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On Sacred Girdles and Matrilineal Descent in Ainu Society

This study examines a mysterious item of the Ainu women's undergarment—the upsor kut, or chakhchanki, which, in ethnographic collections and scholarly texts, is described as a “belt of modesty”. A comparative and historical analysis of Ainu women's girdles from Hokkaido and Sakhalin was carried out. They are displayed in very small numbers at museums of Russia, Japan, and the UK. These artifacts are rare, as women had to preserve their upsor kut (chakhchanki) from being seen by strangers, especially males. They became a part of late 19th to early 20th century ethnographic collections, because scholars, such as B.O. Pilsudski and N.G. Munro, became trusted by the natives. In the past, Japan's hard-line policy of assimilation for indigenous peoples, the banning of the Ainu language and traditional culture, and the introduction of schooling and public health service resulted in an even greater secrecy of Ainu women and the gradual decline of the tradition of wearing secret girdles, precluding the carrying out of field studies. The analysis of Ainu linguistic and folkloric materials analyzed by Japanese and European researchers sheds light on the function and meaning of these items of the women's undergarment. In essence, they had two important functions: determining the maternal lineage and protecting the family and the clan. This suggests that remnants of matrilineal exogamy existed in Ainu patriarchal society, which eventually disappeared at the turn of the 20th century.

Keywords: Ainu, Hokkaido, Sakhalin, belt of modesty, sacred girdle, matrilineal exogamy, upsor kut, chakhchanki.

Introduction

The interdisciplinary approach to studying the material culture of the Ainu people, which is used in this work, makes it also possible to understand other aspects of the traditional life of this people. In studies and catalogs of museums in Russia, Japan, and Great Britain, girdles of the Ainu women worn on the body (*upsor kut* in Hokkaido or *chakhchanki* in Karafuto) are designated as “modesty girdles” or “chastity belts” (Ainu Collections..., 1998: 20–21, 62, 96). However, in the Sakhalin catalog, B.O. Pilsudski described such a girdle as “a girdle for menstruation. МИК 904-18” (Katalog..., 1991: 21). Kindaichi Kyosuke also called them “menstrual belts”, which were inherited through the female line (Tate, 2005: 231). Perhaps, this designation was associated with the

fact that in Hokkaido, Ainu mothers tied the *upsor kut* on the belly of their daughters after the start of their menstruation (Ainu seikatsu shi..., 1984: 210).

Girdles from the collection of B.O. Pilsudski, which are kept in the Kunstkamera in St. Petersburg and which Japanese scholars call undergarments (*shita himo* or *chakhchanki*), differ in appearance from the *upsor kut* of Hokkaido. The latter are rope belts of various types of plaiting, with pieces of fabric at the ends. The undergarments of the Sakhalin Ainu females (*chakhchanki*) are distinguished by a more sophisticated shape: a triangular or trapezoidal colorfully embroidered piece of fabric was sewn on their front part. L.Y. Sternberg drew attention to the fact that the Ainu borrowed “some elements of ornamental decoration” from the Gilyaks (Nivkhs) (1933: 559). Replicas of beautiful Sakhalin

girdles appeared for sale in Hokkaido souvenir shops in the 1970s (Haginaka Mie, 1992: 128–129).

In our study, we have chosen the definition of “sacred girdles” for the *upsor kut* and *chakhchanki*, given by N.G. Munro in 1934, since these items were not only a secret sign of maternal kinship of the Ainu women, but also a protective amulet for the whole family, which was received, according to their legends, directly from the goddess of fire Kamuy-fuchi (Fuji). In the ancient tradition, they are called *e-esimukep*, which means ‘the most hidden thing’. Another name used by old people is *ishirimau-riri*, which means ‘preserving great (bodily) strength’. *Raun kut* or *ram kut* (‘lower girdle’ or ‘girdle of the spirit’) are also used (Munro, Seligman, Watanabe, 1996: 141–143). For example, there are three *raun kut* female girdles in the collection of the Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture (Collections..., 2001: 110).

