

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY OF DISCRIMINATED MINORITIES IN JAPAN

Japanese Association of Sociology for Human Liberation
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The Japanese Association of Sociology for Human Liberation (JASHL) is a small academic society which was founded in March 1985. As of April 2013, JASHL is made up of about 117 members. As one of the founders of this society, I acted as the secretary-general for the first eight years and as the third president for five years starting in March 1993, succeeding EJIMA Shusaku, the first president, and KANEGAE Haruhiko, my predecessor. In the following essay, I will present a brief overview of how the field of sociological research on discrimination against minorities in Japan rose in prominence by highlighting my personal experiences in the field and the historical context from which JASHL has emerged in particular.

THE LATE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON DISCRIMINATION IN JAPAN

The study of discrimination in Japan did not emerge as a prominent field in sociology until the 1980s. Some scholars would explain this delay as follows: During the post-World War II era in Japan, Marxism was considerably influential in instigating social movements as well as in stimulating intellectual discourse in the social sciences. In Japanese society, there was a dominant view that various conflicts in society were ultimately caused by class domination. The old leftists believed that the problems associated with discrimination would have been resolved through the socialist revolution. Japanese scholars who were influenced by Marxist ideology strongly believed that discrimination against the *Buraku* (members of a historic group of outcastes in Japanese society) was a lingering remnant of the feudal system, vestiges of *Mibun* (social status) in pre-modern society. They believed that discrimination would eventually disappear as social modernization progressed. As a result, they were somewhat indifferent to the *Buraku* liberation movement.

Allow me to explain this turn of events through my personal experiences. In 1976, I first became acquainted with research on discrimination against the *Buraku* as a doctoral student. At that time, there was a general tendency in Japanese society to avoid interactions with the *Buraku*. I have a feeling that even academic scholars shared this sentiment as well. In those days, what determined the type of attitude that scholars had towards discriminated minorities such as the *Buraku* or *Zainichi* Koreans was not the type of theories they produced, but rather, whether or not they felt a sense of aversion towards these minority groups.

For example, Kanegae reports on what a professor and research group's representative told his graduate students at the group meeting when he took part in the "general research on local society and education" organized by a course on the sociology of education at the University of Tokyo. The

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professor commented as follows: “Now that we are planning to conduct research in Nagano Prefecture (where discrimination against *Buraku* has been especially severe) we cannot help but pick up *Dowa* education (education for abolishing discrimination against *Buraku*) as a topic of research. But this is a very difficult question and unless we are careful, some problems will likely occur. So I will be the only person in this research group who can deal with this topic. All of you must refrain from becoming involved in this matter.” Kanegae spoke of how he felt disgusted at how his professor was approaching the problem of discrimination. He felt that there was a gap between what needed to be done and what the professor was willing to do. He almost heard the professor’s inner voice; that is, “If possible, I would actually rather not deal with this issue, but if we avoid it, it will engender more problems. So, I will deal with it superficially in order to prevent more problems from occurring” (Kanegae, 1991: 3–4). This episode involving Kanegae occurred in the late 1970s.

I myself heard a similar story directly from a graduate student of Tokyo University about a decade later, during the 1980s. When the student told his adviser that he would like to study discrimination, he was told that if he got involved in that matter no university would hire him as a staff member.

When I applied for a position as a professor in sociology at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Saitama University in 1992 the faculty meeting overturned the decision even though the selection committee had already appointed me as a candidate. By then, I had already made a major contribution to research on discriminations against the *Buraku* and *Zainichi* Koreans, but there were a lot of strong objections at the faculty meeting, including such sentiments as: “If we hire such a person doing research on discrimination, he will most likely frequently stir up problems on issues regarding discriminations and other faculty members will not be able to discuss anything freely,” “If some discriminatory incident happens in the university, he might bring people from organizations that are committed to anti-discrimination movements,” and “In the name of education, he might agitate the students.”

As a result, ISHIKAWA Jun (University of Shizuoka), my friend and fellow colleague in sociology, asked his friends who were staff members of the Faculty of Liberal Arts in Saitama University the following question: “Mr. Fukuoka is just a researcher of minority issues. If he is excluded from candidacy because of what he does, what about me? I am a researcher of disability studies, and at the same time, a minority member myself. As you know, I’m blind.” Ishikawa’s comment provided great momentum for my appointment. At the next vote at a faculty meeting I managed to get a majority of votes by a slim margin. Even in the 1990s, there was an overarching sentiment among academics to keep a certain amount of distance from research on discrimination.

