

Ainu

A culture of silence?

Bjørn Magne Aakre, Bjorn.Aakre@hit.no

Preface

This study is partly related to my research of Art and Design Education in Norwegian upper secondary schools. For this study I chose to make similar schools and educational training in Germany and Japan as a contextual reference. In 2002 I was granted a scholarship from the Norwegian-German Willy Brandt foundation¹, which made it possible for me to make contacts and to visit Germany. I visited Christian Albrecht University and Muthesius Hochschule i Kiel where I received kind help and support from Dr. Ingrid Hoepel, Dr. Anna Minta og Professor Wulf Depmeier and Architect Valeria Eliasberg. I also spent some time in Luebeck where Willy Brandt was born. From this visit I learned more about the Hansa period and the close relationship that existed between Norway and Germany, both economically and culturally. My visit to Germany also made me change my theoretical position from American to German didactics. Therefore, in my gratitude I include the support from the Norwegian- German Willy Brandt foundation. Though the topic of this study may seem far from a German context, there are still some common themes, also related to the life and work of Willy Brandt. I like to mention Kayano, Shigeru who represented the Social Democratic Party in the Japanese Diet. He dedicated his political life for oppressed peoples of Japan, like Ainu and Koreans, and to replace the Former Aborigines Protection Law of 1899 by the Ainu Shinpu that was finally enacted in 1997. The picture on the front page was taken of a Ainu Thanksgiving ceremony i Sapporo in September 2002².

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¹ **Willy Brandt** (1913-1992) was born in Lübeck Germany. Originally he was given the name Herbert Ernst Karl Frahm. However, because of his opposition against the Nazis he adopted his later name and fled to Norway in 1933. In Norway Brandt mostly made his living as a journalist. From 1941 he served Norway as press attaché i Stockholm. In 1948 Willy Brandt returned to Germany, became a German citizen and became elected as a member of the Bundestag in Bonn from the Social Democratic Party. In 1957 Willy Brandt became major of West Berlin and well known from the Berlin Crises in 1961. In the period of the "Great Coalition" before he took over as German Kansler in 1969 he served as foreign minister. As foreign minister and Kansler he became well know for his "Ost-politik" and reconciliation with the states occupied by Germany during World War II. For this contribution Willy Brandt was honoured the Nobel peace price in 1971.

² On the picture is an altar with Inaws and an Ainu performing a thanksgiving ceremony. The Ainu lived close to nature and had deep respect for their surroundings. They believed everything had a purpose and spirits sent from the Gods. In the Ainu culture an Inaw represents a spirit, and there are many spirits. Consequently they use many Inaws in their homes and in their thanksgiving ceremonies. (Photo: Aakre, 2002)

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present an introduction to Ainu History and Culture from an educational perspective. Analytical categories from the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire were applied. We studied the historical relation between Ainu and Japanese, and how the Ainu became a “culture of silence” incorporated in the Japanese society. We came to the conclusion that because the Ainu had deep respect for nature they were considered to be primitive, and they became vulnerable to a philosophy that practiced the idea of exploitation of human and nature. Ainu communities were small and the political and social structure was weak when facing a heavy Japanese expansion. The Ainu gradually became exploited and discriminated. In the Japanese society the Ainu also seem to have been offered a status among the lowest social class, or as outcasts³. Therefore, they were offered few or any social or human rights, and most of them even developed negative image of themselves. Their culture was never appreciated in the schools and they gradually faced heavy assimilation that still affects the existence and survival of the Ainu culture. Some improvements are made over the last years, but mostly on voluntary bases.

This study was made as part of a research about Ainu Arts and Education. In order to understand the status of the Ainu culture in the schools of present day Japan, we found it necessary to learn, and to understand basic aspects of Ainu history and culture as well.

1. Theory and method

This study was basically an attempt to document and to describe what we found to be some important aspects of Ainu history and culture. However, as the overall purpose was to study Art and Education, and also the fact that the Ainu is an ethnic minority in Japan, we chose to apply some analytical categories presented by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1999), and his theory of Liberating Education.

