Resemblance of Ainu ornaments and those of Shang culture

Tresi Nonno
MA in sociocultural anthropology, independent scholar; Chiba, Japan;
e-mail: tresi_nonno@hotmail.com

Abstract

Comparison of ornaments should be the same as comparison of languages, i.e.: should be compared sets of basic elements and positional distributions of elements. Having applied this methodology to Ainu ornaments and to those of Nivkh, Tungusic people, Tlingit, Maori and Shang I discovered that ornamental traditions of Ainu and Shang demonstrate notable resemblance while the rest traditions differ seriously from Ainu. Main element of Ainu and Shang ornamental traditions is rectangular volute, and this element covers almost all available space. This fact also correlates well with data of genetics. This is a strong proof of southern origin of Ainu. Also it can be one of evidences of Ainu and Sino-Tibetan people relatedness.

Key words: Ainu; Shang; ornaments

1. Problem introduction

In cultural anthropology there is a presupposition that Ainu patterns look much alike those of Nivkh\(^1\) and Tungusic\(^2\) people (Orok, Oroch, Nanai and so on) and also much alike some other patterns of Pacific Rim, for instance: those of Maori or Tlingit. Such statements are nothing else, but just very perfunctory and naïve views. In current paper I offer a method that allows seeing whether certain ornaments are related.

2. Method

Comparison of ornaments is much alike comparison of languages. When we compare languages in order to detect whether they are relatives we compare sets of grammatical meanings and compare positional distributions of common grammatical meanings (Akulov 2015b). In the case of ornaments procedure of comparison is almost the same: we compare sets of elements that shape ornaments and then we analyze positional distributions of elements of ornaments. Right now the method doesn’t suppose quantitative estimation, but just strict reasoning; quantitative estimation probably will be elaborated in future, however, in the case of patterns the matter isn’t as obvious as in the case of languages.

3. Comparison Ainu ornaments with Nivkh and Tungusic ornaments

If we compare, for instance, patterns of Ainu clothing with those of Nivkh and Tungusic people we can see that they differ radically: main element of Ainu patterns is so called rectangular volute (Pic. 1) that covers almost all available space of a particular clothing (pic. 2).

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\(^1\) Geographic location of this and all other ethnicities and cultures mentioned in the text are shown at pic 14.

\(^2\) In current text Tungusic people is conventional compact naming of people speaking in Tungusic languages.
Pic. 1. Rectangular volute (a fragment of pic. 2)


Pic. 3. A Nivkh woman wearing traditional Nivkh clothing (source: Siirala)
Ainu usually avoided using of smooth rounded lines as far as it was possible: if we see that in some particular Ainu pattern austere rectangular volute is mixed with smooth rounded lines it means that there was certain influence of Tungusic people, i.e.: it isn’t pure Ainu. At pic. 2, for instance, two men standing on the right side wear clothing with very typical Hokkaido Ainu patterns while man who is standing second from left end has clothing that obviously was made with certain Sakhalin/Tungusic/Nivkh influence.

Pic. 4. Nanai people wearing their traditional garments (source: Nanai)

Pic. 5. A clothing of Sakhalin Ainu (source: Sakhalin museum collection)
Nivkh and Tungusic people usually avoid use of rectangular volute in their patterns. Also their patterns are located within special locations upon wearing, but not cover all available space (pic 3; pic 4).

Pic. 6. A mixed-blood Ainu-Russian man from Sakhalin wearing typical Sakhalin Ainu clothing (source: Bronislaw Pilsudski)

At picture 5 can be seen typical Ainu rectangular volutes heavily mixed with Nivkh-Tungusic smooth rounded volutes. At picture 6 can be seen clothing that was much more seriously influenced by Nivkh-Tungusic traditions: there are no rectangular volutes and ornaments are restricted by special locations upon clothing (such tradition seems to be of Manchu origin).

4. Ainu and Tlingit ornaments

Another ‘hypothesis’ says that patterns of chilkat blanket look much alike those of Ainu clothes. Chilkat blanket is special wearing worn by high-ranking members of tribe on ceremonial occasions (pic. 7).

Pic. 7. Two dancers wearing chilkat blankets (source: Augustana college photo gallery)
Tlingit ornaments can look alike those of Ainu from a perfunctory point of view only.

If we look closer at pattern on a chilkat blanket (pic. 8) we can see that despite it covers almost all available space of the clothing (as well as ornament of Ainu clothing) its basic elements differ seriously from those of Ainu ornament.

As it has been noted above (3) main element of Ainu patterns is rectangular volute, while we don’t see any rectangular volute in Tlingit ornament (and even no volutes at all).

Tlingit ornaments are combinations of blocks that can be represented as squares and convex polygons. This differs seriously from that of Ainu ornament. It’s possible to say that Tlingit and Ainu ornaments are completely different.

