

The Ainu Identity and Japanese Human Rights Education: Part Two

Brian James MAHONEY*

In Part Two of this research paper, Shigeru Kayano's story, *Our Land Was a Forest: An Ainu Memoir*, continues to figure prominently in uncovering the many facets of the Ainu, their unique and once vibrant culture, and the horrors they ultimately met as their civilization was systematically torn apart. Additionally, extensive question and answer surveys with Japanese high school teaching staff in Japan, and with both Japanese university students and foreign university students studying in Japan, help inform an important part of the content that seeks to gauge an understanding of the Ainu in general and current attitude towards the plight of the Ainu people as represented in Japanese public high school education and in Japanese society. Furthermore, the nearly total disregard for the Ainu, coupled with the ongoing historical side-stepping of Japanese government-sponsored genocide in China, including the sexual slavery of tens of thousands of Korean and Chinese nationals during World War II, lends further credence to the idea that the current education policies in Japan are based upon fiction rather than fact. The author contends that this current idea of negating and burying information serves only to distort history, as it is understood by the present generation and those yet to come.

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In *Educational Psychology*, Anita Woolfolk notes that psychologists today recognize that culture shapes cognitive development by determining what and how the child will learn about the world (2010, pg. 42). In Ainu culture, the Ainu people had traditionally been called by and known to one another through the use of only one name. Shigeru Kayano remembers: "My grandfather's name, *Totkaram*, was created from the words *tot* (to grow), *ka* (this), and *ramu* (to think or wish), and it carries a prayer: *May he grow into a fine person*" (1994, pg. 26). The building of positive self-concepts in Ainu culture first began with a name, seen more as a symbol of oneself while also providing an important connection with the past and a window into one's future. Another important form of identity in Ainu culture was the use of an *aysirosi*, or an inscription, an individual's crest or seal that was inscribed on the ends of hunting tools, most notably arrow heads, to identify the hunter who trapped or shot the animal. Wild animals, such as bear, deer or boar, that were trapped or shot with these poison-tipped arrowheads would often first

*Instructor, Multi-Cultural Studies.

escape deep into the forest and thus be found later on by perhaps a different hunter. Depending on the situation, the hunter who found the animal would first skin and gut it, making sure to return the arrow(s) to the appropriate hunter:

The three men determined that the dorsal-fin insignia of the oldest brother should have a single horizontal line underneath; the middle brother's, double horizontal lines; and the third brother's, triple horizontal lines. They then swore that whenever they came across one of these three inscriptions, they would help one another in affirmation of their common ancestry (Kayano, 1994, pg. 24).

Names that were carefully chosen and held with great honor, and inscriptions that determined ownership and thus personal responsibility, were two important ways that young Ainu came to value their place and role within the Ainu community. Whether it is a common trait of hunters and gatherers of having to accomplish various goals through one's own action or in collective action what is evident is that Ainu culture, through the high sense of self-value that these traditions allowed to flower in its own people, flourished because of them. As psychologist Erik Erikson points out, *a strong and positive identity comes only from* "wholehearted and consistent recognition of real accomplishment, that is, achievement that has meaning in their culture" (Woolfolk, 2010, pg. 92). Over many centuries of continuation and survival, Ainu culture and its people had indeed furnished meaning in most every aspect of their lives.

At the beginning of the Meiji period (1868-1912 A.D), in the early 1870s, as the Japanese government extended full control over the former lands of the Ainu, the Japanese introduced the system of the *family register*. When this system took effect, the Ainu people were forced to take on Japanese names, relinquishing their given names and adopting both a first and last name. Their surname came about most often as the result of the Japanese government official who came to distribute names in the area:

"I see, so this village is called Piratur (now Biratori). Then let's name the Ainu here Hiramura (Pira village). Next is Niputani (now Nibutani), so their name should be Nitani, What's the Village beyond? Pipaus? What's *pipa*? I see; it's 'shellfish.' And *us*? So it means " 'there is,' does it? Well, then, let their name be Kaizawa (shellfish stream)" (Kayano, 1994, pg. 44).