Ainu women of Hokkaido and Sakhalin wore sacred girdles under their clothes, hiding them from view. In the dictionary of J. Batchelor, the term *chakhchanki* is interpreted as a female apron made of bast threads (1926: 64). Haginaka Mie calls the modesty girdles of the Sakhalin Ainu females *shita himo*, the Japanese for ‘undergarment belts’ (1992: 128). Their appearance in Hokkaido is associated with the tragic upheavals in the fate of the Ainu of Sakhalin, who were forced to repeatedly leave their place of residence. In the late 1940s, most of them were repatriated to Hokkaido. It can be assumed that the sale of souvenir *chakhchanki* indicates a high degree of assimilation of the Sakhalin residents, who lost not only their native land and their roots, but also the secrets of their culture, and who survived material difficulties in post-World War II Japan.

Very few scholars were able to see and even more so to procure the sacred girdles of the Ainu women for their collections. Only those people whom Ainu women especially trusted had an opportunity to study that secret item, hidden even from the eyes of their husbands. Such scholars included J. Batchelor, B. Piłsudski, and N. Munro. Suzuki Hiromi discovered a drawing of the *upsor kut* in the dictionary of the first Ainu professor Chiri Masiho (1996: 47). The Sakhalin doctor N. Kirillov wrote about the girdles of the Ainu females, who could not “uncover their private parts, except for a shirt or gown, which tightly fitted the belly, additionally covered with a triangular cloth that goes down to the knees and was tied with a rope over the naked body. This apron plays an important role: the woman receives it from her mother, so she will lift it only for her husband. A woman raped without this apron should not persecute the offender; a woman who dies without the apron will not meet her parents in the afterlife” (1898: 71).

In the dictionary of Batchelor, the *upso'unkut* is translated as a ‘woman’s loincloth’ (1926: 512). In the

fall of 1903, at the request of Professor F. Starr from Chicago, J. Batchelor organized a group of Hokkaido Ainu to participate in the World Exhibition in St. Louis (USA, 1904), where they stayed for almost two years. One of the returning women turned to Batchelor with a request to help her save the money earned at the exhibition by making Ainu bags and embroidered cushions. When he agreed, the woman moved into a corner and then handed him a bag with money, which was warm and had a strong smell. When Batchelor asked where she hid the money so safely, she replied that the money was hidden in her *upsor kut* (2000: 144–145).

Indeed, a curious piece of Ainu clothing is the loincloth, which was used instead of pants. This kind of clothing was typical for the inhabitants of the tropics, but not for the peoples of North Asia (Sokolov, 2014: 686). “This can be primarily explained by the distinctive nature of the Ainu culture, whose many features can be described as southern, as well as by the sharp difference in the anthropological type of the Ainu people as compared to the surrounding ethnic communities” (Spevakovsky, 1986: 46). Torii Ryuzo also mentioned that since ancient times the Ainu wore loincloths, and in his work he presented an image of a Neolithic statuette of a female wearing a loincloth, which was found in Mitsu Prefecture (1919: 159).

However, the Sakhalin and Kuril Ainu, displaced from the islands of the Japanese archipelago, also wore pants (Ainu Collections..., 1998: 62), which was caused by the harsh climate and influence of neighboring peoples—the Nivkhs, Orochs, and Kamchadals, who did not have loincloths. Torii Ryuzo wrote that the Kuril Ainu borrowed pants (*ouoi*) from the Kamchadals, but they also wore loincloths (as he called the modesty aprons – *chakhchanke* in the Ainu language, or *mokko* in the Kamchadal language) (1919: 158–159). Among the elements of clothing of the Sakhalin Ainu, M. Dobrotvorsky indicated “pants (*oio*, the Gilyak word), which are worn very rarely” (1875: 34) or “*choske* – leggings: the word in the Ainu dialect of Sakhalin” (Ibid: 426). However, his dictionary also indicates the word *tepa*, meaning the loincloth of the Ainu men or “*chokhke* (*chokhki*) – the Ainu apron for enveloping the scrotum”. “The Ainu males often prefer, if the temperature allows, to sit in front of their hearth without clothing, with only an apron (*tepa*) tightly covering their private parts” (Ibid: 37). In his collection of the myths of his people, Chiri Masiho cited three versions of the legend about the male loincloth *fundoshi* (in Japanese), left by a man in the river for washing, but carried away by the river flow to the goddess of pure water (Chiri Masiho-cho sakushu, 1987: 164–169). According to the Sakhalin Ainu woman Kanaya Fusa, girls also had *chihchika umpe* loincloths (covering the genitals *chin*, *chit* – ‘secret female member’), which varied in size depending on one’s age, but they were not

