

研究論文

# 日本の北方のアイヌ民族にみられるイム現象：その過去と現在

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## Imu phenomena observed among the Ainu people in northern Japan : past and present

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## [Abstract]

Imu is a peculiar behavioral and oral expression observed in Ainu people living in Hokkaido, the northern main island of Japan. Ainu people, of course, were familiar with this phenomena in their daily life and did not recognize it as a disease. On the other hand psychiatrists orientated in western medicine have described it as a psychiatric or abnormal psychological symptom. Its characteristic features are interjectional oral expressions such as echolalia, coprolalia and violent uncontrolled echo-behavior including automatic mimicking, regressive sexual behavior provoked by a verbal stimulation such as "Tokkoni" that means snake in the Ainu language. However, our recent investigations showed that the classical, characteristic features of Imu have already been lost and only slight echolalia and echo-behavior can be seen in a very few Ainu people just like residual foot prints. In this article, the authors showed the psychiatric features of Imu, its cultural background from the viewpoint of Ainu history and how Imu has changed in its mode of expression from past to present.

Key words : Ainu, Imu, psychomotor reactions, culture-bound syndrome

## I . Introduction

Imu is a peculiar syndrome in language and behavior which is characteristic of the Ainu, aborigines living in Sakhalin, Chishima Islands (Kuril Islands) and Hokkaido, the northernmost island of Japan. This specific state is characterized by the sudden onset of symptoms in language and behavior in response to some stimuli, including the Ainu word "tokkoni" meaning snake.

In this article, Imu is discussed in 3 ways. First, for points it has in common with other culture-bound syndromes such as Ratah. Second, for its originality and healing effect against the background of Ainu history. Third, for changes in the form of Imu that correspond to changes in the times.

## II . Phenomenal form of Imu

## 1 . Phenomenal form of classical Imu

Originally, Imu meant the jumping of a shaman when he/she reached a state of ecstasy, but recently the term Imu has also come to mean various psychological reactions and verbal expressions provoked by astonishment or fright<sup>1)</sup>.

In modern times, psychiatrists have expanded the concept of Imu and have included abnormal speech and reflectoric behavior. Uchimura<sup>2)</sup>, who made a detailed psychiatric description of Imu, summarized the phenomenal form of Imu as follows : violent uncontrolled psychomotor reactions ("Bewegungssturm"), cataleptic features, echosymptoms (echolalia and echopraxi), automatic mimicking ("Befehlsautomatie"), and regressive sexual behavior.

## 2. Phenomenal form of contemporary Imu

Shichida<sup>3)</sup> investigated 11 cases of Imu in a rural district of Hokkaido around 1980 and summarized the features of contemporary Imu as follows :

- a) The incidence of Imu has generally decreased and in particular typical Imu has almost disappeared.
- b) The symptoms of Imu are mainly mild echolalia and echo behavior.
- c) These symptoms strongly reflect the personality of Imu-hucchi, an old woman who performed Imu in a habitual manner.
- d) Imu stimuli have also lost their specificity and anything that startles or induces fixed concentration can cause Imu. The specificity of the snake has been also lost due to a decrease in the terror of snake possession.
- e) In a classic type of Imu, Kamuinomi, a ritual for calling the God of Imu ("Imu-kamui") is always followed by Imu. However, Imu-hucchis who have not received Kamuinomi is rather common. In addition, there are some cases who enter Imu while pretending to achieve Imu.
- f) The healing effect of Imu has been decreased. There are some people, who despite repeated Imu, do not become physically healthy. Therefore they have to receive several extra-sessions of Kamuinomi.

The characteristics of contemporary Imu can be summarized as follows : Imu is neither unusual nor strange today compared with previous times and has become, in general, mild.

## III . A case of contemporary Imu

34 year old woman :

She was not healthy from her childhood, but did not receive Kamuinomi to induce Imu-kamui when she was young. However, in her teens, she spontaneously developed mild Imu, saying "opo-po, opo-po" when she was surprised at something.

After her first childbirth she showed severe weakness. She pleaded with Tsusukuru, an Ainu shaman, to induce Imu in the hope of restoring good health. At the age of 30 years, she developed

clear Imu after receiving Kamuinomi. Her Imu was not so severe. When she was surprised something, such as the telephone ringing, she uttered "opo-po" and/or "cha-cha" and sometimes began to dance.

Subsequently, she became considerably healthier, but sometimes developed indefinite complaints, such as finger tremors and uncomfortable sweating. She has not yet recovered from this hypochondriac tendency.

## IV . Nature of Imu from the standpoint of psychiatry

In the past, Imu had been diagnosed as primitive reaction, hysteria, hypnotic state, or obsessional state. These are in some ways similar to Imu, but have several differences.