Culture of silence is a characteristic, which Freire attributes to oppressed people in colonized areas. Freire claims that alienated and oppressed peoples are not respected and listened to by the dominant members of their society. The dominant members prescribe the words to be spoken by the oppressed through control of the schools, the economy and other institutions, thereby effectively silencing the people. Oppressed peoples tend to internalize negative images of themselves, images created and imposed by the oppressor, and they gradually tend to feel incapable of self-governance. Dialogue and self-government are impossible under such conditions.

Mystification is the process by which the alienating and oppressive features of culture disguised and hidden. False, superficial, and naive interpretations of culture prevent the emergence of critical consciousness systems are key instruments in the dissemination of mystifications. For instance: poverty is “mystified” as lack of intelligence or personal failure rather than as a failure of the society or economy, thus making it difficult for the poor to critically understand their own situation.

Banking is a method of education, which Freire claims the oppressors use to passive the learners to receive deposits of pre-selected, ready-made knowledge. The learner’s mind is seen as an empty vault into which the riches of approved knowledge are placed.

Liberating education is the alternative to banking education. Liberating education encourages learners to challenge and to change their own world, not merely uncritically adapt themselves to it. The content and

³ Osaka Center of Human Rights. They have a museum showing how different social groups have been discriminated in the Japanese society. The biggest group is probably the Buraku people, that probably was 10% of the total population in the Edo period. Other groups are Koreans, Ainu, handicapped and women.

purpose of liberating education is the collective responsibility of learners, teachers, and the community alike who, through dialogue, seek cultural as well as economic and personal empowerment. The aim of liberating education is to regain dominion over the creation and use of own culture.

1.1 Main concepts

Ainu means human, or people, in the unique Ainu language that has been used by the Ainu people in Hokkaido for centuries⁴, (AAH, 2002:4). To emphasize that they are a people different from the majority of the Japanese living in Japan, the Ainu often referred to the Japanese people from Honshu as *Wajin*, (p310). Quite often we can also see the word *Utari* be used about the Ainu. *Utari* means “fellow citizens”, which is quite often used about the Ainu by the Japanese, even in official documents (HG 1999). There are discussions about the origin of the Ainu people. However, they seem to have their origin from the oldest cultures in Japan. The typical Ainu culture of today succeeded the Satsumon culture that disappeared from Hokkaido about year 1100 AC.

Indigenous people is a concept used internationally about peoples with distinct ethnic characteristics, who had already developed their own culture in areas that today exists within nations with a majority from another ethnic origin. Among such groups we can list the Saami in Scandinavia, Inuites in Greenland and Indians in North and South America. Indigenous peoples are mentioned in several international conventions and their human rights are declared in the UN declaration of Civilian and Political Rights, and also the ILO-convention 169 about indigenous peoples living in independent nations. To decide who belong to a certain indigenous group there is often used both objective and subjective criteria. However, the criteria might be different in different nations. In Japan for instance, ethnicity is mostly determined from biological criteria. However, The Ainu Association now seems to claim both objective and subjective criteria (AAH, 2000:p238). Objective criteria might be biological family relations, language, religion and culture. Subjective criteria might be ethnic consciousness, feeling of belonging, marriage and adoption.

Culture in our context is used in its broadest, anthropological sense as including all that is humanly fabricated, endowed, designed, articulated, conceived, or directed. Culture includes products, which are humanly produced, both material like buildings, artifacts, factories, slum housing, and immaterial like ideology, value systems, mores, as well as materially derived products such as social class and the socio-political order. The key aim of liberating education is regain control over the creation and use of culture.

2. The Origin of the Ainu culture

Ainu means human, or people, and is the name of the people who was granted the status as indigenous people of Japan in 1997. Long time ago, the Ainu lived in the northern part of Honshu, the land of Ezo, which later became renamed Hokkaido, the Kuril Islands and Sakalin, (Aoyagi 1999). Ainu is a unique language and the Ainu express their life through their own religion and culture. Unfortunately though, because of heavy discrimination and assimilation, very few Ainu speak the Ainu language today.