concealed and constantly worn as the *upsor kut* (Haginaka Mie, 1992: 130; Dobrotvorsky, 1875: 424).

The most detailed descriptions of the *upsor kut* were made by N. Munro, who worked as a doctor among the Ainu of Hokkaido for twelve years since 1893. Thanks to his great tactfulness and patience, he was able not only to see the sacred girdle and learn its role in the life of the Ainu females, but also to receive five *upsor kut* specially made for him (kept in the British Museum) (Munro, Seligman, Watanabe, 1996: 141–142).

The secrecy of the Ainu females regarding their sacred girdles led to the fact that modern scholars in this field are mostly women. In the mid 20th century, an article by Segawa Kiyoko about the *upsor kut* of the Ainu women living in the Saru River valley (Hokkaido) was published. The article mentioned that this item was known as early as the Edo period (17th–19th centuries). In the 1940–1950s, Ainu women reluctantly talked about it, avoiding questions in all ways possible. At that time, the *upsor kut* was worn by many Ainu women, especially by those who were over fifty years of age. They said that girdles worn on the body were a secret and the spirits would punish them if it were revealed. From time immemorial in the Ainu society there was a taboo related to the *upsor kut*: “Do not look, do not tell, and do not listen” (Segawa Kiyoko, 1952: 246–248). However, later in the 1980s, Haginaka Mie had personal meetings with old Ainu women of Hokkaido and Sakhalin, and her interlocutors willingly talked about the *upsor kut* and showed them. Yet, few of these women remain (Haginaka Mie, 1992). Although the tradition of wearing the *upsor kut* had disappeared and few people had seen them, they all knew about the taboo on mentioning this item. Suzuki Hiromi was able to obtain detailed information on sacred girdles from only two Ainu women. She believes that the *upsor kut* performed four main functions: it served as a symbol of an adult woman, played the role of a protective talisman, symbolized modesty, and were the mark of maternal kinship (Suzuki Hiromi, 1996: 47–48).

We will consider sacred girdles as a sign of matrilineal kinship, as a protective talisman, and as a symbol of connection with a deity. Unfortunately, there is very little information about various functions of the Sakhalin girdles (*chakhchanki*), so we will primarily discuss the *upsor kut* of Ainu females of Hokkaido.

Sacred girdles as a sign of matrilineal kinship

Sacred girdles (*upsor kut*) are a mark of matrilineal kinship, which has survived in the patriarchal Ainu society. Women who wore the same *upsor kut* were called *shine-upsor* ‘one pocket’, as belonging to the same family in matrilineal descent (Haginaka Mie, 1992: 129). Sternberg wrote that the Gilyaks had “a typical paternal

system, while the Ainu had a maternal system” (1933: 559). A.B. Spevakovsky, who studied the terminology of kinship, observed that the Ainu people “typically showed a clear distinction between paternal and maternal relatives” (1986: 52–53).