And so the Ainu in this region of former Ezo, now called Biratori, in the heart of the

four great rivers area of Saru, were assigned new names in such an arbitrary, haphazard way, totally ignoring their individual identities and giving no thought to blood relationships and or ancestral lineage (Kayano, 1994). It was an early step in the extinction of a people through forced assimilation practices that emphasized the destruction of identity, confusing and breaking apart cultural practices and dehumanizing the individual and lessening the bonds of the community.

During the Edo period (1603-1868 A.D.) the first and most significant extension of massive displacement policies directed at Ainu communities took full effect: “*Sisam* (another Ainu term for mainland Japanese) came, wearing two swords at their waists and appearing to have crows resting on their heads (the samurai’s topknots), to propose taking villagers and their sons” (Kayano, 1994, pg. 27). Knowing the fate that awaited them, the Ainu village elder refused to let the samurai take their men and boys to labor far away and for nothing, only to succumb to death due to cruel treatment: “In response the Japanese samurai put their hands on their hilts of their swords, appearing ready to unsheathe them at any moment, and threatened to kill all the villagers unless the (village) chief handed them over” (Kayano, 1994, pg. 27). Giving in to this very real threat, the village chief tearfully handed his oldest son to them, and in a cruel twist of fate, the samurai took the chief’s other boy, aged only 11 years, reasoning that even a child could carry a salmon on his back (Kayano, 1994, pgs. 27,28).

The Japanese, from the outset, had based their own culture and society around the production of rice, used not only as a food staple, but also as *the* determiner of currency and wealth. Hokkaido, being situated in the far north, was not suitable for rice production and therefore ownership of land replaced rice for determining both currency and wealth. Since Hokkaido was an area of such immense scale, the Japanese government began to carve it up into areas controlled by Japanese land commissioners that would then be worked by the Ainu. These areas or ‘locations’ offered the Japanese the opportunity to amass immense new resources such as enormous old growth forest areas full of *Katsura* and *Ezo* pine trees, prized for their excellent wood-making qualities, vast stretches of coast line and abundant rivers for a seemingly endless supply of seafood:

The “location” where Nibutani Ainu were taken as slaves was Atsukeshi. Over 350 kilometers from Nibutani, it is closer to Nemuro than the midpoint between Kushiro and Nemuro. Even now, with roads built, the shortest distance between the two places is 293 kilometers. At that “location,” then the focal point of eastern Hokkaido, labor was supplied exclusively by the Ainu. Since the Ainu population in Atsukeshi had been

reduced by work-related deaths, *shamo* (mainland Japanese) employed Ainu from the Saru and Yufutsu areas (Kayano, 1994, pg. 27).

‘The age of affliction’ that rained down over several centuries upon the Ainu people by their new masters, the Japanese, reduced a once deeply proud and powerful culture of hunting and gathering people to little more than slave labor for the Japanese land commissioners of the new region of Hokkaido. As more and more Japanese pioneers came in search of good farmland and opportunity in these areas, their homesteading needs replaced the traditional Ainu *kotan* or villages of the forest. As Kayano again points out, the “influential *shamo* (mainland Japanese) entered the area and designated it the pastureland of the imperial family of Japan. The Ainu who had inhabited the land from long ago became an “obstruction” in making the imperial pastures” (1994, pg. 38). These farmlands sprouted villages and townships and although welcoming new Japanese, were very unwelcome to any and all Ainu who still inhabited the area. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Japanese began building schools for their own children and further relocated Ainu populations to areas that were far from advantageous. Not surprisingly, the Ainu “could not comprehend being told to move from the fertile region they had inhabited for generations to a barren land” (Kayano, 1994, pg. 38).

In these mostly unforgiving areas of ‘barren land’, the Ainu were required to send their children to newly constructed schools or *basic education institutes*, where the Ainu children would be taught the Japanese language, Japanese history and culture, and were thus forbidden from speaking their own Ainu language or learning about their Ainu heritage. Just over a generation or two later, many of these villages would cease to exist as death caused by sickness and disease spread mainly due to malnourishment. As for others lucky enough to have survived, they fled, scattered and all but disappeared: “No matter what your identity outcome is, an important factor for good mental health seems to be having strong positive feelings about your own ethnic group” (Woolfolk, 2010, pg. 88). The incredible stress within the community brought about by the fracturing of the culture and its people, must be considered another strong factor for bringing about such chaotic and heartbreaking finalities.

