

“Northern Culture”

“International Archaeological Research on Rebun Island.” Hirofumi Kato – Professor of Center for Ainu and Indigenous Studies, Hokkaido University, Japan.

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The name of Rebun means “off shore island,” *Repun Siri*, in Ainu. Rebun, the northern most island in Hokkaido, has 7.2km width, 25.8km length, and 72km in circumference. When flowers bloom in this Summer, Thirty students had spent their time in Rebun to conduct excavation research. Students from nine different countries and a political area participated the excavation. Where they from are Japan, Canada, The U.S., Great Britain, Chili, Taiwan, Netherland, Cuba, and Rumania. Their purpose of visit is to join International Archaeological Field School hosted by Baikal · Hokkaido Archaeology Project (BHAP).

BHAP is joint research and educational institution run by Alberta University, Canada, Hokkaido University, Japan and other universities in the world. The aim of this project is to understand adaptation behavior of northern hunter and gatherers after last glacial period, and to clarify the formation process of cultural diversity. Other than archaeological researchers, experts of biology, physical anthropology, geology, physics participated to investigate long term relationship between environment and human being.

Why was Rebun Island chosen as a place to hold international field school? One of the answers is because of its limited land mass. Generally, island has compact ecosystem due to limited capacity. In addition to it, the small-scale ecosystem is really sensitive to environmental changes. Also, it is easy to identify external effects when we analyze the research materials.

Rebun Islands can be seen as a cross road which is used repeatedly by people from North and South. This is very unique feature to study a part of history of human being.

We can see sand dune rows that have four meters thickness at Funadomari lagoon, northern area of the island. In this sand dune accumulation, thousands years of northern people’s history is buried. After ca. 5,000 B.P., since Jomon people firstly arrived to the island using warm current from the South, many migration waves had reached to Rebun. Especially, people of Okhotsk Culture, who moved and settled on the island using cold current from the North about 1,400 B.P., remained their unique and intense marine hunting lifestyle at Rebun archaeological sites. Recent DNA studies show the relationship of Okhotsk people with Ainu cultural formation.

Last ten-thousand years, global environment has repeated warm and cold

periods. In this project, we are trying to draw a clear image of relationship in between inland area (Bikal, Siberia) and island area (Hokkaido) from perspective of environmental and human adaption. There is one of our research questions that is to understand the mobility of hunter and gatherers, and their flexibility to environmental changes. Generally speaking, high sedentary societies tend to exhaust their surround environmental resources in the end. They are usually conservative to change their subsistence when they confront the environmental change. We have many things to learn from human being history of northern area including Hokkaido Island. Recent research topics shift their focus on the Northeast Asian history to understand the Ainu cultural formation. We would like to provide our research materials to the topics that think Ainu formation from wide perspective.

During this field season, local residents of Rebun welcomed foreign students even they cannot speak Japanese. Ainu people taught the importance and method of conversation with their ancestors. Because of these supports, we could have earned great results rather than we expected before the excavation. What the most important is that we have to break a wall stands between researchers and researched people or object, and share the research experience together. Next year, when small-bloomed flowers cover the entire island, young future scholars will comeback from various countries. This project is designed as seven years research. I wonder how and what we will able to draw new Hokkaido anthropological history from this long term research when we stay Summer in the Rebun seven years later.

#### Profile of the writer

Born in 1966 at Yuubari City. Research Interest: Prehistoric Archaeology, Indigenous Archaeology. Chief of BHAP Japan Branch. Monograph: *Human Being who Traveled Siberia*