According to N. Munro, wearing sacred girdles was a condition for observing matrilineal exogamy. A man could not marry two sisters, who had the same girdles. Two brothers were forbidden to marry two sisters. A widow’s marriage to her late husband’s younger brother was permitted, but it was forbidden to marry an older brother (Munro, Seligman, Watanabe, 1996: 147). At the same time, Munro pointed out that the matrilineal descent was recognized only by women, but not by men among the Ainu people of Hokkaido. In addition, his informant listed representatives of the male line of kinship back to the fifteenth generation, while women could determine the female line no further than their grandmother. This seems unexpected, but suggests a gradual disintegration of the matrilineal system. Munro cited the terms used by the Hokkaido Ainu people for the relations of kinship: *fuchi-ikir* or *shine-ikir* – matrilineal group; *ekashi-ikir* – patrilineal group; *kemrit* translated as ‘blood vein’ – matrilineal relationship; *shinrit* – ancestors, patrilineal group; *iriwak* – family relations (Ibid.: 145).

Pilsudski wrote that the Sakhalin Ainu people had “a mixed system of kinship, but family ties on the female side are stronger than on the male side. The mother’s brother is still the head of the family today. A sister in her own family enjoys greater privileges than her brother’s wife” (1994: No. 1, p. 61). When choosing a groom for a girl, the decisive voice was that of the maternal uncle. For the birth of the first child, the woman in labor had to return to her mother’s house (Munro, Seligman, Watanabe, 1996: 146).

Sugiura Ken’ichi observed that the society of the Ainu from the Saru River valley was based on patrilocal families in a village, where men constituted one or more localized patrilineal related groups *ekashi-ikir* (the great-grandfather’s clan); those people who had the same clan sign (*itokpa*) called themselves *shine-itokpa*. Women belonged to a non-localized matrilineal group *fuchi-ikir* (clan of the great-grandmother), and those who had the same sacred girdles formed a kindred matrilineal unity *shine-upsor*. If a married woman moved to her husband’s house in another village, she tried to find women of her clan there. The clan sign of the family (*itokpa*) with which the ceremonial headdress is adorned, was passed from father to son, while the secret female *upsor kut* was passed from mother to daughter. If a girl did not have a mother, one of the women of her maternal clan tied her *upsor kut*. Thus, fathers had priority in the Ainu community, but women were not completely powerless. When divorced, sons left with their father, while daughters stayed with their mother. After the death of the father, the eldest son

inherited the house, and after the death of the mother, women's things were passed on to the eldest daughter (Sugiura Ken'ichi, 1952: 187, 192, 205; Ainu seikatsu shi..., 1984: 210).

J. Batchelor pointed out the important role of Ainu women, especially of advanced age, in the families and community. He observed great respect for them on the part of men. Wherever there was less outside influence, women had a say, in all family matters. Nevertheless, Batchelor mentioned that in the villages directly influenced by the Japanese, the role of women significantly decreased (1930: 14–15). Most likely, this was caused by intensified assimilation policies pursued by the Japanese state since the late 19th century.

According to Segawa Kiyoko, the sacred girdle, hidden from the eyes of men and testifying to the connection between the *shine-upsor* women, was very important for women (1952: 246). The Ainu women claimed that if they would not constantly wear the *upsor kut*, after death they would not be able to meet their mothers and grandmothers. In addition, only *shine-upsor* women could help each other during childbirth, at weddings, or funerals. For example, if a man's mother died, his wife (the daughter-in-law of the deceased) had no right to participate in the preparations for the funeral. Marriage within the *shine-upsor* was prohibited; therefore, before the decision of marriage was made, the mothers of the young couple asked each other whether they were the owners of the same *upsor kut*. Thus, the opinion of the mother could have been decisive. Gradual destruction of matrilineal exogamy in the Ainu society is evidenced by the existence of certain conditions making it possible to bypass this taboo. For instance, if a man insisted on marrying a girl from his mother's *shine-upsor*, they simply changed the bride's *upsor kut* and made up a new, fictitious, genealogy (Haginaka Mie, 1992: 128). Another example: childless spouses could adopt a girl, making a sacrifice to the ancestors, provided that she was from the *shine-upsor* of the foster mother, but even if the matrilineal kinship did not coincide, this did not become an obstacle, since it was possible to change the *upsor kut*. Munro described the case of the adoption of a Japanese girl by an Ainu family. The girl was given the girdle of the foster mother (Munro, Seligman, Watanabe, 1996: 145).