5. Ainu and Maori ornaments

Another ‘hypothesis’ says that Ainu patterns resemble those of Maori carving.

However, having taken a look at some of patterns of Maori (pictures 9, 10) we can see that they differ seriously from those of Ainu.
Patterns of Maori carving consist of highly elaborated complicated forms that resemble interweaving of fern leaves. Despite they cover all available space as well as Ainu patterns, their basic elements differ radically from those of Ainu ornaments.

6. Ainu and Shang ornaments

6.1. Ainu and Shang patterns resemblance

Cases considered above are examples of negative correlation of ornaments. From the other hand there is a positive example: this example is patterns of Shang\(^3\) bronzes.

If we take a look at patterns on bronze artifacts of Shang (pictures 12, 13) we can see almost the same ornamental technique as we see on Ainu textile: main element of Shang patterns as well as patterns of Ainu textile is rectangular volute (pic. 11); and this volute tends to cover all available space.

Pic. 11. Left is basic element of Ainu patterns and right is that of Shang ornaments (Ainu rectangular volute is fragment of pic.2; rectangular volute of Shang is fragment of pic. 13).

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\(^3\) Shang dynasty (Shang culture) existed in the basin of Yellow river in 1600 – 1046 BC.
Pic. 12. A late Shang dynasty bronze ding vessel with so-called *taotie* motif (source: Shang dynasty)

Pic. 13. An elephant (source: Les bronzes de la Dynastie Shang)
6.2. Ainu and Shang relatedness

It seems that ornamental tradition of Ainu and that of Shang are somehow connected. I suppose that this notable resemblance of these traditions is evidence of cultural connection between Ainu and Shang. Probably they used to interact regularly; however, I also suppose that Ainu can be relatives of Shang people or some other people living in the territory of China and neighbor regions. Ainu demonstrate high frequency of Y haplogroup D (Tajima et al. 2004). And certain ethnic groups of Southwest China (for instance Qian and Tibetan) also demonstrate rather high frequency of Y haplogroup D (Xue et al. 2004). Thus it’s possible to conclude that resemblance of ornamental traditions somehow correlates with resemblance of genetics.

Pic. 14. Map representing geographical locations of ethnicities and cultures mentioned in the text (map has been made after Google map screenshot).

6.3. Some notes on roots of Ainu and Shang ornamental traditions

Speaking about Shang bronzes they often mention so called taotie motif (a motif of mask of a mythical animal), however, it should be noted that term taotie and such being hardly was known in Shang epoch and it is invention of later epochs (Allan 1991: 145, 148).
I seriously doubt that ornament represented in picture 12 can be interpreted as a mask of an animal, i.e.: a mask of animal can be seen if someone uses much fantasy, but I would rather say that it’s just a combination of rectangular volutes. But then appear question of possible meaning of this ornament.

I suppose that rectangular volute is nothing else but image of *magatama*.

*Magatama* 勾玉 literally “curved pearl” is rather well known as one of important artifact in emperor’s Shintō, the others are mirror and sword (pic. 15). Also *magatama* is well known in modern popular culture as far as it is often mentioned in different manga/anime series as important magic item.

![Image of Three insignia of emperor’s Shintō: sword, mirror and magatama](source: Imperial regalia of Japan)

However, the earliest *magatama* has been found in the layers of Jōmon yet (pic. 16).

Jōmon *magatama* were often made of quite plain materials such as clay while in Yayoi epoch and later *magatama* were made mostly of jade, agate, quartz or jasper.

It is intended to catch *ramat/tamashii* sent by *kamuy/kami*⁴. *Magatama* is something that bends space and thus protects human *ramat* from dissipation by endless space. *Magatama* is something that makes a curl i.e. a stop, shapes a convenient location for human being in endless space.

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⁴ *Ramat/tamashii* ~ “vital energy” and *kamuy/kami* is a being or an item that has much *ramat* and can share it (Nonno 2015: 32 – 34).
Pic. 16. Magatama, dating from Jōmon period to 8th century (source: Magatama)

Pic. 17. Standard way of wear of magatama (a reconstruction made in Second Life, author’s screenshot)
It seems highly possible that initially motif of *magatama* appeared in the ornaments of some *dogū*\(^5\) (pic. 18). As we can see initially this ornamental tradition was rather primitive, but later it gave such highly elaborated ornamental tradition of Shang bronzes and Ainu textile\(^6\).

Pic. 18. A *dogū* with ornament of rectangular volutes (source: Dogū)

7. Conclusion

Notable resemblance of ornamental traditions of Ainu and Shang is strong proof of Southern origin of Ainu.

Also can be supposed that Ainu are distant relatives of people speaking Sino-Tibetan languages.

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\(^5\) *Dogū* 土偶 literary it means “clay figurine”; clay figurines of unclear meaning found in the layers of Jōmon.

\(^6\) About Ainu and Jōmon relatedness see Akulov 2015a.
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