Furthering the turmoil of the Ainu communities was that the ethnic makeup of these communities and thus their schools began to change drastically as more and more Japanese children replaced the majority Ainu populations of young people (Kayano, 1994). And with this demographic change came even tougher times for the dwindling numbers of Ainu youth: “Many Ainu in Hokkaido attending predominately *shamo* (mainland Japanese) schools were bullied”

(Kayano, 1994, pg. 51). One favorite way for Japanese kids to refer to the Ainu was through a play on the Japanese word for dog, *inu*, by calling the Ainu children *inu*, not Ainu, thus dogs-- "Hey, look at the Inu!" In addition, "Ainu children were also taunted that they were hairy, poor and other things too painful to write down"...In the Ainu culture, there is a saying, "A three year old's soul is carried to age 100." A growing blade of grass snipped in half either stops growing, becomes twisted, or sprouts in a different direction. So, too, humans are molded by their environment. A child who is bullied or victimized tends to become a timid adult (Kayano, 1994, pg. 51).

While it is fact that the environment plays a crucial role in the development of a young person, evidence suggests that other factors contribute strongly as well. Woolfolk explains, "Today, the environment is seen as critical to development, but so are biological factors and individual differences. In fact, some psychologists assert that behaviors are determined 100% by biology *and* 100% by environment—they can't be separated" (pg. 27). Without a doubt, a healthy, vibrant Ainu community of elders passing on knowledge to the younger generations, who thus developed their own self-awareness and self-confidence by engaging in these practices themselves, was an integral part of the Ainu people's continual and circular life process. Fostered with much love, generosity and foresight, generations of Ainu developed into self-assured, open minded, and spiritual human beings.

In a few instances during the assimilation of the Ainu, some Ainu would go on to form the nucleus behind the movement for Ainu rights and Ainu cultural preservation in later years (Kayano, 1994). Such was the case in the village of Nibutani, where a large number of Ainu families lived and where Ainu young people constituted the overwhelming majority of students at the school, and thus faced little threat of hostile aggression, either overt or relational (Woolfolk, 2010, pg. 72) from other children, mainly Japanese. In Hokkaido, as it still was in Nibutani, regardless of the overwhelming demand on the people to assimilate and conform, the Ainu culture held tight as its racial and ethnic heritage was preserved to some degree due to the efforts of members in its community. The younger generations during these very troubling times were raised with an Ainu cultural identity that still mattered (Woolfolk, 2010, pg. 89).

The Ainu extended family system was in a sense one large community with each member having a certain role to play within it. However miniscule it may have been, as a hunting and gathering society living in harmony with their natural surroundings, every part made up each string that formed the rope that tied it all together as one. And when the Ainu community is broken, and especially when its young people are victimized, "an Ainu child comes to hate school,

develops a tendency to skip classes, falls behind academically, and in the end drops out. What kind of adults will such children grow up to be?” (Kayano, 1994, pg. 51).

When the Hokkaido prefectural government undertook a study of the Ainu in 2006, they found that some 24,000 residents of the prefecture claimed Ainu ancestry. However, since the massive assimilation policies were officially enacted by law nearly one hundred fifty years prior at the beginning of the Meiji period, the Ainu had not only lost their culture, their language and their former livelihoods, they had lost their Ainu appearance as well. The 2006 survey found that, “Most [of those who identified themselves as Ainu] were of mixed blood and lacked the telltale fair skin or hirsute features that distinguished older Ainu from the Japanese” (Onishi, 2008). While some 24,000 people in Hokkaido claim Ainu ancestry, how many others are simply unwilling to acknowledge it? “Embracing the values of mainstream culture,” as Woolfolk notes, “may seem to require rejecting ethnic values” (pg. 88). Therefore, for many of those who at least share some, if not total, Ainu ancestry, it may be difficult to *establish a clear identity* (Woolfolk, 2010, pg. 88). Furthermore, what remains a mystery is how many people in greater Japan outside of Hokkaido identify themselves as Ainu. Unfortunately, though, it may never be uncovered as, “it is not known how many live outside Hokkaido since Japan has never conducted a nationwide census of Ainu” (Onishi, 2008). As Woolfolk again emphasizes, “the exploration is important; some psychologists consider ethnic identity a “master status,” one that dominates all other identity concerns when judging the self” (pg. 88).