THE ZENKYŌTŌ GENERATION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF JASHL

I met Ejima and AOKI Hideo for the first time during the early summer of 1979. Our meeting and the relationship that I was able to foster with them later developed into the first seeds of the formation of JASHL. Ejima and Aoki were staff members in the sociology department at Hiroshima Shudo University (HSU). At that time, they wanted ORIHARA Hiroshi, a famous Weberian, to give lectures on an intensive course at their university, but Orihara could not do it. So Orihara sent me in

his place, although I was only a doctoral student at the time.

During the *Zenkyōtō* movement (one of the more well-known Japanese student protests) from 1968–1969 in Tokyo University, when the protests reached a particularly intense period, Orihara, who was known as the “professor of protests,” criticized the university authority which saw their fight as mere conflicts of interests and tried to suppress the student movement that gathered for the *Zenkyōtō*.

Ejima had joined in the students’ movement as a graduate student at Kyushu University and Aoki at Osaka City University. I also became involved when I was an undergraduate student at Tokyo University.

During my lectures at HSU, I took up the Sayama Case, which involved a case where a person of *Buraku* heritage had been falsely accused of acting as a “murderer” out of prejudice. This case involved the kidnap and murder of a female high-school student in 1963 in Sayama, Saitama Prefecture. ISHIKAWA Kazuo, of *Buraku* birth, was convicted as guilty and he and his counsel appealed for a re-trial of his case. (The movement of appealing for re-trial in this case has continued to this day.)

I should mention here why I started to conduct research on the Sayama Case. In 1975, I worked as a high-school teacher for just a year in Hyogo Prefecture, which is located next to Osaka. At the time, I had the following experience inside the faculty lounge. An old teacher who sat in front of my desk who was getting ready to leave stood up and said, “I am going out. I hope you finish up OK.” I asked him, “Where are you going?” “Oh, one of my relatives has received a marriage proposal, so I am going to gather more information about her partner’s family. If it so happens that he is of ‘*that*’ kind of background, I suspect the lady will get in trouble.” The old teacher had a smile on his face. It was a disgusting smile that made me feel as if I were one of them (those who discriminate against *Buraku* people), implying that “Obviously you understand what I mean by ‘*that*’ and I need not go into the details.” I angrily retorted back at him, “Do you think that what you just said was appropriate?” At that moment, he turned pale.

The word he expressed—“*that*”—implied “*Buraku*.” In western Japan the *Buraku* were more visible than in eastern Japan, where I had lived until then. Therefore in western Japan we often encountered such experiences of discrimination in our daily lives.

When I went back to graduate school at Tokyo University in 1976, a professor once called me on the telephone and said: “I am looking for a young researcher who will help us conduct research and write a report on the Sayama Case and *Buraku* issues more generally, per request by the counsel. Would you like to do work supporting the Sayama Case?” Immediately I said, “Yes, of course.”

At the same time, Ejima and Aoki were also deepening their relationship with the *Buraku* people in Hiroshima. Thus, when I met with them, I was able to incite them to take action. We tried to set up a session on “issues of discrimination” at the annual meeting of the Japan Sociological Society (JSS). By then, some people had already given presentations on discrimination at JSS, but they remained individual presentations and had not been organized into a collaborative session. Any papers on the “consciousness” of discrimination were often categorized in the “social psychology” session. The three of us prepared papers on discrimination and submitted an application to hold a

session on this topic. Every year from 1979 onwards we were able to set up sessions on issues of discrimination.

Thus in March 1985, 36 people came together to organize a meeting to inaugurate JASHL. We decided to observe two guidelines to sustain this academic society. The first one was that we would not behave as if we were burdened by the miseries of the world by taking on the position of discriminated minorities, but rather, that we would make a concrete scholarly contribution that would help resolve problems of discrimination by conducting research on the marginalized. Second, we decided to do away with our cultural tendencies toward authoritarianism and paternalism, and moreover, to strive to not feel threatened by the success of other scholars in the field. Instead, we vowed to work towards critically evaluating each other's research and work collaboratively to carry out research in a more effective manner.

Following these guidelines, we, the members of JASHL, published a series of six books, entitled "Sociology for Human Liberation" with Akashi-shoten Press. (Unfortunately these books were not written in English but in Japanese, so I will not mention their titles here.)

THE UNJUST DISMISSAL OF FIVE PROFESSORS FROM HSU

On October 9, 1990, Hiroshima Shudo University (HSU) dismissed five professors from its sociology department. The five professors including Ejima, who was the first president of JASHL, were all core members of JASHL and the *Dowa* Education Committee at their university. The main reason for their dismissal was construed by the university as misuse of research funds. But the real nature of this case was that the university took a reactionary stance to the *Dowa* Education Committee which was considered to be subverting the discriminatory order in the university and stirring up the staff to take up the anti-discrimination cause.

