When Suwa and his colleagues carried out an investigation in 1958, they located only four *imu:* Ainu in the Niputani settlement in the Piratori district of Hidaka (Suwa 1963). Figure 2 summarizes the above information.

There are some marked differences in the nature of *imu:* between the Sakhalin Ainu and the Hokkaido Ainu. I will try to interpret the

	Sakhalin Ainu	Hokkaido Ainu
Symptoms	A. Non-sensical utterances B. Echolalia; echopraxia C. Manifested automatic obedience D. Sudden violent actions	A. Echolalia; echopraxia B. Coprolalia; copropraxia C. Negative automatic obedience; (manifested automatic obedience) D. Sudden violent actions
Stimulus	A. Startle in general B. Hearing verbal suggestions C. (Seeing unfamiliar foreign objects)	A. Catching sight of a snake, frog, octopus, or crab B. Hearing the word tokoni (snake) C. Seeing unfamiliar foreign objects
Sex of the victims	Women; some men	Women exclusively (a few men in the past)
Age of the victims	Middle age to old age	Middle age (forties and fifties)
Frequency per population	?	c 4-1%

Figure 2. *Imu:*.

occurrence of *imu:* among the Hokkaido Ainu first. Recent studies indicate that certain psychobehavioral disorders, many of which are culturally sanctioned, are prevalent among the members of a social group for whom culturally important rights and positions are not accessible. Such studies as Foulks (1972), Kenny (1978), Lewis (1971), Obeyesekere (1970), Rubel (1964), and Spiro (1977), demonstrate the prevalence of psychobehavioral disorders among women in societies in which women, regardless of their ability and personality, not only are deprived of rights and privileges of high cultural esteem, but are expected to meet strict and rigorous role expectations. Thus, one can speculate that low status in a society can result in psychological stress beyond the individual's capacity to resolve it, but that the culture provides a way for these individuals to resolve it in a culturally sanctioned manner such as *imu:, latah,* demonic possession, and so forth. Culture thus provides simultaneously both pathogenic/etiological agents as well as healing agents (cf. Wallace 1970).

Sociocultural factors such as the marginal position of the individual or strict role expectations provide at least a partial explanation for *imu:* occurrence among women in Hokkaido Ainu society. The fact that negative automatic obedience, coprolalia, and copro-

praxia are characteristic behavioral patterns of Hokkaido Ainu *imu:* but are not symptoms of Sakhalin Ainu seems to support this line of interpretation. As noted earlier, there is a greater distance between men and women in Hokkaido Ainu society than there is in Sakhalin Ainu society, and women's modesty, especially with regard to their body, is extremely emphasized. Also of importance here are some of the stimuli. The snake, the primary precipitating factor for Hokkaido Ainu *imu:* is not a consciously perceived phallic symbol among the Hokkaido Ainu according to Chiri (1962:223-228); instead, a turtle is called *ečinke* (one whose head looks like a penis) in one of the Hokkaido Ainu dialects (Chiri 1962:223). While the snake may or may not symbolize a threat posed by men, Japanese washing pans and neon signs are clearly symbols of the threat of the Japanese to Ainu society just as *latah* is, at least in part, a response to new European overlords (Murphy 1976). Note that Japanese washing pans became the major stimulus for *imu:* in the Tokachi district of Hokkaido when they were first introduced to the Tokachi Ainu (cf. Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi 1938:29). Thus, there is at least partial evidence that the *imu:* among Hokkaido Ainu women is linked to their marginal status vis-à-vis Ainu males who form the dominant group in Ainu society. It is also linked to their status vis-à-vis the Japanese who constitute the dominant group in a larger universe, the Ainu having become a minority group in Japanese society. Even in the case of Sakhalin Ainu *imu:*, such stimuli as a domesticated cat of the Japanese or raw fish-eating introduced by the Japanese (see Cases 2 and 3 described at the end of Appendix III in Ohnuki-Tierney 1980b), suggest that their *imu:*, too, may also be related to the minority status of the Ainu in Japanese society.