Upsor kut was removed during childbirth, as well as after the death of the husband. For the entire mourning period, the widow could only be in the corner of the dwelling, with a headdress put on, and she was forbidden to approach the fire. After a week of mourning, she was allowed to put on a renewed girdle. If the widow did not remove the *upsor kut*, she changed its position by moving it from the belly to the back. And only after that could she get married again. If another relative died, the girdle was not removed (Segawa Kiyoko, 1952: 246, 248).

The Ainu people had a special attitude towards the dead; they tried not to mention their names. Munro observed this secrecy among the Ainu old people, even among those who were well-disposed towards him. They did not mention the names even during special prayers to the spirits of their ancestors. Such a strict and long-standing prohibition led to the absence of identical names; at least Munro did not come across them. The special attitude of the Ainu people to the names of their departed ancestors made the Japanese, who pursued the policy of assimilating the indigenous population of Hokkaido in the late 19th century, to compose Ainu surnames from names of the area (Munro, Seligman, Watanabe, 1996: 159). It can be assumed that the secret of the names of the deceased to some extent hindered the ability to trace the relationship of kinship between future spouses, but this was somewhat compensated by the existence of the sacred girdles of the Ainu mothers. It would seem that such a small ethnic community in the modern world should know the kinship of its fellow tribesmen. However, the entire history of the Ainu people suggests that this used to be a numerous and powerful people, who lived on the vast territory of the Japanese archipelago up to the Island of Kyushu. In the course of constant clashes with the Japanese, the surviving Ainu were gradually pushed north—to Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands.

Since the late 19th century, given the Japanese policy of forced assimilation of the Ainu population, especially through schooling, more and more young Ainu women stopped wearing the *upsor kut*. In the second half of the 20th century, elderly women, although they did not wear the *upsor kut*, kept the sacred girdles in special boxes and asked to have them put into the grave after death. Of course, there were also those who continued to wear the *upsor kut*, but it became difficult to keep it a secret, because more and more often it was necessary to undress and remove undergarment belts before visiting a bathhouse, during medical examinations, etc. (Suzuki Hiromi, 1996: 68–69).

Sacred girdles as protective amulets and their connection with the Ainu deities

The *upsor kut* received the definition of 'sacred girdles' because they were also considered an amulet, or protective talisman. According to the Sakhalin Ainu females, their *chakhchanki* were not equivalent in their meaning to the Hokkaido *upsor kut* (or *raun kut*), since they were protective amulets, like the Hokkaido *ishima* (*isma*) (Haginaka Mie, 1992: 131). There were also *ikema* rope amulets with some sign on one end, also made by women. Three *ikema* have been preserved in the collection of the Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture. One of them in the form of a black and white twisted

cord 36.5 cm long and 1.5 cm thick was like a girl's *inau**, which was hung around the neck or over the cradle (Collections..., 2001: 111).

According to the beliefs of Ainu women, the *upsor kut* have magical power (Munro, Seligman, Watanabe, 1996: 142–143). This may explain many Ainu names for the girdles, indicated by different informants. In “Ainu Ethnography”, under the illustration of the *upsor kut*, it is written that this is the protective amulet (*ishima*) of the Ainu women, passed on by matrilineal descent. Men could not say anything specific about the girdles, although they knew about their existence (Ainu minzoku, 1969: 125–126). The Ainu females believed that the *upsor kut* could calm a raging storm, return a tidal wave, stop a fire, and repel the smallpox deity. A woman without a sacred girdle had no right to come close to the hearth in the house or approach the cage with a sacred bear, as during menstruation. She could be punished for not observing the prohibitions, since it was believed that this could bring trouble to the family and clan (Munro, Seligman, Watanabe, 1996: 142–144).