Before the Edo period (1603-1868), the Ainu seems to have lived a peaceful and happy life in the land of Ezo. They were quite few, the land was rich, the climate was moderate and there was easy access to food in the woods, the rivers and the ocean. They also had easy access to the materials they need for making houses, clothes, tools and equipment. There seems to be some discussions about the origin of the Ainu. Archeological and biological research seems to agree that the Ainu probably migrated into the Japanese

⁴ Ainu Association of Hokkaido, Sapporo. I visited the association several times to use their library. They also have a museum. Most of the facts referred to are from their Statement Reports 1987-2000.

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islands from the West and the North very long ago. Originally they may have settled in most of Japan, especially Honshu and Hokkaido, before they were forced to the North and finally remained in Hokkaido, Kuril Islands and Sakalin.

Some scientist claim the migration of Ainu started more than 10.000 years ago, and that the Ainu culture has its origin from the early Jamon culture, which we know today from the use of clay and also ceramic sculptures that is among the oldest in the world.



Figure 2 Traditional ceramics made by Ainu students in Nibutani⁵

Other scientists like to think the typical Ainu culture of today is younger, may be 3.000 – 4.000 years old. Some claim the unique Ainu culture developed even later. However, most researcher seem to agree that the typical Ainu culture we know today, came clear after the Satsumon culture, which disappeared from Hokkaido about year 1100 AC. One main difference between the Satsumon culture and the present Ainu culture is related to the making and use of ceramics. The present Ainu culture did not make and use ceramics, probably because they already adopted the use of metal pots before the Satsumon culture disappeared. The first written records about the Ainu may be from about year 660 AC. At that time a sailor and worrier by the name of Abeno Hirafu sailed to an area that may have been the land of Ezo. He reported about a people living there, but nobody can tell for sure he refers to the Ainu. The first proof written records about the Ainu seems to be from the 12th century. At that time there was no Japanese living in the land of Ezo, and the Ainu were the only to live and govern in the area. They made their living from hunting, fishing and gathering. They had their own social and political system, mainly centered in small villages they called

⁵ I had the opportunity to visit Nibutani and to interview Kayano Shiro, son of the Ainu politician Kayano Shigeru. When I asked Mr. Kayano what men of modern times could learn from the Ainu culture, he addressed respect for human and nature, and a more ecological lifestyle. From my interview and my visit to the Ainu Museum I learned about the history of Nibutani and the Saru river (Sarukawa). Salmon used to important as food in the Ainu communities. Every fall huge amounts of salmon came up the rivers as “supplies of food from the Gods”. When the Japanese colonized Hokkaido, a new fishing policy was introduced: Most of the salmons were cached in nets blocking the rivers before the salmon was able to enter. In the 1980’s the Nibutani Dam was also built to make a power plant, and fertile lands were put under water. Protests did not prohibit the building of the dam, but it became a turning point. There was built a park, a museum and there was made several archeological excavations revealing old cultures from the area. Old ceramics were also found. The ceramics made by the students shown on figure 2 were made as a project to learn about the old culture that originally existed in the area. (Photo: Aakre, 2002)

kotan (Shigeru 1994).

2.1 From free trade to monopolized economy (1300-1600)

Living in the land of Ezo the small population of Ainu controlled valuable resources. These resources also became valuable for the Japanese living in Honshu and other Japanese islands, as well as foreign countries like China and Korea. Gradually a flourishing trade developed in furs and sea products in exchange with textiles, rice, metals and foreign technology. In the beginning, this trade seems to have been fair balanced between the Ainu and the foreign traders. The trade was organized mainly from Ainu villages and settlements. However, gradually there also are reports about some conflicts. Along with the traders also came people of some more or less criminal background who made refuge in the distant areas of Ezo. Problems with this kind of groups seem to have been the first to become a conflict with the Ainu, like the battle of Kosamaynu in 1456.