While conducting a nationwide census of the Ainu in Japan would be an encouraging and courageous step, what is perhaps equally if not more important is educating younger generations of Japanese about the Ainu civilization, their unique and thought-provoking culture, and the incredible hardships they have endured at the hands of a developing Japanese nation, even to the present day.

Survey with both Japanese and Foreign college students studying in Japan

In a survey of college students conducted in June of 2014 at Mie Prefectural University located in the Tokai region, or central region of the main island of Honshu, Japan, twenty-four students were given a five-question (in English) survey asking for their response (for questions 2-5) in a paragraph or less of writing (in English or in Japanese). Each student was asked to state on the form that they were either a Japanese student or foreign student; for the purpose of this survey no other form of identification was necessary.

In response to the first question, *“Have you ever learned / studied about the Ainu of Japan in school?”* Seven out of eight of the foreign students responded *“Yes”* to the question and one student wrote *“No.”* Fourteen out of sixteen of the Japanese students responded *“Yes”* to the question and two students wrote *“No.”* In the following question, *“If answering yes to question one, briefly explain what you know about the Ainu people,”* the difference between the foreign students and the Japanese students responses showed a stark contrast. Nine out of fourteen Japanese students responded simply, *“They lived in Hokkaido.”* Two other Japanese students responded in a sentence or two and another left it completely blank. Only one Japanese student responded in detail, *“Ainu is a group of people who originally lived in Hokkaido, some northern islands such as Karafuto and northern area of Japanese mainland. They made living of fishing and hunting. They were exploited by mainly the Matsumae domain, and after Meiji, by the government assimilation policy. The population decreased dramatically.”* Of the seven foreign students who responded to question two, each answer was three to five or more sentences in length, one student wrote, *“It seems they had/are having problems being recognized in Japan legally as the native people of the country and ever experienced some discrimination. They have some outside characteristics which are quite different to the modern population of Japan. They have their own culture and practices separate from modern Japanese.”* Another foreign student responded, *“The Ainu used to be the common peoples in Hokkaido. Their population decreased more and more throughout the years, so there are only a few thousand Ainu people today. I don’t know the reason for the decrease. Ainu are ethnically different from either Japanese, Russian, Korean people. They are able to grow a thick beard and many of them have blue eyes and blond or at least bright hair. Ainu people paint their faces on several occasions.”*

Following a third more general information type question, *“Are you familiar with these groups of people, the Jomon and the Yayoi?”* a fourth and a fifth question concerning more recent events regarding the Ainu were asked. In response to the fourth question, *“Are you familiar with what happened to the Ainu people in the Meiji era?”* Six out of the eight foreign students wrote *“No.”* Eleven out of the sixteen Japanese students also responded *“No.”* Of the five Japanese who responded *“Yes”* to this question, the most detailed response was, *“Their practice and culture, language were broken by Meiji government under an assimilation policy in the Meiji era.”*

In response to the last question, *“Are you familiar with what happened to the Ainu people in 2008?”* Six out of the eight foreign students responded *“No.”* One foreign student who responded, *“Yes”*, continued on but was somewhat unsure, *“Were they recognized as the native*

people of Japan? Thirteen out of the sixteen Japanese students answered “No” to question five. One Japanese student who answered, “Yes” wrote “*Ainu was recognized Japanese ethnic by the Japanese Diet.*” Indeed, in a landmark 2008 Japanese Diet resolution, “the Japanese government finally, and unexpectedly, recognized the Ainu as an indigenous people. Parliament introduced and quickly passed a resolution stating that the Ainu had a “distinct language, religion and culture,” setting aside the belief, long expressed by conservatives, that Japan is an ethnically homogeneous nation” (Onishi, 2008). It is interesting to note the use of the past tense in the words of the Diet resolution because the Ainu certainly did have a *distinct language, religion and culture*; however, but for all intents and purposes it has all but disappeared. As Norimitsu Onishi reminds us, “In Japan’s case, for better or worse, the assimilation policies since the Meiji era were so successful that almost nothing remains of the Ainu’s traditional way of life” (2008). Nor do the Japanese, even after a visit to an Ainu museum in Hokkaido, recognize the differences between the Ainu and themselves; as one visitor to the museum stated, “I feel like they’re Japanese, I don’t think they’re especially different, not a separate ethnic group” (McGregor, *The Despised Ainu People*, 1994).