The Sakhalin Ainu men knew about the magical property of a girl's loin girdle. Piłsudski mentioned the Ainu legend when a man asked for the *chakhchanki* from his wife, made a blindfold out of it, and was able to obtain “metal likenesses of luminaries”, sent by the gods and becoming the talisman in the village of Kotankes in the house of Shiritorikainu (1994: No. 85). Khaginaki Mie believed that on Sakhalin, *chakhchanki* were often confused with triangular bands used for protecting eyes from the sun (1992: 131–132). Indeed, the collection of Piłsudski contains such a band shaped like a *chakhchanki* (Katalog..., 1991: 21).

During her field research among the Ainu people from the valley of the Saru River, conducted in 1951, Segawa Kiyoko received confirmation that the *upsor kut* passed over from one's grandmother lost its power if it was shown to anyone. Women were obliged to constantly wear the *upsor kut*; otherwise they could not light the fire, prepare food, and make their husband and children happy (Segawa Kiyoko, 1952: 246). It is known that in the late 19th century, during the colonization of Hokkaido by Japanese settlers, who encountered considerable difficulties in this harsh land, some Japanese women adopted the Ainu tradition of wearing girdles as protective amulets against illness or misfortunes (Suzuki Hiromi, 1996: 68–69).

Aware of the taboo on disclosing the secret of the *upsor kut*, Suzuki Hiromi decided to investigate whether there was any mention of them in Ainu folklore. The Ainu

people did not have a written language, so their entire history and life were reproduced in orally transmitted myths and legends. It turned out that there were quite a few legends about the sacred girdles of Ainu women, especially about the role of deities in the emergence of this secret female attribute. Notably, according to a myth told by an Ainu woman from Shizunai (Hokkaido), once, an older brother handed the girdle from the daughter of a deity to his sister, although in Ainu society it was passed on only by the mother or grandmother. In another legend, a girl raised by her older brother did not know how to sew, and once, during a thunderstorm, the daughter of the thunder deity descended to earth, taught the girl the art of sewing and embroidery, as well as the art of making the sacred girdle, and explained that women with the *upsor kut* should make offerings to the goddess of fire and other spirits of the house. Before leaving the world of people, she gave the girl a metal *upsor kut* and told her to remember, when she would lay down next to her husband, that this was a gift from the daughter of a deity. There is no evidence on the existence of metal girdles; most likely, this symbolizes a connection with the deity of thunder. Thus, the legends show a direct connection between the *upsor kut* and Ainu deities, who not only handed over or taught how to make girdles, but also gave them magical properties (Ibid.: 58, 68–69). The prevailing belief was the role of the goddess of fire Kamuy-fuchi in manufacturing the *upsor kut*, with all prohibitions established by her.

Main types of sacred girdles

Two main types of Ainu female sacred girdles in Sakhalin and Hokkaido can be distinguished: the Sakhalin type (*chakhchanki*) and Hokkaido type (*upsor kut*, *raun kut*, *pon kut*, *ishima*). The former type differs significantly in manufacturing technique, as well as shape and patterns embroidered on the fabric with colored cotton threads, from the simpler Hokkaido *upsor kut*, similar to braided cords. Yet, Haginaka Mie also came across Sakhalin girdles similar to the Hokkaido ones, which consisted of two cords, sometimes sheathed with fabric (1992: 129). Cotton fabric was used more in *chakhchanki*. For example, Piłsudski describes one of the girdles in the following way: it is “...made of dense dark blue fabric, lined, with three fabric ties. It is trapezoidal; the upper half is decorated with embroidery with colored (yellow, light green, and white) threads” (Katalog..., 1991: 21). It is known that Sakhalin craftswomen also weaved using nettle fibers (Roshia ga..., 2013: 57). Sakhalin *chakhchanki* with black and red rectangles were embroidered with colored threads and beads (Ainu Collections..., 1998: 20).

The Hokkaido *upsor kut* looked much simpler. They were twisted or braided of two, three or five cords made

*Inau are sticks with curled shavings at one end, vaguely resembling a human figure. They were perceived as intermediaries between people and deities, and served as amulets.

of plant fibers (nettle, bast of the elm, linden, or spindle tree) with black triangles or rhombs at both ends. In some Hokkaido settlements, white, red or black colors were avoided when decorating girdles (Suzuki Hiromi, 1996: 51, 57, 66).