Gradually the Ainu adapted to foreign products as they became dependent of regular supplies of products and technology from the south. At the same time the traders from the south gained more and more control over the trade by organizing the trade from their own settlements and special trade posts. This strategy was a way to control the trade and to make more profit from it. The Ainu had to pay more for products like rice and textiles, which they had become dependent of, and they got less for the fur and sea products they sold.

Conflicts about trade policy gradually happened more often. However, the Ainu population was small and their type of social system and political organization was mostly centered from small independent villages, and therefore weak. Though the Ainu won some battles about trade policy in the beginning, their weak organization and technology gradually faced too strong and well organized military and economic powers from the south.

2.2 From control to discrimination (1603-1868)

In 1604 the Kakizaki family, who had already taken the name of Matsumae, was incorporated into the Tokugawa unified Japanese state as a fief. The Tokugawa state also gradually claimed the land of Ezo as part of Japan. The reasons for this seem to be many: Firstly, the Tokugawa state had the ambition of Japan to become an independent and powerful unified nation. Secondly, Japan, and its growing population, needed the valuable resources available in Ezo. Thirdly, also Russia advanced some interests in the area in the late 1700. Consequently, the Ainu and their land became part of a strategic conflict outside their own control. Finally: As the Ainu became more and more involved with the Japanese society, they became part of the lower class of this culture.

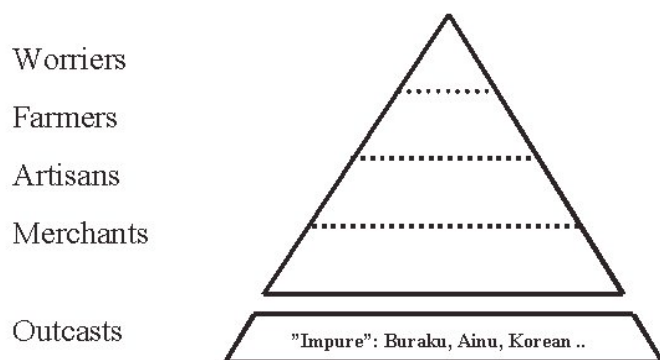


Figure 3 Social structure of Japan in Edo (1600-1868)⁶

In the Edo period (1603-1868) the Tokugawa state developed a strict class society with four distinct social

⁶ Osaka Center of Human Rights has a separate section about Ainu. A typical Ainu house, a Cise, has been raised in this section to give the visitors an experience about the traditional Ainu lifestyle. According to Osaka Center of Human Rights the idea that some people are impure – dojin – is very old and probably came from China.

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classes: The warriors, the farmers, the craftsmen and the merchants. However, below this four social classes there also were groups of peoples, the *Senmin* (humble people), who consisted of the eta and the *hinin* (IMADR-JC 2001:3). The *hinin* were outcasts from the society and even regarded as non-human or impure, *dojin*. As not being really Japanese, the Ainu became part of this fifth class who had hardly any human or social rights. Therefore, both exploitation as well as discrimination of the Ainu became legal and normal.

To impose control of the trade the Matsumae systematically centralized its trade from their own trading posts in the Ainu territories, and the Ainu were discouraged from freely trading where and when they wished to. The trade soon became totally monopolized by the Matsumae fief.

The Ainu community and their political system also became destabilized by this new trade policy. The trading posts became a lot larger communities than the traditional Ainu villages, the *kotan*. These new communities became controlled by a new upper class of wealthy and powerful Ainu, who were able to maintain the power by being loyal to the Matsumae system of management. There even came to conflicts between some of them, like a battle outside Obihiro⁷. However, the Ainu also managed to organize successful attacks against some trading posts, like the battle led by Shakushain in 1669. However, when hundreds of Ainu moved to confront the Matsumae near their own domain in Hakodate, they were defeated. Shakushain and his main supporters were assassinated. The last group of Ainu to raise in arms against the Japanese was the Ainu living in the Kunashiri island in 1789.