The Ainu “Show”

“One of the purposes of educational psychology in general” according to Woolfolk, “is to go beyond individual experiences and testimonies, powerful as they are, to examine larger groups” (pg. 6). Regrettably, the Japanese government’s idea of examining the Ainu culture was to put it on display, as more of an amusement, something akin to a circus performance for new generations of Japanese tourists to visit as part of the Hokkaido tourist circuit. As Shigeru Kayano describes it:

“I worked beside “Bear Meadow,” where an Ainu-style house had been built where we presented half-hour shows of “bear sending” songs and dances. What in real life took place once in five or ten years was repeated there three or four times a day. It is beyond words for me to explain to others how miserable it made us feel to sing, and dance—albeit for money—in front of curious tourists from throughout Japan when we weren’t even happy or excited” (pg. 119).

When younger generations “are knowledgeable and secure about their own heritage, they are also more respectful of the heritage of others. Thus, exploring the racial and ethnic roots of all students should foster both pride in self and acceptance in others” (Woolfolk, 2010, pg. 89).

It is possible then that the majority of Japanese, adolescent or otherwise, were either unaware of the government's assimilation policies directed at the Ainu people or that with some knowledge about the atrocities that overwhelmed and destroyed the Ainu civilization they refused to come to terms with it in a productive way. Either way, by visiting for an afternoon with the Ainu "Show" the Japanese tourists are afforded the opportunity to soothe their conscience for an afternoon of illusionary fun and romance with the Ainu culture, perhaps causing more harm than good when the very existence of this civilization was destroyed by one's own government policies (Kayano, 1994).

The experience is quite different viewed from the Ainu point of view: "After the performance, tourists would crowd around and shower us with questions: "You speak Japanese well. Where did you learn it?" "What do you do?" Do you go to school like Japanese do?" "Do you pay taxes?" In the beginning, I thought that they knew the answers full well and asked those questions deliberately, just to bait us. But when those same questions were repeated day after day, I came to realize that in truth many Japanese knew nothing about the Ainu" (Kayano, 1994, pg. 119).

If issues within a culture and its community are not resolved effectively, what kind of influence does this have on the overall health of the individual and thus the overall health of the community? The destruction of the Ainu culture and the humiliation and torment that was cast upon its people for many generations did nothing but sicken and weaken it. Will the modern Japanese nation continue to treat the Ainu civilization as a relic of the past, one that was steadily conquered and successfully assimilated into a modern, productive and harmonious Japanese society?

Psychologists Jean Piaget, Sigmund Freud, as well as Erik Erikson in his theory of psychosocial theory, all saw "development as a passage through a series of stages, each with its particular goals, concerns, accomplishments, and dangers. The stages are independent: Accomplishments at later stages depend on how conflicts are resolved in the earlier years..." Furthermore, "Erikson suggests that [at each stage] the individual faces a *developmental crisis*—a conflict between a positive alternative and a potentially unhealthy alternative" (Woolfolk, 2010, pg. 17). Even at this late stage in time, the Japanese nation has, as history shows, continually chosen to pursue the *unhealthy alternative* to this issue. The recent Japanese parliament decision of 2008 granting limited status to the Ainu as an indigenous people, offered a first step in this ongoing *developmental crisis*, perhaps signaling a positive outcome. However, it has been viewed

by most of the Ainu in Hokkaido as nothing more than “empty” (Onishi, 2008), especially in light of the treatment of the Ainu in the modern era:

The Ainu had not intentionally forgotten their culture and their language. It is the modern Japanese state that, from the Meiji era on, usurped our land, destroyed our culture, and deprived us of our language under the euphemism of assimilation. In the space of a mere 100 years, they nearly decimated the Ainu culture and language that had taken tens of thousands of years to come into being in this earth (Kayano, 1994, pg. 153).

