

Nature and occupation in narratives of Ainu bear ceremonialism

Mami Aoyama

University of West Kyushu, Kanzaki, Japan

Introduction: Occupational therapy has largely ignored the important problem of how the natural environment relates to human health through occupation. In previous research, I have used prehistoric hunter-gatherers to suggest that the explicit links between occupation and nature in hunter-gatherer societies mean that hunter-gatherer groups provide important material for the study of this problem. The presence of pictorial and other documentary accounts in historic-period hunter-gatherers further allows us to incorporate narrative approaches that can help understand how hunter-gatherers internalized views of nature and occupation. **Objectives:** This paper uses pictorial and oral narratives of Ainu bear ceremonialism in northern Japan to examine how occupation relates to the natural environment in the formation of Ainu world-views. **Description:** Here I make particular use of the bear ceremony paintings by Teiryō Kodama who was an active painter between 1751 and 1764. I also utilize yukar, the traditional Ainu epic poetry. While originally transmitted orally, many of these yukar have now been translated into Japanese and English. **Results:** The narratives of the Ainu bear ceremonies analyzed here show how occupations are connected to the natural world, how they provide significance and sometimes pleasure for participating individuals, and how they help to form group identities. Since Ainu believe the bear is a kamuy spirit who wants to visit the human world, it is interesting to consider how occupations of the bear are portrayed in these narratives. **Discussion:** The narratives used here show how the various occupations that were part of the Ainu bear ceremony were closely related to Ainu identity and being. The bear ceremony and many other Ainu rituals were banned after the Japanese colonization of Hokkaido in the late 19th century. In recent years, however, there has been a growing revival of Ainu ceremonial life, a revival that re-emphasizes the importance of these occupations to Ainu well-being. **Contributions to OT practice:** This paper provides a case study of how occupation is integrated into a world-view that respects nature. This world-view gives us very important hints as to how to change human occupations for solving the earth's current environmental problems.