In short, the data indicate that the etiology of *imu:* may relate to threats from the social environment. Among the Hokkaido Ainu, there is greater patterning in that the dominant group, either men or the Japanese, poses or at least is seen to pose, the threat to the victims who are almost exclusively women. In the case of the Sakhalin Ainu, the etiology of *imu:* may be more individualistic, although in some cases it may also relate to the threat of the Japanese.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *IMU:* AND SHAMANS

On the basis of etymological analyses and information from the oral tradition of the east coast Sakhalin Ainu and the Hokkaido

Ainu, Chiri (1952) and K. Wada (1965) propose that in the past the Ainu saw a close association between *imu:* and shamanism. However, present-day Ainu, either in Sakhalin or Hokkaido, do not consciously relate *imu:* to the personality of shamans. However, when I checked a list of individuals who were victims of *imu:*, more than half of them were also shamans. Of the 13 Hokkaido Ainu shamans and 1 Sakhalin Ainu shaman investigated by Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi (1938:39), 9, including the Sakhalin Ainu, were also *imu:* victims. Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi also report that for 20% of their sample the initial occurrence of *imu:* related to shamanism, for during a major illness these individuals consulted a shaman who diagnosed the cause of the illness to be a possession by a snake. In each case the individual was cured by an elder on the condition that she would eventually become an *imu:* sufferer after the recovery from the illness. They indeed started to periodically experience *imu:* shortly after the recovery (Uchimura, Akimoto, and Ishibashi 1938:35-36). Among the Niputani Ainu of Hokkaido, Munro (1963:161-163) records two prayers which attempt a "transmutation of an incapacitating or distressing neurosis to Imu [*sic*]" and two other prayers which aim at "transmutation to *tusu* shamans in case of a severe neurosis where *imu* [*sic*] could not be obtained."

It is fairly certain to conclude that there is an overlap between shamans and *imu:* victims and but that the overlap is only partial—not all shamans suffer from *imu:* and not all *imu:* victims are shamans. In order to probe into this question of partial overlap, it is now necessary to examine the nature of spirit possession which characterizes the Ainu shamanistic ritual. As noted earlier, Ainu shamans become possessed by spirits when the spirits wish; the possession is not subject to the shaman's will. The spirits act and speak through the shaman's body. During a possession trance, therefore, shamans are not held responsible for their behavior. It is for this reason that Ainu sorcerers are not held responsible for their acts (see Ohnuki-Tierney 1973).

Possession, therefore, can serve as a culturally sanctioned mechanism with a definite therapeutic function for the individuals who, either because of their personality or role constraints, cannot otherwise express themselves in the manner that is possible during a possession trance. As Spiro (1965) eloquently expressed a number of years ago, religion serves as a "culturally constituted defense," and provides a "non-pathological resolution of the conflicts" (Spiro 1965:107). In discussing Burmese shamans, Spiro (1977) successfully

demonstrates that the availability of a variety of *nats* makes it possible for these Burmese female shamans, who have a variety of personality types, to dissolve their various types of frustrations through the *nat* possession. Similarly, using as an example a case of demonic possession in Sri Lanka, Obeyesekere (1970) illustrates how the role resolution is accomplished through a culturally sanctioned means of temporarily deviating from the norm. Obeyesekere (1970:102) states:

> The adoption of a new status, and its attendant role, which utilizes and acts out the psychological problem of the individual in a positive matter, would be considered a normal way of "coping."

Similar reasoning is behind Wallace's (1970) explanation of the process of becoming a shaman as one example of the process of mazeway resynthesis, during which a confusing and anxiety-provoking world starts to make sense.

While the psychological conflicts which some individuals resolve through the culturally sanctioned possession trance may arise from "deprivation in personal satisfaction," they may also relate to "deprivation resulting from low social status or lack of power" (Bourguignon 1973:328). An often cited work by Lewis (1971) emphasizes this link between status deprivation and possession trance. Lewis (1971:31) explains:

> For all their concern with disease and its treatment, such women's possession cults are also, I argue, thinly disguised protest movements directed against the dominant sex. They thus play a significant part in the sex-war in traditional societies and cultures where women lack more obvious and direct means for forwarding their aims.

In contradiction to the sex-war interpretation of Lewis, Wilson (1967) asserts that illness and possession are caused by tension and frustrations between the members of the same sex arising from competition for the same goals and rewards, such as competition for the husband's attention among co-wives. According to Wilson, they are not due to tension between the sexes. It seems to me that Wilson's interpretation in fact reinforces the interpretation by various scholars, including Lewis, cited above, which links sociocultural deprivation to possession, illness, and various culturally normative departures. If culturally defined rewards and goals are narrowly defined for women, then competition becomes sharper and thus causes greater anxiety on the part of the individual.