As a response to requests for support from the five professors, I immediately organized the Association of Scholars Seeking the Overturn of the HSU Dismissals. Many famous sociologists in Japan joined in this organization, including the successive presidents of JSS. Jeffrey BROADBENT (Minnesota University) contributed an essay entitled, "A Question of Academic Freedom in Japan" in the *Footnotes* of April 1991, the newsletter of the American Sociological Association (ASA), asking sociologists from all over the world to write protest letters to HSU. Allow me to use this opportunity to express my cordial gratitude to everyone who participated in this movement.

Unfortunately, the unjustly dismissed professors lost their lawsuit and were "expelled" from HSU. I will mention briefly here what happened to them after the case. The most disheartening incident for me consisted of FUKUDOME Noriaki's death. After his dismissal, Fukudome worked actively as secretary-general of an NGO, the "Network for Research on Forced Labor Mobilization." This organization supported bilateral cooperation between the Korean and Japanese governments to return the remains of Korean forced laborers, who were forcibly taken from Korea to Japan during World War II. Fukudome passed away on May 5, 2010 while on a work-related trip to Korea for the organization.

In Hiroshima, Ejima founded the Institute of Sociology for Human Liberation and Aoki established the Institute on Social Theory and Dynamics, on which they have been working

independently. WATARI Akeshi received a position as a professor at Nagasaki Wesleyan University and also worked as the 5th president of JASHL. I will not discuss the current status of one individual, Mr. Y, who reached a compromise with the university during the middle of the court proceedings.

Currently, JASHL's administrative and editorial office is located in HSU, the university that unjustly dismissed five of its core members. The scholars involved in *Dowa* education, such as Ooba Nobutaka, SASAO Shoji, and four other members of JASHL, also teach at HSU as professors in sociology. Therefore, we can say that the department of sociology in HSU has now become a core center for JASHL once again. I have come to believe that reactionary attacks on efforts to fight discrimination will ultimately fail.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH WITH FOREIGN SCHOLARS

As a scholar who conducts research on the discrimination of *Buraku*, *Zainichi* Koreans, and ex-patients of Hansen's disease and their families, I have come to feel strongly about the importance of forming relationships and collaborating with overseas researchers. I have come to feel this way in particular through my own personal experiences.

KUROSAKA Ai (my research colleague) and I attended the 13th Biennial Conference of the Japanese Studies Association of Australia, which took place in Brisbane, Australia from July 2–4, 2003. We attended the conference with WADA Ken'ichi, the Tochigi Branch's Chair of the *Buraku* Liberation League (BLL) and LEE Kyung-Jae, president of the *Mukuge* Society, a grassroots organization for *Zainichi* Koreans based in Takatsuki City, Osaka. The coordinator of the Activists' Forum had asked me to introduce her to some Japanese activists for human rights.

A scholar from a university in New Zealand, whom I will refer to as Mr. M, presented his research on the *Buraku* problem at the same session that we were in. The content of his presentation caused us much consternation and astonishment. His presentation consisted of the following: he projected one picture on the screen with a PowerPoint slide. On that picture there were five cars running from different directions. The cars meet at one point and cannot move any more. Each car was labeled with a name, which were respectively "*Burakumin*," "Non-*Burakumin*," "Administration," "*Buraku* Liberation League," and "*Zenkai*ren" (an organization whose strategic agenda differs from BLL). In his presentation Mr. M posed the question, "Why have we been unable to resolve the *Buraku* problem to this day?" And his answer was, "Because these five actors have blamed each other for being responsible for the perpetuation of discrimination, putting fault on each other, and refusing to cooperate with one another. First of all, BLL should stop severely denouncing people who discriminate." I asked a question to Mr. M, "Have you ever participated in *Kyūdankai*?" He answered, "No. Never." I said, "Why do you say that BLL should stop *Kyūdankai*, when you have never been there?" Mr. M responded, "Because BLL did not allow me to participate in it." I said, "BLL never rejects researchers from attending *Kyūdankai*. Actually a sociologist who is my friend attended *Kyūdankai* and videotaped everything that happened there. He analyzed each of their actions very precisely." Mr. M said, "During my visit at the *Buraku*, *Kyūdankai* was not active." I continued, "You gave this type of presentation without seeing what happened and without hearing what was said in *Kyūdankai*. Your presentation does not depend on first-hand data but only on your

own conjectures and hearsay. This does not qualify as professionally conducted research!”

