Faunal Remains Excavated from the Nijibetsu Shuwan Kumaokuriba Site:  
A Zoo-archaeological Study of a Nusa Site at an Ainu Kotan

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For an archeologically discussion of the establishing process of Ainu's animal cult, including the "sending-off" ceremony for bears, it is first necessary to investigate modern Nusa sites, places where outdoor sacred altars were built, that have ethnographic information available and to organize the characteristics and remains of animals there so as to compare them with other archaeological evidence. However, only a few attempts have been made for Nusa sites in the mountains, far from an Ainu settlement, called a kotan. In particular, the species and characteristics of animal remains at a kotan's Nusa site important due to its relationship with the "sending-off" ceremony for reared bear cubs, called an iomante, have effectively not been studied.

As far as I know, the Nijibetsu Shuwan Kumaokuriba Site in Shibeche-town, east Hokkaido, is the only remains that is appropriate for the investigation of animal remains. The History Study Group of the basin of the River Kushiro excavated the Kumaokuriba Site in 1976 and 1978 with an about 5mm mesh sieve for collecting fine samples, and recovered over 18,000 pieces of animal body fragments from the Site, it is said that Mr. Kotaro Hashibami, a neighbor of the Site, sent off 200 - 300 bears from late 19th century (early Meiji era) to 1939 at the site, which is also famous for being the site of the last iomante (December 1939) that was observed by Dr. Takemitsu Natori and his colleagues. However, although these animal remains have a high academic significance, they have not been analyzed in detail.

I scrutinized the animal body remains between December 1996 and January 1998. As a result, a statement of the details and characteristics of the animal body remains can be summarized as follows:

- The excavated species were 15 in total including wild animals such as brown bear (*Ursus arctos yesoensis*), fox (*Vulpes vulpes schrenckii*), river otter (*Lutra lutra*), sable (*Martes zibellina brachyura*), deer (*Cervus nippon yesoensis*), Blackiston’s fish owl (*Ketupa blakistoni*), and large eagles (*Haliacetus sp.*); as well as boar (*Sus scrofa*, of course, which has a possibility of pig) and domestic animals such as dog (*Canis familiaris*), sheep (*Ovis domesticus*), cattle (*Bos taurus*), and horse (*Equus caballus*), which originally did not inhabit Hokkaido and is unknown as a cult object.

- At least 59 mandibular bones of brown bears were detected, including 11 cubs (<2 years old) that are the objects of the iomante. Beside, bones of extremities, those of trunks, which are rarely observed at rock shelter Nusa sites in the mountains, were also found, though their quantity was lower than 30% of the mandibular bones on a population basis.

- Cranial bones were more marked in the excavated bones of small terrestrial animals (rabbit, fox, river
otter, and otter) than in those of brown bears. One hundred, 49, and 7 maxillary bones of rabbit, fox, and river otter, respectively, were found. Small amounts of bones of extremities and trunks that were derived from one individual had been excavated. Moreover, only 3 sable mandibular bones were found; no sable otter bones were observed.

- The deer specimens were derived from only 2 individuals; this may be attributable to the hunting with bow or trap, and hunting by chasing animals being banned in the early Meiji era, and a reduced population size due to heavy snowfalls.

- The Blackiston's fish owl specimens obtained were derived from at least 3 individuals, with nearly entire body parts being excavated. These findings indicate the possibility of a "sending-off" ceremony for owls, something that is poorly researched in ethnographic information, and will be valuable for archaeological study of the establishing process of that ceremony.