Behavior, Thinking and Education

Educational policies must be reprioritized in order to bring about a transformation in thinking with regards to the Ainu people and Ainu cultural heritage, both from an historical and modern viewpoint. In particular, a comprehensive policy shift towards the teaching of the Ainu civilization in primary school curriculum would be one way to help young learners build a better understanding of the topic. At present, though, the Ainu issue is neither a priority nor a concern for educational policymakers, rather it tends to be viewed as something akin to the remaining remnants of a renegade element refusing to assimilate. If Japanese educational policymakers continue to refrain from incorporating the subject of the Ainu civilization into the curriculum, especially for young learners, then a general misunderstanding including misleading and overtly negative stereotypes will persist. It was not too long ago, that educational psychologists began to come to a better understanding about how people perceive and act towards others. Although these findings are not directly related to the Ainu issue, it is important to realize, though, that the connection between observing indifference and even hostility towards others conversely affects the mindset of people. It was precisely this connection that was shown clearly in a classic study with preschool aged children known as the Bobo doll experiment.

In the early 1960s psychologist Albert Bandura conducted his groundbreaking “*Bobo*” doll experiment with preschool aged children. In this experiment, “Preschool children saw a film of a model kicking and punching an inflatable “Bobo” doll” (Woolfolk, 2010, pg. 220). For the study, Dr. Bandura had the children separate into three groups to view the original film, with each group viewing a different conclusion. In each separate conclusion the children either saw the model receive positive encouragement, punishment or neither positive nor negative reinforcement for its violent action against the Bobo doll. Afterward, “when the children were moved to a room

with the same Bobo doll, the children who had seen the punching and kicking reinforced on the film were the most aggressive toward the doll” (Woolfolk, 2010, pg. 220). Furthermore, when the children were offered incentives for kicking and punching the Bobo doll as the model had done in the film, *all of them demonstrated that they had learned the behavior* (Woolfolk, 2010, pg. 221). What Dr. Bandura’s experiment showed is that humans do learn from others’ behavior, even if observationally, that these behaviors are modeled in a positive or negative manner and acted upon accordingly, and even without rewards or incentives: *we all may know more than we show* (Woolfolk, 2010, pg. 220).

Dr. Bandura’s attempts to prove that people, in this case young children, do learn from observing others’ actions and that with certain incentives offered all participants will act in whichever way necessary in order to receive the stated reward, was a seminal moment in educational psychology and helped bridge the ideas of behaviorism with that of cognitive psychology (Woolfolk, 2010). To some extent, though, Dr. Bandura’s Bobo doll experiments with preschool children being subjected to viewing violent acts in the name of science, was not without its controversy. For at what point, and in what way, is it necessary to introduce, as well as limit and control young people’s exposure to complicated mature themes, such as violence. While Dr. Bandura’s Bobo doll experiment most likely was not intended to find an answer for this, it certainly brought up a difficult problem- one that all parents and those educators involved in the care and development of young people continue to deal with.

Every society is tasked with having to confront mature issues that young people are either directly or indirectly faced with, or perhaps completely shut off from. It is necessary for young people to come to understand issues of war, violence and hatred and poverty, starvation and indifference, just as much as it is for them to know those of peace, prosperity and love. Increasingly, educators are confronted with this dilemma, and therefore tasked with exploring ways to reflect upon, if not of how to resolve, prevent or even of how to prepare for crisis by examining specific examples in the classroom setting. While younger students may find an easier answer to the question of what to do when one’s clothes catch fire, just *stop, drop and roll*, what would the response be in later stages if given an order from a superior who calls for the bombing of a village where known enemies are amongst the innocent? Therefore, for both parents, caregivers and educators alike, it is crucial to understand that not only modeling concepts but also thinking constructively about them significantly stimulates both behavioral and cognitive development. As Woolfolk observes, “*social cognitive theory* today retains an emphasis on the

role of other people serving as models and teachers (the social part of social cognitive theory), but includes thinking, believing, expecting, anticipating, self-regulating, and making comparisons and judgments (the cognitive part)” (pg. 349).

Ainu Education: Question and answer survey with Japanese high school teachers

In June 2014 a written question survey (in Japanese) was conducted with two veteran Japanese high school teachers, *Mr. Yamamoto and Mr. Kono, both from Kawagoe high school in Mie Prefecture, Japan. Modeling concepts and also thinking constructively about them were both at the center of the topic of the significance of the Ainu civilization and its people as seen through the lens of modern day Japanese high school history and human rights education.