Maybe Mr. M did not expect researchers who studied the discrimination of minorities and activists who are working to stop the perpetuation of discrimination in Japanese society to travel overseas to attend a meeting held in Australia. Afterwards, Mr. M disappeared from the session room, parting from us with the following words, “I have the right to present my ideas, as well.” If we were not there, the audience who did not have access to local information and knowledge about Japan might have taken Mr. M’s presentation as truth.

Before the session took place we had the opportunity to meet with Mr. M. He told us that he had conducted research “living in a *Buraku* neighborhood” in Osaka. I asked him how long he had lived in the *Buraku* village. He said one month. He told me that the leader of the BLL connected him to a room inside a community center for the elderly in the *Buraku* neighborhood. At that time Kurosaka, my collaborator, was also carrying out her fieldwork living in a *Buraku* village for a year and ten months in Tochigi Prefecture. We found it difficult to believe staying in a *Buraku* village for one month was equivalent to “living” within the *Buraku* community.

This experience made me realize how significant it was to develop relationships with overseas scholars and researchers. We need to publish our papers on discriminated minorities in Japan in English. Thus far, I have published *Lives of Young Koreans in Japan* (2000). This volume consists of an analysis on how *Zainichi* Korean youth have searched for their identity, based on 150 “life-history” interview data. Through this publication, many Ph.D. candidates with an interest in Japan’s problem of discrimination and the marginalized have contacted and visited me. I think that more and more members of JASHL need to publish their papers and books in English.

In addition, we also need to invite more scholars who are interested in the situation of discriminated minorities in Japan to collaborate on research projects and conduct fieldwork together. I have hosted many young researchers from overseas as visiting scholars at Saitama University. In 1998–1999, Erin Aeran CHUNG came to work with me as a Japan Foundation Doctoral Fellow. She published *Immigration & Citizenship in Japan* (2010) as a result of the research she was able to conduct during her stay in Japan.

THE CURRENT STATUS OF RESEARCH ON DISCRIMINATED MINORITIES IN JAPAN

As we have encouraged overseas scholars and researchers to become interested in Japan’s problems of discrimination and the marginalization of minorities, I feel compelled to inform you of the current situation surrounding minorities in Japan.

First of all, with regards to discrimination against the *Buraku* population, March 2002 marked the end of a 33-year program entitled “Special Measures for *Dowa*.” So were the problems surrounding the *Buraku* resolved? Kurosaka and I visited a *Buraku* village once a month from March 2003 to March 2006 to conduct interviews. The *Buraku* village, which acted as our field site, was located in Chiba Prefecture next to Tokyo. Two years after we commenced our field research, a woman and a man in their thirties told us that they experienced marital discrimination. The woman lost her boyfriend and the man was forced to get divorced when their identities as *Buraku* became known. Almost at the same time as their interviews, the *Buraku* people in the same generation as

theirs told us that they believed that discrimination no longer existed and that they had been unaware that the man and the woman, who had been their two childhood friends, had experienced such discrimination. The two interviewees had never shared their experience of discrimination with anyone else, because they were afraid of causing their family to feel grief. Furthermore, they themselves felt ashamed of their experiences of discrimination. Their experiences caused them to feel low self-esteem.

In the past, the *Buraku* people felt a sense of community with each other and mutually supported each other. The environmental reforms implemented by the *Dowa* policies provided them with cleaner homes and a more pleasant neighborhood. Among their population, more members of the younger generation have been able to find employment in Japanese companies. Moreover, there are fewer opportunities for *Buraku*'s residents to congregate together and share their everyday experiences with each other. Today, people who live in *Buraku* neighborhoods are unable to share their experiences of discrimination with one another. Unfortunately, I feel that the marginalization and discrimination of the *Buraku* population are far from resolved.

To name a few scholars in JASHL, other than Kurosaka and myself, who have studied discrimination against the *Buraku*, these would include Ejima, MIURA Kokichiro (Kwansei Gakuin University), and SAKURAI Atsushi (Rikkyo University).

Secondly, I will expound on the status of *Zainichi* Koreans. We cannot say that discrimination against *Zainichi* Koreans no longer exists in Japan. The striking case at present consists of the Japanese government's discriminatory treatment of students who attend Korean ethnic schools in Japan. The Japanese government excludes Korean high schools from the free tuition system appropriated to Japanese high schools, because Korean high schools are managed by "*Soren*," a political organization that supports the North Korean government. These measures are supposed to reflect their reactionary response to the abduction of Japanese citizens by the North Korean government and its experiments with missiles and nuclear weapons. Although the Japan Federation of Bar Association and other conscientious Japanese have protested against the Japanese government, proclaiming that their actions constitute a violation of human rights, the government and local administrations seem apathetic about the plight of these Korean students in Japan.