Nishida<sup>4)</sup> indicated the relationship of Imu to Tourette's syndrome. Although Tourette's theory that Ratah was included in Tourette's syndrome was not initially accepted, it has been attracting attention in recent years.

In conclusion, as described by Simons<sup>5)</sup>, it may be most appropriate to consider that the startle reaction is the basic psychological mechanism which is common to culture-bound syndromes such as Imu and Ratah.

## V . Imu and the mind of Ainu

A peculiar psychiatric state characteristic of a nation has been reviewed and discussed as a culture-bound syndrome since the 1960s. The culture bound-syndrome may also be considered a reaction of the nation under a crisis.

A mental condition which has been considered to be normal and characteristic in one culture may be regarded as an abnormal mental symptom when this culture meets another one and is merged and assimilated into it.

Therefore, usually it becomes necessary to change the form of the mental condition, and as a result it disappears in many cases. The culture-bound syndrome is an aspect of historical change.

Imu is also classified as a culture-bound syndrome. It appears to have been present in Ainu from ancient times when they had no writing

system. At that time, Imu was not considered a disease, but was accepted as a special mental state among the Ainu.

Imu has been recorded in writing since the Meiji era. According to the records, classic Imu has gradually transformed into new types, including “festival-Imu”(“matsuri-Imu”) only observed during festivals or likewise “role Imu”(“yarase-Imu”) as a lubricant for personal relations in the Ainu community by “Imu-yara” inciting the Ainu to Imu and “pseudo-Imu”(“sunke-Imu”) which is seemingly Imu. Furthermore, contemporary Imu is destined to be lost.

Such changes have occurred as the culture of the Ainu has been lost and absorbed into that of the Japanese. Therefore, we are in agreement with Takahata’s view<sup>3)</sup> of that some kinds of Imu mentioned above represent a form of resistance of the Ainu to Japanese culture.

On the other hand, it has already been known from the time of Uchimura that Imu infrequently develops in Japanese living together with the Ainu, persons who are not racially Ainu. This may be evidence in favor of the theory that Imu is not characteristic of the nation in a biological sense, but is a phenomenon accompanying the nation as a culture.

Briefly, it appears that the Japanese generally made an invasion into Ainu, resulting in a decrease in the number of Ainu and also in the incidence of Imu, while like a swirl in the stream, the culture of the Ainu made an invasion into the Japanese, resulting in the transmission of Imu to the Japanese.

What is the cause of Imu in relation with the culture of the Ainu? It is presumably the animistic mind of the Ainu. Ainu with the animistic mind tend to be surprised at nature and incorporate it into themselves and at the same time, they tend to be assimilated into nature. The awe of nature and assimilation into it are both aspects of the animistic mind of the Ainu.

Therefore, it appears that both the startle reaction to nature and assimilation into it disappeared from the Ainu when their animistic mind was lost, and so Imu has been reduced to a shell of its former self and shown a change from classic Imu to

entertainment at parties or as self-assertiveness.

Modern people have lost their animistic mind as they have grown away from nature. Therefore, there is, at present, nothing compensating for Imu in Japan. There is a tradition in the Ainu people that people can escape from severe diseases if they have Imu. If it is true, the increase and manifestation of neurosis may have occurred in parallel with the disappearance of animism and Imu.

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(Appendix) This article was presented in a symposium of the 2nd Pan-Asia Pacific Conference on Mental Health (Beijing) with Dr. Hirohumi Shichida who is my colleague of this project.

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## 抄 録

イムは日本の北方の島である北海道に住むアイヌ民族に見られる、行動面並びに言語面における特徴的な状態である。もちろんアイヌ民族は日常生活の中でこの現象は見慣れたものであり、病気とみなしてはいなかった。一方西洋医学の立場に立つ精神科医は、これを精神医学的ないし異常精神症状として記載してきた。その特徴的な症状は、アイヌ語で蛇を意味する「トッコニ」などの言語的な刺激によって惹起される、エコラリアやコプロラリアといった爆発的な言語表現、および自動運動や退行した性的行動などを含む乱暴で突発的な制御できない反響症状である。しかし我々が調査した現在では、このような古典的で特徴的なイム現象は既に失われていて、わずかに断片的なエコラリアや反響行動のみが、あたかも残された足跡のように、アイヌ民族のごく少数の者に見られるだけであった。本論文では、イムの精神的側面と、アイヌ民族の歴史の視点からみた文化的な背景、そしてイムの過去から現在への変容について述べる。

キーワード：アイヌ、イム、精神運動反応、文化結合症候群