These two types of sources of psychological conflict which the

possession trance serves to alleviate explain the differences between the Sakhalin Ainu and the Hokkaido Ainu in regard to the shamanism and *imu:* phenomenon in each respective society. I interpret that some, but not all, Ainu shamans may indeed by psychologically disturbed and we see a partial overlap between shamans and *imu:* victims. The case of the Hokkaido Ainu, on the other hand, is more closely correlated with status deprivation and role constraints imposed by Ainu culture upon women (cf. Bourguignon 1973; Greenbaum 1973). For this reason, women alone are shamans and *imu:* victims among the Hokkaido Ainu, and their *imu:* symptoms include negative automatic obedience, coprolalia, and copropraxia. In short, there is a partial overlap in the etiology and function between *imu:* and the spirit possession of shamans. In order to explain a partial, and not complete, overlap between shamanism and *imu:* and to probe into the relationship between shamanism and other types of behavioral disturbances, we must have a much more extensive picture of psychobehavioral disorders of the Ainu.

The interpretation that some shamans may indeed be individuals with psychological difficulties should in no way preclude the possibility that some shamans may be stable or "healthy" individuals without major psychological problems, as Kennedy (1973) suggests. Here I must emphasize the multiple roles of shamans discussed in an earlier section of this paper. Shaman-chiefs in the ancient society of the Ainu may indeed have been "healthy" and perhaps strong-minded individuals who learned the art of possession. For that matter, it seems not at all contradictory to see a strong-minded person with a desire to exercise formalized or nonformalized power occasionally manifest temporary departures from the norm. Given the complexity of the multiple roles which shamans carry out, and given the fact that at least half of the population—that is, women—are politically peripheral and have only a marginal status in society, we must allow room for "perfectly healthy" individuals to enter the career for other reasons, such as the exercise of nonformalized power. A female sorcerer in pre-Communist China who became an eloquent village representative (Yang 1969:132) is an example of a "healthy" and "strong-minded" magico-religious practitioner who, if given the opportunity, would have used a legitimate route.

SUMMARY

On the basis of data from a small society of the Sakhalin Ainu and a larger society of the Hokkaido Ainu, I have attempted to understand the interrelationships between shamans and *imu:* victims. Although data are limited and thus interpretations remain highly

speculative, my study suggests that we must assume that shamanism is an extraordinary complex cultural institution which is highly variable in nature from culture to culture, but which is closely related to the structure of the society in which it operates. The cultural valuation it receives and the social position of shamans are thus explainable in terms of the structure of the society.

I speculate, as a gross generalization, that when a society is small, shamanism often receives high cultural valuation and shamans are not confined to certain personality types, certain statuses in the society, or one biological sex. In a larger society, shamanism is culturally insignificant and consequently is an arena for the socially marginal, including women. As a corollary, a greater number of shamans are individuals with psychological difficulties which they in turn resolve through the experience as shamans, and in particular, through the possession trance. Relevant sociocultural factors that are responsible for such a configuration of shamanism in these larger and more complex societies include the presence of such cultural features as an institutionalized religion, social stratification, a great distance between the public and the domestic domains, ascribed statuses, strict role allocation, rigidity of role expectations, and several other related factors. In the case of the Ainu, the shamanism of the northwest coast Sakhalin Ainu used to be that of a small society in which it was an important cultural institution, while the shamanism of the Hokkaido Ainu typifies that of a large and complex society. Northwest coast Ainu shamanism during the ethnographic present represents shamanism which falls somewhere between the two types.

Another factor which further increases the complexity of shamanism is the fact that shamans in any society are at least potentially capable of carrying out multiple roles—healers, religious specialists, covert politicians, and theatrical performers. They may be perfectly "healthy" shamans who enjoy exercising nonformalized power or who enjoy entertaining an audience. It is perhaps for this reason that the scholars' interpretation of shaman's mental state ranges from those who view them as having psychological disorders (e.g., Lebra 1964, 1969; Lévi-Strauss 1967:161–180; Spiro 1977) to those who consider them to be well balanced (Kennedy 1973:1151). This is another reason why there is a definite but partial overlap between shamans and the victims of psychological disorders, such as the culture-bound syndrome of *imu:*.[3]

[3] Although the concept of multiple etiology, as suggested by Foulks (1972) as an explanation of the Polar Eskimo *pibloktoq* is a useful tool of interpretation, sociocultural factors seem

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to be more basic than that of a biochemical basis for the etiology of *imu:*. Since most female *imu:*, both among the Sakhalin and Hokkaido, are found to be in their 40s and 50s, one might postulate that hormonal and other biological changes are responsible. However, since women of other ages are also *imu:* victims and, especially in the past, some men also suffered from *imu:*, a biological explanation of this sort may be considered at best only one of multiple factors in the etiology of *imu:*.

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