From early 1700 the Ezo trade gradually became more controlled by merchants from mainland Japan. Generally the merchant class in Japan gained more power and control of trade in these years. Prices for products from the south became higher and the Matsumae had problems making profit from the trade in Ezo. In fact, the Matsumae even became in debt to these mainland merchants. Therefore he introduced a kind of subcontracting economy, the *basho ukeoi*, in order to increase the volume and the profit from the trade. Now the Ainu did not sell their own products to the same extent any longer. Instead more and more Ainu became proletarian workers in fishing and harvesting industries managed by Japanese, their capital and technology. This new industry also made the Ainu become more involved with the values and social structure of the Japanese class society at that time.

2.3 From discrimination and exploitation to assimilation (1868-1965)

The Meiji restoration of 1868 turned the situation of the Ainu people from bad to even worse. An overall Emancipation Edict was enacted in 1871 (IMADR-JC 2001:p9), but had no effect for the Ainu. Instead, the land of Ezo was nationalized and renamed Hokkaido. Advisors from USA were invited, and a policy similar to the American policy towards the Indians was implemented. There were no talks with the Ainu and there was no compensation for the land they lost and from which they had made their living for generations. Though the Ainu were forced to change their names with Japanese names, they were still classified as "former aborigines" in the census register. In this way they were formally identified as part of the fifth class, the outcasts. The Ainu did not only lose the few lands they still possessed and from which they made their living. Their language and religion were banned as well as all other cultural identities like cloths, ornaments, stories, songs and dances. Mass immigration, a market economy and administration by local officials who were responsible to distant powers rapidly created a new society in Hokkaido. The Ainu soon

⁷ Mizuru Ashizawa showed me a small lake, or pond, outside Obihiro. Today there is a ceremony of reconciliation every fall in September. The story tells that different groups of Ainu were fighting each other here long time ago, and the pond became red from the blood of the victims. The fighting that took place here, may have been arranged by Ainu leaders who had become wealthy and rich by being loyal to the Matsumae fief.

fell into severe poverty and isolation. By the end of the century their situation became a serious social problem.



Figure 5 Ainu in a segregated school in Asahikawa 1912⁸

By the end of the 18th century legislation to protect the Ainu was discussed and also promoted by humanitarian movements. However, the view, which was expressed at the National Diet was very discriminating: “The Ainu are an unenlightened people. They are ignorant, their profits are being taken away by immigrants so that they are gradually losing their means of survival. Therefore we the Japanese, full of chivalry, have to protect them by all means” (AAH 2000:p12). As a result the Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act was enacted in 1899. Based on this law the Ainu were granted small portions of land so they could become farmers. This was a help to survive, but hardly any more. The purpose of the new law was rapid assimilation of the Ainu people and their culture.

Heavy assimilation was also encouraged by a segregated school system that did not allow the Ainu language to be spoken, or any Ainu identities like Ainu arts, cloths, songs or dances to be expressed in any way. History and Geography were also left out in the segregated Ainu schools. The basic idea was that the Ainu people were not intelligent enough to follow traditional education.

However, some Ainu still survived the pressure. Some were even able to benefit from the education they received. The Ainu were also supported from missions and humanitarian organizations that helped some Ainu to received higher education and some few achieved economic prosperity. One of the missions, John Batchelor from Scotland, even helped young Ainu to establish the first Ainu organization in 1930.

2.4 From social welfare to emancipation (after 1965)

During the first decades of 1900, some Ainu managed to organize resistance and tried to keep the Ainu language and culture alive. In 1930 the first Ainu organization was founded, The Hokkaido Ainu Association.

⁸ Ainu Museum in Asahikawa. I made the photo from an old photo in the museum and a lady there told me it was from 1912.