Munro first discovered three types of Hokkaido girdles, denoting three lines of the maternal clan: from the deity of fresh water (Wakka-ush-Kamui), from the deity of the bear (Kim-un Kamui), and from the deity of the sea or killer whale (Rap-un Kamui). Each of these types was woven in a special way and differed in pattern and number of strands; all were made of wild hemp fibers. The length of the cord was individually determined by the distance between the fingers of the woman's outstretched arms. Later, Munro managed to study five more types of sacred girdles with special marks of the origin of the family clan (the wolf, fox, eagle, badger, and hare). People of the hare clan occupied the lowest position. According to the Ainu legend, once a hunter saw a beautiful girl who was weaving a cord in the forest. She was ashamed that the man saw her secret occupation. To hide her shame, the girl had to become his wife. She originated the clan of the hare. All women worshipped the goddess of fire Kamuy-fuchi (Fuji), the ancestor of the Ainu people, who taught them how to make the *upsor kut* at the order of the main goddess of the Ainu Aeoia Kamui. At the same time, as Munro writes, female informants gave him different explanations for the origin of the sacred girdles: some said that their great-grandmothers received the *upsor kut* directly from Kamuy-fuchi, while others said that it was received from divine animals (Munro, Seligman, Watanabe, 1996: 141–144).

With great care and tactfulness, Munro was able to order five girdles of various types. They were woven of softened bast fibers, although most of them were woven of nettle fibers. Thus, Ainu women tried to circumvent the ban on making them by the order of a male, and even more so a foreigner. The women warned Munro about the need to keep their secret; otherwise, as they said, he might develop a toothache or even die (Ibid.: 141–144).

From an early age, girls were taught that the *upsor kut* had to be hidden from the eyes of other people. Among themselves, the women talked about the sacred girdles very carefully and showed them to each other furtively. Young women were not allowed to participate in their manufacturing; mostly old women could make them. In addition, the *upsor kut* had to be regularly renewed so it would not inadvertently fall in the presence of the husband (Ibid.).

One of the legends about the rainbow speaks of strict observance of specific ways of making girdles in accordance with the clan of the mother. A girl named Rayochi received a girdle made by her mother before the wedding according to the ancient custom. Rayochi, disobeying her mother, adorned it with multicolored silk.

The deity who learned about this became angry and turned the bride into the rainbow (in Ainu, *rayochi*). And if it suddenly rains on a clear day, they say that this is Rayochi who is grieving and crying (Suzuki Hiromi, 1996: 59).

The collection of the Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture contains girdles made by old Ainu women in the second half of the 20th century, which were already out of use. The female amulet girdle of rope, *raun kut* (397.3 cm long, 0.9 cm wide), was made by Sugimura Kyoko under the guidance of Kinarabukku, who admitted that she never wore them herself (Collections..., 2001: 110–111). Suzuki Hiromi presented various types of Hokkaido girdles in her work: from simple cords without additions to more sophisticated items (with black triangles or quadrangles at the ends or with straps), as well as Karafuto *chakhchanki* with triangles in the lower belly (1996: 54).

Conclusions

Thus, we agree with N. Munro that the girdles of the Ainu women, secretly worn on the body and designated in the scholarly literature and catalogs of museums as belts of modesty or chastity, are sacred family clan girdles passed on by matrilineal descent. The main argument in favor of this definition is the fact that they performed the most important function of preserving matrilineal exogamy in the already patriarchal society of the Ainu people (by the late 19th century). The secrecy of the sacred girdles, which, according to the Ainu myths, were received from the deity of fire, and which were carefully hidden not only from the male eye, but also from the eyes of strangers in general, was dictated by the sense of women's responsibility for the destiny of the family and clan. The presence of two lines of kinship (matrilineal and patrilineal) in the Ainu society indicates the preservation of the important role of mothers in the life of the Ainu people, as well as close connection and mutual assistance of women belonging to the same maternal lineage.

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