

President's Statement on Ainu Research Conducted at the Faculty of Medicine, Hokkaido University (July 27, 2026)

Hokkaido University has previously published two reports regarding research on Ainu conducted at the university's Faculty of Medicine. As Hokkaido University publishes our third report today, I would like to once again express our profound remorse to the Ainu people and to offer our heartfelt apologies for the research conducted at our Faculty of Medicine. The report is entitled "Investigation Report on the Research Findings of Eight Departments of the Faculty of Medicine, Hokkaido Imperial University, which Participated in the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science's 'Medical, Ethnological, and Biological Research on Ainu.'"

Between 1931 (Shōwa 6) and 1977 (Shōwa 52), the Faculty of Medicine conducted anthropological research involving the ancestral remains of Ainu people. The University investigated how these ancestral remains came to be held in its collections and published its findings in a report in 2013 (Heisei 25). In 2018 (Heisei 30), it published a supplement to the report based on additional materials.

In 2005 (Heisei 17), then-President Mutsuo Nakamura stated that the University had a responsibility to advance research and education concerning the Ainu and other Indigenous peoples, both in Japan and internationally, while respecting their dignity. He also expressed sincere remorse for the University's past failure to show them the respect they deserved. In 2019 (Reiwa 1), then-Acting President Masanori Kasahara acknowledged that the Faculty of Medicine's research on the Ainu, particularly its storage and management of ancestral remains, had failed to treat the Ainu people with the respect they deserved. He expressed profound regret and reiterated the University's sincere remorse for these actions. The University has also been addressing the return of ancestral remains in accordance with national guidelines.

The report released today provides a detailed account of the findings of research on Ainu conducted at the Faculty of Medicine of Hokkaido Imperial University between the 1933 (Shōwa 8) and 1937 (Shōwa 12) academic years, entitled "Medical, Ethnological, and Biological Research on Ainu." The report reveals that the research conducted at the time reflected an attitude that sought to characterize a particular ethnic group, as physically and mentally inferior. This research, in large part, was conducted without adequately examining the prevailing assumptions of the time and lacked ethical consideration for and respect toward the Ainu people. This includes analyses based on interpretations that lacked objectivity, experiments that would be considered ethically problematic by today's research standards, and investigations based on preconceived notions about particular diseases or intelligence. The research also included inappropriate descriptions based on physical measurements and research approaches that showed a lack of understanding of rituals that form part of Ainu spiritual culture. In these and other ways, investigations were conducted and findings recorded without sufficient consideration for the dignity of the Ainu people.

We must also sincerely acknowledge the fact that Ainu people raised criticism of this research even as it was being conducted at the time. Ainu ancestral remains were likewise collected

without due regard for the dignity owed to the deceased through honoring and mourning them. This research was conducted on the basis of hypotheses grounded in discrimination and prejudice against Ainu people. Even when these hypotheses could not be substantiated, the discrimination and prejudice underlying them went unexamined, and in some cases researchers continued to adhere to hypotheses that could not be proven. All of these practices are contrary to the codes of conduct established by the University (the “Code of Conduct for Scientists at Hokkaido University” and the “Hokkaido University Code of Conduct”) and must be rejected by the standards of contemporary academic research as well. Moreover, this report must never be used to fuel or justify further discrimination. Any such use is absolutely unacceptable.

In light of the above, Hokkaido University takes very seriously the fact that the Ainu research conducted at the Faculty of Medicine deeply harmed the dignity of the Ainu people. Hokkaido University sincerely reflects on the research conducted at the Faculty of Medicine and the series of actions associated with it, including the collection of ancestral remains and burial goods, and we offer our heartfelt apology to all Ainu people who have carried this pain.

Hokkaido University will not let this reflection remain a mere reckoning with the past. We will continue to fulfill our responsibility to advance scholarship that respects the dignity and rights of Indigenous peoples. We continue to work toward the return of ancestral remains in accordance with procedures established by the national government. At the same time, we recognize that Ainu people hold diverse views, including strong criticism, regarding how these returns are being carried out. We will continue to work hard to find ways to stand alongside all those who wish for the return of ancestral remains and honor their feelings, and we will continue our unceasing efforts to do so.

We pledge never to forget this painful chapter of our history, to continually reexamine our approach to research ethics and education, and to move forward into the future with integrity.

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HOUKIN Kiyohiro
President of Hokkaido University,
National University Corporation