In response to a general question about whether the Ainu civilization is a topic of focus in Japanese high school education, Mr. Yamamoto stated, “I think we study it in Japanese history. Before, when I was teaching about the *Jomon*, *Yayoi* and *Kofun* eras (in Japanese ancient history), I would always talk about Ainu history. During the *Heian* era (794-1185 A.D.), the island of Hokkaido (the original Ainu homeland), and the northern most parts of the main island of Honshu were not part of the greater sphere of Japan.” Furthermore, Mr. Yamamoto commented that the Ainu and Yayoi people did mix and form a new ethnic group of people (often referred to as the *Emushi* or *Emishi*). Mr. Yamamoto’s formal background of study is in cultural anthropology and as such, he has “a great interest in the Jomon, Yayoi, and Kofun eras especially,” a time in ancient Japan when seemingly disparate cultures and groups of peoples significantly influenced one another. Mr. Yamamoto’s approach to teaching about the Ainu civilization is clearly outside the lines of the normal rote-style memorization of seemingly endless facts and figures that the typical Japanese high school history lessons focus on. According to David Ausbel, expository teaching, like that of Mr. Yamamoto, “stresses meaningful verbal learning—verbal information, ideas, and relationships among ideas—taken together. Rote memorization is not meaningful learning, because material learned by rote is not connected with *existing* knowledge” (Woolfolk, 2010, pg. 462). Mr. Yamamoto explained further his approach to teaching about this topic: “I always take time to teach about this time period but teachers usually do not teach about these things like me. If Japanese people check their own DNA, many will find that they are related to the Yayoi people and others may have a strong link with the Ainu.” In fact, the nation-wide Japanese history curriculum as set by the Japanese Ministry of Education in Tokyo does not include the Ainu topic in its educational requirements as information that needs to be tested. In other words, if the Ainu story is not relevant to the all-important history tests, then teachers, excluding the few of those

like Mr. Yamamoto, will not teach it. However, for people like Mr. Yamamoto, there is good reason to teach about the Ainu: “During the Edo era (1603-1867 A.D.), the Japanese government made contact with the Ainu in an attempt to do business with them, but soon there were wars and the Ainu lost their power and their control. The Japanese government then sought to assimilate them into Japan. I try and touch upon the discrimination and hardships that they (the Ainu) were faced with.”

For Mr. Kono, a veteran high school teacher of Japanese history and human rights education, the question related to the topic of Ainu education in high school in Japan came as something of a surprise, “For 37 years as a teacher of history, including human rights educational issues, I never once taught about the Ainu people.” Mr. Kono went on to explain that, “Japanese students do not have to test about the Ainu people so there is no real need to study in depth about the Ainu situation.” However, as Mr. Kono pointed out, perhaps less than one class hour is spent introducing the Ainu during the Edo (1603-1867 A.D.) and Meiji (1868-1912 A.D.) eras in Japanese history. Aside from framing the Ainu people from a historical perspective, the idea of including their struggles and hardships as part of greater Japanese human rights causes is another possible link that could be explored in depth and be incredibly relevant to the Japanese people. Unfortunately though, Japanese human rights education has long taken its ideas from foreign examples: African-American slavery and racism issues in the United States, Indian independence from Great Britain in the mid-20th century, and others, that coincide with more relevant Japan issues such as online bullying. As Mr. Kono points out, the Ainu are excluded from this discussion: “I taught human rights education and during this time I never taught about Ainu human rights. Even in meetings with other high school instructors over content teaching of human rights issues, the Ainu were never discussed as a relevant human rights issue.”

Human rights education in the Japanese high school curriculum typically follows a three-step approach. In the first year of high school, students are involved in *nakama zukuri* or making friends with others; in the second year, the focus is on anti-war, peace-based issues known as *hansei heiwa gakushu*; and in their final year of high school, students take classes organized around a theme of society and human rights. Especially in these theme-based third year class sessions, the historical and ongoing issues relating to the destruction and subjugation of the Ainu civilization through Japanese government policies would seem very appropriate to include in such a curriculum. The apparent lack of any careful examination of the issue seems almost too easily written off, though, as Mr. Yamamoto commented: “Stubbornly so, we do not teach about the Ainu because in this region [Mie prefecture is located in the center of the main island of Honshu] of

central Japan it is thought that the people do not have any direct connection to or contact with the Ainu.”