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Figure 6 Kayano, Shiro with a Saami flag, (Photo: Aakre, 2002)

However, the active Ainu were few and weak and lacking resources. There were also many practical and social problems to take care of, which had first priority. Supported by humanitarian organizations and missions many Ainu chose assimilation as a strategy to forget their own bad memories and to build a new and better life within the Japanese society. Social welfare programs, better housing and better education became the most important issues. In 1936 the Ainu finally succeeded to make an important change in The Former Aborigines Protection Law: The segregated school system was brought to an end. However, the discrimination of Ainu children in the integrated schools continued and still exists until today (AAH 2000:44). And there are still no Ainu language or culture included in the national school programs.

After 1965 the voices of indigenous peoples around the world were more often expressed, heard and listened to by the international society. In Japan the Ainu issue also experienced a revival by young Ainu activists and supporters. Contacts between indigenous peoples became more frequent, they learned from each other and they developed a common strategy for human, civil and political rights. For the first time the Ainu managed to make a comprehensive program for legislation concerning the Ainu people in 1984 (HAA 2000:p46). In 1988 the Ainu asked the United Nations to appeal to the Japanese government to acknowledge the existence of Ainu as an ethnic minority group and to investigate and deliberate on this matter.



Figure 6 Ainu attending a private club and school⁹

⁹ Photo: Aakre, 2002. Taken in Obihiro.

A private club and evening school, “juku”, in Obihiro, managed by Mr. Mizuru Ashizawa¹⁰ and his friends on voluntary bases, was the only alternative we could find. Ashizawa also told that in the beginning the parents wanted him to emphasize regular school subject and not to focus too much on Ainu culture or to be involved with Ainu activists. However, over the years they had experienced a growing self-esteem, especially after being involved with indigenous peoples from other countries. Hokkaido Government (HG 1999) has made some surveys about Ainu Cultures in the schools and made some proposals. However, the Ainu culture is still more or less nonexistent in the present school system and there are few or any sign of liberating education of the Ainu.

3. Conclusion

We came to the conclusion that the Ainu suffered many of the same characteristics that Paulo Freire attributes to oppressed peoples in colonized areas (1999). Because the Ainu culture had deep respect for nature, they were treated as primitive objects and they became vulnerable to a philosophy that practiced the idea of exploitation. Ainu communities were small and their overall political and social structure became weak when facing the heavy Japanese expansion.

After some hundreds years the Ainu lost freedom and control of their own development. Therefore the Ainu gradually became exploited and discriminated. In the Japanese society the Ainu also seem to have been offered a status among the lowest social class, or as outcasts. They were offered few or any social or human rights. Most Ainu also developed a negative image of themselves, which is another typical process that can be observed among oppressed peoples.

The process of mystification and the implementation of banking education are quite obvious. The Ainu were considered to be primitive and unlighted people unable to take care of themselves, and therefore also poor. Segregated schools and present a curriculum without the Ainu language, history and culture are quite typical. The Ainu were never appreciated and gradually faced heavy assimilation that still affects the existence and survival of the Ainu culture. Hokkaido Government (HG 1999) has made some surveys about Ainu Cultures in the schools and made some proposals. However, the Ainu culture is still more or less nonexistent in the present school system and there are few or any sign of liberating education of the Ainu.



*Figure 7 “Inaw”
Modern Ainu Sculpture by Bifukazawa¹¹*

¹⁰ In 1990 Mizuru Ashizawa started a club and evening school for Ainu children in Obihiro, while he was a student of agriculture at Obihiro University. Students and others help as teachers and supervisors on a voluntary basis. The students are in all ages from about 6 years old and up to 20. Mr. Ashizawa also involve the children in camps and others activities to meet and to learn from indigenous peoples from other countries. The purpose is to help the children develop better self-esteem and to have pride in their heritage. In the summer of 2003 he hopes to arrange a camp in Sapporo. Hopefully some Saami from Norway will also be able to participate. Photo: Aakre, 2002.

¹¹ Photo: Aakre, 2002. Taken at Ainu Museum, Nibutani.

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