KIM Myungsoo (Kwansei Gakuin University) has conducted excellent research on this issue. Another scholar, KWAK Kihwan (Tohoku Gakuin University), teaches at a university located in the Tohoku area that was severely damaged by the earthquake on March 11, 2011. Both Kim and Kwak are third-generation *Zainichi* Koreans. Kwak has devoted much time and effort to setting up a Disaster Volunteer Station in his university and has often worked with his students as volunteers supporting the victims of the earthquake. In addition, he is also energetically conducting research on the response of foreign residents to the tragedy of the earthquake.

Thirdly, I will discuss the Hansen's disease problem. The Japanese government has continued to enforce policies of segregation towards Hansen's disease patients with the Leprosy Prevention Law, which was implemented for 89 years from 1907 to 1996. In 1998 some ex-patients, who had been institutionalized in a special sanitarium, filed a suit against the state claiming that it was unconstitutional. In 2001 the plaintiffs won the trial. Afterwards, it became one of their objectives to

assist ex-patients in returning to their “normal” lives. Actually not so many people managed to do so, because they were already too old and the prejudices against Hansen’s disease have not yet disappeared from Japanese society.

There are 13 national sanatoria for Hansen’s disease ex-patients all over Japan. In the late 1950s the number of patients living in sanatoria reached its peak at 12,000, and since then has continued to decrease to 2,008 as of February 28, 2013. Many internees have grown old, on average exceeding 82 years of age. Currently, a problem of great urgency consists of trying to sustain medical treatment and care in the facilities, while at the same time opening the sanatoria up to the local society. In short, the problem is how to maintain an environment where the internees of sanatoria who are, in a sense, victims of the Forced Segregation Policy, can enjoy the rest of their lives comfortably by receiving care while interacting with locals.

Kurosaka and I have actively listened to the life stories of ex-patients with Hansen’s disease and their families. YAMADA Tomiaki (Matsuyama University) and Sakurai have addressed the issue of people living with HIV/AIDS, who share common problems with Hansen’s disease as both are infectious diseases.

Fourthly, on the issue of sexual minorities, I am not a specialist in this field, but two gay men, one lesbian, two female to male GIDs, two male to female GIDs have so far attended my seminar in sociology in the past ten years. They “came out of the closet” to other students in the seminar, and completed a graduation thesis reflecting on their own problems. In regard to sexual minorities, recently an increasing number of people have started to reveal their identities as LGBTIQ, and I believe that we have entered a critical moment in developing research on this topic in the field of sociology. Among the members of JASHL who study sexual minority issues are KAWAGUCHI Kazuya (HSU) and KAZAMA Takashi (Chukyo University).

Fifthly, regarding the study on *Yoseba* workers as Japan’s urban underclass, Aoki and NAKANE Mitsutoshi (HSU) have conducted a great deal of research on this topic. Since the mid-1990s, this has been developed as homeless studies by YAMAGUCHI Keiko (Tokyo Gakugei University), KARIYA Ayumi (HSU) and KITAGAWA Yukihiko (the Open University of Japan). Works in this field have since shifted their focus to examine problems associated with poverty and unstable labor after the gradual dissolution of *Yoseba* workers in the 21st century.

Lastly, to briefly discuss the status of other related fields, NOMURA Koya (HSU) has developed research on the Okinawa issue from the perspective of post-colonialism. Regarding research on individuals with disabilities, Isikawa Jun helped establish scholarship in the field. He was inaugurated as the first president of the Japan Society for Disability Studies in October 2003. Among the members of JASHL, few are involved in the field of gender studies. Scholars in this area of research have joined various societies such as the Women’s Studies Society of Japan, the Women’s Studies Association of Japan, and the Japan Society for Gender Studies.

TOWARDS A BRIGHTER FUTURE

We live in a diverse world. The myth of Japan’s “mono-ethnic society” has continued to persist until recently. We were able to convince ourselves that we lived amongst people who were “the same”

as ourselves. Minorities tend to be physically invisible in Japanese society. Thus, even though we live among many of these discriminated minorities, we go through our daily lives as if they do not exist. I believe that JASHL plays a critical role in contributing knowledge that will help us build a more harmonious society that is increasingly capable of accepting the differences of others. We would like to help build such knowledge by collaborating with other scholars and researchers from around the world. For those of you who are interested in conducting research on discriminated minorities with us, please feel free to contact Nakane, the secretary-general of JASHL for more information at tasse@voice.ocn.ne.jp. We look forward to hearing from you.

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