Ainu Historical Revision

The current (2014) history textbook used in all public high schools in Japan was approved and introduced to the curriculum by the Ministry of Education in 2006. Within this text in just two short footnotes related to the discussion about the southern most island chain of Okinawa and to the Matsumae domain in Edo era Hokkaido, the Ainu story is summed up in a total of one hundred and one words. In the words of Ainu Chisato Dubreuli, “The *Atarashi Rekishi Kyokasho* (New History Textbook) for 2006, is an insult to the Ainu, and a huge disservice to the Japanese people. It is a disgrace that most Japanese know more about American Indians than they know about Ainu” (2007). In a typical play on the victimization of the Japanese by foreign aggressors that weighs so heavily in the revision of historical events in Japan, the short footnote relating to the Matsumae domain in southern Hokkaido during the Edo era states that it was the Ainu leader *Shakushain’s* hostile response to perceived unfair trade practices that led to war between the Ainu and the Japanese, and thus to his death and the Ainu defeat:

In this particular case what the text omits is that representatives of the Matsumae called for a halt in the fighting to discuss peace. A meeting was held, and the Matsumae treacherously killed *Shakushain* and all his men. The total lack of scholarly integrity in this textbook is appalling. But this is just one example, there are many, many more. The Japanese government owes both the Ainu and the Japanese public the truth (Dubreuli, 2007).

The Japanese take on the mythology regarding the Ainu people is that they originally came from dogs. In the Japanese language the word for dog, *inu*, is easily interchanged with the word Ainu, and while the dog creation story remains laughable at best, ultimately this overtly racist and cruel depiction of the indigenous race of people by the conquering race, has remained in the mindset of many of the Japanese to this day (Dubreuli, 2007). This *ripple effect* or “contagious spreading of behaviors through imitation” has long strengthened this grossly negative attitude. Modeling of positive attitudes towards the Ainu would most certainly help to stem some of the negative tide and perhaps push forward towards a new and constructive awareness. One of the obvious places to start would be in the school classroom where “modeling can also be applied deliberately...to teach mental skills and to broaden horizons—to teach new ways of thinking”

(Woolfolk, 2010, pg. 353). Unfortunately, the Japanese educational system, with educators like Mr. Yamamoto notwithstanding, has failed to approach this issue with honesty and foresight, opting to completely overlook its value by choosing to erase it entirely from the conversation. As Dubreuli writes, this official response is illogical at best:

While I can understand why the government would want to leave out its disgraceful disregard for Ainu civil rights, the theft of our land, and the continuing lack of respect, I find it mind numbing that the Japanese government can apologize to China for the Nanking massacre, and apologize, if half-heartedly, for their disgusting use of ‘Comfort Women’ during World War II, yet refuse to even discuss their injustices against the Ainu (2007).

Closing Remarks

Regrettably, Japanese educational policy, both at the local and national levels, has chosen to side-step the issue of Ainu human rights including Ainu cultural heritage and to whitewash any negative concepts they may present that might somehow distort the image of Japan as a nation of one race in peaceful harmony and coexistence. By blatantly reframing fact-based historical atrocities committed against the Ainu over many generations, and by refusing to properly acknowledge their unique and varied contributions to Japanese history, society and culture, the ongoing indifference and hostility towards the Ainu will continue. Only an honest and completely renewed educational policy can be hoped upon to turn indifference and hostility into open-mindedness and empathy. For the Ainu, this may just begin to give true meaning to the words, Japan’s first people.

In Nagoya city’s Higashiyama zoo, in an old concrete cage about half the size of a basketball court, the largest land animal in Japan, one of the last remaining Ezo Brown Bears of Hokkaido has been living out its life. When standing on its hind legs, these magnificent mammal usually reach some three meters in height and weigh between 150-250 kilograms, but can actually reach almost 500 kilograms. To the Ainu people the Ezo Bear is the messenger god who brings the gifts of its food and its fur to help feed and clothe the people, bringing goodness in times of uncertainty. The Ainu story has almost vanished into oblivion, and the Ezo Bear sees a similar fate. Perhaps there is little real harmony in this world, the land of humans, only that in the land of gods.

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*The names, Mr. Yamamoto and Mr. Kono, have been used in place of real names in order to respect individual privacy. All other content remains unchanged.

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